

Chapter-I

INTRODUCTION

The chapter is designed to introduce the life and Works of the world literary master- Albert Camus, a French-Algerian journalist, playwright, novelist, writer of philosophical essays, and Nobel laureate. Neither by advanced training nor by profession as a philosopher, Camus' literary works, articles, essays, and speeches make him legendary figure and his contribution unique to a wide range of issues in moral philosophy from terrorism, political violence and psychological conflict to suicide and the death penalty. In awarding him its prize for literature in 1957, the Nobel committee cited the author's persistent efforts to illuminate the problem of the human conscience in our time. He is pre-eminently a writer of conscience and a champion of imaginative literature. As a vehicle of philosophical and psychological insight and moral truth that Camus was honored by his own generation and is still admired today. He is a versatile genius. His broad range of works consist of Short Stories, plays, essays, philosophical tracts and a handful of novels during his relatively short literary career. He is an intellectual writer in the tradition of the great humanists and a Resistance fighter during the Second World War. Albert Camus wrote five important novels namely –*The Stranger, The Plague, The Fall, A Happy Death* and *The First Man*. He wrote the essays namely *Betwixt and Between, Nuptials, The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*.

Albert Camus being sensualist had great love for the sun, the sea, sex, football and theatre. Camus was a Mediterranean man. He was a devotee of sun, sand and swimming. He tried to promote a real Mediterranean culture which could unite both the coasts in a common identity. For Camus, the relevant question is: How is one to behave, without any guiding moral code, in the face of such massive irrationality? What is the point of going on, if there is no meaning or purpose of life. Albert Camus' French and Algerian heritage found its way into many of his works and his politics. His last work *The First Man* published 35 years after his death is about Algeria. In fact, Camus was loyal to France and Algeria. Despite her heat, poverty and social unrest, Camus loved Algeria. His exile from the colony seemed to have increased his passion for it. Algeria is the setting for most of Camus' works. Her sun is the key in *The Stranger*, *The First Man* and other stories. *The Plague* could have been set anywhere but Camus chose Algeria only. In this sense, Algeria is the main character in Camus' fiction. He is a writer who struggled hard in his own era and mattered more for his works than his life.

Birth and Parentage

Albert Camus is one of the greatest writers of absurdity. His works supported this statement and proved him the gigantic personality of absurd works. The characters in his works are well-formed with absurdity and have poor interest towards the realities of life. He adorns their minds with the absurd phobia. Almost all the readers feel that the characters are the photocopy or image of his life. If we have known about his early life or his life in background, we

also agree to the autobiographical view of this statement. He was not from the landlord family; he was born in a small Whitewashed Bungalow in the village of St.Paul, just north of the small town of Mandovi in Algeria on November 7, 1913. He was the child of Lucian Camus who was just a poor agriculture worker and was killed in the Battle of the Marne in 1914 during the First World War, while serving as a member of the Zouave infantry regiment. His mother was of Spanish extraction and was half deaf. Albert was a year old when his father died. His mother had little money for their livelihood. So his life became joyless and difficult. His mother is like a boring companion to him as a child. In short, he was brought up in poor condition during the childhood in the Belcourt of Algiers. He was accepted into the Lycee and eventually to the University of Algiers in 1923. The background of Albert Camus' life shows that he was a deprived child, he felt helpless like a toy in the hands of destiny. The very impression carried out throughout his life. His works are also affected from these past incidents of his life. The phobia and bad angle of human behaviour which he felt expressed in his works and its characters. He tried much to enjoy life in proper way but at last he felt the momentousness of happiness and meaninglessness of life and become sad. This process of sadism made him absurd lifetime.

Camus' Characters

Most of the characters of his works also suffer from the various kinds of psychological disorder and phobia as well as neurosis. His characters display the various types of human behaviour in various conditions, places, with various

personalities, relationships and even with himself at the different stages of their lives. The characters of Camus are not feeling less but they have something strange in their behaviour. They are the hard-hearted people who enjoy lives only externally and materially without any special feelings or emotions. They live their life in accordance to their own liking and acceptance. They just believe in use and throw or escaping from one situation to another. Sometimes, Camus' characters appear self-centered and selfish because we can see that they live only for themselves, they do not take care of others' feelings and emotions. They are flat-natured and have complexity of manners. When we study Camus' works, we know that his characters are thoughtless, anti-emotional, deceptive, criminal minded, betrayal and like anti-social animals. They spoil their life and atmosphere as well as they spoil the atmosphere and of their surroundings by their behaviour. All these qualities refer that Camus' characters are absurd. Absurdity is the kind of a psychological condition. The strange manners and habits make man absurd for the others because they have different kinds of idea and strange outlook towards life. Absurdity is the inner conflict which takes place between the human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life and the human inability to find anything. Absurdity is created by the existence. They fear to lose their importance or existence, which they had already lost. The escaping from realities and harshness of life is also responsible for being absurd. The absurd always finds the fundamental disharmony between the individuals' search for meaning and meaninglessness of the universe. However, Camus himself describes the solutions in his work *The Myth of Sisyphus* in 1942.

Suicide or escaping from the existence is a solution, in which the person ends his life but Camus' dismisses this option. He states that it does not counter the absurd but only becomes more absurd by ending the life or existence. The absurd rejects the existence of God or spirituality, to make him religious and spiritual or abstract. Camus also believed in it while the other Absurdist believes it as philosophical suicide. The most important and most common thing is the acceptance of the absurd. Camus also suggests that it is the better way to understand and change the absurd. In short, the problem of existentialism and nihilism, escaping from harsh realities and rejection of spirituality and religious and demand for the special safe place for the absurd in the society are the ideas of pure and neat absurdity and the absurdity proved by the various strange behaviour. Absurdity is the product of deprivation, neglecting and avoidance of a person; it is the consequence of lack of different things and persons in life. It is the reaction of loveless and insulting life. It is the revolt against the pompous and over-sophisticated society. It is the battle of existence and status in the society. It is the suppressed feelings and emotions which are come out with the chaos for the society. Absurdity is nothing but it is the state of mind which promotes human being to do a strange behaviour. His surroundings and affected people can feel his awkwardness of behaviour and flat manners but he himself never aware from his behaviour. According to him, he himself is proper, perfect and okay but his surrounding is awkward and strange. Unlike, the mad never accepts or has idea of his madness but he feels the world around him is mad and

outsider. While truth is that he himself is outsider. In short, they are suffering from the psychological disease.

Absurdity and Human behaviour

Absurdity is the psychological condition which makes unfair or strange behaviour of humanbeing. Camus' works and characters have all kinds of strange behaviour. They are affected more poisonously to their surroundings people. They try much to set in the norms of society but the social rules and regulations never have any compromise with their behaviour. So, they become more and more outsider and absurd for the world around them.

Human behaviour and absurdity are the two sides of the same coin. At the same time, absurdity and Camus' works are also vice versa. So, it is essential to study Camus' works with the different human behavioural theories and studies. Albert Camus has delivered all the aspects of human behaviour in his works. His works are like the psychological case study of human behaviour through his characters in general. Camus naturally creates the awkward situation and in this situation his characters step out from the proper way and commit the blunder of mistakes. Hence, they do not have any feelings in to do something wrong or improper. They reject all the spiritual, social, moral and behavioural rules of different situation and make themselves barren of emotions.

Psychology and Human Behaviour

If we turn towards the psychology and human behavioural studies of psychologists, we can better understand the human behaviour of Camus' characters. First of all we should know about the different phases of human

behaviour. It depends more on age and requirements than atmosphere and satisfaction. Human behaviour has two main special effects internal and external. Internal effect is related to lack of emotions, love, feelings and affections of others in life. External effect is the product of insulting behaviour of others and controversial situation in life.

The first and important stage of human behaviour is the age. Every human being has different requirements and expectation according to his economical, social and physical needs. As child, he asks for pampering and warmth from his parents but in any case he has been deprived of and that it changes his view towards his surroundings. It leaves an everlasting image on his mind and this image takes a permanent place in his unconscious mind, so it reflects automatically in his behaviour. Another stage of age and changing psychological behavioural stage is of teen age or of adolescent. During this period, there have been a number of changes in his physical and mental procession. So, the requirements and expectation at this age are apparently increased and the unfulfilled wishes and aspirations create chaos and fear of displacement and strange feelings. The image of this age is the main cause of human's further career. This stage is responsible to make human being a good citizen or the person who joins in dissocial activities. At this stage of life the conscious and unconscious mind work very sincerely and more actively, so the incident has been taking by conscious mind which directly or rapidly sent to the unconscious mind.

The next affected stage of human behaviour is the youth stage; at this stage the human being has a number of family problems, social requirements, psychological pressure, educational pressure and the other upheavals of life. The period is called youth in which the people live more and more casual. It is the time to prove self before the society and family. Sometimes the youth takes shelter of some kind of addiction to get peace and release. The most required thing at this stage is the need of love and sex. It is the most obvious need of youthful days, the fulfilment of love and sex. In short the need of partner or mate as well as the friendship also plays an important role at this stage. It is the stage when the human being becomes adventurous and strengthened. He wants to do something new and bold; he wants to live a life according to his own point of views. This period is not only for mischievousness and enjoyment but it is very responsible period to make one's career and future.

Thus, the human behaviour fully depends upon these stages and age requirements of life. The behaviour of human being in general sense rests upon the experiences and image of surroundings on his conscious and unconscious mind. Human behaviour is nothing but the reverse action or reaction of the behaviour of surroundings. The surrounding behaviour of human being makes him generous, sophisticated and legend personality in his surroundings; at the same time it can also make him criminal, mad, outsider and absurd towards life and its charm.

The process of human psychology remains till the end of death of a person. The process starts from his birth and continues to his childhood, teenage

or adolescent and youth. The deflection or the instability in these stages creates the despair and sadism in life; the human being cannot remain generous and kind towards the life. The human being feels the meaninglessness and surface feelings towards life. Slowly and gradually the human being gets the feeling of despair and sadism, hatred and depravity; he rolls towards absurdity at last. Thus the human being gets the stage of absurdity. The society can accept and keep them safe but they cannot accept society and keep it safe. They spoil the atmosphere of their surroundings by their strange behaviour. Now, we would like to turn towards the behavioural psychology's rules, factors and its results.

Behaviourism can perhaps be best summed up by the following quote from the famous psychologist John B. Watson in *Behaviourism*, 1930.

Give me a dozen healthy infants, well-formed, and my own specified world to bring them up in and I'll guarantee to take any one at random and train him to become any type of specialist I might select -- doctor, lawyer, artist, merchant-chief and, yes, even beggar-man and thief, regardless of his talents, penchants, tendencies, abilities, vocations, and race of his ancestors.¹

Behaviourism also known as behavioural psychology is a theory of learning based upon the idea that all behaviours are acquired through conditioning. Conditioning occurs through interaction with the environment. Behaviourists believe that our responses to environmental stimuli shape our behaviours. According to this school of thought, behaviour can be studied in a systematic and observable manner with no consideration of internal mental states. It suggests that only observable behaviour should be studied, since internal states such as cognitions, emotions, and moods are too subjective. As Watson's above quote suggests, strict behaviourists believe that any person could

potentially be trained to perform any task, regardless of things like genetic background, personality traits, and internal thoughts within the limits of their physical capabilities; all it takes is the right conditioning.

Human behaviour can be criticized as:

- Many critics argue that behaviourism is one-dimensional approach to understanding human behaviour and that behavioural theories do not account for free will and internal influences such as moods, thoughts and feelings.
- Behaviourism does not account for other types of learning, especially learning that occurs without the use of reinforcement and punishment.
- People and animals are able to adapt their behaviour when new information is introduced, even if a previous behaviour pattern has been established through reinforcement.

The strength of human behaviour is as under:

- Behaviourism is based upon observable behaviour, so it is easier to quantify and collect data and information when conducting research.
- Effective therapeutic techniques such as intensive behavioural intervention, behaviour analysis and discrete trial training are all rooted in behaviourism. These approaches are often very useful in changing maladaptive or harmful behaviours in both children and adults.

Thus, the human behaviour is the range of behaviour exhibited by the human being and it is influenced by the culture, attitudes, emotions, values, ethics, authority, rapport, hypothesis, persuasion, and genetics. Some behaviours

are the common, some are acceptable and some outside the acceptable limits. The word behaviour is used more in social context and psychological context than any other because man is a social animal whose life passed in the society. So it is experienced throughout his lifetime. It depends on the various factors like- genetics, social norms, core faith, and attitude. It impacts by certain traits each individual has. The traits vary from person to person and can produce different actions or behaviour from each person. Social norms also impact behaviour. The heredity plays an important role. Human beings are pressurized into certain rules and display certain behaviour in society. Core faith can be perceived through the religion and philosophy of that individual. It shapes the way a person thinks and this in turn results in different human behaviours. Attitude can be defined as the degree to which the person has a favourable and unfavourable evaluation of the behaviour in question. One's attitude is essentially a reflection of the behaviour he or she will portray in specific situations. Thus, human behaviour is greatly influenced by the attitudes we use on a daily basis.

In short, the factors of human behaviour psychology are rests on the genetics of a person, the social norms of a person, remain on the core faith of a culture, and attitude of a person. The most states of behavioural theories depends on these factors, like- the theory of escapism behaviour, sadism, despair, happiness, understanding the worth of life, mental disorder, the multi-behaviourism, madness, violent behaviour, absurd behaviour and uninterested point of view towards life etcetera.

Psychology and human behaviour are the terms which indicate the human nature and make man differ from animal and social animal. The human nature has a number of fantasies and instability at the various stages of life. These controversies and dissatisfaction of human beings are revealed in real life as well as in their literary or informative documents.

Psychoanalysis body of human behaviour is constructed from the Australian Sigmund Freud and continued by others. The psychoanalysis designates concomitantly three things:

- The method of mind investigation, and especially of the unconscious mind,
- A therapy of neurosis inspired from the above method,
- A new stand alone discipline which is based on the knowledge acquired from applying the investigation method and clinical experiences.

Albert Camus has also become the victim of these human behavioural psychologies. He also passed through a number of drawbacks and then lastly he sheltered himself to the literature as the medium of expression. He applied the theory of absurd in his works which is the special and strange condition of human mind. On the basis of the above description of psychological upheavals, we study his experiences of childhood, adolescent and youth.

Early Life

As we know that Albert Camus was the son of Lucian Auguste Camus and Catherine Sintes. His mother was of Spanish descent. His father was

of French descent. Lucien August worked in the vine sellers of the firm of supervising the pressing of grapes and the shipping of the wine. In 1913, when Albert, his second son, was seven months old, Pere Camus joined the French Army to fight in the First World War, and died on October 11, 1914 of wounds received during the Battle of the Marne. He was twenty eight. His wife, Catherine, four years senior to him, one of Nine Children illiterate throughout her life, partly deaf, and hampered by a speech impediment, was thirty one when Albert Camus was born. Impoverished by the death of her husband, she moved with her two children in her mother's apartment and occupied the top floor of the building with two other apartments in Belcourt a lower working class waterfront district of Algiers. During the war period, she worked sorting cartridges in a munitions factory. She was a cleaning woman and laundress. There was neither electricity nor facility of running water in their apartment. Camus, his mother and his older brother Lucien lived in one of three rooms; Camus and Lucien sharing one bed until Albert was seventeen. Two of his uncles, one, Etienne,, a barrel maker, occupied another room, which served also as the dining room, and his grandmother occupied the third room. The common toilet for the three apartments was in the hall and evacuated into a ditch outside. Camus lived under these circumstances until he moved in with his aunt and uncle, Antoinette and Gustave Acault in 1930, when he was seventeenth and recuperating from his first bout with tuberculosis.

His father remained out of focus, and only appeared in his last work. There is hardly a more vivid picture in Camus' life than that of his mother.

Catherine Sintes Camus, of Spanish descent, who worked as a 'charwoman', was illiterate and partially deaf, and completely dominated by her own mother to whose household she meekly returned after her husband's death. If there is any real tenderness to be found in the works of Albert Camus, it is in regard to the Image of this woman, sitting idly by her Algiers window, indifferently watching life pass her by. His early and formative life of poverty was not a poor life. Belcourt provided a waterfront and a beach. As a boy and as a young man, Camus had a band of friends and the diverse and colorful neighborhoods of Algiers, including the cashbah, the factory district and the docks to explore. He was an excellent swimmer, and the Algerian Sun provided an immediate experience of an ongoing and sensuous present. He wrote:

'Poverty' was never a misfortune for me: it was always counterbalanced by the richness of light. And, because it was free from bitterness, I found mainly reasons for love and compassion in it. Even my rebellions at the time were illuminated by this light.....I was placed half way between poverty and the sun. Poverty prevented me from judging that all was well in the world and in history is not everything.²

Belcourt was the good city to live a peaceful life with comforts. There were library, movie theatre, and cafes; the young played together when they were children and pranced and flirted when they became teenagers. If we talk about his internal life, we can say that he was more dependent on his mother. Her mother was sweet and gentle woman, intimated by her family and emotionally confined. When she took a lover, her brother broke up the relationship. Camus longed for her affection, but was frustrated in his longing. Throughout his life he was devoted to her.

At the initial stage of his life he was very friendly and good hearted person. He helped the boys to prepare for the scholarship examination. He himself was an intelligent and powerful as a student. In his earlier schooling period, he found a teacher who recognized and cultivated his talent and to whom he admired. The philosopher Jean Grenier to whom he had later dedicated '*The Rebel*'. Writing about Grenier's book '*The Islands*', at the time, Camus said: "He is completely in and the admiration and love that I feel for him are growing....will I ever know how much I owe him?"² Camus was devoted to Soccer and played it with great enthusiasm, taking quite a few blows. As a youth, before his illness, he was athletic and team oriented. Throughout his life, he was known for being a good dancer and effortlessly successful with women. He did not take off during the summer vacations. Among other jobs, he worked at an ironmonger's shop, and as a clerk for a maritime broker.

In 1930, when he was seventeen, Camus had a fever and chills and began vomiting blood. It was his first encounter with tuberculosis, a lifelong affliction. He lived with it and struggled with it, forcing himself to be the stronger, insisting on life as tuberculosis kept drawing him towards death. Camus's struggle to choose between life and death as it is formulated in *The Myth of Sisyphus* through the question of suicide was a philosophical problem rooted in his own painful experience. The treatment for tuberculosis before antibiotics was primitive and painful. It involved injecting air between the chest wall and the lung, forcing the lung to collapse. This procedure was repeated

every few weeks, and x-rays were taken to monitor the treatment. After hospitalization, paid for by the State since Camus was a war orphan, he moved from his grandmother's apartment to stay in his own room with his aunt and uncle, the Acaults. His uncle Gustave was a butcher, a storyteller, something of an anarchist politically, and a cultivated man with a library in his home which included works by Voltaire, Honore de Balzac, Victor Hugo, Emile Zola, Paul Valery, Anatole France and James Joyce. Living with the Acaults, Camus was well cared for making literature available to him.

Albert Camus's Works

Now, we turn towards the major works of Albert Camus and will find the facts of different types of human behaviour and moods of humanbeings affected by surroundings. The surroundings affected one's life and one's affected surroundings. Camus' reputation rests largely on the three novels published during his lifetime (*The Stranger*, *The Plague*, and *The Fall*) and on his two major philosophical essays (*The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*). However, his body of work also includes a collection of short fiction (*Exile and the Kingdom*), an autobiographical novel *The First Man*, a number of dramatic works (most notably *Caligula*, *The Misunderstanding*, and *The Just Assassins*), several translations and adaptations (including new versions of works by Calderon, Lope de Vega, Dostoyevsky, and Faulkner), and a lengthy assortment of essays, prose pieces, critical reviews, transcribed speeches and interviews, articles, and works of journalism. A brief summary and description of the most important of Camus' writings is presented below as preparation for a larger

discussion of his philosophy and world-view, including his main ideas and recurrent philosophical themes.

The Stranger

Camus' first and most famous novel *The Stranger* (1942) – From its cold opening lines, “Mother died today, Or maybe yesterday; I can't be sure,”³ takes the form of a terse, flat, first-person narrative by its main character Meursault. He is a very ordinary young man of unremarkable habits and unemotional affect who, inexplicably and in an almost absent-minded way, kills an Arab and is arrested, tried, convicted, and sentenced to death. It is a commentary of its anti-hero narrator, the ultimate “outsider” and a person who seems to observe everything, including his own life, with almost pathological and psychological detachment.

The Plague

The Plague (1947) – Set in the coastal town of Oran, Camus' second novel is the story of an outbreak of plague. It is traced from its subtle, insidious, unheeded beginnings through its horrible, all-encompassing, and seemingly inescapable dominion to its eventual climax and decline. It is told from the viewpoint of one of the survivors. Camus made no effort to conceal the fact that his novel was partly based on and could be interpreted as an allegory or parable of the rise of Nazism and the nightmare of the Occupation. However, *The Plague* metaphor is both more complicated and more flexible. *The Plague* signifies the Absurd in general as well as any calamity or disaster that tests the

mettle of human beings, their endurance, solidarity, sense of responsibility, compassion, and will.

The Fall

The Fall (1956) – Camus’ third novel is an extended dramatic monologue spoken by M. Jean-Baptiste Clamence, a dissipated, psychic, cynical, former Parisian attorney. He is also called a “judge-penitent”. Set in the night-life of Amsterdam, the work is a small masterpiece of compression and style: a confessional and semi-autobiographical novel, an arresting character study and psychological portrait. It is a wide-ranging philosophical discourse on guilt and innocence, expiation and punishment, good and evil.

Betwixt and Between

Betwixt and Between (The Wrong Side and The Right Side) is a collection of five essays:

- *Irony*
- *Between Yes and No*
- *Death in the Soul*
- *Love of Life*
- *The Wrong Side and The Right Side*

The subject of the collection is happiness. The essays illustrate the temporary nature of happiness and how one's happiness is constantly contrasted with unhappiness and despair. In *Love of Life* Camus writes, “There is no love of life without despair of life.”⁴ The contrast of love for life with despair of life will

run throughout both collections of essays and will eventually form the paradox of the absurd discussed by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. *Love of Love*, unsurprisingly, covers 'love of life' and, in the collection, immediately follows *Death in the Soul*. Camus actually wrote *Death in the Soul* after *Love of Life* but chose to put the essays in reverse order of writing, perhaps to better illustrate the idea that an upsurge in happiness often follows a period of isolation.

Camus visited Prague in 1936; he was experiencing problems with his marriage as well as with his health. He spent a few desperate days alone in the city, with no understanding of the language and limited funds. He wrote an account of this experience in 1937, included in *The Right Side and The Wrong Side*, under the title *Death in the Soul*. "Here I am, stripped bare, in a town where the signs are strange, unfamiliar hieroglyphics, with no friends to talk to, in short, without any distraction."⁵

The lack of language and money alienates Camus from his surroundings. He has nothing but himself and the world around him. The sun in Prague is not the same as in Algeria and the city is cold compared to the Italian countryside he will later luxuriate in. What Camus wants is to feel a harmony between him and the world. In Prague, all he feels is isolation from the world as well as people.

In the first essay, *Irony*, Camus compares the vitality and love for life experienced in youth and the despair of the elderly. There is the elderly old woman, who is left alone in the corner to sit in the dark while the young people

leave her to go to the cinema. An old man, who desperately tries to keep the attention of the young men with tall stories, knowing all the while that they are uninterested in what he has to say, And an old woman, who while alive bullied and dominated her family and when dead left behind no-one, sincerely wishing she were still alive. In the final paragraph, Camus writes:

None of this fits together? How very true! A woman you leave behind to go to the movies, an old man to whom you have stopped listening, a death that redeemed nothing, and then, on the other hand the whole radiance of the world. What difference does it make if you accept everything? Here are three destinies, different and yet alike. Death for us all, but his own death to each. After all, the sun still warms our bones for us.⁶

In the essay, from which the title of the collection is taken, *The Right Side and The Wrong Side*, Camus says:

I do not want to choose between the right and wrong sides of the world, and I do not want the choice to be made... The great courage is still to gaze as squarely at the light as at death. Besides, how can I define a link that leads from this all-consuming love of life to this secret despair?⁷

The right side of the world is represented by happiness, often experienced as a surge of happiness when one feels a harmony between themselves and their place in the world. The wrong side is represented by the despair one feels when contemplating life, chiefly brought about by the thought of impending inevitable death. Camus claims, in this collection, that both 'sides' are experienced as a fact of life. The correct way to live is to accept both these sides of life. Enjoy and relish the moments of happiness but accept that they are temporary and must come to an end. Camus is not suggesting that this is possible

or offering advice on how to achieve this acceptance. Does he want us to accept that our lives are temporary and, because of this acceptance, no longer despair, or simply accept that despair is inevitable, and not overcomplicate life by trying to evade it? Camus also writes about a middle position, *Between Yes and No*. In this essay, he writes about an experience he had, in a café, in which he felt neither a great love of life nor a great despair. “Since this hour is a like a pause between yes and no, I leave hope or disgust with life for another time.”⁸ During this hour, he is able to stand back from his life and reflect on his position. In the essay, he relives childhood experiences in his mind during this period between yes and no.

There is also the idea brought up in the collection, not usually dwelled upon by commentators, of the importance of social interaction. Much of the suffering of the elderly observed in *Irony*, it seems to me, was not brought about by impending inevitable death but through isolation and the resulting loneliness. Camus suffered a similar isolation in Prague, something he admits that could have been avoided if he'd found the prostitute in 'his restaurant' more alluring. His suffering is finally ended with the arrival of his friends. In *Between Yes and No*, Camus writes about the loneliness of his mother and the relationship between her and her son, as well as the indifference he feels for the father he never knew. The subject of *The Wrong Side and The Right Side* is happiness and the key ideas are as follows:

1. Love of life- Experienced as a feeling of harmony between oneself and the society.

2. Despair of life- Experienced as a feeling of hopelessness brought about by the disharmony between oneself and the society.
3. The importance of social interaction.

There are no arguments or clear cut instructions on how to achieve happiness, other than the idea of simplicity. Camus suggests that the world is simple. He discovers this between *yes* and *no*. You live, have periods of happiness and periods of despair and then you die. He seems to be saying that the correct way to live is to accept this simplicity and not attempt to avoid the wrong side, or 'no' by overcomplicating matters. This over complication comes from ideas that Camus will later refer to as consolations. He says at the end of *Between Yes and No*:

Yes everything is simple. It's men who overcomplicate things. Don't let them tell us any stories. Don't let them say about a man condemned to death: 'He is going to pay his debt to society,' but: 'They are going to chop his head off.' It may seem like nothing. But it does make a difference. There are some people who prefer to look their destiny straight in the eye.⁹

Nuptials

Camus' second collection of essays, *Nuptials*, published in 1939, picks up the same ideas as those expressed in *The Wrong Side and The Right Side* but develops them further. The title of the collection refers to the idea of wedding human experience of life with the social and natural world. The essays included in the collection are:

- *Nuptials at Tipasa*
- *The Wind at Djemila*
- *Summer in Algiers*

- *The Desert*

Nuptials at Tipasa is a vivid account of Camus' relationship with the natural world. Here Camus writes about a harmony between the pride he feels in being a human and the pride seemingly shown by the world.

Yet people have often told me: there is nothing to be proud of. Yes, there is: this sun, this sea, my heart leaping with youth, the salt taste of my body and this vast landscape in which tenderness and glory merge in blue and yellow. It is to conquer this that I need my strength and my resources. Everything here leaves me intact; I surrender nothing of myself, and don no mask: learning patiently and ardently how to live is enough for me, well worth all their arts of living.¹⁰

In *The Wind at Djemila* Camus writes about death and illness. “I do not want to believe that death is a gateway to another life. For me, it is always a closed door.”¹¹ A key theme with Camus, that notions of an afterlife diminish the ‘present wealth’ of living in the natural world. Religion, and philosophy, to Camus, seeks only “to deliver man from the weight of his own life.”¹² Of illness, something Camus is more than familiar with as a TB sufferer, he writes:

It is a remedy against death. It prepares us for it. It creates an apprenticeship whose first stage is self-pity. It supports man in his great effort to avoid the certainty that he will die completely.¹³

Camus goes on to say that there is a poverty of ideas about death in our society. He will go to write two long essays on that subject, *The Myth of Sisyphus* is concerned with suicide; *The Rebel* is concerned with murder. Almost all his fiction involves death. Some examples:

The Happy Death – explores whether it is possible to die happy.

The Stranger – the hero kills a man and is sentenced to death.

Caligula – kills frequently and is assassinated following the logic of ‘men die and they are unhappy.’

The Plague – bubonic plague strikes in the Algerian town of Oran.

The Fall – the title refers, in part, to a suicide involving a fall off a Parisian bridge. The hero is haunted by his inaction after witnessing the suicide.

The Malcontents – mother and daughter run a hotel, killing the guests.

The Just Assassins

The Just Assassins anarchists plan an assassination and receive the death penalty. Towards the end of *The Wind at Djemila* Camus writes the words that he heard when he was seventeen, lying in a hospital bed after being diagnosed with TB, “You are strong and I owe it to you to be honest: I can tell you that you are going to die.”¹⁴ This experience was a major influence in Camus' life. Coping with TB at the time of Camus' suffering meant long periods in hospital and painful procedures collapsing his lungs. Of all the essays, *Summer in Algiers* is one that gives us the greatest insight into Camus' early thought. It is in this essay that Camus is at his most idealistic when writing about the Algerian working class society. We also see, for the first time, the simple values that together form Camus' early ‘ethics’.

It is not surprising that the sensual riches this country offers so profusely to the sensitive person should coincide with the most extreme deprivation. There is no truth that does not also carry bitterness. Why then should it be surprising if I never love this country more than in the midst of its poorest inhabitants?¹⁵

Here again is the idea that happiness and suffering coincide together.

Another key idea, with Camus, is the idea of people ‘complicating’ the simple

facts of the world with arguments designed to offer relief from the ‘wrong side’ of life, offering ‘truths without bitterness’. Thinking about the youth of Algiers’ society, engaging themselves with sunbathing and swimming, Camus writes:

‘They just ‘like being in the sun.’ It would be hard to exaggerate the significance of this custom in our day. For the first time in two thousand years the body has been shown naked on the beaches. For twenty centuries, men have strived to impose decency on the insolence of the Greeks, to diminish the flesh and elaborate our dress.¹⁶

***The Myth of Sisyphus* and His ideas on Absurd and Revolt**

Camus’ essay collection *The Myth of Sisyphus* is the eponymous portrait of the mythological figure of Sisyphus. Sisyphus was one of the wisest men on earth, extremely skilled in trickery and the founder of Corinth. After deceiving the gods, Zeus banished him into Tartarus, a prison-like waste land beneath the underworld. Here, Sisyphus endlessly rolls a rock up a hill, just to have it roll back to start anew. A Sisyphean task became synonymous with senseless work that man has to do nowadays. From the beginning on it is the very clear tone of the book, that the value of life is most important issue. All other themes resolve about the question of suicide, mortality and faith. The term ‘faith’ is burdened with a heavy religious meaning, but for the French writer it is not a matter of one believes in God or not, but rather to believe in oneself. Camus examines how an honest affirmation of life can come into existence without pinning it down to external influences. It is life that matters, the pure ability to be part of this world.

There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy. All the rest – whether or not the world has three dimensions, whether the mind

has nine or twelve categories – comes afterwards. These are games; one must first answer.¹⁷

The discussion of the *The Myth of Sisyphus* essay in the collection starts from a fairly existential viewpoint: existence matters, all questions of essence come afterwards. Suicide, the decision to end one's own life, is an act of despair and an inability to cope up with life. Camus is aware of that, but digs immediately deeper: he looks at mortality. The pairing between mortality and the endless task of Sisyphus, that makes him immortal in his punishment, is not a stark contrast. On the contrary, with this combination, Camus presents that we are all immortal until the moment of death occurs. How is this possible? It is because death has never been experienced. This reveals to the reader why Camus fascination with suicide marks the start of 'Absurdity and Suicide': since there is no personal experience of death, the fascination and curiosity prevails. It is this drive that is later needed for overcoming the absurd.

The words 'eternal', 'endless', 'immortal' are made up by the human mind to fix something that is ungraspable. By naming 'eternity' as such, the status loses a threatening quality of never-ending quality. In Camus' works, these unlimited visions like eternity are summed up in the notion of the absurd. It is also a far better word to describe how our mind processes a word but can never fully grasp the meaning behind since we always act within limits of information. Sisyphus is in the same situation and his story illustrates how man copes with the graspable world around him. His situation also shows how one can overcome the despair of the absurd through Camusian revolt.

The basic idea of revolt is largely political: to overthrow an existing and often oppressive authority. Despite the political importance of this essay at the time of publication, the idea of overcoming a tyrannical force is crucial. Camusian revolt consists of three steps: acknowledgement, acceptance, accomplishment. Acknowledgement of the absurd makes it first of all a part of one's own; it is not foreign and unpleasant anymore. After this step, "you have already grasped that Sisyphus is the absurd hero."¹⁸ Acceptance is therefore much more difficult for many people. Sisyphus cannot break his fate from the outside, but only from the inside. This inside is the attitude shown towards an issue, although it could alternatively be regarded as the underworld itself or a representation of the Freudian unconsciousness.

Sisyphus has to accept the absurd around him in order to overcome it. Camus uses the lack of information about Sisyphus to create his own story about the man alone with a rock. Nothing seems to be scarier than working for no results and always starting all over again, apparently with no aim. This is the point where Camus, like a lawyer, takes position for Sisyphus and works in his theory of the absurd.

At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks towards the lairs of gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock. ... Sisyphus, the proletarian of the gods, powerless and rebellious, knows the whole extent of his wretched condition; it is what he thinks of during his descent. The lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory. There is no fate that cannot be surmounted by scorn.¹⁹

The Myth of Sisyphus is a deeply humanistic book. Even though the word 'fate' appears several times, it is meant in terms of fear: fear of a (wrong) decision, a situation or a life in short, representations of the absurd. Since this is no solid soil for an individual to grow on, this state of fear is only overcome by faith in the self. Camus' essay is a celebration of the individual without falling into self-indulgence or egotism. Nonetheless, Camus puts special emphasis on the society as shown in his later works like *The Plague* or *Les justes*. A strong individual creates a strong society and can change the world.

A Happy Death

A Happy Death is the first novel by French writer-philosopher Albert Camus. The existentialist topic of the book is the "will to happiness," the conscious creation of one's happiness. It draws on memories of the author including his job at the maritime commission in Algiers, his suffering from tuberculosis, and his travels in Europe. Camus composed and reworked the novel between 1936 and 1938 but then decided not to publish it. It was eventually published in 1971, more than 10 years after Camus' death. *A Happy Death* is clearly the precursor to his most famous work, *The Stranger*, published in 1942. The main character in *A Happy Death* is named "Patrice Meursault", similar to *The Stranger's* main character "Meursault"; both are French Algerian clerks who kill a man in cold blood. *A Happy Death* is written in the third person, while *The Stranger* is written in first person.

The novel has just over 100 pages and consists of two parts. In the first part, titled "Natural death", describes the monotone and empty life of Patrice

Meursault with his boring office job and a meaningless relationship with his girlfriend. Meursault gets to know the rich invalid Roland Zagreus (Zagreus is a character of Greek mythology) who shows Meursault a way out: "Only it takes time to be happy. A lot of time, Happiness is a long patience. In almost every case, we use up our lives making money, when we should be using our money to gain time. Meursault decides to kill Zagreus in order to create his happiness with the rich man's money. In Part two, titled "Conscious death", follows Meursault's subsequent trip to Europe. Traveling by train from city to city, he is unable to find peace and decides to return to Algiers, to live in a house high above the sea with three young female friends. Everybody here has only one goal: the pursuit of happiness. Yet Meursault needs solitude. He marries a pleasant woman he does not love, buys a house in a village by the sea, and moves in alone. "At this hour of night, his life seemed so remote to him, he was so solitary and indifferent to everything and to himself as well, that Meursault felt he had at last attained what he was seeking, that the peace which filled him now was born of that patient self-abandonment he had pursued and achieved with the help of this warm world so willing to deny him without anger. Severely ill, he dies a happy death.

The Rebel

The Rebel (1951) – Camus considered this work a continuation of the critical and philosophical investigation of the Absurd that he began with *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Only this time his concern is not the ethics of suicide, but the problem of murder. After introducing the view that an authentic life inevitably

involves some form of conscientious moral revolt, he ends up arguing that only in rare, and in very narrowly defined, instances can political violence be morally justified. Camus' critique of revolutionary violence and terror in this work touched nerves throughout Europe and led to his celebrated feud with Sartre and other French leftists.

Resistance, Rebellion, and Death

Resistance, Rebellion, and Death (1957) – This posthumous collection is of interest to students of Camus mainly because it brings together an unusual assortment of his non-fiction writings on a wide range of topics, from art and politics to the advantages of pessimism and the virtues of Christianity. Of special interest are two pieces, *Letters to a German Friend* and *Reflections on the Guillotine* that helped secure Camus' worldwide reputation as a voice of liberty: "Letters to a German Friend" is a set of four letters originally written during the Nazi Occupation.

Camus's short story collection *Exile and the Kingdom*

In March of 1957 Camus's short story collection *Exile and the Kingdom* was released. Four of the six stories take place in Algeria and they reveal a writer becoming more concerned with narrative craft experimenting with different methods of narration, structures and topics. Many critics consider the collection invaluable in that Camus emphasized storytelling over philosophy and politics, thus infusing the stories with human warmth that had been missing in previous works. The stories are: *An Adulterous Woman*, *The Renegade*, *The Silent Men*, *The Guest*, *The Artist at work*, *The Growing Stone*.

The first story, “An Adulterous Woman” is written from the perspective of the woman. She is the first and the only female narrator to appear in Camus’ career. She travels Algeria with her husband who is a salesman but feels a nagging restlessness in her comfortable but loveless marriage. So she sneaks out in the middle of night to look at the stars and the desert; her adultery is with the landscape, the place itself, but she eventually returns to her bed, resigned.

The second story “The Renegade” is written from the point of view of a recently converted missionary who goes into a dangerous part of Africa and endures torture. He got his tongue cut out. He then embraces evil just as he had wholly, suddenly embraced god, and at the conclusion, he lies in wait to kill the missionary sent out to take his place.

In “The Silent Men” an Algerian Frenchman who works as a cooper returns to his job after a futile hit. There are Spaniards, Arabs, Frenchman a mixed, poor, honest community that makes up Camus’ ideal of Algeria as he wished it to be. The worker treat the boss coldly, which angers him, but then , the boss’s young daughter falls seriously ill, causing the men to remain silent. The difference is that their silence changes from one of cold refusal to one of speechless sympathy.

The fourth story “The Guest” is the most famous and the strongest story in the collection. In it, a French Algerian school teacher, living alone in the school house is left with an Arab arrested for murder. The teacher is ordered to hand over the Arab to the police station in a nearby town the next morning. Daru, the teacher, tells the officer that he will not do it, though he knows this

will get him in trouble. Nonetheless, he lets the Arab stay overnight, secretly hoping that the Arab would escape but he doesn't even try. The next morning, the teacher walks with the Arab, gives him money, and tells him that one path leads to Nomads which would take him in, and the other way leads to police. Daru leaves him, and after a few minutes, he watches the Arab walking towards the town and the police. And upon Daru's return, a message written on the black board says, "You handed over our brother, you will pay for this". This story also includes the first individualized, more fleshed-out Arabic character that Camus ever created.

The fifth story "The Artist at work" reveals the story of a painter in France who is wholly involved in creating art, regardless of whether he is successful or not.

Finally "The Growing Stone" is one of the most optimistic stories Camus ever wrote. It tells the story of D'Arrast, an engineer coming to Africa to build a dam.

The First Man

Regarding the topic of his father Camus returned to it in the Novel he was then working on, called *The First Man*. *The First Man* is Albert Camus' unfinished final novel. This novel was found in the mud at the accident site. It was published by his daughter in 1995. It is a novel of basic and essential things: childhood, school days, the life of the body, the power of the sun and the sea, a painful love of son for his mother, the search for a lost father. He thinks one last time of his father, the First Man both for him and for the 'New World' of

Algeria. The two images, sun and sea, recur in Camus' work and achieve symbolical force. The range of Camus' imagery is fairly narrow and derives almost entirely from the central experience of his life, his encounter with nature and surroundings. Images are concerned with the blinding sun. Algerian landscape is the main character and it is the main surroundings. It is within the context of this particular experience of nature that Camus' references to the sun and the sea need to be set. These images figure prominently in Camus' work because they are obviously the representative images of the type of landscape in which he was born and spent the formative years of his life.

The Themes and Plot Construction

The themes and plot construction of Camus' works are affected by the number of experiences of life and the special concerns of his relationships with his surroundings. Regardless of whether he is producing drama, fiction, or non-fiction, Camus in his mature writings nearly always takes up and re-explores the same basic philosophical issues. These recurrent topics constitute the key components of his thought. They include themes like the Absurd, alienation, suicide, and rebellion that almost automatically come to mind whenever his name is mentioned. Hence any summary of his place in modern philosophy would be incomplete without at least a brief discussion of these ideas and how they fit together to form a distinctive and original world-view.

Absurd

The theme of absurdity is the heart beats of Camus' works. Even readers not closely acquainted with Camus' works are aware of his reputation as

the philosophical expositor, anatomist, and poet-apostle of the absurd. It is largely through the thought and writings of the French-Algerian author that the concept of absurdity has become a part not only of world literature and twentieth-century philosophy, but of modern popular culture as well.

The meaning of absurd is contrary to the view conveyed by popular culture. According to Camus, the absurd, does not simply refer to some vague perception that modern life is fraught with paradoxes, incongruities, and intellectual confusion. Instead, as he himself emphasizes and tries to make clear, the absurd expresses a fundamental disharmony, a tragic incompatibility, in our existence. In effect, he argues that the absurd is the product of a collision or confrontation between our human desire for order, meaning, and purpose in life and the blank, indifferent silence of the universe. Camus explains, the absurd is not in man nor in the world, but in their presence together. It is the only bond uniting them.

So here we are poor creatures desperately seeking hope and meaning in a hopeless, meaningless world. Sartre, in his essay-review of *The Stranger* provides an additional gloss on the idea. The absurd, to be sure, resides neither in man nor in the world, if you consider each separately. But since man's dominant characteristic is being in the world, the absurd is, in the end, an inseparable part of the human condition. The absurd, then, presents itself in the form of an existential opposition. It arises from the human demand for clarity and transcendence on the one hand and a cosmos that offers nothing of the kind

on the other. Such is our fate: we inhabit a world that is indifferent to our sufferings and deaf to our protests.

In Camus' view there are three possible philosophical responses to this predicament. Two of these he condemns as evasions; the other he puts forward as a proper solution.

Our first choice is blunt and simple: physical suicide. If we decide that a life without some essential purpose or meaning is not worth living, we can simply choose to kill ourselves. Camus rejects this choice as cowardly. In his terms it is a repudiation or renunciation of life, not a true revolt.

Choice two is the religious solution of positing a transcendent world of solace and meaning beyond the Absurd. Camus calls this solution "philosophical suicide" and rejects it as transparently evasive and fraudulent. To adopt a supernatural solution to the problem of the absurd for example, through some type of mysticism or leap of faith is to annihilate reason, which in Camus' view is as fatal and self-destructive as physical suicide. In effect, instead of removing himself from the absurd confrontation of self and world like the physical suicide, the religious believer simply removes the offending world, replacing it, via a kind of metaphysical abracadabra, with a more agreeable alternative.

In Camus' view the only authentic and valid solution is simply to accept absurdity, or better yet to embrace it, and to continue living. Since the absurd in his view is an unavoidable, indeed defining, characteristic of the human condition, the only proper response to it is full, unflinching, courageous acceptance.

The example par excellence of this option of spiritual courage and metaphysical revolt is the mythical Sisyphus of Camus' philosophical essay. Doomed to eternal labour at his rock, fully conscious of the essential hopelessness of his plight, Sisyphus nevertheless pushes on. In doing so he becomes for Camus a superb icon of the spirit of revolt and of the human condition. To rise each day to fight a battle you know you cannot win, and to do this with wit, grace, compassion for others, and even a sense of mission, is to face the Absurd in a spirit of true heroism.

Over the course of his career, Camus examines the Absurd from multiple perspectives and through the eyes of many different characters from the mad *Caligula*, who is obsessed with the problem, to the strangely aloof and yet simultaneously self-absorbed Meursault, who seems indifferent to it even as he exemplifies and is finally victimized by it. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus traces it in specific characters of legend and literature and also in certain character types- the Actor, the Conqueror, all of whom may be understood as in some way a version or manifestation of Sisyphus, the archetypal absurd hero.

The Outsider

A recurrent theme in Camus' literary works, which also shows up in his moral and political writings, is the character or perspective of the "stranger" or outsider. Meursault, the laconic narrator of *The Stranger*, is the most obvious example. He seems to observe everything, even his own behaviour, from an outside perspective. Like an anthropologist, he records his observations with

clinical detachment at the same time that he himself is warily observed by the community around him.

Camus came by this perspective naturally. As a European in Africa, an African in Europe, an infidel among Moslems, a lapsed Catholic, a Communist Party drop-out, an underground resister, who at times had to use code names and false identities, a “child of the state” raised by a widowed mother, who was illiterate and virtually deaf and dumb, Camus lived most of his life in various groups and communities without really being of them. This outside view, the perspective of the exile, became his characteristic stance as a writer. It explains both the cool, objective precision of much of his work and also the high value he assigned to longed-for ideals of friendship, community, solidarity, and brotherhood.

Guilt and Innocence

Throughout his writing career, Camus showed a deep interest in questions of guilt and innocence. Once again Meursault in *The Stranger* provides a striking example. Is he legally innocent of the murder he is charged with? Or is he technically guilty? On the one hand, there seems to have been no conscious intention behind his action. Indeed the killing takes place almost as if by accident, with Meursault in a kind of absent-minded daze, distracted by the sun. From this point of view, his crime seems surreal and his trial and subsequent conviction a travesty. On the other hand, it is hard for the reader not to share the view of other characters in the novel, especially Meursault’s accusers, witnesses, and jury, in whose eyes he seems to be a seriously defective human being – a

kind of hollow man at best; at worst a monster of self-centeredness and insularity. That the character has evoked such a wide range of responses from critics and readers – from sympathy to horror – is a tribute to the psychological complexity and subtlety of Camus' portrait.

Camus' brilliantly crafted final novel, *The Fall*, continues his keen interest in the theme of guilt, this time via a narrator who is virtually obsessed with it. The significantly named Jean-Baptiste Clamence is tortured by guilt in the wake of a seemingly casual incident. While strolling home one drizzly November evening, he shows little concern and almost no emotional reaction at all to the suicidal plunge of a young woman into the Seine. But afterwards the incident begins to gnaw at him, and eventually he comes to view his inaction as typical of a long pattern of personal vanity and as a colossal failure of human sympathy on his part. Wracked by remorse and self-loathing, he gradually descends into a figurative hell. Formerly an attorney, he is now a self-described "judge-penitent" means a combination sinner, tempter, prosecutor, and father-confessor, who shows up each night at his local haunt, a sailor's bar near Amsterdam's red light district, where, somewhat in the manner of Coleridge's Ancient Mariner, he recounts his story to whoever will hear it. In the final sections of the novel, amid distinctly Christian imagery and symbolism, he declares his crucial insight that, despite our pretensions to righteousness, everyone is guilty. Hence no human being has the right to pass final moral judgment on another. In a final twist, Clamence asserts that his acid self-portrait is also a mirror for his contemporaries. Hence his confession is also

an accusation not only of his nameless companion, who serves as the mute auditor for his monologue but ultimately of the hypocrite lecturer as well.

Christianity and Paganism

Another most important core theme of Camus is the Christianity and paganism. The theme of guilt and innocence in Camus' writings relates closely to another recurrent tension in his thought: the opposition of Christian and pagan ideas and influences. At heart a nature-worshipper, and by instinct a skeptic and non-believer, Camus nevertheless retained a lifelong interest and respect for Christian philosophy and literature. In particular, he seems to have recognized St. Augustine and Kierkegaard as intellectual kinsmen and writers with whom he shared a common passion for controversy, literary flourish, self-scrutiny, and self-dramatization. Christian images, symbols, and allusions abound in all his work which is probably more so than in the writing of any other avowed atheist in modern literature, and Christian themes like judgment, forgiveness, despair, sacrifice, passion, etc permeate the novels. Meursault and Clamence are presented not just as sinners, devils, and outcasts, but in several instances explicitly, and not entirely ironically, as Christ figures.

Alienation and Dehumanization

The themes of alienation and dehumanization as by-products of an increasingly technical and automated world enter into nearly all of Camus' works. Even his concept of the Absurd becomes multiplied by a social and economic world in which meaningless routines and mind-numbing repetitions predominate. The drudgery of Sisyphus is mirrored and amplified in the

assembly line, the business office, the government bureau, and especially in the penal colony and concentration camp. In this manner, the ever-ambiguous Meursault in *The Stranger* can be understood as both a depressing manifestation of the newly emerging mass personality for example as a figure devoid of basic human feelings and passions and conversely, as a lone hold-out, a last remaining specimen of the old Romanticism and hence a figure who is viewed as both dangerous and alien by the robotic majority. Similarly, *The Plague* can be interpreted, on at least one level, as an allegory in which humanity must be preserved from the fatal pestilence of mass culture, which converts formerly free, autonomous, independent-minded, human beings into a soulless new species.

Suicide and Escapism

The story of suicide and escapism from bondages of life is the real criterion theme of Camus' works. For an example- Suicide is the central subject of *The Myth of Sisyphus* and serves as a background theme in *Caligula* and *The Fall*. In *Caligula* the mad title character, in a fit of horror and revulsion at the meaninglessness of life, would rather die and bring the world down with him than accept a cosmos that is indifferent to human fate or that will not submit to his individual will. In *The Fall*, a stranger's act of suicide serves as the starting point for a bitter ritual of self-scrutiny and remorse on the part of the narrator.

Death Penalty

From the time he first heard the story of his father's literal nausea and revulsion after witnessing a public execution, Camus began a vocal and lifelong

opposition to the death penalty. Executions by guillotine were a common public spectacle in Algeria during his lifetime, but he refused to attend them and recoiled bitterly at their very mention. Condemnation of capital punishment is both explicit and implicit in his writings. For example, in *The Stranger* Merseault's long confinement during his trial and his eventual execution are presented as part of an elaborate, ceremonial ritual involving both public and religious authorities. Similarly, in the Myth of Sisyphus, the would-be suicide is contrasted with his fatal opposite, the man condemned to death, and we are continually reminded that a sentence of death is our common fate in an absurd universe.

Camus' opposition to the death penalty is not specifically philosophical. That is, it is not based on a particular moral theory or principle. Camus' opposition, in contrast, is humanitarian, conscientious, and almost visceral. Like Victor Hugo, his great predecessor on this issue, he views the death penalty as an egregious barbarism – an act of blood riot and vengeance covered over with a thin veneer of law and civility to make it acceptable to modern sensibilities. That it is also an act of vengeance aimed primarily at the poor and oppressed, and that it is given religious sanction, makes it even more hideous and indefensible in his view.

Camus' essay "*Reflections on the Guillotine*" supplies a detailed examination of the issue. An eloquent personal statement, with compelling psychological and philosophical insights, it includes the author's direct rebuttal to traditional retributions arguments in favour of capital punishment such as

Kant's claim that death is the legally appropriate, indeed morally required, penalty for murder.

Camus concludes his essay by arguing that, at the very least; France should abolish the savage spectacle of the guillotine and replace it with a more humane procedure such as lethal injection. But he still retains a scant hope that capital punishment will be completely abolished at some point in the time to come. In the unified Europe of future the solemn abolition of the death penalty ought to be the first article of the European Code we all hope for. Camus himself did not live to see the day, but he would no doubt be gratified to know that abolition of capital punishment is now an essential prerequisite for membership in the European Union.

Existentialism

Existentialism is the more powerful and inter woven theme which forced naturally in Camus' works from his heart and emotions. Camus is often classified as an existentialist writer, and it is easy to see why. Affinities with Kierkegaard and Sartre are patent. He shares with these philosophers and with the other major writers in the existentialist tradition, from Augustine and Pascal to Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche. A habitual and intense interest in the active human psyche, in the life of conscience or spirit as it is actually experienced and lived. Like these writers, he aims at nothing less than a thorough, candid exegesis of the human condition, and like them he exhibits not just a philosophical attraction but also a personal commitment to such values as

individualism, free choice, inner strength, authenticity, personal responsibility, and self-determination.

However, one troublesome fact remains throughout his career. Camus repeatedly denied that he was an existentialist. On the other hand, besides his personal rejection of the label, there appears to be solid reasons for challenging the claim that Camus is an existentialist. For one thing, it is noteworthy that he never showed much interest in, indeed he largely avoided. Of course there is no rule that claims an existentialist must be a metaphysician. However, Camus' seeming aversion to technical philosophical discussion does suggest one way in which he distanced himself from contemporary existentialist thought.

Another point of divergence is that Camus seems to have regarded existentialism as a complete and systematic world-view, that is, a fully articulated doctrine. In his view, to be a true existentialist one had to commit to the entire doctrine and not merely to bits and pieces of it, and this was apparently something he was unwilling to do.

Yet a further point of separation, and possibly a decisive one, is that Camus actively challenged and set himself apart from the existentialist motto that being precedes essence. Ultimately, against Sartre in particular and existentialists in general, he clings to his instinctive belief in a common human nature. In his view human existence necessarily includes an essential core element of dignity and value, and in this respect he seems surprisingly closer to the humanist tradition from Aristotle to Kant than to the modern tradition of skepticism and relativism from Nietzsche to Derrida.

Obviously, Camus' writings remain the primary reason for his continuing importance and the chief source of his cultural legacy. But his fame is also to his exemplary life. He truly lived his philosophy. And thus it is in his personal political stands and public statements as well as in his works that we can find his views clearly articulated. In short, he bequeathed not just his words but also his actions. Taken together, those words and actions embody a core set of liberal democratic values including tolerance, justice, liberty, open-mindedness, and respect for personhood, condemnation of violence, and resistance to tyranny that can be fully approved and acted upon by the modern intellectual engage.

On a purely literary level, one of Camus' most original contributions to modern discourse is his distinctive prose style. Terse and hard-boiled, yet at the same time lyrical, and indeed capable of great, soaring flights of emotion and feeling, Camus' style represents a deliberate attempt on his part to wed the famous clarity, elegance, and dry precision of the French philosophical tradition with the more sonorous and opulent manner of 19th century Romantic fiction. The result is something like a cross between Hemingway and Melville; or between Diderot and Hugo. For the most part when we read Camus we encounter the plain syntax, simple vocabulary, and biting aphorism typical of modern theatre. However, this base style frequently becomes a counterpoint or springboard for extended musings and lavish descriptions almost in the manner of Proust. And here we may note that this attempted reconciliation or union of opposing styles is not just an aesthetic gesture on the author's part. It is also a

moral and political statement as well. It says, in effect, that the life of reason and the life of feeling need not be opposed; that intellect and passion can, and should, operate together.

Perhaps the greatest inspiration and example that Camus provides for contemporary readers is the lesson that it is still possible for a serious thinker to face the modern world with hardly a grain of hope. To read Camus is to find words like justice, freedom, humanity, and dignity used plainly and openly, without apology or embarrassment, and without the pained or derisive facial expressions or invisible quotation marks that almost automatically accompany those terms in public discourse today.

Albert Camus' Death

On January 3, 1960, Camus was planning to take the train back to Paris from Lourmarin, but changed his mind at the last minute- there was a railroad ticket found in his wallet-allowing himself to be persuaded to drive back with his friends Michel and Janine Gallimard. Michel drove the car. The two men were sitting in the front talking. Michel was not speeding, the roads were wet, he lost control of the car, hit a tree, and Camus was dead instantly. Michel and Gallimard died a week later. Camus's briefcase was found at the scene of the accident. Among its contents was an eighty thousand word manuscript he had begun work on, the draft of a novel, *The First Man* which was to be his '*Bildungsroman*'. Edited by his daughter Catherine from his closely written first draft, it was published in 1995.

His death made headlines round the world. He was buried in the cemetery at Lourmarin, without a Church service. In attendance were his wife, Francine, Gaston Gallimard and his Wife, Gabriel Audisio and Rene Char. The mound of his grave is marked by an aged stone bearing his name and dates. It is covered by a thick growth of rosemary.

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