The Discrepancies of Kant and Camus:

Relating to the world

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Honors Thesis

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...the senses never and in no matter enable us to know things in themselves but only by their appearance...

Prefatory Note
(also known as the author’s apologia)

The endeavor here is not merely to compare two philosophical figures. The depth of thought both thinkers possess is unmistakable. Despite being nearly 200 years apart the similarities in Albert Camus and Immanuel Kant thought is startling. And even though the two men start and differing places, the attempt by both men to understand the role of themselves in the world makes both worthy to note. Perhaps Kant should be introduced as his historical signification. Kant is considered to be an 18th century German idealist, Camus is a 20th century French existentialist. Kant in some circles is considered to be a forerunner of phenomenology, Camus a user of phenomenology. But the attempt here is to get past the labels and stereotypes that merely confuse the issue. The task here is talk of two men with a depth of thinking and a scope for the human situation that allies them more closely than any labels or historical period.

The fundamental concern of philosophy and philosophers is the question concerning discrepancy- discrepancy between two people and discrepancy between the individual and the world. Why does such a discrepancy exist? The discrepancy of conception between persons is the matter of a difference in the way people view the world. Why is it that people view objects and events differently in the world? The
answer lies in the condition that ultimate reality is not necessarily
the same world that is perceived through the senses and reorganized
through conception. This may seem like an unfounded assertion, but I
do not believe so. The commonality in the differing philosophical
systems of Kant and Camus, and the insight of there being a difference
in the way in which the world manifests itself and the way in which
people perceive the world, may not point, conclusively, to the
soundness of this assertion. The prevalence with which it occurs
indicates that it is a topic not to be overlooked. Kant points out
that there is a difference between ultimate reality, noumena and what
it is that we perceive, phenomena. Albert Camus, too, illustrates the
affect the discrepancy illicits between perception of the world, with
human reason and its limits, and the “true” world as it exists. True
in the sense in which I apply it to Camus can be understood in the
terms of the totality of object or event, or, in Kantian terms, as
noumena.

**Immanuel Kant**

**Historical Foundation-** Germany and the Humean problem

Kant’s allotment in the history of philosophy has been that of a
watershed figure. He marks the ends of both rationalism in the
tradition of Descartes and Spinoza and empiricism in the tradition of
Locke and Hume. Kant marks the beginning of a new German idealism
predicated by Hegel.

Kant’s dates are 1724-1804, which places him secure in the 18th
century. Kant was a professional student his entire career at the
University of Konigsburg. After completing his studies he continued on
to become both professor and eventually director of the university. Kant never left farther than 40 miles from Konigsburg. His physical life, while being limited geographically, did not impede his breadth of thought.

Eighteenth century Germany was divided, politically into provinces. The country, as it is known today, was not formed yet. It was an aggregate of principalities. Politically the landscape allowed for invasion by many foreign countries and even neighboring principalities. While the political landscape was tumultuous, the academic did not truly suffer. The academics were noted for the continuing advance in science and mathematics and were considered relatively safe. The fortunes of war did not greatly affect the academic environment. In the fields of mathematics and science, great advances were being made. Bacon’s scientific methodology had steered the sciences in a secure and objectifiable course. Newton and Leibniz had created a new calculus with still undiscovered applications. But chief among the applications was in physics, which also was making great advances toward explaining the world within a rational and ordered schema. The Copernican model of the universe was the widely accepted view of the world. The 18th century was marked by the influx of the humanities into all of Europe. It was a great time of excitement and wonder concerning mastery over the world by man.

Immanuel Kant begins his inquiry into human understanding and what it is that humans can understand through an epistemological questioning. Both Kant’s metaphysics and ethics are derived from what humans are able to understand. Kant’s entire epistemology can, in turn, be understood as a reaction or answer to the radical skepticism of David Hume. Kant, himself, admits that it was Hume who ‘awoke him from his dogmatic slumber.’
For the purpose of this essay Hume's criticism of human understanding and cognition is best expressed in terms of doubt and skepticism. David Hume effectively ended the question of scientific certainty. Hume shows that the relation of cause and effect is merely an illusory one which humans apply in order to conduct business with some degree of possible success. For Hume it is merely custom or habit which guides people to form these connections (of cause and effect).

Kant tackles this problem. He attempts to form a postulate from which it might be able to better understand how it is that humans come to understand the world. Kant attempts to answer: What is custom and habit. For this reason the assertion can be made that all of Kant's work stems from an epistemological study of the world and of humans in the world.

**Epistemology/Metaphysics** (because they are so closely allied)

Starting with an epistemological investigation is the only sound method for Kant. The assertion can be made: "...for experience is nothing but a continual joining together of perceptions..."¹ Kant acknowledges that it is always through a filter that humans understand the world around them. There is no perception of the world that does not go through a humanizing process. One could never see the world through the eyes of either a dog or divinity. Perception, by Kant's definition, is skewed from the actual object or event. Kant asserts that humans, regardless of their situation, have the elements of time and space through which all objects and events are filtered. Seeing the world through time and space creates one remove from reality. Time and space are two facets of perception. They are held unaccountably in

our perception of the world. Because the totality of a specific
object/event is not dependent, in fact it transcends time and space
noumenally, the discrepancy which Kant is trying to illustrate is made
manifest.

But Kant adds another element to his system of human
understanding- the element of cognition. While time and space color
all perception, without deference to culture or belief system, it is
cognition that truly shapes the way things are understood. Cognition,
according to Kant, is the structuring of the sensation that humans
receive from perception. But prior to cognition is time and space.
Time and space are pure intuition. The "...basis of their empirical
intuition lies a pure intuition (of time and space), which is a
priori." Pure intuition occurs prior to conception. Humans
experience, by pure intuition, phenomena in time and space and conceive
of the phenomena as happening in such a matrix. That phenomena occur
at a particular time and location is unavoidable in human cognition
because space and time are pure intuition. This is not to say that
this is the essence of reality. It is merely the way humans understand
reality. As time and space are pre-cognitive functions, they do not
occur in cognition, they are prior to conceptualization.

Conceptualization (cognition), for Kant, is a wholly
internal process. It is the way through which humans filter the
perception so that they may be able to understand and utilize the
information. For Kant there are the twelve transcendental categories
of human understanding. By these twelve categories "thinking is
uniting representations in consciousness... The uniting of
representations in consciousness is judgement." Through these

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2 Ibid., p. 949.
3 Ibid., p. 961.
categories sense data is manipulated. This data is manipulated into a form by which humans can understand the information they perceive. By unifying the perception within a field of judgement one may begin to use the information. To illustrate the importance of understanding and acknowledging this dichotomy, Kant claims that 'concepts without percepts are empty' and that 'percepts without concepts are blind.'

Because all humans start from the same perception of phenomena in time and space, everyone should understand the object/event in the same way. But it is precisely by cognizing the data that creates the discrepancy between humans. Personal history, inclination, and outside influence, other than pure perception, affect cognition. While everyone's perception of object/event is essentially the same, the influences on cognition are radically individualistic. The evidence is clear that people have differing beliefs about how they perceive the world. The error is the belief that the world is perceived differently. It is really that the world is conceived differently. Perhaps there is some difference in the perception—sense data—but for the most part it is the same. It is the epistemological impossibility to know phenomena as they occur in the world that leads Kant to create his two-fold metaphysics of the phenomena and the noumena.

From Kant's epistemology, one inevitably concludes that the world as it is perceived is not the world that actually exists. Because object/event is filtered, first through time and space, then through the twelve transcendental categories of human understanding, the event/object perceived differs from that which actually exists. Noumena, the totality of being for event/object— the thing in itself, are different from the phenomena that we perceive. Phenomena, as Kant describes them, are representational. If phenomena represent, logically they must represent something. Phenomena represent noumena.
Yet phenomena consist of the data that one is able to sense. The perception of object/event is not the entirety of the occurrence. Sense receptors are limited to the data they are able to collect. In cognition, too, another remove from the noumena is made. In cognition certain data is acknowledged, others ignored. Some percepts are chosen above others. For example, the most used data collection sense is sight, and hearing, touching and smelling often take on a secondary role in perceiving. There is a discrepancy between the world and humans' perception of the world.

The noumena are unknowable. The noumenal world is analogous to Platonic Forms. Not that the noumena exists in another physically tangible place in time, rather the analogy is that object/event exists in its totality, as it is noumena. The noumenal world is not another realm as it is in Plato, but it is the object/event itself. That the totality of object/event exists is a realistic concept. The noumena must exist. It is from the noumena that we perceive the representational phenomena. "The existence of the thing that appears is thereby not destroyed, as in genuine idealism, but is only shown that we cannot possibly know it by the senses."4 While it is unknowable, it must exist in order for perception to occur.

Kant's realism of the noumenal world becomes a mute point because it is unknowable. Kant slips into a Berkelian idealism. Because the senses never and in no manner enable us to know things in themselves, but only their appearances, which are mere representations to the sensibility, we conclude that 'all bodies, together with the space in which they are, must be considered nothing but mere representations and exist nowhere but in our thoughts.'5

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4 Ibid., p. 952.
5 Ibid., p. 952.
If all there is to human cognition is the perception which humans have of the world, then the noumenal world is unknowable as a certainty. Perception is all that humans have to operate from.

From Kant’s epistemology it is inevitable to conclude that the world, as it is perceived, is not the world which actually exists. Because object/event is filtered, first through time and space, and then through the twelve transcendental categories of human understanding, the event/object which humans perceive is different from that which actually exists. Noumena, the totality of being for event/object, is different from the phenomena which we perceive. There is a discrepancy between the world and the perception of the world which humans’ cognize. If the world that is conceived is not the world that actually exists, then action in such a state is questionable. What or how can one act in such a world?

**Ethics**

In order to understand Kant’s ethics some footwork must be done in the field of mathematics. Understanding the notion that mathematics is an a priori synthetic system is integral in understanding Kant’s ethics. It is mathematics that Kant uses as a model for ethics. Mathematics as a set of axioms and principles, which may not be violated due to the nature of mathematics itself, serves as an ideal to which ethics aims. Kant is attempting to find some set of principles that may guide human action that are not dependent upon the experiential world. Such a principle is needed because conception of the world might be mistaken. An interpretation of the situation might be mistaken. Self-aggrandizement and personal fortune may incline an individual to interpret the situation with a certain bias. To avoid any personal inclination to act in a way favorable to the actor, a
maxim is needed by which one may find the most consistency in an inconstant world. Should one be able to find such a principle then the course that one should take will never be in question. By applying this principle, one should always be able to determine which action should be taken in order to be ethical.

Mathematics as an a priori synthetic discipline put simply means that the subject in a mathematical construct does not contain the predicate. That is to say that in the construct $5+7=12$, $12$ is not contained within the statement $5+7$. In this way Kant makes the first distinction between analytic and synthetic. In an analytic statement, the subject contains the predicate.

Analytic judgements express nothing in the predicate but what has been actually thought in the subject, though not so clearly and with the same consciousness. If I say: 'All bodies are extended,' I have not amplified in the least my concept of body, but have only analyzed it, as extension was really thought to belong to the concept before the judgement was made...\(^6\)

But a synthetic statement contains a predicate that is not contained in the subject.

On the other hand, this judgement, 'All bodies have weight,' contains in its predicate something not actually thought in the universal concept of body; it amplifies my knowledge by adding something to my concept, and must therefore be called synthetic.\(^7\)

Ethics relate to mathematics by the binding of the concept of synthetic. Ethics are a synthetic a posteriori system for determining action. Because the realm of human action does not occur prior to

\(^6\) Ibid., p. 939.
experience, it is subject to confusion caused by situation. But should one be able to determine an overriding principle, like in mathematics, one should not be subject to the chance of occasion.

Kant finds his universal principle in the statement; "I should never act in such a way that I can also will my maxim should be a universal law." In doing so Kant finds a way in which to prescribe human action without the chance of occasion. Ethics, while operating within the realm of more than one person, remains a wholly personal one. The consequences may have a result on more than the individual making the decision, but the questioning becomes a wholly individual endeavor. Kant’s categorical imperative is a wholly individual endeavor. Not to justify or condemn some other’s action, more of a principle by which to guide your personal actions is the aim of Kant’s ethics. The categorical imperative is the way in which one may determine whether his/her actions are of moral worth.

The key to determining whether one’s action is of moral worth lies in acting against inclination. Inclination is the conscious desire to act in a certain way in a given situation. "Now an action done from duty [and thereby be moral] must altogether exclude the influence of inclination." If a house is burning and a child is trapped inside and the inclination is not to rescue the child. That is the primary reaction to the situation- the inclination. Would acting in such a way be moral? No, by acting with inclination no moral judgement can be determined. Even should the inclination be to save the child, no moral judgement can be made of the action. Without duty there can be no moral worth. Inclination runs counter to duty.

7 Ibid.
9 Ibid., p. 13.
According to Kant the categorical imperative can be applied to all action. It is only through universalizing the behavior and seeing if it contains an element of consistency that an action can be chosen over another. The classic example Kant uses is that of a man reduced to despair by a series of misfortunes feels sick of life but is still so far in possession of his reason that he can ask himself whether taking his own life would not be contrary to his duty to himself. Now he asks whether the maxim of his action could become a universal law of nature. But his maxim if this: from self love I make as my principle to shorten my life when its continued duration threatens more evil than promises satisfaction. There only remains the question as to whether this principle of self-love can become a universal law of nature. One sees at once a contradiction I a system of nature whose law would destroy life by means of the very same feeling that acts so as to stimulate the furtherance of life, and hence there could be no existence as a system of nature. Therefore, such a maxim cannot possibly hold as a universal law of nature, and is, consequently, wholly opposed to the supreme principle of all duty.\textsuperscript{10}

Ethically, one cannot act in accordance with inclination or contrary to duty based upon the universalization of action.

\textbf{Problems with Kant's ethics: The a priori and the problems with it}

The attempt (it might almost be called a need or compulsion) to legitimize philosophical systems runs rampant in the 400 years following the end of Scholasticism. Beginning with Rene Descartes and continuing through Berkeley, Leibniz, and even to some extent Hume, the evidence is clear that these thinkers sought a way to combat the Scholastics while attempting to have an all-encompassing system like that of established religion and the scholastic academicians. A

\textsuperscript{10} Ibid., pp. 30-31.
curious point about this particular time frame is the great advances in the fledgling group of sciences, i.e. mechanics, chemistry, and physics, through the use of mathematics. Mathematics, too, was great advances with the calculus of Newton and Leibniz. The importance of mathematics was paramount in most all disciplines. Why? Mathematics since the time of Euclid was the one unassailable discipline. Euclid had written his axioms some 1500 years earlier and they were the testament to longevity and truth. Mathematics was a series of self-evident truth which built upon one another and within which no one could find fault. Kant considers mathematics an a priori discipline, one that is universally necessary and prior to experience. Because mathematics held such esteem in the mind of Kant, he attempts to create an ethics which will have as much validity and soundness as his conception of mathematics.

The error in using mathematics as the overriding metaphor upon which to build a system seems obvious - the fallacy of weak analogy. The attempt to assert a methodology found in mathematics, which, according to Kant is a priori, to a discipline that is entirely a posteriori is misplaced. The realm of ethics has to do with the world. Mathematics is an endeavor that, according to Kant, has nothing to do with the world, a priori. The attempt to found ethics upon some principle which is without condition and without experience is to take ethics out of the world. Kant’s purpose is to do so. Kant’s description of mathematics and illustration of similarities between ethics and mathematics may prove fruitful for our cognizing of ethics, it is an error to ground something which is entirely based upon experience with something which is not supposed to have any relation to the world of experience.
Kant's very analysis of analytic and synthetic is wanting. A body that has extension is an analytic statement because body implies extension. So, too, does body imply weight. If a body has extension then it must necessarily have weight. Weight is a progression of extension (mass) and gravity. No body operates outside of the realm of gravity. Even when extended to realms outside of the Earth, some gravity is applied to all bodies. Therefore all bodies have weight. By the very assertion of body the concept of weight is applied. This seems to fit within Kant's notion of an analytical statement. The division of analytic and synthetic skews the very outset of Kant's ethical discourse. Is this division necessary? For Kant it can be no other way. The division of synthetic and analytic is vital to conceptualize a maxim, which has no ends in sight. By doing so Kant undermines his very purpose. Kant is looking for a principle by which ethics may have as clear and universal characteristics as mathematics. Is it forced? It appears so.

Albert Camus

Historical Foundation

Camus' role in the history of philosophy is a bit uncertain. His role as a literary figure is one that is more certain. As a World War II French underground resistor and as a post WWII existentialist writer, Camus has attached himself to a definite role in literary history. It is through his literary figures that Camus sketches his philosophical position. Only in his works, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*, does Camus' explain his position in unequivocal terms. The
bulk of his philosophical position must be interpreted from his literary roles. With some rudimentary knowledge gained from his non-fiction works and from his fictional depictions, Camus' message is communicated.

While the trouble in understanding Camus' conception of the absurd and his latent metaphysics is one consigned to literary debates as to his exact meaning, the notion that it is up to the reader to come to terms with the absurd and understand how the world is seems to fit in with the very idea Camus was trying to convey. Camus' existentiality is apparent because of his amalgamation of literature and philosophy. It is through the straightforward presentation (although the absurd is an ambiguous notion) of the absurd as a universal and definite occurrence, and an illustration of such an occurrence, through literature, while leaving the interpretation of such events and consequences of such events to the reader that fully explains the accolade that it is to call Camus and existentialist.

Camus comes from a historical time period that is truly novel. World War II France and the post-World War II world were placed in a truly frightening position. With the veritable destruction of Europe, part of Africa and the horrible devastation created by the atomic bomb, Europe and the rest of the West had to confront the possibility of total world destruction. This destruction coming to power through the technology of the West itself. This technology coming to the West from a paradigm shattering physics and mathematics.

With the influx of relativity physics and non-Euclidean geometry, the West's conception of the nature of the universe and reality shifted. No longer held the old power structures, with certainty and universality, of Newtonian physics and Euclid's geometry. These centuries old bastions of unshakable truth were toppled. A new
conception of the world was formed. The world as organism, quanta-
emitting energy on a sub-atomic level, the skeptical nature given to
science at seeing the bastions of truth shaken, and the horrible
atrocities men exacted upon one another destroyed the old vision of the
world. The destruction forced philosophy, science and all other
disciplines to rethink the role of humans in the world. It is from
such a climate that Camus ascends to try and find some humanity in a
very uncertain world. It is from such an uncertain world that Camus
tries to find some cohesion: epistemologically, metaphysically, and
ethically from the one source that he can trust, himself, the
individual.

Albert Camus is involved with an idealistic notion of the world
around him. Like Kant, Camus posits that the world in which we
perceive is only a world that has come to cognition through a human
filter. The world that we perceive is not the world that "actually"
exists. Our perception and cognition of the world can never reveal the
phenomenon as it occurs. Humans have the distinct ability to color
anything with which they come into contact with. It is colored with a
sense of humanity. "Understanding the world for a man is reducing it to
the human, stamping it with his seal."\textsuperscript{11} The totality of the phenomenon
is pre-empted by humanity. The totality being the thing in itself.
Hence a discrepancy arises. Camus calls such a discrepancy "the
absurd." But the absurd is not limited, and indeed is not really
concerned with discovery of absurd situations, but is concerned only
with the ramifications of discovering the absurd. Discovering how the
absurd affects people, object, or event is the task for Camus. But
before we look at the ramifications of the absurd, man's relationship

\textsuperscript{11} Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays trans. Justin O'Brian (New York: Vintage
with the world and each other—ethics, a small comparison of Camus with Kant is in order.

**Epistemology/Metaphysics**

Perhaps because Camus is a literary figure it is more difficult to isolate the methodology he uses in order to come to the conclusions he asserts. But the conclusions Camus obtains are well thought and given through diverse examples. Because the methodology is hard to isolate Camus’ epistemology and metaphysics are more easily discovered by comparing him to Kant.

Like Kant, Camus finds the only perception of the world that can be trusted, with some marginal reliability, is that of the individual. Because of the discrepancy between various religions, sciences, and politics all concerning the same subject matters, no one and no institution can be believed in. The fractious reports provided by various people, concerning the same phenomenon, points to a situation within which the resolution between the phenomena observed and the observers cannot easily be reconciled. The epistemological variation and uncertainty within a world that claims ever-increasing unity is paradoxical to Camus. The dogmatic arrogance with which institutions mandate what is right, what the nature of the world is, and what is knowable in the world was the cause of the world wars. The institutions take away the ability of the individual to observe and think about what is occurring in the world. In order to do away with these institutions Camus looks toward the individual.

Metaphysically the two thinkers are aligned in the most curious of ways. While Kant goes from a Platonic Realism to an Idealist position based upon the matter of epistemological truth of knowledge and utility, Camus goes from an outright Idealistic position to a
latent Realism. For Camus the world that we perceive is not the world that actually exists, but we act as if it is. One can never have knowledge of objects in the world. But the characterizations Camus makes in his literature all point to situations in which it is inevitable to act. The world must be interacted with and therefore is real. This action is the action of a very real world with very real consequences. For Camus the noumena can never be known, in fact is seriously doubted to exist. For Kant, the question of the noumenal world is the logical conclusion to the inquiry. Camus does not have the faith in logic that the German Idealist possesses.

The limit of reason is another distinction Camus makes in his explication of the absurd. Unlike Kant, Camus permits reason and logic to fall in the world that is unknowable. Logic is merely one of the humanizing techniques employed to conceptualize the world. The necessity and universality of logic fall under the human allotment of the world, not a necessary condition of the world. Nothing escapes the absurd. Human reason has its limit. The influx of non-Euclidean geometry and the concept of a non-Newtonian physics might have some to with the allotment of mathematics into the world of absurd, whereas with Kant the world of mathematics was still impregnable.

Epistemologically, Camus holds to the notion of the individual, in the world, seeing the world as individual. Seeing the world differently than anyone or anything else. The individual sees the phenomena of the world, much the same as anyone or anything else. Most humans see essentially the same, barring abnormalities i.e. blindness, deafness, or other dysfunctions. The sense perception of the world is the same for most humans. Much like Kant it is not until the conceptualization is it that the discrepancy of the phenomenon and reality occurs. Each individual has his/her different influences that
effect the way sense data is recognized. The simple difference between occupations provides any easy illustration. A man climbing a ladder is a good example. The man climbs and wobbles a bit, nearly falling, but catching himself before he does. A lawyer might see this as a potential lawsuit, but an acrobat may see it as nothing but a little foot fault-normal in any workday. The conceptualization of the same phenomena leads to very different interpretations of the same phenomena.

Established religions provide one of the most powerful examples. The numerous and varied factions of religions in the world. Differences between Hindu, Muslim and Christianity exist but all are merely explanations aimed at describing how and why humans are alive. Even more dramatic are the schisms within Christianity. Catholic, Protestant, Calvinist, Quaker- all attempted explanations within an even more closely aligned paradigm than culturally different religions. "The cat’s universe is not the universe of the anthill." Indeed, the Hindu’s universe is not that of the Catholic. Both are attempting to live in and explain the world. Because of all these conflicting views about the world, the only reliable source that one can know is oneself.

The reliance of the individual upon himself/herself to know and understand the world is not as radical as it sounds. In this aspect Camus mirrors Kant. The only thing one may know is the world that one perceives and conceives oneself- "stamping it with his seal." Relying on any other system or notion of the world, not obtained by the individual, is a matter of faith. That is not to say that Camus is anti faith, rather if one is to place faith in something, why not put faith in oneself.

This epistemic reliance upon oneself and one’s ability to interpret the world is where Camus inserts the notion of the absurd.
If many different persons are relying upon themselves to interpret the world, then the interpretations may be as numerous as the people perceiving. According to this schema, discrepancy between reports is bound to occur. This discrepancy is the absurd. But not only is the discrepancy between persons the absurd, more fundamentally, the discrepancy between what a person perceives and what it is that is actually there to perceive, the world, is the absurd. If everyone universally perceived the world the same way, which we know not to be the case, then one might with some reliability be able to make the claim that one is cognizing the world properly. But as the case is clear between the discrepancy between two persons, is the individual not "seeing" the world as it truly is.

The determinant of this misinterpretation of the world stems from the reliance on reason. Humans are often unwilling to admit to the limits of reason. It is when the individual realizes the limit of reason that the absurd unfolds before him/her. The limit of reason may be described as the situation where one's conception of the world does not concur with the data received from the outside world.

But Camus is not concerned with discrepancy with the world. "I am interested... not so much in absurd discoveries as in their consequences." Camus is concerned with the consequences that arise from discovering and acknowledging the absurd- in essence ethics.

Ethics

Ethically Camus takes, perhaps, his most extremely existential position. It is in the realm of ethics that Camus breaks away from Kant. Unlike Kant who attempts to find some universal maxim, by which

12 Ibid.
13 Ibid., p. 16.
one may operate, Camus leaves his ethics in a radically subjective state. Camus implies that once one realizes the limit of reason and the abuse of reason in order to legislate and implement morality, the only recourse is to act outside of the established morality.

It is by reliance on the self that Camus prescribes the way to solve the question involved in an ethical dilemma. By the very nature that multiple people are involved in the situation that calls ethics into question discrepancy between reports and opinions are bound to occur. People view the situation with their experiential bias. Because no one may be trusted or relied upon more than any other, the individual is left to make the decision for himself/herself. Camus makes a strange leap, although not too strange because Kant addresses the very same issues in his ethics. The issue that ethics is a wholly individual function. The individual must choose. Whether or not the choice is in concurrence with law or against is merely coincidental. Behavior coerced by law is not ethical and has no moral value. Such behavior is greed/inclination centered- the inclination not to be punished.

Camus’ ethics can be described as a pseudo-situational, pseudo-value ethic. This is not to say that the ethical action is entirely arbitrary. It is dependent. Not dependant upon some universal maxim, as in Kant, dependent upon the situation. Within any situation that requires decision, Camus prescribes that one acknowledges the absurdity at hand. By acknowledging the limit of human reason in comprehending the totality of the situation one acknowledges his/her role therein. By acknowledging one’s role in a situation, with the possibility and most likelihood of discrepancy, one creates the possibility of exploring the situation. “It is a matter of living within that state of the absurd. I know on what it is founded, this mind and this world
straining against each other without being able to embrace each other."  

With mind and world colliding, the individual is thrust into an absurd situation. It is from the absurd situation that one must act.

Camus' The Stranger is his most noteworthy illustration of living (if even briefly) after the acknowledgement of the absurd. Camus places Mersault in the impossible situation of having killed a man and having been caught. When one operates so far outside of the established morality one comes into an ethical situation. The contention is not that Mersault acted ethically in killing the man. Camus does not present it as such. Camus considers the actual act of killing the Arab as an accidental occurrence. The real importance lies in the consequences of the action. Camus espouses action with responsibility. For his action Mersault must be responsible. The inevitability of conflict with existing power structures is inherent in any ethic that is individually centered. In the case of Mersault he conflicts with the law not to kill. But within the law, the prosecutors and priest are not so much concerned with the culpability of Mersault. Mersault's guilt is outright when he admits to having killed the Arab. The concern of everyone involved is his rationale behind killing. The attempt is made behind the prosecution to prove that Mersault is the killing sort because of his lack of morbidity at his mother's funeral and the shortage of emotion exemplified by his cavorting with women and watching movies shortly after Maman's death. The psychology of a killer is what the prosecution is attempting to show. "'Indeed, he [the prosecutor] loudly exclaimed, 'I accuse this man of burying his mother with crime in his heart.'"  

Because

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14 Ibid., p. 40.
Mersault is not able to justify or merely to explain his action, the establishment is flustered. "Why? You must tell me. Why?"\textsuperscript{16} is the magistrate's response to Mersault's inability to explain. Mersault has accepted his action and the responsibility that taking another's life implies. Mersault accepts the consequence of being in a situation that he cannot explain. The limit of reason is accepted by Mersault when expresses that he doesn't know why he killed the Arab. The body of governing law does not accept the limit of reason.

Suicide is not an option for Camus- it is the easy escape. To live is the important thing- to live without hope. To live without hope is to acknowledge the absurd, but, also, to try and find meaning within the world. To kill oneself is to end the search for meaning in the world. Not as it is used in the ordinary sense, but the meaning of having a meaning in the absurd sense. Suicide ends the existential search for meaning. To be alive, to search, to strive, to find meaningless life. "It becomes clear, on the contrary, that it will be lived all the better if it has no meaning. Living an experience, a particular fate, is accepting it fully."\textsuperscript{17} But in searching for meaning hope must be abandoned. To hope is to think that there may be a resolution of the absurd, a resolution between the individual and the world. "But what does life mean in such a universe? Nothing else for the moment but indifference to the future and a desire to use up everything that is given."\textsuperscript{18} By addressing the question of suicide, Camus questions whether it is better not just to leave this world. Murder is obviously an ethical question, because the effect has a direct impact upon another, but the question of suicide has only the bearing on the individual committing the action.

\textsuperscript{16} Ibid., p. 101.
\textsuperscript{17} Camus, \textit{The Myth of Sisyphus and other essays}, p.53.
Don Juan, the noted lover, is one character Camus cites as a person who lives without hope. Don Juan, who lives without ever finding his one true love, is a man who has consigned himself to live in the absurd. Don Juan the embodiment of physical love, who brings the pinnacle of physical love to all he encounters, cannot himself find the love which he imparts to others. "But it is ridiculous to represent him as a mystic in quest of total love. But it is indeed because he loves them with the same passion and each time with his whole self that he must repeat his gift and his profound quest."\(^{19}\) Don Juan is a man aware of the absurd. A man in such a situation after such a long quest, with so many failures, cannot hope to find this long unsatisfied quest. Consequently the only recourse would be to end one's life. After searching for so long and with such fervor and never finding the object desired Don Juan wishes to end his life. But he does not do so. Don Juan continues on giving all of himself to every encounter, not in the hope of ever finding true love, but because it is the one thing that he can do. The discrepancy arises out of the fact that Don Juan wishes and thinks it may be possible to live and find such a love and the fact that such a love might not be attainable. But the fact that Don Juan does carry on shows his attempt to find meaning in the world. It is an existential meaning. Don Juan’s experience is exclusively his own— it is his experience. By acting, by searching for his own meaning in a meaningless (in terms of finding true love) world, Don Juan is acting in the world of the absurd and ethically. Ethically, Don Juan takes responsibility for his actions— the responsibility of loving fully and the possibility of never finding love.

\(^{18}\) Ibid., p. 60.
\(^{19}\) Ibid., p. 69.
While Camus attempts to escape most of the errors of Western philosophy by not steeping his own philosophy in universality, Camus does, indeed, assert one universal occurrence— that of the absurd. The absurd, understood as the limit of human reason, extends to all categories of philosophy— epistemology, metaphysics, and ethics.

The critique of Camus ethics is the charge of relativism. While no universality exists in Camus admonition to live one's life with awareness and thrive within the absurd situation, there is universality in the absurd itself. Camus provides no list of what is acceptable action within any given situation. No chart by which one may determine whether an action is of moral worth is provided. Moral worth lies in the individual accepting responsibility. Camus' system of ethics provides for the contingency that the world might not be interpreted the correct way by the governing law bodies. If the governing law bodies do not have an exclusive on the nature of reality then they, too, might have interpreted the situation incorrectly. The role of each individual is to determine his/her own role as best as possible and to act in such a way that the individual may be able to accept responsibility for the action. Responsibility for action is the real product of Camus' ethics. If one is responsible then one is acting with the only degree of moral worth that is possible.

**Solipsism and Conventionalism**

After acknowledging that the world is known only through a radically individual approach, how is it that humans can and do act, in the world? If all that exists is merely in the head of the individual, it can lead to nothing but solipsism and nihilism. The conclusion can only be that each individual's knowledge is exclusive to them. The
individual constructs the world around him/her with the easiest and most available definitions. Individuals do so without knowledge that it is occurring. The conventions the individual uses are exclusive to them.

With such an exclusive on knowledge valuation of the world is wholly individual. The world becomes valueless. There is no common ground from which people can evaluate the world. With no common valuation, each individual’s value and action is paramount in any scenario- relativism. Accordingly, if each value structure carries as much validity as another then there are no values- nihilism.

Camus suggests that responsibility is the ground from which individuals may find some relation to each other. Because each individual views any situation with his/her own peculiar conceptualization, responsibility, the affect of the action, is the only possible connector. After persons are affected by the result of another’s actions then there can be an arena from which all persons involved can act. Mersault is Camus prime example. After having shot the Arab, Mersault, prosecutor, magistrate, and the entire legal system begin to discuss the responsibility of the action.

Kant, on the other hand, attempts to find some universalizing maxim. The categorical imperative was created to solicit just such a universal grounding. But this cannot be the case. The reliance on mathematics has shown the error of the categorical way. There is no universalization, prior to action, that can ground ethical behavior. Motives are irrelevant. It is only the course of action that possesses any bearing on the situation.
Ethically, Camus shows the way of the a posteriori world. He shows that the action is the only concern. But even after action is taken, the chance for discrepancy arises. When it is the individual defining and controlling the conceptualization of the situation, some attempt must be made to resolve the discrepancy. If such discrepancies arise from all action, how is it possible to relate? Communication is the only possible way.

Communication

Communication is the key to resolving discrepancies. But is communication worthwhile and is it effective? Both Kant and Camus illustrate mixed responses to such questions. The overt answer is: of course communication is a worthwhile endeavor- simply look to the authors themselves. Both attempt to communicate, in an attempt to illuminate, the issues at hand. Pathologically, both men answer the question with a resounding yes.

While their behavior solicits one answer, their written message contains some variety. Kant imagines the field of ethics to be a radically individual endeavor. The categorical imperative is meant for an individual to judge only his/her own actions. When one begins to compare and judge other's actions one slips into the realm of the hypothetical imperative, from which it is impossible to ascertain any choice - a grandiose mistake. The only product of the categorical imperative is guiding one's own actions. The action of the individual is the only way of communicating the process of the categorical. One may, certainly explain the motivation behind the action and process of universalizing behavior, but finally it is only the example that is noteworthy. Kant implies that the only communication of ethics is done
by actions. In this sense Kant forecasts what Camus will later state explicitly.

Camus provides various examples of how it is impossible to describe ethical action. When Mersault is put to task to explain his behavior, he is at a loss for what to say. Mersault even admits to himself that they couldn't possibly understand him. And if he did attempt to communicate what his motivation and rationale was, it would take away the meaning of the action itself. Mersault precipitates an interesting question. Is communication possible at all?

For Camus it seems that there is no possible way for a meeting of the minds to occur. In every form of communication, there is the discrepancy between the intent of the author and the perception of the recipient. Everything comes full circle to the unavoidable absurdity of perception. The structure of perception and discrepancy encompasses communication. The far-reaching arms of the absurd extend into everything. The only resolution is the advice that Camus gives concerning the absurd—acknowledge the absurd, attempt to define one’s role, attempt to understand some facets of the absurd, act within the absurd situation, in fact thrive in the absurd, and finally take responsibility for actions taken. To attempt communication, and to continue attempting communication, even in the face of continued failure, is thriving within the absurd situation of communication.

Conclusion

The world and individual, the situation of being in the world, the responsibility to act in the world: all these ideas are of central focus within philosophy. Understanding and dialogue of these issues is
the task of philosophy. Acknowledgement of these issues leads to a deeper, more meaningful relation both with oneself and with the world. Attempting to function within a discrepant system is the task at hand. Camus and Kant, both, attempt to explore these ideas. Both attempt to conceptualize and communicate these questions.

Camus and Kant are allied more closely than their personal or historical backgrounds may indicate. French or German both address the radical irresolution between realistic and idealistic metaphysics. While Kant operates from realism to idealism and Camus vice-versa, both men point to unsatisfactoriness of such a division. Both men indicate a need for a better resolution between the two. Operating from a phenomenal vantage-point both men point to the unknowableness of the world and the resolution man uses to try and find order within such a world. Both men also show how man constructs his world around him and how shattering the world becomes when the world does not operate according to these preconceptions. Man’s place in the world, which has been the subject for all of history, is the topic both men attempt to address. Kant wishes for a universal maxim by which judgement may be judged moral or no. Camus wishes for a world in which individuals make choice and take responsibility for their actions. Yet despite their differences, ethically, both men desire to relate and correlate with the world. This fact is the testimony to their depth of thinking and their attempt to discover and communicate discrepancy with the world.
Works Consulted