

**ALBERT CAMUS: PERSPECTIVES ON THE  
NATURE OF POLITICAL REVOLT**

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THESIS

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## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Chapter	Page
I. INTRODUCTION. . . . .	1
Scope and Purpose	
Significance of the Thesis	
Background	
II. THE NATURE OF ABSURDITY . . . . .	13
Elements of Absurdity	
Immediate Consequences of Absurdity	
III. THE THEORY OF REVOLT. . . . .	39
The Nature of Revolt	
Ethics and Revolt	
Literature and Revolt	
IV. REVOLT AND POLITICS . . . . .	73
Normative Principles of Revolt	
Revolt and Ideology	
Revolt and Political Issues	
V. CONCLUSION. . . . .	99
Emergence of Relative Absolutes	
Elements of a Political Theory	
BIBLIOGRAPHY . . . . .	110

## CHAPTER I

### INTRODUCTION

#### Scope and Purpose

This thesis is an attempt to promote the inclusion of Albert Camus, French novelist, playwright, and essayist, within the ranks of Western political theory. Although Albert Camus by no means developed a consistent political theory in the tradition of Western political thought, he was instrumental in bringing to light many of the most pressing political issues of the twentieth century. He saw and understood political thought almost entirely in terms of human conflict and morality. It is for this reason, if for no other, that his name should be included in the tradition of Western political thought.

The scope and purpose of the thesis is an evaluation of Camus' literary and philosophical works and their implication to the concept of political revolt. It was the development of this concept which occupied the greatest amount of Camus' time and which made him a candidate for the title of political philosopher. His examination of the origins and effects of modern political revolutions provided insight to the nature of twentieth century totalitarianism. His ideas also helped to explain the modern emergence of "irrational" terror and political oppression. Whichever ideas are held to be most important

as a contribution to political theory, there can be little doubt that Camus' horror of and reaction to the misuse of political power in this century made him one of the most astute observers of the human purpose within the framework of the state.

Three basic points are made in this thesis concerning Albert Camus' influence on political theory. First, Camus was a political moralist. All of Camus' political thinking stemmed from a basic reaction to the political immorality demonstrated in a war-torn Europe. His first concern was the state's inhumanity to man. Thus Camus took it upon himself to describe the abrupt and coercive rise of a type of political power which considers humanity an expendable commodity. Although his political analysis suffers because of this particular motivation, Camus' emphasis on morality and political practice is highly important. His unique contribution in this area was his dogmatic belief that political values could reflect a relatively positive nature even though they ultimately stem from an "absurd" origin. Political revolution, as a consequence, does not have to reflect a nihilistic character.

The second point relates that Camus was, to a degree, a liberal humanist. As will be pointed out, the use of this label is restricted. Camus did, however, because of his explanation of revolt and his concern for human dignity, merit the general implications of this title. He felt that the

nature of revolt was primarily a reaction to the status quo, and for this and other reasons he can be considered to have been a liberal in the very general sense of that term. He also remained faithful to a vigorous proclamation of the dignity of man. All political systems exist to further the cause of humanity. Any political power which reduces the importance of the individual in order to expand the purpose of the state is not only guilty of "bad faith" but deserves immediate revolution and overthrow. The only authentic revolt then is one which seeks the realistic expansion of human dignity. Camus' contribution in this area reflected again and again the application and importance of normative principles to the development of political theory and practice.

The third point contends that Camus was devoted, in a special sense, to the dialectical exposition of revolt. He differed from the Marxist and Hegelian concern with dialectical history in that he could not heed the call of an absolute in history. From this basic distinction with dialectical history Camus traveled to a position of value relativism. Political revolt cannot be concerned with the attainment of absolutes without destroying the humanitarian purpose behind the revolt. Political revolt, therefore, must be concerned with the relative goals and values of any given society at any given time rather than an unyielding devotion to its own ultimate finality and totality. Because revolt is an eternal

process, however, it assumes much of the characteristics around which dialectical history developed.

### Significance of the Thesis

With the advent of nineteenth and twentieth century philosophy, much of which is not built upon "traditional" foundations, there has developed, especially in Europe, a school of thought which denies the existence, or at least importance, of such traditional concepts of absolutes as the Divinity, natural law, and natural rights. A system of thought has arisen which attempts to formulate philosophical principles around a vague notion called, in Camus' terms, the absurd. Man, as an existential being, has become the fundamental consideration. Essentiality, or the essentialist approach in philosophy, i.e. the study of essences, dogma, and a priori knowledge and presuppositions, has suffered from neglect. It therefore seems proper, in the light of traditional philosophy and classical political theory, to attempt to formulate definite political ideas which are relative to contemporary philosophy since it appears that there might be an important break in political philosophy between the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and such previous times during which an essential rather than an existential approach was used. Albert Camus' philosophical and political ideas definitely reflect the nature of this change.

A second point of significance concerns the relationship between rationality and irrationality. The nineteenth and

twentieth centuries have moved philosophically, and maybe somewhat politically, from a preoccupation with reason to an emphasis on the irrational aspects of theory. There is simply not as great a faith present in twentieth century political thought that reason is the foundation or method by which ultimate political principles can be understood. The idea of irrationality appears in both philosophical and political behavioral theories and, therefore, a study of the impact of this trend, as expressed by such men as Camus, deserves close observation.

A third point of significance should be pointed out. With the advent and use of the scientific and analytic approach to political thought, there has come a revived concern about the importance of normative political theory. Although recent works have demonstrated the effectiveness of the adoption of scientific methodology to the development of normative principles, there still remain areas in which metaphysical and ontological speculation supercede the desire for epistemological clarity. Metaphysical and ontological principles are no doubt vulnerable to the attacks by scientific epistemologists, but the importance of such principles and speculation should not be overlooked. Political theory must always be concerned, as was Camus, with the overriding normative issues of the day. Analytical and empirical methods can certainly be effective toward crystallizing normative principles, but the achievements



of the methods must not reduce the importance of the normative goals in the political system.

This thesis demonstrates how the basic philosophical principles formulated by Albert Camus influence political theory; an influence which, although built on the non-absolute and the irrational approach, definitely moves toward a positive approach in political theory through the media of humanism, values, and ideas which promote the fundamental concepts of the dignity of man.

#### Background

A glance at Camus' personal history will help in illuminating the origin of many of his key concepts and their relation to political thought. A short comparison with the general thesis of existentialism will also help establish a perspective around which Camus' ideas can be discussed.

Albert Camus was born in 1913 in Algeria. After graduating from the lycée, he became a philosophy student at the University of Algiers. In 1930 he was found to be tubercular, a condition which no doubt led him to his early preoccupation with death. He joined the Communist Party during this period (he was twenty-one), but left it quickly after a party-line modification on a question concerning Algerian Moslems. In 1936 he completed a dissertation on the relations between Greek and Christian thought in Plotinus and Saint Augustine, but in 1937 a renewed attack of tuberculosis prevented his taking the final examinations and his university career ended at this point.

He turned to journalism as a career and was recognized as a writer of promise. He also ran a theatrical company to which he devoted much time as a director, playwright, and actor. At the outbreak of war, Camus joined a southern Resistance network called "Combat." He formed a close friendship with Malraux and with René Leynaud, who was executed by the Germans in 1944. This act was one of the turning points for Camus' thoughts concerning revolt, and no doubt had the primary influence on his writing the essay on capital punishment. After the liberation of Paris in 1944, Camus took over the editorship of Combat, the organization's Resistance magazine, and continued to maintain a left-wing attitude of political thought. He retained this position until 1948.

In 1951 Camus published The Rebel, which immediately brought severe criticism from the communists and Sartrian left-wingers. The book clearly showed that Camus had made a transition concerning many of his basic political ideas, a transition which brought him much attention and often discomfort. The conflict between Sartre and Camus forced both men to formulate clearer positions concerning their political views and, as a result, their quarrel cost them their friendship. The quarrel, however, illuminated the intellectual emphasis of Sartre as opposed to the moral rigor of Camus concerning politics. Camus, following his position in relation to the argument, withdrew from UNESCO due to the admission of Spain.

Camus was awarded the Nobel Prize in 1957 at the early age of 44. He continued to write novels and adapt plays to French theatre until his premature death in 1960 in an automobile accident. During his lifetime he had produced three novels, four original plays, many adapted plays, two major philosophical essays, and hundreds of other articles, editorials, and essays. His death came early, but his impact on the moral consciousness of his times was already firmly established.

From the moment that Camus gained recognition in France he was considered to be an existential philosopher. This classification is somewhat justified, but it is not difficult to demonstrate that Camus did not agree with several of the most important aspects of existentialism. In the first place Camus did not accept the catch-phrase "existence precedes essence." This is the formula which existentialists put forward in order to describe man's condition in relation to knowledge. The basic idea is that man exists without knowing why. There is no a priori knowledge to which he can appeal to give his life essence. Life is at first without essence, and therefore meaning must be created. Camus was basically opposed to this fundamental proposition. He agreed that there was no a priori knowledge which could explain the universe, but he did put forth a fundamental view of the nature of man without respect to the creation of essence. Camus was not, in short, a presuppositionless philosopher. He denied a priori

knowledge, but he accepted a fundamental "essence" concerning a common nature of man. In this respect he differed from most of his existential contemporaries.

The second point of disagreement with existentialism concerns the view of the condition of man in the universe. The existential position maintains that existence without essence causes an eternal search and struggle, surrounded by danger and uncertainty, for self-identification. The existential position is basically pessimistic toward the outcome of this struggle. Camus' position differed in several respects. Although he painted an unhappy picture of the absurd world, Camus was not fundamentally pessimistic concerning the nature of man's realization. He was, in fact, optimistic with regard to man's condition and his ability to create new and positive essences. Camus felt that man could be happy in his struggle with the unknown, once he had established the limits of knowledge. He also contended that man's search for being and truth could be a happy experience as opposed to the existential cloud of nothingness.

Another area of difference concerns the nature of freedom. The existential position regards freedom as absolute. Man is, to use Sartre's phrase, condemned to be free. Man's freedom is an unavoidable circumstance rather than a desirable quality. Freedom, according to the existential position, is an unlimited absence of

restraints. Camus could not agree with this position; he was unwilling to admit that "everything is permitted." Freedom to him had positive characteristics of desirability, and it was not unlimited. This is probably the most important distinction between Camus and the existentialists with respect to political theory. His fundamental concept of freedom led to his expression of and desire for political moderation and restraint. He too felt that man's freedom was an inescapable condition to a great extent, but he could not reconcile the idea of unlimited freedom with the political immorality of the twentieth century. He was determined to express a concept of freedom which would be consistent with a concept of moderate political action.

Camus was in agreement with several important positions taken by existential thought. He opposed the rationalism of classic philosophy which sought universal truth. Truth can be known (if at all) only in terms of subjective introspection and passion. Camus also believed, as do the existentialists, in a "dynamic interpretation" of human existence. (The individual is always becoming,) constantly making choices, and taking risks. In this respect the individual is a free agent who is not governed by determinism. He also agreed that all philosophy must be centered around personal experience. Camus then shared with the existential position a common view of the disunity of the world and the absurdity of man's condition with respect to the world, but the comparison with existentialism ends with this observation.

Camus' position moved beyond existentialism in several respects. He did not attempt to systematize his philosophy in the same manner as the other existential thinkers; he showed no concern for the objective ontological and epistemological methods of Husserl, Heidegger, or Sartre. Camus' position was highly personal and, as a result, his philosophical thinking could not be completely identified with any systematic approach in philosophy. Camus was quite willing to disregard his methodology for the sake of human understanding. His philosophy was meant to be read and understood by the average individual rather than by other systematic philosophers and thinkers.

Albert Camus' position within the ranks of Western political theory should not be minimized. His perceptive recognition of the problems of humanity and of the growth of the totalitarian state mark him as an important political observer of his times. His importance should not be reduced because of the methods by which he discussed political thought. His insistence on the inclusion of morality within every aspect of political consideration deserves the highest praise in a century torn by examples of ruthless political immorality. Albert Camus died without fully experiencing the sensation of philosophical maturity; there is little doubt that his ideas were undergoing further development. But his passion for life and humanitarian causes has left

its impact on the moral conscience of a political and social environment already fearful of total self-destruction.

## CHAPTER II

### THE NATURE OF ABSURDITY

Albert Camus' philosophical thinking stems from a concept he developed during his early years. Camus called the idea "the absurd." The term, however, is by no means original in philosophical speculation. "Camus neither invented the absurd nor introduced it into France."<sup>1</sup> Such other men as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Kafka, Husserl, Marcel, and Sartre, all of whom at one time or another have been called "existential," were in some way concerned with the problem of absurdity. It was Camus, however, who gave lucidity and articulation to the term.

As will be pointed out, Camus' meaning of absurdity differs from the conventional meaning. Absurdity is not meant to entirely oppose rationality. Rationality for Camus became a necessary element of absurdity. The fact that Camus' concept of absurdity includes elements of rationality sets his definition and meaning of the term apart from the conventional usage.

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<sup>1</sup>Philip Thody, Albert Camus 1913-1960 (New York, 1961), p. 54.



### Elements of Absurdity

As early as March, 1936, Camus began to formulate the principles which would eventually comprise the fundamental elements of the absurd.

Lucid ecstasy and smiling destitution--the despair which we see in the viril acceptance reflected in Greek stelae. Why do I need to write or create, to love or suffer? The part of my life which is now lost is not, basically, the most important. Everything becomes pointless. Neither despair nor joy seems justified before this sky and the shining suffocating heat pouring down from it.<sup>2</sup>

Later, in 1938, Camus wrote in Noce:

One lives with a few familiar ideas. Two or three. By the chance encounter of worlds and men, one polishes them and transforms them. It takes ten years to have an idea fully one's own--about which one can talk. Naturally, this is a little discouraging. But in this way man gains a certain familiarity with the beautiful face of the world. Up to that point he looked at it face to face. But then he has to step to the side to gaze at its profile. A young man looks at the world face to face. He hasn't had the time to polish the idea of death and nothingness, the horror of which, however, he has tasted.<sup>3</sup>

These ideas, which express the feeling of absurdity, merged in December, 1938, to give rise to Camus' term, "absurdity." He mentioned the term in a brief passage in his Notebooks concerning a man who had been sentenced to death, a problem with which Camus later became obsessed.

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<sup>2</sup>Albert Camus, Notebooks 1935-1942 (New York, 1963), p. 17.

<sup>3</sup>Albert Camus, Noce, cited in Hanna Thomas, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus (Chicago, 1958), p. 3.

Here the Absurd is perfectly clear. It is the opposite of irrationality. It is the plain and simple truth. What is and would be irrational is the fleeting hope, itself already near to death, that it is all going to stop and that this death can be avoided.<sup>4</sup>

The problem of death perplexed Camus to the point that it became the source of his first philosophical essay concerning the nature of absurdity. The first sentence of the essay states the theme well: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide."<sup>5</sup> The Myth of Sisyphus concerns death in the form of suicide, and a later work, The Rebel, discusses the problem in relation to murder. It is primarily The Myth of Sisyphus and a novel, The Stranger, which use the concept of death to state the nature of the absurd. Camus felt that death forced man to accept the inevitable conclusion that life is absurd. His logic is not always clear, and he forces himself into the critical arena of the logicians and dialecticians by elevating the absurd to a position of transcendence which is understood by man only in terms of death. As will be pointed out later, the absurd even becomes a value. Despite the logical problems, which Camus readily admitted, he adhered to his thesis that man's existence is surrounded and agonized by a condition of absurdity--a condition which has its source in death, yet at the same time is resolved only through the inevitability of death.

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<sup>4</sup>Camus, Notebooks 1935-1942, p. 116.

<sup>5</sup>Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus (New York, 1955), p. 3.

Nicola Chiaromonte states in an article on Camus that "it is certain that what induced him to remain firm was not an ideological system, but the sentiment, so vehemently expressed in The Stranger and in some pages of The Myth of Sisyphus, of the inviolable secret which is enclosed in every man's heart simply because he is 'condemned to die.'<sup>6</sup>

Whether or not Camus' ideological position is logically acceptable is not the important question. Absurdity is not, and was never meant to be, a coherent, systematic philosophical position; it is a description of a feeling. Camus states this idea in a prefatory remark to The Myth of Sisyphus:

But it is useful to note at the same time that the absurd, hitherto taken as a conclusion, is considered in this essay as a starting-point. In this sense it may be said that there is something provisional in my commentary: one cannot prejudge the position it entails. There will be found here merely description, in the pure state, of an intellectual malady. No metaphysic, no belief is involved in it for the moment. These are the limits and the only bias of this book. Certain personal experiences urge me to make this clear.<sup>7</sup>

Camus was simply not interested in the explication of the absurd in metaphysical and epistemological terms. "Camus poses the feeling of absurdity as one of the irreducible qualities of human sentiment. He is not interested in the

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<sup>6</sup>Nicola Chiaromonte, "Albert Camus: In Memoriam," Camus, edited by Germaine Bree (Englewood Cliffs, 1962), p. 13.

<sup>7</sup>Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 2.

reasons for its existence."<sup>8</sup> The important contribution to be discovered in Camus' works emerges in the form of a driving emotive affirmation of the absurdity which envelops man's social, political, and metaphysical environment.

The Myth of Sisyphus <sup>Camus' works</sup> is a group of philosophical essays inspired by Homer's myth. The myth tells the story of a man condemned to the underworld whose eternal punishment is to push a boulder up a mountain until it reaches the top, only to let it roll down again so that the process may be repeated. Camus used the myth to explain the absurd as analogous to man's condition on Earth.

Rising, streetcar, four hours in the office or factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm-- this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the "why" arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.<sup>9</sup>

The question "why?" constitutes the most elementary aspect of absurdity, and it is a question which Sisyphus easily asks. Camus believed that Sisyphus becomes fully conscious of his plight as he returns to his eternal rock-pushing. There is no way for Sisyphus to escape his condition, yet by fully realizing this, he transcends his situation in so far as he is cognizant

<sup>8</sup>Kermit Lansner, "Albert Camus," Kenyon Review, XIV (Fall, 1952), p. 571.

<sup>9</sup>Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 10.

of the absurdity of his plight. Sisyphus must simply make the best of his condition of absurd existence. As the last two lines of the myth indicate, Sisyphus even has cause to be content. "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart. One must imagine Sisyphus happy."<sup>10</sup>

The concept of absurdity contains two basic elements: the conflict between irrationality and rationality and the negation of absolutes. The first principle of absurdity is the confrontation of a rational mind with an irrational world. Neither the world nor man constitutes absurdity. There must be a conflict of both elements for absurdity to exist. It is at the moment when a rational mind begins to question a humdrum existence that the feeling of absurdity is first experienced. It is more fully recognized when man attempts to understand the nature of the world.

The absurd, we have let it to be understood, is everything that has no meaning. But the world appears thus to us only because it eludes our reasoning, and our own life shows up the same character only in the same divorcement. We are then justified in concluding that the absurd depends upon neither the one nor the other of the elements present, but upon their confrontation.<sup>11</sup>

In an attempt to understand the knowledge of the world, man finds that metaphysical truths are elusive. The absurdity

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<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 91.

<sup>11</sup>Albert Maquet, Albert Camus: The Invincible Summer (New York, 1958), p. 42.

comes from man's realization that his attempt to distinguish what is true from what is false is clouded with paradoxes and contradictions which evade human understanding. Camus used Aristotle's example of a logical paradox to illustrate man's difficulty in discovering truth. Aristotle pointed out that if one asserts that all is true, he also asserts the truth of the contrary assertion and consequently the falsity of his original thesis. If he starts from the opposite direction by asserting that all is false, then he perceives that this statement in itself is also false, thus leading him into a vicious circle that continues ad infinitum.

Despite the logical naïveté of Aristotle's argument, Camus maintained that his example contained important elements basic to his thesis. Absurdity exists when rational man attempts to understand a world which offers him no sympathetic explanation. Man can sensually experience the world, he can learn of the theories of knowledge concerning its essence, but he cannot truly comprehend its meaning.

And here are trees and I know their gnarled surface, water and I feel its taste. These scents of grass and stars at night, certain evenings when the heart relaxes--how shall I negate this world whose power and strength I feel? Yet all the knowledge on earth will give me nothing to assure me that this world is mine. You describe it to me and you teach me to classify it. You enumerate its laws and in my thirst for knowledge I admit that they are true. You take apart its mechanism and my hope increases. At the final stage you teach me that this wondrous and multi-colored universe can be reduced to the atom and that the atom itself can be reduced to the electron. All this is good and I wait for you to continue. But you tell me of an

invisible planetary system in which electrons gravitate around a nucleus. You explain this world to me with an image. I realize then that you have been reduced to poetry; I shall never know.<sup>12</sup>

Hannah Arendt has neatly summed up Camus' argument in this fashion:

For Camus . . . man is essentially a stranger because the world in general and man as man are not fitted for each other; that they are together makes the human condition an absurdity . . . . Man is essentially alone with his "revolt" and his "clairvoyance," that is, with his reason, which makes him ridiculous because the gift of reason was bestowed upon him in a world where everything is given and nothing ever explained.<sup>13</sup>

"The experience of the absurd is simply this: a revelation of the unbridgeable chasm between the yearnings of the individual and the indifference of the world."<sup>14</sup> Camus' argument may lack unity and validity, but in a war-torn Europe of the early Forties it smacked of a reality with which many Europeans could readily identify.

. . . Camus has given us a poetic insight into the meaning of individual existence as it is caught within the ruthless and soulless forces of social convulsion. And this is, without a doubt, the unhappy image of the twentieth century; that of millions of individuals dominated, torn, and destroyed by social and

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<sup>12</sup>Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 15.

<sup>13</sup>Hannah Arendt, cited in D. Stanford, "Albert Camus," Contemporary Review, CXCIII (April, 1958), p. 192.

<sup>14</sup>Thomas Hanna, The Lyric: Existentialists (New York, 1962), p. 203.

political forces which they may understand but cannot control.<sup>15</sup>

The first principle of absurdity, in short, consists of a contradiction between rationality and irrationality. Man is rational in so far as he attempts to question and understand the world. The world is basically irrational due to its stingy rewards for man's efforts.

The absurd, like the Cartesian cogito, is the first result of thinking about the world and about ourselves. It results from the conflict between our awareness of death and our desire for eternity, from the clash between our demand for explanation and the essential mystery of all existence.<sup>16</sup>

The rational mind seeks to make explicable the knowledge of the world in human terms; it is the failure of this effort which leads to the first cognizant recognition of the existence of absurdity. Once the absurd is recognized, the conflict grows deeper and the absurd augments in intensity.

Once he has reached the absurd and tries to live accordingly, a man always perceives that consciousness is the hardest thing in the world to maintain. Circumstances are almost always against it. He must live his lucidity in a world where dispersion is the rule.<sup>17</sup>

The second basic element of absurdity concerns the negation of absolutes. Camus' thinking must be considered to be agnostic in terms of metaphysical, as well as transcendental, truth.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 190.

<sup>16</sup>Philip Thody, Albert Camus (New York, 1959), p. 4.

<sup>17</sup>Albert Camus, Notebooks 1942-1951 (New York, 1965), p. 10.



Once again The Myth of Sisyphus provides the argument characteristic to this element of absurdity.

I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone. I am told again that here the intelligence must sacrifice its pride and the reason bow down. But if I recognize the limits of the reason, I do not therefore negate it, recognizing its relative powers. I merely want to remain in this middle path where the intelligence can remain clear. If that is its pride, I see no sufficient reason for giving it up. Nothing more profound, for example, than Kierkegaard's view according to which despair is not a fact but a state; the very state of sin. For sin is what alienates from God. The absurd, which is the metaphysical state of the conscious man, does not lead to God. Perhaps this notion will become cleared if I risk this shocking statement: the absurd is sin without God.<sup>18</sup>

Camus followed the tradition of Nietzsche and Dostoevsky in his negation of God and related absolutes. His position echoes Ivan Karamazov's declaration that "God is dead, everything is permitted." Camus agreed with the general premise that God offers little meaning in a world torn with despair, evil, and destruction. (Camus, it must be pointed out, developed this position prior to and during the Second World War; yet, there seems to be little let-up in later writings concerning his harsh view of the world's state). He did not like to negate, however, the existence of God due to the logical problem of affirmation. The mere negation of God implies the affirmation of God as well. This position leads one to regard Camus as a revolutionary agnostic rather than a systematic atheist.

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<sup>18</sup>Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 30.

For the existentials negation is their God. To be precise, that god is maintained only through the negation of human reason. (Let me assert again: it is not the affirmation of God that is questioned here, but rather the logic leading to that affirmation).<sup>19</sup>

Camus was not an atheist, but it probably can be asserted that he was a weak antitheist. His argument rested on the theme that if God were all-powerful, He could not, at the same time, be good, or if He were all good, He could not be all-powerful. This contention rests on the premise that if God were all-powerful and good, He would alleviate suffering and absurdity in the world.

For Camus, the idea of God becomes the denial of human reason, justice and freedom . . . . A man like Albert Camus . . . cannot see how a God worthy of that name can tolerate the sufferings of children.<sup>20</sup>

Camus negated God in spite of the weak logical support and contradictions with traditionally Western doctrines such as original sin which could be considered compatible with suffering and the existence of a benevolent transcendental being. He stayed with his cold contention that God, if He exists, denies the world. As Nada, an almost sympathetic character in Camus' play A State of Siege, says: "God denies the world, and I deny God. Long live nothing, for it's the only thing that exists."<sup>21</sup>

<sup>19</sup> Ibid., p. 31.

<sup>20</sup> F. Temple Kingston, French Existentialism (Toronto, 1961), pp. 144-5.

<sup>21</sup> Albert Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays (New York, 1958), p. 179.

The Myth of Sisyphus provides another statement which clearly supports the contention that Camus was agnostic in relation to the existence of transcendental absolutes.

I do not know whether or not this world has a meaning which transcends it. But I am aware that I do not know this meaning and that at the moment it is impossible for me to know it. What can a meaning which is outside my condition signify to me. I can understand only in human terms.<sup>22</sup>

This state leaves man in a position of total freedom and responsibility, but Camus never became as obsessed with this idea as did Sartre. The feeling of loneliness, nevertheless, is the inevitable result of man's negation of absolutes.

"To experience the isolated self is to be overwhelmed with 'absurdity.'<sup>23</sup> Man is thus forced into a position of freedom and responsibility from which he cannot escape, and his responsibility for his situation in the world becomes an acute problem. "[Absurdity] is revealed as an attitude toward the eternal problem of evil in the world, and--since the question of responsibility inevitably arises--the problem of man's guilt or non-guilt."<sup>24</sup>

The immediate result of Camus' contention that absurdity isolates man so that he becomes a "stranger" in the world carries the additional argument of absolute relativism.

<sup>22</sup>Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 73.

<sup>23</sup>Glenn Tinder, The Crisis of Political Imagination (New York, 1964), p. 183.

<sup>24</sup>Louis R. Boss, "Albert Camus: The Plague of Absurdity," Kenyon Review, XX (Summer, 1958), p. 400.

If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance. There is no pro or con: the murderer is neither right nor wrong. We are free to stoke the crematory fires or to devote ourselves to the care of lepers. Evil and virtue are mere chance or caprice.<sup>25</sup>

Camus' logic leads him in this direction, but he did not choose to follow it, as will be pointed out later. He did, however, leave man in an eternal state of absurdity--a position from which there is no escape and little hope. Camus did not turn to the logical consequence of absurdity: nihilism. (He did not, however, reduce his harsh view of the struggle which man faces with the absurd.)

Absurd, the contradiction between our aspiration for the eternal, and our subordination to duration; absurd, the opposition between our desire for unity and the irreducible duality of our nature; absurd, the discord between our passion for understanding, for exercising our reason, and the unintelligibility, the "unreasonable silence" of the world, between our feverish quest for happiness and the vanity of our action.<sup>26</sup>

#### Immediate Consequences of Absurdity

The first consequence of absurdity involves struggle. The conscious man, once he perceives absurdity, immediately begins a struggle with irrationality which is resolved only by death. The very idea of death is enough, for Camus, to

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<sup>25</sup>Albert Camus, The Rebel (New York, 1956), p. 5.

<sup>26</sup>Albert Maquet, Albert Camus: The Invincible Summer, pp. 42-43.

force man into an eternal struggle with the very meaning and purpose of life itself. The nature of this struggle is not a happy one. As Caligula says in Camus' play by the same name, "Men die; and they are not happy."<sup>27</sup> This utterance does not completely reflect a negationist view. Camus meant Caligula to demonstrate the proposition that "death is there as the only reality."<sup>28</sup> In short, the struggle with life contains its own finality: death. But death, the creator of absurdity in its primary stages, is also the escape from absurdity. As will be pointed out later, Camus did not advocate suicide because he did not want man to deny the absurd. "Men die" does not create, in other words, any kind of ultimate proposition of negation. To live is to affirm absurd existence and, for the moment, that is a value.

Death, however, causes man's struggle with the "life force" to become acute. Camus felt that death is strangely more real than life because it is always lurking in the background as a constant threat to life.

The idea that "I am," my way of acting as if everything has a meaning (even if, on occasion, I said that nothing has)--all that is given the lie in vertiginous fashion by the absurdity of a possible death. Thinking of the future, establishing aims for oneself, having preferences--all this presupposes a belief in freedom, even if one occasionally ascertains that one doesn't feel it. But at that moment I am well aware that that higher liberty, that freedom to

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<sup>27</sup> Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, p. 8.

<sup>28</sup> Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 42.

be, which alone can serve as a basis for truth,  
does not exist.<sup>29</sup>

Death brings about the acute realization, if one does not appeal to transcendental absolutes (and there are none in Camus' writings), that anything a man may do is ultimately meaningless. Once man has recognized the absurd, he is always bound to it. "I have just defined it [absurdity] as a confrontation and an unceasing struggle."<sup>30</sup> Death is the only ultimate truth.

Man struggles with himself as well as with the irrationality of the world.

Of whom and of what indeed can I say: "I know that!" This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction. For if I try to seize this self of which I feel sure, if I try to define and to summarize it, it is nothing but water slipping through my fingers. I can sketch one by one all the aspects it is able to assume, all those likewise that have attributed to it, this upbringing, this origin, this ardor or these silences, this nobility or this vileness. But aspects cannot be added up. This very heart which is mine will forever remain indefinable to me . . . Forever I shall be a stranger to myself.<sup>31</sup>

The best illustration in Camus' writings concerning man's alienation from himself and the world is found in his rather famous novel, The Stranger. The Stranger is a short novel about Meursault, an average person, who lives his life quietly

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

<sup>30</sup> Ibid., p. 23.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., pp. 14-15.

in Algiers. Meursault slowly becomes aware of absurdity as the novel develops. The pace quickens until he commits a murder for no more reason than "the cymbals of the sun clashing on my skull . . . ."<sup>32</sup> It is after Meursault pulls the trigger that he realizes it was at that point that he began to struggle with absurdity. "The trigger gave, and the smooth underbelly of the butt jogged my palm. And so, with that crisp, whiperack sound, it all began."<sup>33</sup> Meursault is taken to trial and condemned for committing a crime for no other reason, to the dismay of the judges, than "because of the sun."<sup>34</sup>

After Meursault's trial and conviction he finds himself isolated and alienated from a society which cannot understand the cold logic of absurdity. Meursault concludes, before his death, that if he had his life to live over, he would undoubtedly relive it under the same logic. Meursault can find no justification for his act, but he cannot justify not acting. He is a tragic hero of the absurd.

Meursault is not only a "stranger" in the world because the world is absurd, but a stranger among men because he alone accepts to live the absurd, that is, accepts the suppression of the Self which must, if we are rigorous, follow the suppression of sense in the exterior world. Meursault has no subjectivity considered as a thing; his crime is therefore a "gratuitous act."<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>32</sup>Albert Camus, The Stranger (New York, 1961), p. 75.

<sup>33</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

<sup>34</sup>Ibid., p. 71.

<sup>35</sup>Everett W. Knight, Literature Considered as Philosophy (London, 1957), p. 87.

Meursault's cold logic leads him to the conclusion that without absolutes life is ultimately meaningless. There is no justification for any act. At the end of the novel, before Meursault is to die for his crime (which also includes the character accusation of not weeping at his mother's funeral), a priest comes to offer him God's salvation. Meursault, as might be expected, rejects any salvation on the grounds that he is indifferent to religion. It is during this discussion that Meursault realizes the full impact of absurdity.

He seemed so cocksure, you see. And yet none of his certainties was worth one strand of a woman's hair. Living as he did, like a corpse, he couldn't even be sure of being alive. It might look as if my hands were empty. Actually, I was sure of myself, sure about everything, far surer than he; sure of my present life and of the death that was coming. That, no doubt, was all I had; but at least that certainty was something I could get my teeth into--just as it had got its teeth into me. I was right, I was still right, I was always right. I'd passed my life in a certain way if I felt like it. I'd acted thus, and I hadn't acted otherwise; I hadn't done x, whereas I had y or z. And what did that mean? That, all the time, I'd been waiting for this present moment, for that dawn, tomorrow's or another day's, which was to justify me. Nothing, nothing had the least importance, and I knew quite well why. He, too, knew why. From the dark horizon of my future a sort of slow, persistent breeze had been blowing toward me, all my life long, from the years that were to come.<sup>36</sup>

Camus' play Caligula illustrates well the second consequence of absurdity. If there is no transcendental absolute, no ultimate authority to which man can appeal for justification for his acts, then both good and evil are equal in terms of

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<sup>36</sup>Camus, The Stranger, pp. 151-152



meral decision. Caligula is an example of a negationist and nihilist. He, like Meursault, discovers absurdity; yet Caligula chooses to carry the absurd logic to the extreme. Caligula is a ruler who decides to annihilate his subjects. This decision is justified by the fact that, without absolute values, man may act in any fashion whatsoever--without restraint. Caligula discovers that the quest for power is as legitimate as the quest for peace. He says to himself:

Logic, Caligula; follow where logic leads.  
Power to the uttermost; willfulness without end.  
Ah, I'm the only man on earth to know the secret--  
that power can never be complete without a total  
self-surrender to the dark impulse of one's  
destiny. No, there's no return. I must go on  
and on, until the consummation.<sup>37</sup>

Caligula chooses negation, nihilism, and, ultimately, suicide. Absurd logic leads him to total annihilation. He finds himself in a world where despair rules and where the gods have denied man. He cruelly rules his kingdom by killing, for no reason, hundreds of his subjects. Eventually, he plots his own murder. Caligula finds no values in the universe and therefore makes no attempt to create any for his subjects. Instead, he follows the logic of a meaningless existence to the extreme by affirming Ivan Karamazov's conclusion that "all is permitted."

It is this discovery of the truth of human existence that drives Caligula to a course of action that is an attempt to equal the absurdity

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<sup>37</sup> Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, pp. 41-42.

of the world that he sees around him. To him the world is a closed universe of misery and death, and the way to become an equal of the supposed gods who have created such a world is to become equally as cruel as they.<sup>38</sup>

Camus used this play to introduce his ideas concerning the rejection of negation and nihilism. He spent his effort in The Myth of Sisyphus attempting to define the nature of the absurd and, in the same breath, to say that man was bound to the absurd. Camus stated in The Myth that man has two basic choices. Man can commit suicide, but Camus ruled that this choice was a poor one because it only allowed man to escape the absurd. Man can affirm the absurd and act accordingly. This choice involves two possibilities. Man can either affirm the absurd by choosing to create positive values for himself and his society, or affirm the absurd by becoming a negationist and nihilist. Caligula is a representative of the latter choice. Camus used Caligula to reject the second possibility. Although Camus had sympathy at times for Caligula's cold logic, he did not accept Caligula's action. Cherea, Camus' spokesman in the play, tells Caligula that he will not accept his absurd logic of nihilism.

Because what I want is to live, and to be happy. Neither, to my mind, is possible if one pushes the absurd to its logical conclusions. As you see, I'm quite an ordinary sort of man. True, there are moments when, to feel free of them, I desire the death of those I love, or I

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<sup>38</sup> James H. Clancy, "Beyond Despair: A New Drama of Ideas," Education Theatre Journal, XIII (October, 1961), p. 159.

hanker after women from whom the ties of family or friendship debar me. Were logic everything, I'd kill or fornicate on such occasions. But I consider that these passing fancies have no great importance. If everyone set to gratifying them, the world would be impossible to live in, and happiness, too, would go by the board. And these, I repeat, are the things that count, for me.<sup>39</sup>

Cherea's statement points out two positive reasons for rejecting nihilism and negation: life and happiness. These values will be discussed thoroughly in a later chapter. But it should be pointed out that although Camus accepted these values, there is no justification for his choice. The cold logic of absurdity still preempts the choice.

The only liberty possible is a liberty as regards death. The really free man is the one who, accepting death as it is, at the same time accepts its consequences--that is to say, the abolition of all life's traditional values. Ivan Karamazov's "everything is permitted" is the only expression there is of a coherent liberty. And we must follow out all the consequences of his remark.<sup>40</sup>

Camus, in short, rejected negation, nihilism and suicide in favor of life and happiness. But the choice is purely relative in the face of absurd logic. Negation, nihilism, and self-annihilation are always possible consequences of absurdity.

The third consequence of absurdity is called "philosophical suicide." Camus attacked the existentialists, both atheistic and religious, for committing this philosophical suicide. Camus held firmly throughout his life that absurdity

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<sup>39</sup>Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, pp. 51-52.

<sup>40</sup>Camus, Notebooks 1935-1942, p. 95.

and hope are contradictions which cannot co-exist. There is no hope to escape the absurd; no hope to discover a meaningful existence and unity with the world. The existentialists, Camus pointed out in The Myth of Sisyphus, all entertain a futile element of hope. Camus held this hope to be a mere escape from the philosophical demands of absurdity.

Now, to limit myself to existential philosophies, I see that all of them without exception suggest escape. Through an odd reasoning, starting out from the absurd over the ruins of reason, in a closed universe limited to the human, they deify what crushes them and find reason to hope in what impoverishes them. That forced hope is religious in all of them.<sup>41</sup>

The religious existentialists, such as Karl Jaspers, following the tradition established by Kierkegaard, make the "existential leap." This leap is characterized by the assertion that there must be a transcendence of absurdity. The religious place this transcendence in the hands of faith. They choose to believe in God! The atheists assert that there is a transcendence to absurdity, but instead of God, they choose to absolutize irrationality.

Camus rejected both arguments on the ground that they drop one of the essential terms of absurdity: rationality. To the religious existentialists, reason is vain, but there is something beyond reason. Camus held that reason is vain and there is nothing beyond it. The atheistic existentialists negate reason in favor of asserting that irrationality is absolute.

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<sup>41</sup> Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 24.

Irrationality becomes their god. Camus held that there is a limited and useful rationality which man can use, but that this rationality explains nothing to him. He stated this contention in the following manner:

The theme of the irrational, as it is conceived by the existentials, is reason becoming confused and escaping by negating itself.<sup>42</sup> The absurd is lucid reason noting its limits.

Camus agreed with the existentialists that the world is basically irrational, but he did not agree that irrationality is an absolute. Man finds the world to be irrational only because his rational mind comprehends it thus. It is this confrontation which creates absurdity--the absurdity which the existentialists say they accept. Camus did not see this acceptance to be any reason to turn to God for salvation or to turn to irrationality as the ultimate truth. Camus wanted man's consciousness to discover the lucid clarity of absurdity without committing "philosophical suicide" by negating the very premise of absurdity that metaphysical knowledge cannot be understood. Any assertion that "God exists," or that irrationality is absolute is, in Camus' terms, an inherent contradiction.<sup>43</sup>

Camus rejected any appeal to transcendental authority or ultimate absolute in order to understand the nature of existence. He was content to believe that man must live with what he knows--that he cannot be certain of anything he knows.

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., p. 36.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., pp. 41-42.

Let us insist again on the method: it is a matter of persisting. At a certain point on his path the absurd man is tempted. History is not lacking in either religions or prophets, even without gods. He is asked to leap. All he can reply is that he doesn't fully understand, that it is not obvious. Indeed, he does not want to do anything but what he fully understands. He is assured that this is the sin of pride, but he does not understand the notion of sin; that perhaps hell is in store, but he has not enough imagination to visualize that strange future; that he is losing immortal life, but that to him seems an idle consideration. An attempt is made to get him to admit his guilt. He feels innocent. To tell the truth, that is all he feels--his irreparable innocence. This is what allows him everything. Hence, what he demands of himself is to live solely with what he knows, to accommodate himself to what is, and to bring in nothing that is not certain. He is told that nothing is. But this at least is a certainty. And it is with this that he is concerned; he wants to find out if it is possible to live without appeal.<sup>44</sup>

The final consequences of absurdity, the consequences Camus chose to be most important, consist of revolt, freedom, and passion. "Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death--and I refuse suicide."<sup>45</sup> These consequences were offered by Camus to be alternatives to suicide or philosophical suicide. It is in these alternatives that one discovers the source of Camus' ethical and political thinking.

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<sup>44</sup> Ibid., p. 39.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., p. 47.

Revolt is the first consequence of the absurd which contains value. Conscious man recognizes that he is bound to absurdity if he chooses not to escape it. With this affirmation of the will to live begins an obstinate struggle with a force which cannot be overcome. Revolt constitutes an affirmation of absurdity, and, therefore, life. It is through revolt that the human being reaffirms his existence in defiance of the absurdity of the world and the finality of death. Through this confrontation man attributes meaning to his existence with the knowledge that there is no ultimate meaning nor justification. This revolt does, however, allow man to act, create value judgments, and assert his individuality in a world otherwise void of understanding. Through revolt man gives meaning to his own existence, his ethical and political environment, and his actions.

The second consequence of man's acceptance of absurdity is freedom. Camus' concept of freedom is not metaphysical. He did not assert the concept of freedom to be an absolute. Freedom, as Camus saw the concept, is an inner feeling. "Knowing whether or not man is free doesn't interest me. I can experience only my own freedom."<sup>46</sup> Freedom is not something given to man a priori by God or nature; it is an inner reaction to any external force which constitutes a threat to living. It is an introspective quality which is gained through the recognition of absurdity, and, as such, it becomes a value.

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<sup>46</sup> Ibid., p. 41.

The only conception of freedom I have is that of the prisoner or the individual in the midst of the State. The only one I know is freedom of thought and action. Now if the absurd cancels all my chances of eternal freedom, it restores and magnifies, on the other hand, my freedom of action.<sup>47</sup>

Man is not "condemned to be free," as Sartre puts it, because there is no guarantee of this proposition. Freedom is simply not that absolute. It is merely an inner awareness of an opposition to the absurdity of external restraints, such as death, or the state. Freedom is a consequence of the absurd because there is no future connected to any ultimate purpose. Man is not metaphysically free to escape the absurd, but he does experience freedom when any external force attempts to halt his confrontation with existence. He is not free, in terms of any future consequences, to give full meaning to his experiences or justification to his acts. He is free only in terms of his revolt against any authority which attempts to restrict the continuation of his confrontation of absurdity.

The third consequence of absurdity is passion. The absurd man who confronts his meaningless existence can live, and develop a passion for, this world only through an indifference toward the future and with the desire to experience every present moment to his greatest capacity. This idea leads to Camus' concept of quantitative experience as opposed to qualitative, or moral, experience.

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<sup>47</sup> Ibid., p. 42.



These three consequences of absurdity--revolt, freedom, and passion--comprise the foundation upon which Camus' political ideas are built. Camus was a thinker who was completely indifferent to transcendental absolutes. He was a man totally committed to the absurd. Yet he gave Western thought a wealth of ideas concerning normative political and ethical principles. It is the political thought of Camus which will be discussed in this thesis. The following chapters attempt to give articulation to Camus' political thought, within the framework of the concept of the absurd, in order to demonstrate that Camus contributed to political theory several important normative concepts which cannot go unheeded in twentieth-century political philosophy.

## CHAPTER III

### THE THEORY OF REVOLT

#### The Nature of Revolt

In an age characterized by a decline of appeal to transcendental authority or natural law, Camus came to recognize the existence of ethical neutrality. Within the framework of absurdity all moral judgments are leveled to a relative ethical equality. Absurd ethics become quantitative rather than qualitative due to the absence of transcendental justification. Nihilism and procreation are equally legitimate consequences of quantitative ethics. Their nature cannot be judged qualitatively within a void of a priori moral imperatives. The absurd is simply indifferent to ethical approval. The strict logic of absurd ethics implies total moral freedom. Camus, however, could not embrace the logical extremity of his argument.

The absurd does not liberate; it binds. It does not authorize all actions. "Everything is permitted" does not mean that nothing is forbidden. The absurd merely confers an equivalence on the consequences of those actions. It does not recommend crime, for this would be childish, but it restores to remorse its futility. Likewise, if all experiences are indifferent, that of duty is as legitimate as any other. One can be virtuous through a whim.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 50.

One of the actions which Camus felt could not be authorized within any philosophical framework is nihilism. It must be pointed out here that absurdity does not presuppose the negation of morality; it merely denies justification. The rational mind can certainly create, or affirm, definite moral principles. Morality, within the framework of absurdity, is relative; nevertheless, it embodies a rational choice. Camus' entrance into the French Resistance in 1942 best illustrates the affirmation of a moral choice. He could not reconcile the stale indifference of an intellectual framework with the nihilistic terror of Nazism. He expressed his rejection of nihilism in a series of letters published clandestinely in the Revue Libre during the Occupation. These articles, called Letters to a German Friend, depict Camus' contempt for the absurdist ethic of nihilism, and contain an affirmation of individual dignity.

I continue to believe that this world has no meaning. But I know that something in it has a meaning and that is man, because he is the only creature to insist on having one. This world has at least the truth of man, and our task is to provide its justification against fate itself. And it has no justification but man; hence he must be saved if we want to save the idea we have of life. With your scornful smile you will ask me: what do you mean by saving man? and with all my being I shout to you that I mean not mutilating him and yet giving a chance to the justice that man alone can conceive.<sup>2</sup>

Camus refused to make the Machiavellian distinction between the political good and the moral good. Morality and politics in

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<sup>2</sup>Albert Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death (New York, 1960), p. 22.

Camus' works are not independent. "It cannot be denied that Camus did tend to judge political events morally, and he has to stand or fall, as a thinker, by this attitude."<sup>3</sup> Any political action involves a moral choice within a context of relative concepts of morality. Camus felt that nihilism, due to the weight of the inhumanitarian practices of his time, was the result of all action; it is for this reason, coupled with the absence of transcendental values, that Camus felt no man could shun his personal responsibility from this moral problem. Man is wholly responsible and no individual is innocent.

Our purpose is to find out whether innocence, the moment it becomes involved in action, can avoid committing murder. We can act only in terms of our time, among the people who surround us. We shall know nothing until we know whether we have the right to kill our fellow men, or the right to let them be killed. In that every action today leads to murder, direct or indirect, we cannot act until we know whether or why we have the right to kill.<sup>4</sup>

Camus' rejection of nihilism leads to the primary consideration of this chapter: revolt. This principle, an offspring of the absurd, was developed from 1942 until the completion of his major philosophical essay, The Rebel, in 1952. The Rebel demonstrates a transition from a primary concern for absurdity to a preoccupation with revolt. This transition is also a shift from an ethic of quantity to

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<sup>3</sup>Lionel Able, "Albert Camus, Moralist of Feeling," Commentary, XXXI (February, 1961), p. 174.

<sup>4</sup>Albert Camus, The Rebel, p. 4.

quality. Revolt is an affirmation rather than a negation; it is, therefore, qualitatively valuable. Revolt is a result of the consequences of the absurd, but it does not attempt to negate absurdity. It constitutes, in fact, the ethical element of absurdity. Inherent in this implicit value judgment is the nature of a rebellion from any given state of affairs. Revolt then is to existence in the realm of absurdity as cogito is to thinking in the experience of knowledge. Camus states the matter by saying, "I rebel--therefore we exist."<sup>5</sup>

In a period which "in the space of fifty years, uproots, enslaves, or kills seventy million beings,"<sup>6</sup> Camus' concept of revolt is highly significant to political theory. Regardless of the inconsistencies and contradictions inherent in his argument concerning the logic of the absurd and the affirmation of values, Camus' contribution to political values is considerable. His resistance to the rational negation and nihilism of values in the absurd, war-torn world of the twentieth century makes Camus a man who refused to accept the nihilistic logic of the absurd in order to affirm the value and dignity of existence. "In this nightmare of negatives Camus recognized his role of 'rebel'; a heroic sanity reaffirming itself against all rational quibble."<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., p. 22.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid., p. 3.

<sup>7</sup>Harold Clurman, "Albert Camus," Nation, GXC (January, 1960), p. 43.

Camus could not embrace the political abortions of justice expressed by the systematic destruction of the masses by totalitarian force during World War II. It is through his discussion of revolt, primarily in The Rebel, that Camus provided the most articulate rejection of nihilism without reducing the impact of his notion of absurdity.

To be aware of the absurd is to doubt, in a Cartesian fashion, the meaning of existence. To resist the absurd, however, necessarily implies the affirmation of the value of existence. When one chooses to resist the absurd, the most elementary activity of revolt, he says "no" to a general state of affairs. In saying "no," however, one also says "yes" to something which is challenged by absurdity. ✓

What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion. A slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command.<sup>8</sup>

This primary stage of revolt, the categorical rejection of supreme authority, simultaneously embraces a negative and affirmative principle. The rejection of authority, Camus contended, carries the inherent affirmation of positive values which are to be asserted. The obstinate slave, when he refuses his master's authority, has some notion, some feeling, of a value which he must defend. ✓

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<sup>8</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 13.

The slave's revolt moves from the realm of egocentricity into the region of solidarity. He begins to identify his value and revolt with those of other men, even the oppressor. The sense of human solidarity suggested to Camus that there might be a common nature of man, at least within the analysis of revolt. "Why rebel if there is nothing permanent in one-self worth preserving?"<sup>9</sup> The slave feels, at the moment that he rebels, that his act may be significant to all men, i.e., to human nature.

It is for the sake of everyone in the world that the slave asserts himself when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something in him which does not belong to him alone, but which is common ground where all men--even the man who insults and oppresses him--have a natural community.<sup>10</sup>

It is at the moment when the slave refuses to take the orders of his master that he also begins to exceed the immediate bounds of his revolt: he desires to be treated as an equal. This is the first experience of what Camus called "metaphysical rebellion." The rebel becomes so absorbed in his revolt that he refuses to establish limits. His revolt becomes total.

What was at first the man's obstinate resistance now becomes the whole man, who is identified with and summed up in this resistance. The part of himself that he wanted to be respected he proceeds to place above everything, even life itself. It becomes the supreme good. Having up to now been willing to compromise, the slave suddenly adopts . . . an attitude of All or Nothing. With rebellion, awareness is born.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 16.

<sup>10</sup>Ibid., p. 14.

<sup>11</sup>Ibid., pp. 14-15.

Metaphysical rebellion originates when the slave decides not to rebel as a slave but as a master. The slave becomes a rebel. He is totally committed to the task of his revolt which now takes him beyond his original purpose. He is not content to restrict his rebellion to his personal oppression; he must protest his whole condition and the condition of mankind in general. His revolt becomes metaphysical because he starts to look for the source of his condition in order to revolt from it. His revolt consequently aims toward the universal source of his frustration.

Metaphysical rebellion is the movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it contests the ends of man and of creation. The slave protests against the condition in which he finds himself within his state of slavery; the metaphysical rebel protests against the condition in which he finds himself as a man. The rebel slave affirms that there is something in him that will not tolerate the manner in which his master treats him; the metaphysical rebel declares that he is frustrated by the universe. For both of them, it is not only a question of pure and simple negation. In both cases, in fact, we find a value judgment in the name of which the rebel refuses to approve the condition in which he finds himself.<sup>12</sup>

Metaphysical rebellion is a Western phenomenon because it is inevitably connected to Christianity. There seem to be two basic reasons for this assertion. First, Christianity is the most articulate religion expressing the nature of creation. If Western man revolts from the creation of his universe, then it is God to whom he must turn. Secondly, if God created a

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., p. 23.



world where so much injustice, disunity, and cruelty prevail, then His existence, to men who rebel in the name of justice and unity, must be defied. "The metaphysical rebel is therefore not definitely an atheist, as one might think him, but he is inevitably a blasphemer."<sup>13</sup> In the early stages of this revolt against God the rebel treats Him as an equal. This is the rebel's blasphemous defiance. He has been told, after all, that Christ suffered as a man; a fact which suggests to him some notion of equality. The rebel soon supercedes his grasp for equality, for his rebellion must be complete. "The slave begins by demanding justice and ends by wanting to wear a crown."<sup>14</sup> He realizes that to dethrone God, he must replace Him, not as an equal, but as a superior. It is now his responsibility to create the justice, order, and unity which he sought in vain. He understands that this responsibility alone will justify the fall of God.

Camus traced this idea of metaphysical rebellion through history from the sons of Cain to the present century. The Marquis de Sade is considered by Camus to be the first important metaphysical rebel. His twenty-seven years in prison, suggested Camus, forced him to wage a war against the order of Heaven. If God denies man justice, according to Camus' version of Sade's thought, then why should man not do the same? As a result of his question, Sade not only rejected

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<sup>13</sup>Ibid., p. 24.

<sup>14</sup>Ibid., p. 25.

transcendence, but he rejected any source of ethics for man as well. Camus passed Sade off as a "dandy" and went on to more important representatives of metaphysical revolt, of which only two need to be cited here.

Ivan Karamazov, Dostoevsky's rebel hero in The Brothers Karamazov, is an example of a true metaphysical rebel for Camus' framework. Unlike the nihilistic Sade, Ivan goes farther in his revolt. Sade and other dandies raised themselves to a position of equality with God, and then defied Him. Ivan refuses God in the name of what he considers to be a superior value: justice. Ivan revolts against the Christian faith because this faith connects human suffering with religious truth. Suffering is unjust for Ivan, and no promise of salvation or immortality can justify the suffering of children and human existence in general. Justice is the supreme good. It transcends man and even God. But Ivan is driven to madness because of this idea. Ivan rejects God on the basis of moral ideal, but he cannot give the moral value meaning without God. "God is dead, all is lawful" can be the only logical consequence for him.

Nihilism, at this stage of metaphysical revolt, becomes a political principle of devastating clarity. The supreme authority of any state can rule his subjects through a reign of terror and destruction. Political power is unlimited under a system which proclaims that "everything is permitted." The political leader can create a system of absolute "justice" by

any means possible. The foundation established through metaphysical revolt is easily adopted by the state.

The revolt of Ivan ended in madness, but the extreme consequences of his revolt remained: consequences which in their bitter defiance of God lead to the frenetic effort to create a world of absolute unity and absolute justice by any means, including injustice itself. Ivan, as well as Sade, has prepared the way for the coming of Caesar.<sup>15</sup>

Perhaps the most important philosophical figure of the metaphysical rebels, according to Camus, is Friedrich Nietzsche. Nietzsche carried the idea of metaphysical rebellion one step beyond nihilism. His idea of "everything is permitted" is based on the principle that nothing is true. Atheism for Nietzsche goes without saying. Since there is no external law, man must create his own values. He is completely at liberty to do this because of the unlimited freedom created by the rejection of truth. Yet Camus points out that Nietzsche held that if nothing is true, then nothing is permitted. This is a position which goes beyond the meaning of Ivan's statement. Complete freedom can be obtained only through complete bondage. Unless man knows what is permitted and what is forbidden he cannot act. In short, man cannot be free without law.

Freedom exists only in a world where what is possible is defined at the same time as what is not possible. Without law there is no freedom. If fate is not guided by superior values, if chance is king, then there is nothing but the step in the dark and the appalling freedom of the blind. On

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<sup>15</sup>Hanna, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus, p. 113.

the point of achieving the most complete liberation, Nietzsche therefore chooses the most complete subordination . . . . To deny that one single thing is forbidden in this world amounts to renouncing everything that is permitted. At the point where it is no longer possible to say what is black and what is white, the light is extinguished and freedom becomes a voluntary prison.<sup>16</sup>

Nietzsche therefore says "yes" to total necessity. Without transcendental values the world becomes god. Man must re-create the world according to his own experiences and values. The notion of law becomes positivistic since the individual can now formulate restraints and liberties according to his wishes. Total affirmation (Nietzsche denied this) leads again to the "everything is permitted" idea. His affirmation goes beyond nihilism by his rejection of negation in order to accept the secularization of the ideal. Yet the possibilities of this affirmation are easily foreseeable. Political values can become the tyrant's desires. "And though Nietzsche did not so conclude, it is possible to use his ideas to justify, as did the Nazis, the conclusion that to say yes, unqualifiedly, to the world, includes affirming the legitimacy of murder."<sup>17</sup> The tyrant's secularization of transcendental values puts him in the right. Such was the fate, according to Camus, of Nietzsche's thought in the hands of National Socialism. It was a fate which Nietzsche would have viewed as a historical corruption of his thought. Speaking on German culture in 1874 Nietzsche said:

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<sup>16</sup> Camus, The Rebel, p. 71.

<sup>17</sup> F. H. Willhoite, Jr., "Albert Camus' Politics of Rebellion," Western Political Quarterly, XIV (June, 1961), p. 405.

Political superiority without any real human superiority is most harmful. One must seek to make amends for political superiority. To be ashamed of one's power. To use it in the most salutary way. Everybody thinks that the Germans may now rest on their moral and intellectual superiority. One seems to think that now it is time for something else, for the state. Till now, for "art," etc. This is an ignominious misunderstanding; there are seeds for the most glorious development of man. And these must perish for the sake of the state? What, after all, is a state? The time of the scholars is past. Their place must be taken by philaletes ["Friends of truth"]. Tremendous power. The only way to use the present kind of German power correctly is to comprehend the tremendous obligation which lies in it. Any slackening of cultural tasks would turn this power into the most revolting tyranny.<sup>18</sup>

Nietzsche's ideas concerning nihilism and (to use Camus' term) metaphysical revolt inspired Camus to discuss a second aspect of revolt: historical rebellion. Although Camus felt that many of Nietzsche's ideas, such as his idea of total affirmation, were undeveloped, he was inspired by Nietzsche's contribution to the principle of revolt. The secularization of values and law, and the concept of obligation concerning political power gave Camus the idea for a new interpretation of revolt in history. He picked 1789 as the starting point of modern revolt, because it was during this period that men introduced negation and rebellion as co-concepts. Camus proposed that modern times began with the French Revolution. Revolt became connected to history through the secularization

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<sup>18</sup>R. H. Cox, "Ideology, History and Political Philosophy: Camus' Rebel," Social Research, XXXII (Spring, 1965), p. 78.

of the Christian doctrine concerning the divine nature of dialectical history. The French Revolution represents the origin of the political result of metaphysical revolt in that it symbolizes the killing of God in the shape of a king who was believed to rule by divine right. The rejection of divine values transfers the creation of values to man, and therefore into history. From 1789, Camus contends, revolt has become an inseparable element of political ideology.

Camus picked Rousseau as the origin of the French regicides. He is the first man, according to Camus, who justified the death penalty in a civil state, and who preached the absolute submission of the subject to the sovereign within the context of general consent. The general will, for Rousseau, became the infallible expression of truth and virtue rather than a rational deity. Therefore, reason became the new absolute. It is the basis of his political ideology. The Social Contract is a study of the legitimacy of power; but for Camus, its major contribution lies in its assertion of the primacy of the general will over divine authority. "Until Rousseau's time, God created kings, who, in their turn, created peoples. After The Social Contract, peoples create themselves before creating kings."<sup>19</sup>

Camus was not so much interested in the economic and political causes of the French Revolution as he was in establishing a theoretical framework of metaphysical revolt to

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<sup>19</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 115.

actual historical revolt. Camus felt that Rousseau's general will kept political intentions humane. But a dehumanization of the idea of revolution was introduced not so long afterward which established another ideological deity. Hegel's philosophy placed history itself in the spotlight of the absolute. Hegel's position essentially represents the antithesis of The Social Contract in so far as man cannot contribute to his ultimate destiny. He is simply carried along by the historical process. This means that the conqueror is necessarily right and the subject wrong. "History had passed judgment on them. The one moved forward with history; the others were outstripped by history."<sup>20</sup> Hegel's philosophy, therefore, substitutes one absolute for another. Truth and values do not come from divine authority; they come from the historical process. Thus, any political action will be judged as justifiable within the context of the historical process. This meant, for Camus, that once again humanity would be challenged in the name of a dehumanized political ideology: "Cynicism, the deification of history and of matter, individual terror and State crime, these are the inordinate consequences that will now spring, armed to the teeth, from the equivocal conception of a world that entrusts to history alone the task of producing both values and truth."<sup>21</sup> Until truth ultimately

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<sup>20</sup>John Cruickshank, Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt (New York, 1960), p. 104.

<sup>21</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 146.

results from the historical process, every action will be arbitrary, and political force will be supreme.

Karl Marx is the last major revolutionary discussed in The Rebel as an example for Camus' idea of historical rebellion. Marx goes beyond Hegel by asserting that man is basically the lord of history. He secularizes history by pointing out that man is the master of nature, but the primary course of history, unlike Hegel's thought, leads toward the realization of man's dignity. Secularization for Marx does not mean an absolute, unlimited quest for power. Power is to be used to gain a specific, humane goal. Camus expressed the view that Marx was at first concerned with rejecting the moral principles of the nineteenth-century bourgeoisie, but eventually became totally committed to the philosophical foundations for revolution. Thus, for Marx, revolution is the ideological absolute.

Camus protested against the general conception of Marx's thought concerning the importance of the individual within the economic context of industrial production. He maintained that Marx never intended to reduce the individual to a thing. Camus considered it a basic error to regard human beings as expendable commodities for the sake of "progress," and he denied that Marx had ever intended this view.

He rebelled against the degradation of work to the level of a commodity and of the worker to the level of an object. He reminded the



privileged that their privileges were not divine and that property was not an eternal right.<sup>22</sup>

Even though Camus admired aspects of his thought, he felt that Marx had made two important errors. His first error lay in "believing that extreme poverty, and particularly industrial poverty, could lead to political maturity."<sup>23</sup> His second mistake was made by giving his totalitarian heirs the justification to use any means possible to obtain the end. His suggestion of the bitter class struggle left to his heirs the unlimited possibility of political action, perpetrated in the name of justice and humanity. "One does not become overly concerned about the morality of one's tactics when engaged in mortal combat; the end of the classless society justifies any means necessary to its attainment."<sup>24</sup> Marx's fate, according to Camus, was common to most political prophets: his ostensible followers manipulated or ignored his thought in order to achieve their own desired results. From the Bolshevik Revolution onwards, Camus contended, the Russians were guilty of ignoring Marx's moral principle that the end requiring an unjust means made the end itself unjust.

Camus considered the fatal flaw of such revolutionary thinkers as Nietzsche, Hegel, and Marx to be the inevitable

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid., p. 209.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., p. 215.

<sup>24</sup> Willhoite, "Albert Camus' Politics of Rebellion," p. 404.

transformation of political revolution into political murder of purge. These thinkers, to Camus, became overly involved in developing their ideological principles of the will to power, history, and revolution to the exclusion of their original purpose. Thus, ideology tends to corrupt the purest revolutionary ideals. It is the nature of all revolt, Camus explained, to be balanced between two extremes: absolute negation and absolute affirmation. Either way leads to the growth of power through violence and the suppression of the political subject.

In historical revolt, which is the dimension of political action, the excesses result, in contemporary times, from diametrically opposed answers to the question whether history is "rational." To deny all rationality in history leads, logically, to the deification of the irrational and to the total denial of history itself. Similarly, to affirm that history is wholly rational leads, with equal logic, to the deification of rationality and to the total acceptance of history. In both cases absolute value is ascribed to those actions which are logically consistent with the initial premise. In both cases revolution based on such doctrinal systems--and it is these which are, for Camus, the archetype of "ideology"--inevitably result in an enormous increase in state power and in the violent suppression of all opposition and dissent. In short, such revolutions of doctrine invariably culminate in the institution, by violent means, of a new orthodoxy: Nazism is absolute denial institutionalized, and Stalinism is absolute affirmation institutionalized.<sup>25</sup>

The basic question to be asked at this point concerns what Camus meant by true rebels. It is clear that Camus made the distinction between rebellion and political revolution. Political revolution has shown to be on the side of an ideological

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<sup>25</sup>R. H. Cox, "Ideology, History, and Political Philosophy: Camus' Rebel," pp. 77-78.

principle of history which has been dehumanized and has become a political monstrosity. Such men as Nietzsche, Hegel, and Marx were not "true rebels," because they refused to make the necessary moral concessions to their intellectual abstractions. True revolt or rebellion, in contrast, is centered around limitation, rather than absolutism and unity. It preaches moderation rather than extremism. The true rebel recognizes that the fight against human suffering is endless. Rebellion, therefore, is an eternal activity. It is creative rather than nihilistic in relation to history.

Rebellion's demand is for unity; historical revolution's demand is totality. The former starts from a negative supported by an affirmative, the latter from absolute negation and is condemned to every aspect of slavery in order to fabricate an affirmative that is dismissed until the end of time. One is creative, the other nihilist. The first is dedicated to creation so as to exist more and more completely; the second is forced to produce results in order to negate more and more completely.<sup>26</sup>

Camus used two examples to demonstrate the distinction. He found in the youthful rebels of Russia in 1905--Kaliaev, Dora Brilliant, and others--the example of authentic revolt, at least as close an example as possible in history. These young terrorists, immortalized in his play The Just Assassins, represented for him the true spirit of revolt. They tried to create values, from the depths of nihilism, through the means of guns, bombs, and the willing sacrifice of their own lives.

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<sup>26</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 251.

They deliberately proclaimed their guilt and death in order to give force to their ideals. Through a strong sense of solidarity they united to revolt in the name of human values. Their abortive revolution was built around political assassination (they spared women and children, unlike the later revolutionaries), yet it was guided by the principles of human dignity rather than a strict political or historical ideological goal. They were, in Camus' terms, true rebels.

The other example Camus found was in German Nazism. This type of totalitarianism, although springing from the same fundamental philosophical root as Marxian totalitarianism, is an example of false rebellion. The fascist state exists in contrast to the rational or goal-directed terror of the Marxian state. It embodies the principles, for the first time, of irrational terrorism. Its only values lie in the might makes right practice. Hitler and Mussolini "were the first to construct a State on the concept that everything is meaningless and that history is only written in terms of the hazards of force."<sup>27</sup> The fascist state is therefore irrational. "Both the true rebel and the nihilist have been overwhelmed by their experience of the world's injustice and absurdity, but the faithful rebel has continued to struggle against these forces, whereas the nihilistic fascists cooperate with them."<sup>28</sup> More will be said of this distinction later.

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<sup>27</sup> Ibid., p. 178.

<sup>28</sup> Willhoite, "Albert Camus' Politics of Rebellion," p. 409.

### Ethics and Revolt

Camus' rejection of totalitarian nihilism led him to the ideological acceptance of limited revolt. He was guided, as were the Greeks, by a sense of moderation. Having said "no" to nihilism and murder, Camus affirmed the worth and dignity of the individual. Although there is no ultimate authority, according to Camus, to which man can appeal, man can still find values which he can assert without seeking transcendental justification. This proposition, if not entirely logical, is coherent in relation to the idea of revolt. If the dignity of the individual is asserted, if murder is denounced as a result, and if there is no appeal to absolute authority for justification of action, then man is totally responsible for his actions and, consequently, the world's state of affairs. But this does not mean that man ascends to the throne of divine authority. "Having denounced totalitarianism, he came to believe in revolt for limited ends. He hated nihilism and its inevitable product: the man god."<sup>29</sup> Man is a fallible creator. His morality, virtues, and values are metaphysically unsound; yet in his revolt, he must create rather than destroy.

True rebellion is discovered, as has been pointed out, in human solidarity. Political revolt, as a consequence, cannot be absolute. It must have limited goals and methods; otherwise

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<sup>29</sup>V. S. Pritchett, "Conscience with a Style," New Statesman, LIX (January 9, 1960), p. 34.

it would ultimately embrace, according to Camus, the logical consequence of nihilism. Political revolt must be concerned with human goals and happiness. Man's condition is governed by frustration and despair. Yet there is the longing to understand, to achieve meaningfulness in an otherwise absurd existence. Because the fulfillment of this longing is not possible, man must affirm what happiness he can discover, ever cognizant of the fate of his search. Thus, political revolt is guided by an ethical and moral principle: human happiness and dignity. Any form of revolt which does not respect this relative ethical norm meets Camus' passionate affirmation of the happy life with immediate rejection.

For Camus, rebellion means not only an individual and collective refusal of death and absurdity in the name of nature and happiness; it comes to imply resistance to physical or political oppression as well--for such oppression is on the side of death and misery in negating men's freedom and happiness. Camus' basic intent at this point is to establish that there are intrinsic limits to the kind of treatment which may be meted out to human beings, if their essential humanity is to be preserved.<sup>30</sup>

Political rebellion for the sake of power alone is unworthy of the "authentic" title of revolt. Yet historically speaking, Camus could not find authenticity in political revolutions due to the excessive emphasis placed on the achievement of power. Historical revolution betrays authentic revolt because it refuses ultimately to uphold the affirmation of human values as the primary goal. Revolutions are born in a

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<sup>30</sup>Willhoite, "Albert Camus' Politics of Rebellion," p. 404.

quest for power and inherently, as far as Camus could discover historically, end by achieving and maintaining as much absolute power as possible without consideration of basic human values. "But rebellion in man is the refusal to be treated as an object and to be reduced to simple historical terms. It is the affirmation of a nature common to all men which eludes the world of power."<sup>31</sup> Authentic political rebellion must acknowledge the value of human dignity; otherwise, this value will be overshadowed by other goals, such as absolute power, which become the center of interest to the extremist forms of revolutionary political action.

Political rebellion, therefore, is not an affirmation of absolute political or metaphysical freedom. Everything is not permitted. If man chooses to move beyond the realm of nihilism and continue to revolt against injustice and inhumanity, either politically or metaphysically, or both, then he must necessarily choose a set of relative ethics, without appeal to objective or transcendental truth, which limits the sphere and means of his revolt. Limited rebellion, Camus believed, cannot exist without a concern or love for human existence.

Then we understand that rebellion 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 . . . . Rebellion proves in this way that it is the very movement of life and that it cannot be denied without renouncing life. Its purest outburst on each occasion, gives birth to

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<sup>31</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 250.

existence. Thus it is love and fecundity or it is nothing at all. Revolution without honor, calculated revolution which, in preferring an abstract concept of man to a man of flesh and blood, denies existence as many times as is necessary, puts resentment in the place of love . . . . It is no longer either revolution or rebellion but rancor, malice, and tyranny.<sup>32</sup>

Camus contended that revolt against oppression and inhumanity is always justified as long as there is a moral objective. But he discovered that a short glance at European history disclosed the fact that political revolutions in the name of moral principles and values have been to the greatest extent theoretical aspirations toward a hypothetical future which never comes about. The contradiction between theoretical revolt and revolt in practice led Camus to discover two sets of political antinomies between violence and non-violence and between justice and freedom. Revolt must seek to reject violence out of a concern for human life; but political revolution takes its origin and nature from the principle of violence. Thus, for example, one may renounce murder and revolt against political authority in order to overthrow a murderous tyrant. But one may have to commit murder in order to overthrow the ruling regime. By the same reasoning, justice and freedom are many times the proclaimed goals of political revolution. But political revolution always denies the ruling class its freedom in its attempt to gain justice for those who support the revolution or, at least, those who have suffered injustice at

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<sup>32</sup>Ibid., pp. 304-305.



the hands of the ruling class. After the revolution, in order to obtain freedom for the adherents of the revolution and subjects, the new order must deny justice to the counter-revolutionaries. "There is an apparently irreducible contradiction between the moral demands of revolt and the practical requirements of revolution."<sup>33</sup>

Thus, Camus considered moderation to be a desirable political value; but it is a value that political revolution has continually ignored. Political revolution in the twentieth century has not, according to Camus' thought, been guided by moderation. It has been marked by extremism. Camus cited the deification of history as an example of political extremism. In the first place, the deification of history is a betrayal of genuine revolt.

History in its pure form furnishes no value by itself. Therefore one must live by the principles of immediate expediency and keep silent or tell lies. Systematic violence, or imposed silence, calculation or concerted falsehood become the inevitable rule. Purely historical thought is therefore nihilistic; it wholeheartedly accepts the evil of history and in this way is opposed to rebellion. It is useless for it to affirm, in compensation, the absolute rationality of history, for historical reason will never be fulfilled and will never have its full meaning or value until the end of history. In the meanwhile, it is necessary to act, and to act without a moral rule in order that the definitive rule should one day be realized. Cynicism as a political attitude is only logical as a function of absolutist thought; in other words, absolute nihilism on the one hand, absolute rationalism on the other. As for the

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<sup>33</sup>Cruickshank, Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt, p. 112.

consequences, there is no difference between the two attitudes. From the moment that they are accepted, the earth becomes a desert.<sup>34</sup>

In the second place, history as an absolute is a logical impossibility. Camus followed the argument established by Karl Jaspers that it is impossible to view history in its totality because men are themselves a part of that history. History for men cannot be an absolute which they can entirely embrace because they cannot be totally objective in their observations. Because history is uncertain and unpredictable, all dogmatism which elevates it to an absolute position is unjustifiable.

In reality, the purely historical absolute is not even conceivable. Jasper's thought, for example, in its essentials, underlines the impossibility of man's grasping totality, since he lives in the midst of this totality. History, as an entirety, could exist only in the eyes of an observer outside it and outside the world. History only exists, in the final analysis, for God. Thus it is impossible to act according to plans embracing the totality of universal history. Any historical enterprise can therefore only be a more or less reasonable or justifiable adventure. It is primarily a risk. In so far as it is a risk it cannot be used to justify any excess or any ruthless and absolutist position.<sup>35</sup>

Political revolt involves another aspect which Camus felt was important to the establishment of moderation: the distinction between rational and irrational terror. Irrational terror, exemplified in the fascist rule of Germany and Italy during World War II, is the result of the doctrine that history

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<sup>34</sup>Camus, The Rebel, pp. 288-289.

<sup>35</sup>Ibid., p. 289.

is the meaningless product of aimless force. The fascists were not concerned enough with the importance of history. Their use of terror was irrational because it sought no further goal than its perpetuation. "They were the first to construct a State on the concept that everything is meaningless and that history is only written in terms of the hazards of force."<sup>36</sup> The goal of their revolution, need it be said, did not include any of the important human values identifiable with Camus' concept of authentic revolt. Irrational terror is therefore one example of the political extremist use of power.

Rational terror, on the other hand, is too much concerned with the nature of history and, as a result, discounts the genuine values such as human dignity and happiness which political revolutions are supposed to achieve. In a long critical and analytical evaluation of Marxism in The Rebel, in which Camus explored the historical impact of Marxism on modern political revolution, he concluded that modern revolutions, originating from metaphysical revolt, have been established around the deification of man as well as history. He contended that modern revolutions have evolved into nihilism and terror because they either placed values completely above history (the French Revolution) or they identified values completely with history (the fascist and

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<sup>36</sup>Ibid., p. 178.

Soviet states).<sup>37</sup> In both cases rational terror was carried to the extreme for the sake of augmenting an absolute principle.

More of Camus' discussion of Marxist thought and its impact on modern political revolutions will be included in the following chapter. It should be pointed out here, however, that Camus took a moderate position concerning history and the use of terror and the nature of political revolution. Political revolutions should not deify history; nor should they overlook historical principles. By the same reasoning, some form of terror, although it is not considered to be desirable, is sometimes permissible if the goal of the political revolution is to immediately repress future political terror. Once again, Camus returned to the Russian revolutionists of 1905 to point out that their goal was to overthrow what they considered to be an unjust regime in order to bring about as much freedom from state terror as possible. It was necessary for the young rebels to employ terror themselves, but they were willing to offer their lives for the accomplishment of their revolution. According to Camus these young rebels were justified in using terror because they had as their ultimate goal the abolishment of political terror for the sake of individual dignity and happiness. (Perhaps their revolt was also devoted to an extreme absolute concept of

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<sup>37</sup>Hanna, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus, p. 140.

history, but their action was at least justified to Camus due to their devotion to the human values which he held to be most important.) Thus, in some cases rational terror is acceptable, but Camus would have the use of terror limited to the immediate goals, and to be used only if political terror was itself to be abolished after the revolution had run its course. Human dignity must remain the highest goal of any political revolution.

There are two more points which should be made about Camus' discussion of political moderation. First, Camus' ideas concerning political moderation are not meant to equate intellectual mediocrity. His Mediterranean attitude regarded emotional moderation as unhealthy. Intellectual moderation and the absence of extremism are important to the maintenance of a stable social and political theory for the sake of human happiness. But intellectual creativity and vigor was encouraged by Camus to be as fully developed, i.e. unlimited, as possible. The goal and means of political revolution should be moderate; but creative political thinking should not be stifled.

Secondly, Camus' ideas concerning revolution and moderate political values are vulnerable to those who attack his metaphysical foundation. The logical positivists, such as A. J. Ayer, have criticized Camus' relative ethical position concerning political moderation and other values because those values essentially involve metaphysical questions about which

philosophical analysis is impossible.<sup>38</sup> Although Camus attempted to escape from being involved with metaphysical and religious presuppositions, he ultimately could not escape essential questions posed in these areas. In an absurd existence in which there are no objective a priori values which reason can discover, how can any values, relative or not, be proclaimed over other choices? How could Camus have been so committed to the principles of human happiness and dignity? How can one know what is justice as distinct from injustice? These values, which to Camus were as logical as nihilism and murder, were never defended metaphysically in his writings. Political values are merely considered to be reasonable possibilities. The rejection of tyranny to Camus was as possible as its acceptance. Metaphysically there is no ultimate answer. Political values are relative matters about which metaphysical justification is a waste of effort.

It must be admitted that Camus' metaphysical thinking leaves much to be desired and that his values lack perhaps an important foundation as a result. But in his defense one may say that Camus' position in relation to his (and many others) proclamation of the absence of a priori principles at least deserves admiration. His ambitious attempt to establish political and social values within the framework of a metaphysically sterile environment deserves attention. In short, one must

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<sup>38</sup>A. J. Ayer, "Novelist-Philosophers," Horizon, VIII (March, 1946), pp. 155-168.

admire Camus' commitment to positive (relatively speaking) values in the face of an otherwise negative and nihilistic possibility.

#### Literature and Revolt

A few words should be devoted to Camus' literature of revolt. It is in his literature that Camus' ideas concerning revolt often receive the greatest articulation. A novel, The Plague, and two plays, The Just Assassins and A State of Siege constitute the literature of revolt. Throughout these works there are two fundamental ideas which unify their themes: the picture of an absurd existence and the principle of revolt in the face of that absurdity. It has been said that The Stranger, representing the early works, is basically nihilist and that The Plague, representing the later works, is antinihilist.<sup>39</sup> Perhaps this evaluation is too superficial to do Camus justice, but it rightfully indicates that Camus' later works are more concerned with the revolt from injustice and inhumanity than were his earlier works which attempted to define the nature and characteristics of absurdity.

The Plague is a novel which, through the use of symbols, allegories, and metaphorical meanings, attempts to convey a picture of the general condition of man in the universe. It is the account of a fight against an epidemic in a small

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<sup>39</sup>Alfred A. Kazin, "A Condemned Man," Reporter, XXIV (February, 1961), p. 54.

North African city. This epidemic symbolizes the evil and suffering encountered by man in the universe. It also represents the German Occupation of France with all its injustice and inhumanity. The leading character of the novel is a doctor who is faced with the responsibility of treating the victims of the epidemic. This doctor, who is obviously the spokesman for Camus, comes to grips with the meaningless existence of a world under a plague. His decision is to revolt against the injustice created by this epidemic, without appeal to transcendental authority (which the people of the city feel is responsible for the plague in the first place) in order to find some measure of hope that the condition might be overcome. A second character who is caught by the doctor's unyielding resistance to the plague expresses well Camus' rebellious reaction to injustice in a world hopelessly void of divine intervention.

I have realized that we all have plague, and I have lost my peace. And today I am still trying to find it; still trying to understand all those others and not to be the mortal enemy of anyone. I only know that one must do what one can to cease being plague-stricken, and that's the only way in which we can hope for some peace or, failing that, a decent death. This, and only this, can bring relief to men and, if not save them, at least do them the least harm possible and even, sometimes, a little good. So that is why I resolved to have no truck with anything which, directly or indirectly, for good reasons or for bad, brings death to anyone or justifies others' putting him to death.<sup>40</sup>

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<sup>40</sup>Albert Camus, The Plague (New York, 1962), pp. 219-220.



State of Siege is a play continuing the idea presented in The Plague. In this play the plague is personified. The Plague comes into a city of Spain and takes over the government by declaring a state of siege. His power and use of terror immediately give the reader a clearer image of Camus' bitterness toward the totalitarian state. In a statement made shortly after the production of the play, Camus made clear the political theme of the play:

. . . I did not seek to flatter anyone in writing The State of Siege. I wanted to attack directly a type of political society which has been organized or is being organized, to the right or to the left, on a totalitarian basis. No spectator can in good faith doubt that this play takes sides with the individual, in that which is noble in the flesh, in short, with terrestrial love, against the abstractions and the terrors of the totalitarian state, whether this be Russian, German, or Spanish.<sup>41</sup>

This play specifically rejects, more than his novel, the evil caused by man-made totalitarian ideology. The plague presented in his novel by the same name concerns a universal force, i.e., absurdity, which man cannot defeat even though he revolts against its existence. But the type of plague established in this play can be overcome because it is man-made. Man can certainly revolt against the evils caused by certain types of political domination. The basic point made in this play, in fact, is that man can, through revolt, assert human values by revolting against the political

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<sup>41</sup>Albert Camus, Actuelles I, p. 242, cited in Thomas Hanna, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus, p. 207.

oppression of these values. A second point made is that man should revolt from any positivistic notion of law and absolute justice. As the Plague's judge states: "I do not serve the law because of what it says but because it is the law."<sup>42</sup> Camus' experience with totalitarian theories of jurisprudence is all too well expressed with this line.

The last work comprising the literature of revolt is The Just Assassins. The theme of this play, as the title suggests, concerns the amount of terror which can be justified in order to overthrow an unjust and terrorist regime. The play concerns the Russian revolutionists of 1905 and their assassination of the Grand Duke. Camus' position regarding the use of terror to abolish terror was established before he wrote the play:

Any murder to be justified must be balanced with love. For the terrorists the scaffold was the final proof of love.<sup>43</sup>

Camus' admiration for the young rebels is easy to perceive. He felt that revolt must be limited at all times, but that a certain amount of terror is sometimes justified if the action itself has limits and is projected toward a humanistic goal.

My admiration for my heroes, Kaliayev and Dora, is complete. I merely wanted to show that action itself had limits. There is no good and just action but what recognizes those limits and, if it must go beyond them, at least accepts death. Our world of today seems loathsome to us for the very reason that it is made by men who grant themselves the right to go beyond those limits, and first of all to kill

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<sup>42</sup>Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, p. 189.

<sup>43</sup>Camus, Notebooks 1942-1951, p. 231.

others without dying themselves. Thus it is that today justice serves as an alibi, throughout the world, for the assassins of all justice.<sup>44</sup>

The basic theme of this play is to establish limits concerning the idea of revolt. The play fundamentally restates Camus' notion that political revolution must have humanitarian values at heart before it can be justified. Limited revolution for the sake of humanitarian values is most clearly illustrated by the assassination attempt in the play. Kaliayev first attempted to throw a bomb at the Grand Duke's carriage, but stopped because there were two children with the Duke. The assassination was carried out successfully the second time (although Kaliayev was hanged for this act) because there were no children with the Duke. In defending Kaliayev's action, Dora points out the limits imposed upon political revolution:

Kaliayev agrees to kill the Grand-Duke since his death can bring the time nearer when Russian children will no longer die of hunger. That in itself is not easy. But the death of the nephews of the Grand-Duke will not prevent any children from dying of hunger. Even in destruction there is an order, there are limits.<sup>45</sup>

Camus' literature of revolt expresses well his idea that morality and political theory and action cannot be separated. The following chapter will describe in greater detail the importance of philosophical value relativism and its impact on political thought.

<sup>44</sup>Camus, Caligula and Three Other Plays, p. x.

<sup>45</sup>Ibid., p. 258.

## CHAPTER IV

### REVOLT AND POLITICS

It is difficult to summarize or develop a system of consistent political thought from the writings of Albert Camus. This is because his political ideas were expressed basically within the framework of philosophy and literature. From World War II on, however, Camus' writings never ceased to be concerned with the consequences of political life and its impact on human existence. The fact that his political ideas result from a larger interest in the existential condition of man probably limited his ability to articulate his political thoughts within a framework of political science standards. Camus did not attempt to establish a consistent political theory; his political ideas are more fundamentally created in response to the abuses he found in totalitarian oppression. But no responsible political scientist can truly contend that Camus' political ideas have no important contribution to modern political theory. His recognition and horror of the growth of political power and its historical abuses in the twentieth century made him a man who was intimately qualified to discuss political thought in relation to the fate of human existence.

### Normative Principles of Revolt

Perhaps the most important contribution made by Camus to political theory is his discussion concerning the creation of normative political values within a framework of philosophical relativism. There are three normative principles of revolt which deserve analysis at this point: freedom, justice, and the dignity of man. Some mention of one or all of these principles can be found in any source of Camus' writings.

Camus' idea of freedom in relation to the absurd has already been discussed in an earlier chapter. In that chapter it was noted that Camus considered freedom to be a metaphysical feeling rather than an absolute position. It is clear in The Myth of Sisyphus that Camus considered freedom to be a consciousness of necessity rather than an absence of restraint.<sup>1</sup> The absence of restraint means that "everything is permitted." This idea, which has already been discussed, is not acceptable to Camus. In the first place, the existence of the absurd destroys all possibility of completely knowing eternal freedom. If everything were permitted, then this possibility could be realized. But the absurd prevents absolute knowledge and, as a consequence, absolute freedom. In the second place, absolute freedom is not even desirable. "Absolute freedom is the right of the strongest to dominate."<sup>2</sup> Camus could not

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<sup>1</sup>Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus, p. 44.

<sup>2</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 287.

tolerate the idea of an absolute for the very reason that humanity, as a result, would suffer. The general idea of freedom is surrounded by limits. But how can these limits exist without appeal to universally objective, normative standards?

"Is it possible, in other words, to recognize limits on the exercise of freedom without appeal to higher law or objective truth?"<sup>3</sup> Camus' answer to this question is positive. Freedom can be developed as a limited concept in relation to political revolt. It is through political revolt, in fact, that it becomes a positive value. [Philosophical rebellion is an affirmation that the individual has a worth which should be protected against political oppression. Authentic political revolt must strive to gain as much individual freedom as possible under a system of laws which are designed to maintain that freedom. If freedom is sought for and defined in human terms, and not against an absolute and abstract standard, then the concept will represent a relative value which will need no justification, according to Camus, in terms of higher law or objective truth.]

The danger is in fact that such a value as freedom will receive attention only in terms of an absolute. Camus contended that when a value becomes defined in terms of an absolute, it simultaneously ceases to exist as a humanitarian goal. The

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<sup>3</sup>Terry Hoy, "Albert Camus: The Nature of Political Rebellion," Western Political Quarterly, XIII (September, 1960), p. 573.

political system will exploit the value for the sake of an abstract principle. An example is Camus' interpretation of Marxism with relation to freedom and justice. He sees the tragedy of the Marxist movement in its conception of freedom. In condemning the bourgeois conception of freedom, the Marxists condemned all freedom in the present for the sake of the attainment of a future absolute.

From a justifiable and healthy distrust of the way that bourgeois society prostituted freedom, people came to distrust freedom itself. At best, it was postponed to the end of time, with the request that meanwhile it be not talked about. The contention was that we needed justice first and that we would come to freedom later on, as if slaves could ever hope to achieve justice. And forceful intellectuals announced to the worker that bread alone interested him rather than freedom, as if the worker didn't know that his bread depends in part on his freedom.<sup>4</sup>

Thus the Russian Revolution of 1917 abstracted itself for the sake of an historical absolute which, in Camus' view, cost the proletariat, as well as the bourgeois, his immediate freedom.

In short, freedom is a limited relative value. It is a value which gains definition through human meaning and understanding rather than political analysis. It is a normative principle of revolt because it expresses the individual desire to be spared from political oppression. As such, Camus' definition of freedom lacks articulation and clarity. It has

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<sup>4</sup>Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, pp. 66-67.

significance, however, as a value which gains importance through its relative status as a political principle. It is a concept, expressed through revolt, which attempts to repress the violence of slavery caused by the nihilistic abstractions of totalitarian rule. Freedom is a unique result of the same absurd condition from which springs political oppression and negation.

The second normative principle which occupied much of Camus' time is justice. Justice is almost a co-principle with freedom. Camus' idea of justice can be summed up neatly and precisely: "There is no justice; there are only limits."<sup>5</sup> There is no absolute justice in the same sense as there is no absolute freedom. Yet there are limits imposed on political action by authentic revolt. Once again Camus took a position which denies the importance of transcendent values for the basic needs of human society. Political justice for Camus is the manifestation of social equality with respect to the human condition. The rebel realizes that the quest for justice must include man's happiness, dignity, and freedom from political oppression.

At the same time the rebel understands that a quest for total justice debases the human condition and ultimately negates justice. "Absolute justice is achieved by the suppression of all contradiction: therefore it destroys freedom."<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Camus, Notebooks 1942-1951, p. 185.

<sup>6</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 288.



Political action which seeks to realize the greatest amount of justice for men will rely on the spirit of relativity rather than an objective absolute. Responsible political action will seek limits to its own ends; the means will justify the end. Any concept of justice which does not recognize the relative moral imperative of human compassion is not in accord with the true spirit of revolt.

He again argued that every man accept his obligation to be not a revolutionary but ever in revolt and seldom happy. This revolt is distinguished by its sense of limits, by the happy discovery that justice is the value open to each man "in the small place of his existence." And justice is recognized by the compassion that accompanies it. In rejecting murder compassion is born and with it the realization: "I have need of others who have need of me and each other." In this moral order the man in revolt refuses to murder or to be an executioner of another.<sup>7</sup>

Freedom and justice are both limited relative values. One cannot be absolute while the other remains relative. If revolt is to be faithful to its purpose, justice and freedom must coexist, each one limiting the other.

The revolution of the twentieth century has arbitrarily separated, for overambitious ends of conquest, two inseparable ideas. Absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom. To be fruitful, the two ideas must find their limits in each other. No man considers that his condition is free if it is not at the same time just, nor just unless it is free.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Edward T. Gargon, "Revolution and Morale in the Formative Thought of Albert Camus," Review of Politics, XXV (October, 1963), p. 495.

<sup>8</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 291.

Any revolution which is faithful to the human condition will attempt to seek as much freedom from oppression as possible. What injustice is left after a revolution must remain to open criticism. Political societies can never attain a perfect form of justice and freedom in the future without resorting to injustice and violence in the present. But man can be content to live under a system of relative political principles in the present without seeking an absolute justification for possible injustice in the future. Any attempt to bring freedom and justice within the framework of historical absolutism will immediately reduce the amount of that freedom and justice enjoyed in the present.

The third normative principle of revolt is the most important: human dignity. It is for the sake of human dignity that authentic political revolutions must take place. Without the principle of human dignity, in an existence where there is little hope for transcendental benevolence, positive relative values have no more importance than nihilistic and negative principles. It is for the achievement of human dignity that absolutism must be denied:

When the end is absolute, historically speaking, and when it is believed certain of realization, it is possible to go so far as to sacrifice others. When it is not, only oneself can be sacrificed, in the hazards of a struggle for the common dignity of man. Does the end justify the means? That is possible. But what will justify the end? To that question,

which historical thought leaves pending, rebellion replies: the means.<sup>9</sup>

The dignity of man is by no means a unique political value. But with respect to Camus' denial of rationally accepted a priori values the dignity of man principle has a fresh foundation. Camus' proclamation of this value was directed to those for whom the nihilist premises appear valid. He was determined to demonstrate that nihilistic premises do not lead to nihilistic conclusions. This is his unique contribution to the political concern with human dignity. The basic question which the political theorist wants to ask, however, concerns the possibility of a purely relative concept of dignity without universal norms. Camus felt that a relative position concerning the value of human dignity could be justified on the grounds that all men share the same ultimate condition. This does not mean that all men share a universal nature, but Camus did contend that man could create relative values out of a common existence which has lost identification with universal norms. These values, of which human dignity is probably the most important, could be established by authentic political revolution.

It should be pointed out here that although Camus held these three values to be elements of revolt, it appears that they fit more neatly into categories of presuppositions to revolt. It is entirely possible, contrary to Camus' contention, that rebellion alone does not furnish man with the relative

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<sup>9</sup>Ibid., p. 292.

values which will guide his political and social environment. These values are more likely pre-existent norms, though they may be acknowledged implicitly rather than overtly. There is no doubt that revolt entails values, but it would be difficult to agree that revolt itself is a complete value. The principles of freedom, justice, and human dignity are part of a tradition of values which precede the revolt. It remains the act of revolt, however, which establishes normative principles in a new order.

#### Revolt and Ideology

There are two areas of political ideology, one implicit and the other explicit, which Camus spent much time discussing. The first, liberalism, is Camus' response to the growth of the second principle; totalitarianism. Camus' insistence on freedom, human dignity, law, justice, limited political power, and a change in the status quo makes him an exponent of the liberal tradition. His ideas on liberalism and liberal democracy are not, however, entirely traditional. In the first place, his liberal notions are established within a relative framework. In the second place, liberalism is the result of a basically irrational movement.

Camus' interpretation of liberalism as an ideology of relative values is somewhat unique in the political spectrum. Traditional liberalism has recognized the importance of absolute values and principles. It has basically contended that

freedom, law, justice, and rights are grounded in some higher law or authority which can be rationally ascertained. Camus' position, on the contrary, reveals a liberal ideology which rejects appeal to absolute principles and reason. As one of his interpreters has expressed it:

There is nothing more disastrous in human affairs than absolutes. Those who think that they have the truth in any final form are always willing to impose it on others; they may even consider it their duty to do so. A wholly ordered system is the equivalent in logic of an absolute belief. There is no room in it for change, since neither its assumptions nor its consequences can be altered in the slightest. But the trouble with wholly ordered systems is that while rigid they are apt to be incomplete. In which case their consistency is not enough. A partially ordered system is not complete and so lacks the security which wins unswerving adherents who are willing to make converts to their point of view by physical force. Humanism can survive in democracy because democracy is only partially ordered; with all its logical limitations, it has the virtue of not lending itself to absolutes or to political imposition.<sup>10</sup>

This attempt to bridge the gap between liberalism and climate of pure relativism makes Camus' ideological position unique. Liberalism in this context is an alternative to the possibility of nihilistic absolutism. Camus went so far as to imply that liberalism could not co-exist within a framework of absolutism without destroying many of the very principles which formulate this ideological position.

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<sup>10</sup>J. K. Feibleman, "Camus and the Passion of Humanism," Kenyon Review, XXV (Spring, 1963), p. 284.

Authentic political revolt takes place for the sake of values which are consistent with the principles of liberal democracy. One goal of revolt then would be the establishment of this desirable form of government. The rebel knows that human solidarity can exist only if there is a free exchange of ideas and values between human beings. Because there are no absolute normative principles to which man can turn for the sake of political justification, the individual relies on the creative spirit of humanity. Liberal democracy would be the most desirable form of government which would allow the creation and development of political and social values which would be consistent with human dignity. The laws developed in a democratic state would be most effective in restraining the power of government to control the will of the people. An ideological position of liberalism is, in short, more effective in meeting the values and goals established relatively by human beings. It is also more apt to provide for the change which is necessary within an environment of value relativism.

The second reason for Camus' unique interpretation of liberalism concerns the irrational movement. Reason does not occupy the important place it did in traditional liberalism. Reason must be used to establish the political values upon which the governmental structure is built, but it cannot, with respect to the absurd, appeal to higher law for justification for these values. The inability of reason to fill the gap left by the denial of transcendent values causes irrationality to emerge as

a legitimate principle of liberalism. One does not, in other words, have to embrace a position of negation due to the existence of irrationality. It is quite possible to establish relative values (resembling even those established by the natural law, natural rights, and religious heritage) which can exist in an irrational environment as long as they are protected by relative laws. Camus recognized that the development of a negationist attitude in the face of irrationalism was largely the result of the rebellion by the rationalists and romantics against the Christian heritage. Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski have pointed out a similar idea by stating that

. . . in spite of these sharp conflicts between totalitarian ideology on one hand and the Christian and Democratic heritage on the other, it is only within the context of this heritage that the ideologies can be fully understood. . . . There is a style of living involved that calls for transcendent explanations of what is right. When the theological explanations become untenable as a result of the decline of religious faith, these "secular religions" then fill the vacuum.<sup>11</sup>

Camus' development of positive values under irrational circumstances no doubt makes him a secular moralist, but this is in no way identifiable with the "secular religion" of totalitarian terrorists.

Finally, revolt alone expresses a spirit of liberalism. Political revolt advocates political change. A true rebel can

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<sup>11</sup>Carl J. Friedrich and Zbigniew K. Brzezinski, Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy (Cambridge, 1956), pp. 87-88.

never be happy with the status quo. A true spirit of revolt brings about the most reasonable amount of freedom, happiness, justice, dignity, and other relative values, but there is always need for improvement. Relative values are entirely man-made and, as a consequence, are never complete. Yet with respect to absolute values, relative values offer a greater adaptability to human needs due to their capability of change. The true rebel is always concerned with the reduction of any amount of injustice and oppression which may exist even in the most democratic of governments.

Revolt, in a second sense, is a value of traditional liberalism. John Locke for one established that revolution is a basic principle of liberal democracy. The people of a state have the right (in his case, the natural right) to rebel against any government or political force which becomes tyrannical. Rebellion, in Camus' sense also, is an ever-present recourse to political oppression and power. The state must be faithful to the human values which it serves. Any state which continues to deny attention to injustice and oppression, or which openly resorts to violence and oppression, must be overthrown by the subjects if they desire the continuation of positive, humanitarian, political action. Political rebellion, therefore, is always a possibility and a source of limitation to political power.

The second ideological principle, about which Camus was much more explicit, involves the rejection of totalitarianism



as a legitimate expression of political theory. Camus' rejection of totalitarianism, as has been pointed out earlier, is based on two ideas: the total submission to absolute principles, and the inhumanitarian practice of totalitarian methodology. The history of totalitarianism has demonstrated acceptance of the principle that the end justifies the means. It has consistently denied the importance of present human values in order to justify the evolution of a glorious future. Totalitarianism, whether "rational" or "irrational" has emerged because of the failure of men to be faithful to the humanitarian goals of authentic political rebellion. Mass murder, concentration camps, and the total regimentation of human lives bear the mark of totalitarian injustice.

It is the emergence of totalitarian nihilism that disturbed Camus more than any other political problem in the twentieth century. Negation and murder are the most important provisions of totalitarianism which do not merit the justification of political revolt. These principles exist in most cases as a result of the total devotion to some absolute principle (even negation since, carried to its logical extremity, it ultimately seeks absolute destruction) for which humanity must suffer. Camus denied the use of any unjust means, for example, murder, which could be employed to bring about an absolute goal for two reasons: the means used to bring about an absolute goal are generally unacceptable to humanitarian principles, and the absolute goal for which the

unjust means are employed is not a legitimate pursuit in the first place. An example of an absolute goal which, carried to its extreme expression, would allow for the suppression of human values and life is freedom.

In a flash--but that is time enough to say, provisionally, that the most extreme form of freedom, the freedom to kill, is not compatible with the sense of rebellion. Rebellion is in no way the demand for total freedom. On the contrary, rebellion puts total freedom up for trial. It specifically attacks the unlimited power that authorizes a superior to violate the forbidden frontier. 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 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. Therefore, thanks to rebellion, there is something more in history than the relation between mastery and servitude. Unlimited power is not the only law. It is in the name of another value that the rebel affirms the impossibility of total freedom while he claims for himself the relative freedom necessary to recognize this impossibility. Every human freedom, at its very roots, is therefore relative.<sup>12</sup>

Camus' most obvious rejection of totalitarianism, besides its adherence to absolute principles and unjust means, concerns totalitarian rejection of human rights and laws. Although

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<sup>12</sup>Camus, The Rebel, p. 284.

these rights and laws are relative, they must deserve the respect of the state. Totalitarian states, however, do not respect the concepts of human rights and the rule of law. They are governed by a positivistic notion of law which holds that the law and rights of men are those proclaimed by the supreme authority. Once again, the true spirit of rebellion is betrayed by political action which seeks to establish absolute power in order to force the individuals to serve the demands of the state. The totalitarian state thus reduces the freedom of individuals to establish their own political limits and rights and, in effect, betrays the humanitarian spirit in which those rights and laws were proclaimed.

The limit where freedom begins and ends, where its rights and duties come together, is called law, and the State itself must bow to the law. If it evades the law, if it deprives the citizens of the benefits of the law, there is breach of faith.<sup>13</sup>

Camus discussed his ideas concerning totalitarianism with respect to three major examples: Marxism and the Russian Revolution; fascism and the Nazi state; and Franco and the Spanish dictatorship. This discussion of Camus' ideas will eliminate fascism except to point out that fascist totalitarianism is the most nihilistic and employs the greatest amount of "irrational" terror. It is rather apparent that Nazism had little respect for the use of human values and, as a result,

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<sup>13</sup>Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 75.

prostituted itself with respect to the values of true rebellion. Marxism and the Franco dictatorship, on the other hand, are more interesting to the discussion of political revolt since their theoretical foundations offer a greater "rational" and philosophical foundation for the study of totalitarian principles and the nature of revolt.

Camus' rejection of totalitarianism is derived from a section in The Rebel devoted to Marxism. This section, accepted immediately (and probably mistakenly) by the French right wing, was the source of the rather famous political quarrel between Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre in 1952. In his discussion of Marxian teachings, Camus was at the same time critical and respectful. [Camus contended that the initial writings of Marx reflected a genuine concern for authentic rebellion. Marx was repelled by the sub-human treatment of workers by the capitalists. His revolt at the outset was marked by an expression of human dignity and the related values.] But Marx, according to Camus, began to systematize his rebellion through rational, philosophic, and religious influences. "His concern for the humanitarian goals of his revolt began to turn toward the development of a prophetic ideology. It was not long before Marx's full attention was devoted, at the expense of immediate humanitarian concerns, to the development of the historical absolute. Marx, like Hegel, made the mistake of establishing a drive toward the future which made political morality provisional.

Camus pointed out in this section that Marx was influenced by a Christian theory of history which constituted a break with the Greek theory of history.

In contrast to the ancient world, the unity of the Christian and Marxist world is astonishing. The two doctrines have in common a vision of the world which completely separates them from the Greek attitude. Jaspers defines this very well: "It is a Christian way of thinking to consider that the history of man is strictly unique." The Christians were the first to consider human life and the course of events as a history that is unfolding from a fixed beginning toward a definite end, in the course of which man achieves his salvation or earns his punishment. The Greek idea of evolution has nothing in common with our idea of historical evolution . . . . For the Christian, as for the Marxist, nature must be subdued. The Greeks are of the opinion that it is better to obey it.<sup>14</sup>

From the linear concept of history Christianity deduced that man was evolving toward a goal of spiritual totality. Marx secularized this idea by proclaiming that man was evolving toward a totality of human achievement. "From this angle, socialism is therefore an enterprise for the deification of man and has assumed some of the characteristics of traditional religions."<sup>15</sup> Marxism and Christianity then held for Camus a comparison in relation to history which he considered to be unique. Prompted by this comparison, Camus offered the observation concerning history and human nature that

Communists and Christians will tell me that their optimism looks further ahead, that it is

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<sup>14</sup>Camus, The Rebel, pp. 189-190.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid., p. 192.

superior to all the rest, and that God or history, according to the case, is the satisfactory aim of their dialectic. I have the same reasoning to make. If Christianity is pessimistic as to man, it is optimistic as to human destiny. Marxism, pessimistic as to destiny, pessimistic as to human nature, is optimistic as to the progress of history (its contradiction!). I shall say that, pessimistic as to the human condition, I am optimistic as to mankind.<sup>16</sup>

Marx's secularization of the human role in the evolution of history helped to spring the waiting trap of contemporary dictatorships. His notions of the historical dialectic overshadowed the political morality needed in the present to reduce the injustice caused by modern industrial society. Camus contended that it was Marx's mistake to place the great emphasis he did on the achievement of absolute justice. This principle could only be realized in a classless society which would emerge at the end of a violent class struggle during which the end would justify any means necessary to its attainment. This basic premise of Marx's thought justifies the emergent totalitarian dictatorships which, in the name of humanity and justice, govern by self-perpetuating force.

The Communists came into power in 1917 in order to realize the Marxian ideal, but, according to Camus, the result of that revolution has been a denial of the spirit of Marx. The Communist Revolution, proclaimed in the name of human values, has been the realization of nothing more than a powerful dictatorship which has more than once employed the techniques of mass

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<sup>16</sup>Camus, Notebooks 1942-1951, p. 124.

murder and systematic injustice for the sake of the "final goal." This dictatorship, in the style of all others in the twentieth century, has become murderous and nihilist in its approach to humanity and values. Camus found the totalitarian revolution of this century intolerable with respect to the established values of authentic revolt.

Revolution, in the dilemma into which it has been led by its bourgeois opponents and its nihilist supporters, is nothing but slavery. Unless it changes its principles and its path, it can have no other final result than servile rebellions, obliterated in blood or the hideous prospect of atomic suicide.<sup>17</sup>

As far as the historical absolute goes, Camus felt that Marx and all other advocates of Utopian absolutes were hopelessly wrong. Man's total unification with dialectical history has the effect of destroying the human values and principles for which his struggle with history has been engaged. Human values succumb to a search for order.

If man is reduced to being nothing but a character in history, he has no other choice but to subside into a sound and fury of a completely irrational history or to endow history with the form of human reason. Therefore the history of contemporary nihilism is nothing but a prolonged endeavor to give order, by human forces alone and simply by force, to a history no longer endowed with order.<sup>18</sup>

Revolt for the sake of history, in short, is nihilistic to the human values in whose name revolt should be perpetuated.

<sup>17</sup> Camus, The Rebel, pp. 219-220.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid., p. 192.

It was this idea that led Sartre and his followers to attack Camus for anti-historicism. In his "Letter to the Editor of Les Temps Modernes," he responded to this attack with probably his most articulate expression of the nature of authentic revolt and history.

To legitimate the position he [Francis Jeanson, a follower of Sartre] takes toward my book, your critic should demonstrate . . . that history has a necessary meaning and a final outcome; that the frightful and disorderly aspect that it offers us today is sheer appearance; and that, on the contrary, in spite of its ups and downs, progress toward that moment of final reconciliation which will be the jump into ultimate freedom, is inevitable . . . . Only prophetic Marxism (or a philosophy of eternity) could justify the pure and simple rejection of my thesis. But how can such views be upheld in your magazine without contradictions? Because, after all, if there is no human end that can be made into a norm of value, how can history have a definable meaning? On the other hand, if history has meaning why shouldn't man make of it his end? If he did that, however, how could he remain in the state of frightful and unceasing freedom of which you speak? . . . The truth is that your contributor would like us to revolt against everything but the Communist Party and the Communist State. He is, in fact, in favor of revolt, which is as it should be, in the condition (of absolute freedom) described by his philosophy. However, he is tempted by the kind of revolt which takes the most despotic historical form . . . . If he wants to revolt, he must do it in the name of the same nature which existentialism denies. Hence, he must do it theoretically in the name of history. But since one cannot revolt in the name of an abstraction, his history must be endowed with a global meaning. As soon as this is accepted, history becomes a sort of God, and while he revolts, man must abdicate before those who pretend to be the priests and the Church of such a God. Existential freedom and adventure is by the same token denied. As long as you have not clarified or eliminated this contradiction, defined your notion of history, assimilated Marxism, or rejected it, how can we be deprived of the right to



contend that, no matter what you do, you remain within the boundaries of nihilism?<sup>19</sup>

Camus' second example used to demonstrate his rejection of totalitarianism is contained in a reply to Gabriel Marcel's desire to know why Camus staged the setting of his play State of Siege in Spain instead of Eastern Europe. Camus' point in this essay is that the Western World has kept too silent about the emergence of a totalitarian state within its midst. He explained in the article that State of Siege was written in response to Spain's admission to UNESCO. Pointing out the memory of the inhumanitarian plague in Western Europe during World War II, Camus reminded Marcel that a party to that plague still freely exists as a threat to human dignity:

You write that, for the well-informed, Spain is not now the source of news most likely to spread despair among men who respect human dignity. You are not well informed, Gabriel Marcel. Just yesterday five political opponents were condemned to death there. But you did everything you could to be ill informed by developing the art of forgetting. You have forgotten that in 1936 a rebellious general, in the name of Christ, raised up an army of Moors, hurled them against the legally constituted government of the Spanish Republic, won victory for an unjust cause after massacres that can never be expiated, and initiated a frightful repression that has lasted ten years and is not yet over. Yes, indeed, why Spain? Because you, like so many others, do not remember.<sup>20</sup>

Totalitarianism, in short, is a result of twentieth century misuse of political revolution. Political revolution

<sup>19</sup> Camus, "Letter to the Editor of Les Temps Modernes," cited in Germaine Bree, Camus, pp. 34-35.

<sup>20</sup> Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 59.

in this century has sought the realization of political power rather than the abolition of injustice and political oppression. It has employed the most hideous of crimes in order to carry out its devotion to irrational terror for the sake of terror or rational terror for the sake of absolute ideal. The cause of human dignity has suffered as the result.

#### Revolt and Political Issues

Two particular political matters occupied much of Camus' thinking in relation to authentic revolt. The first political issue concerns capital punishment. Camus understood that his system of relative values and laws allowed some political practices with which he could not agree. A relative system of law, without appeal to higher law, means that man is going to be judged by man. This experience is not always fruitful to the cause of human dignity. It is perhaps the worse situation if man cannot be judged by any law whatsoever, as in the case of some totalitarian systems in which the law is so unpredictable the state might as well resort to anarchy. As the central character in Camus' novel The Fall states, judgment without law is the worst possible experience:

He who clings to a law does not fear the judgment that reinstates him in an order he believes in. But the keenest of human torments is to be judged without a law.<sup>21</sup>

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<sup>21</sup>Albert Camus, The Fall and Exile and the Kingdom (New York, 1958), p. 117.

Judgment by a law, however, is sometimes a not too happy experience. This is the case of capital punishment.

Camus' rejection of totalitarianism does not mean that he was content with non-totalitarian society. He carried on his own rebellion for the abolition of the death penalty. The basis on which Camus rejected the death penalty in his article "Reflections on the Guillotine" involves several principles. First of all, the death penalty is revolting to the principle of human dignity and the worth of life. Secondly, and this argument is probably his most important, the death penalty is too much of a totality and irreparability. Thirdly, society or the state must claim some of the responsibility for its crimes. The existence of the absurd human existence makes it an impossibility for anyone to be totally responsible for his actions, and total punishment is not justified.

The death penalty, which is satisfactory neither as an example nor as an instrument of distributive justice usurps in addition an exorbitant privilege in claiming the right to punish guilt that is always relative with a definitive and irreparable punishment.<sup>22</sup>

Justice must be moderate; the death penalty is too absolute. Camus realized that political society cannot exist without some measure to deal with crime. But those measures must not be absolute. Man has no absolute right to "retaliate" against the crimes committed by another by taking his

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<sup>22</sup>Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 177.

life as a consequence. To do away with the death penalty would have the effect of saying that the state and society are not absolute values. The state should, instead of capital punishment, punish its criminals by imprisonment, rehabilitation, or hard labor. These forms of punishment would be more consistent with the relative values established by society.

The second concern with a specific political issue involves freedom of expression. Camus was especially interested in this civil liberty--specifically the freedom of the press--because he had been editor of a suppressed Resistance publication and had felt the effects of that restraint. Political revolt must safeguard civil liberties if the expression of human values is to receive full attention. The freedom of expression is extremely significant, for it enables men to share their common existence and engage in a mutual exchange of ideas and values concerning their solidarity. With freedom of expression, and especially freedom of the press, men can determine their justice and fight against the existence of injustice.

With freedom of the press, nations are not sure of going toward justice and peace. But without it, they are sure of not going there. For justice is done to people only when their rights are recognized, and there is no right without expression of that right.<sup>23</sup>

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<sup>23</sup>Ibid., p. 76.

Civil liberties can give practical expression to those relative values which are created by human beings. Political revolt cannot fail to realize the importance of development and maintenance of those liberties. Any political suppression of civil liberties will result in the direct oppression of human values within the political system. The creation and establishment of civil liberties might be considered to be the single area in which Camus advocated an almost unlimited sphere with respect to the values of political revolt.

## CHAPTER V

### CONCLUSION

It should be clear by now that Albert Camus is an important political figure. He is one who stood out and spoke loudly against the political travesties of the twentieth century. He not only condemned the totalitarian miscarriages of justice, but he called on all political societies of any tradition to join hands to revolt against inhumane principles. An editorial piece written for Combat in 1948 expresses well his appeal for humanitarian principles.

There are some of us who do not want to keep silent about anything. It is our whole political society that nauseates us. Hence there will be no salvation until all those who are still worth while have repudiated it utterly in order to find, somewhere outside insoluble contradictions, the way to a complete renewal. In the meantime we must struggle. But with the knowledge that totalitarian tyranny is not based on the virtues of the totalitarians. It is based on the mistakes of the liberals. Talleyrand's remark is contemptible, for a mistake is not worse than a crime. But the mistake eventually justifies the crime and provides its alibi. Then the mistake drives its victims to despair, and that is why it must not be condoned. That is just what I cannot forgive contemporary political society: it is a mechanism for driving men to despair.<sup>1</sup>

Camus' complete adherence to humanitarian principles in politics established him as a political moralist. As a result

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<sup>1</sup>Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, p. 62.

his political ideas were often shaky, loosely formulated, and at times unsound; but they were never irresponsible. He never considered himself to be a champion of political theory; his political ideas were written to be understood by the masses rather than political scholars. In this attempt Camus was successful. His words and concepts were ripe for a Western World which wanted to understand why millions of human beings had died and been politically oppressed even before the first half of the century. "He was the frank, outspoken defender of human values. He never denied the repugnance he felt for the world in which he lived, but likewise he never ceased claiming a solidarity with men who suffer in that world."<sup>2</sup>

#### Emergence of Relative Absolutes

One of the reasons Europeans eagerly absorbed Camus' political ideas is due to the emergence of what might be termed "relative absolutes." The twentieth century has experienced a decline of appeal to higher law and reason for justification of traditional political values. Camus concurred with this decline and even supported it. He maintained that, within the framework of the absurd, men would have to seek values and justification without any hope of being able to know the validity of their choice. Theoretically, any value, positive or negative, is acceptable under a system of pure relativism. But Camus contended that if human existence

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<sup>2</sup>Wallace Fowlie, "Albert Camus: 1913-1960," Commonweal, LXXI (February, 1960), p. 550.

is affirmed, some values will and should be more acceptable to the continuation of that existence.

Camus' position is actually closer to an essentialist rather than an existentialist point of view. Despite absurdism and revolt, he placed his confidence in certain previously established values. The dignity of man, individual freedom, justice, and even political revolt are all values which are not original in the liberal tradition. What is original to the development of normative political principles created in a system of relativism is the contention that these values should be preferred. Camus wanted to replace the inhumanitarian principles established by totalitarian force in a purely relativistic environment by positive human values. If his first premise that life is worth living is accepted, Camus' positive values would relegate the nihilistic principles to an unacceptable position.

Camus' political values are more than simply relative values; they are relatively absolute values. Once established, these values should be maintained and constantly improved rather than changed by caprice. In this sense Camus' values are transcendent in contrast to the ever-changing principles and goals of totalitarian rule. They are legitimate values of revolt, however, due to their continuous need for revision and improvement. The values of authentic revolt are imperfect, but they constitute a closer realization of human needs than



the transient values of nihilism. What Camus wanted to do, in short, was to replace the foundation of liberally oriented values.

Relative absolutes have an important contribution for political theory. They are the alternatives to totalitarian principles which, springing from the same foundation, would seek to reduce the importance of human existence. They embody a positive character in the face of a political environment under which human destiny is precarious. Relative absolutes can also fit the framework of liberal democratic principles without resorting to a fundamental foundation denied by many who would like to retain, however, the values established by the traditional approach. Relative absolutes would also give political subjects a belief in concrete principles which, according to Camus, can co-exist with a relative basis of establishment.

The major question of concern here to the political theorist is the realistic possibility of practical application of these values to a political society. Can men govern themselves without appeal to absolute principles of government? It is obvious that the state can govern its subjects without appeal to any ultimate justification of its political acts. But it is more difficult to ascertain the reliability of relative ethics as a presupposition to self-government. As long as political subjects believe in an absolute basis of political values, there seems to be no danger, provided the

subjects have any realistic control over their agents and laws, of the destruction or negation of those values in a traditionally liberal and normative environment. This expression of relative absolutism seems to be one alternative to the scientific value relativists who are evidently more concerned with describing the values that are rather than discovering values that should be. If, however, political subjects ultimately cease to recognize any metaphysical foundation for the existence of values, then relative absolutism may be the emergent normative theory which will allow for the continuation of traditional values, as well as for the establishment of new ones consistent with the desires of the subjects. But whether or not human nature could or would tolerate a completely non-metaphysical value system remains to be discovered. One point is clear, however, with respect to Camus' concept of revolt: political revolt must proclaim the importance of human values, whether relatively absolute, or absolutely relative, on the grounds that a valueless society will quickly succumb to the nihilistic terror of unrestrained political power. Human beings must be ready to completely revolt, if it becomes necessary, for the sake of the principles of human dignity.

#### Elements of a Political Theory

No one would contend that Camus developed a consistent, self-contained political theory; this was not even a conscious

attempt on his part. But there are elements identifiable with a political theory which must come to light in relation to the previous considerations of this thesis. If labels are helpful in classifying thinkers in political terms, then some may be used to describe Camus' political ideology. Camus can be considered to be a liberal humanist in a special sense. This conclusion is based on two premises: first that his concept of revolt advocates a definite change from the status quo and, secondly, that this change is advocated only for the sake of the betterment of human dignity. In the first place, revolt is a continuing process. Values are not given a priori and therefore must be created by individuals even though they may be formulated before the time of the revolt. Values established by human creation are of necessity lacking in perfection. The true rebel, as a result, must be forever in demand of greater justice, freedom, and dignity.

There is no ideal freedom which will suddenly be given to us one day, like a pension which one receives at the close of his life. Freedoms are to be conquered one by one, painfully, and those which we already possess are the milestones, insufficient to be sure, on the way to a concrete liberation. If one allows them to be taken away, there is no advance. To the contrary, one moves backward, and one day it will be necessary to take this route over again, but this new effort will once more be brought about by the sweat and blood of men.<sup>3</sup>

In the second place, the only authentic goal for revolt is the development of human dignity and all related values

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<sup>3</sup>Camus, Actuelles II, pp. 166-167, cited in Thomas Hanna, The Thought and Art of Albert Camus, p. 177.

which exist to perpetuate it. Political change is not sought to improve the status of the state without a concern for the development of humanitarian principles. The only legitimate end for the state is the achievement of the greatest amount of human dignity and respect. All other goals fall short of this principle. This premise may restate the greatest happiness for the greatest number, but Camus goes much further. The political state exists for the realization of the greatest possible development and freedom for the individual. There is little room for Utopianism here, though. Camus was not seeking an absolute goal for the development of man. He understood man's weakness and quick ability to be politically and morally corrupted. In this sense Camus was not a traditional humanist. Man has no hope to achieve perfection through political, cultural, or any other means. But politics for Camus concerned the formulation of human values rather than political or social absolutes. Whatever weaknesses it has, humanity is the only legitimate pursuit political philosophy ultimately has.

A second label might be effectively attached to Camus' political thought. Camus was a dialectician of revolt rather than history. Once again, this term must be used in a limited sense. He was concerned with the dialectic of revolt in so far as it is an eternal movement. But revolt is not moving toward its own absolute realization. It is an ever-growing process which falls back and moves ahead at times; but there is no universal finalization waiting at the end of time. The

political means must always be limited because the goal of human dignity and happiness can never be fully realized. Any attempt to absolutize the means would distort the end. Thus, the means can only justify the end.

What does such an attitude signify in politics? . . . We must answer without hesitation that it is the only attitude that is efficacious today. There are two sorts of efficacy: that of typhoons and that of sap. Historical absolutism is not efficacious, it is efficient; it has seized and kept power. Once it is in possession of power, it destroys the only creative reality. Uncompromising and limited action, springing from rebellion, upholds this reality and only tries to extend it farther and farther. It is not said that this action cannot conquer. It is said that it runs the risk of not conquering and of dying. But either revolution will take this risk or it will confess that it is only the undertaking of a new set of masters, punishable by the same scorn.<sup>4</sup>

It has been stated that the terms "liberal humanist" and "dialectician" must be used in a special sense. In the case of the first term, Camus' political philosophy has one drawback as an exposition of a liberal position. His political ideas were fundamentally reactionary. His complete devotion to revolt and humanism was based on a reaction to totalitarian nihilism. He defended his political values in reaction to the extremes of nihilism. Camus was evidently content to devote his entire political thinking to a defense of political values in order to demonstrate that those values could be the only alternatives in a nihilistic environment to the continuation of totalitarian domination of masses. Thus, he defended those

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<sup>4</sup>Camus, The Rebel, pp. 292-293.

values as a reactionary rather than in the spirit of a rebellious rival, but this defense may have been, paradoxically, one of his most valuable contributions to the development of relative liberalism.

In a second sense, Camus cannot truly be called an exponent of the dialectical interpretation of political revolution. Camus expressed a notion of limited rebellion and moderation. In this sense he does not carry on the tradition of Hegel and Marx (in his discussion of a connected, but related principle) because their dialectical systems had little room for moderation. Camus' position also held that man alone, and not history, could perpetuate the ends of political revolt. Man plays a relatively unimportant role in the realization of the historical absolute in both the Marxian and Hegelian sense. History, in their systems, is in complete control. Camus rigorously denied that history was in control of revolt. Yet Camus' ideas concerning revolt, especially the concepts of eternal movement and relation between antitheses and theses, exemplify some of the elements of the dialectic.

Camus' importance to political theory consists of three basic contributions. His discussion of totalitarianism has shed much light on its origins and development. Although his discussion is based almost entirely on a moral evaluation, at the expense of perhaps a more scientific evaluation, his personal commitment and involvement illuminated many concepts and discoveries which might not have been brought forth from

any other source. His unique political moralism is an important contribution to the understanding of totalitarian theory.

In the second place, Camus' keen devotion to normative principles, in an environment in which they can be easily denied, resulted in an articulation of the important relative values which no political society can overlook and remain faithful to a devotion of its subjects. He demonstrated through his writings and personal actions that there are positive alternatives which man can create in his revolt to combat the tyranny of totalitarianism. In this action Camus has given political theory responsible, if not always systematic, ideas concerning the development of positive principles in the face of a world considered to consist of absurd, irrational elements.

Finally, Camus offered a ray of hope to a century which has known, and could experience still, some of the world's greatest political oppressions. There is little hope of transcending the absurd. Man can, however, discover principles which make life worthwhile. He can also help to better his social and political status through the thoughtful creation of values which will seek to bring him a greater amount of happiness, freedom, and dignity. The present condition of man, Camus believed, is not a happy one. But it is possible that through his efforts man may be able to reduce the amount of injustice and political oppression in the world. This implores that history will have to be changed, not followed.

One can reject all history and yet accept the world of the sea and the stars. The rebels who wish to ignore nature and beauty are condemned to banish from history everything with which they want to construct the dignity of existence and of labor. Every great reformer tries to create in history what Shakespeare, Cervantes, Moliere, and Tolstoy knew how to create: a world always ready to satisfy the hunger for freedom and dignity which every man carries in his heart . . . . Is it possible eternally to reject injustice without ceasing to acclaim the nature of man and the beauty of the world? Our answer is yes. This ethic, at once unsubmitive and loyal, is in any event the only one that lights the way to a truly realistic revolution. In upholding beauty, we prepare the way for the day of regeneration when civilization will give first place--far ahead of the formal principles and degraded values of history--to this living virtue on which is founded the common dignity of man and the world he lives in, and which we must now define in the face of a world that insults it.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>5</sup>Ibid., pp. 276-277.



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