

**Staying True to Rebellion:**  
**Extracting Political Principles from Albert Camus' Post-**  
**Existentialism**

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### **Abstract**

My aim in this research project is to dispel the potential misconception that Albert Camus' oeuvre is not of any political use or interest. Therefore the question I shall be answering throughout this work is as such: What concrete political principles can be drawn from Camus' post-existentialist philosophy? I shall carry out my research through a close reading of two of Camus' most robust philosophical works: *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. I will then seek to explicate the central political concept in Camus' work, 'rebellion', why it is central and why it is political character. I will show how rebellion, culminating in political revolution, can go wrong for Camus by reference to particular historical and intellectual revolutions. Finally, I will conclude that when rebellion goes right it functions on concrete political principles which affirm the value and freedom of human lives, these being the positive premises from which it sets out. Such principles include the limitation of violence, inclusive struggle, aimed at democratic political society paired with a socialist economy.

## Contents

Introduction.....	1
I. Rebellion is Central to Camus' Philosophy.....	7
I.1. The Concept of Rebellion.....	7
I.2. The Concept of the Absurd.....	9
I.3. Reason and the Rule of Decency.....	11
I.4. Metaphysical Rebellion.....	14
I.5. Metaphysical Revolution.....	16
II. Rebellion is Political.....	18
II.1. A Collective Ontology in Rebellion.....	18
II.2. A Collective Task in Revolution.....	21
III. Mistaken Rebellions.....	26
III.1. The French Revolution.....	26
III.2. Authoritarian Socialism: Intellectual Roots.....	30
III.3. Authoritarian Socialism: Political Cynicism.....	38
III.4. Sartre's Defense of History.....	43
IV. The Principles of Rebellion.....	45
IV.1. Limits to Violence.....	45
IV.2. The Inclusivity of Struggle.....	50
IV.3. Democracy and an Open Society.....	53
IV.4. Democratic Socialism.....	55
Conclusion.....	60

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## Introduction

Albert Camus is, among other figures such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir, arguably one of the most prominent figures in existentialist philosophy. Yet it has also been argued that, strictly speaking, he was not in fact an existentialist himself.<sup>1</sup> He criticized the existentialist tradition, especially the Christian existentialist tradition of which Kierkegaard was a notable member, for advocating a 'leap into faith' and therefore 'deifying' in life the exact irrationality of the world that crushes them and finding "reason to hope in what impoverishes them".<sup>2</sup> Even if existentialism started out from a desolate and frustrating view of the world, which baton Camus certainly picked up, Camus wanted to refuse the negative tendencies which he saw in the existentialism of even his contemporaries.<sup>3</sup> As John Foley recounts: "in 1939, reviewing Sartre's short story collection *The Wall*, Camus can be seen to object to Sartre's depiction of human freedom as both total and futile."<sup>4</sup> What Camus wanted to construct in his own philosophy, it seems, was a theory of human existence which faced up to the reality of being without 'subterfuge', but which would also not turn around to merely bemoan or destroy its own fate.<sup>5</sup> Reason, on his view, must be one's guide in navigating life even though it reveals the total lack of inherent meaning in existence, and the goal must be to live in this condition while never deriding life entirely for its hardships: "I want to know beforehand if thought can live in those deserts."<sup>6</sup> It is because of this tense balance between both critiquing and affirming life, accepting the premises of existentialism (or even nihilism) while trying to build something greater on them that I, in the coming analysis and reconstruction of Camus, will refer to him as a post-existentialist.<sup>7</sup>

It is notable that perhaps Camus' most famous work, *The Myth of Sisyphus* is highly individualistic in perspective.<sup>8</sup> Indeed, in some way this may be a common theme of

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<sup>1</sup> John Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt* (Routledge, 2008), 1.

<sup>2</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, trans. Justin O'Brien (Penguin Classics, 2013), 25.

<sup>3</sup> "To an absurd mind reason is useless and there is nothing beyond reason." From the very outset Camus notes that human reason is both necessary to the human and yet hopelessly limited. *Ibid*, 37.

<sup>4</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 1.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 38-39.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid*, 18.

<sup>7</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 6.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid*, 28.

existentialism as well. Camus' contemporary Sartre, especially in his early thought, begins his analysis of Being explicitly from the conscious experience of a particular: "The concrete consciousness arises in situation, and it is a unique, individualized consciousness of this situation and (of) itself in situation."<sup>9</sup> Such a philosophy, which is in its fundamentals so preoccupied with the experience of existence for the individual human, may engender the assumption that it cannot be of great societal worth other than by allowing a few pretentious intellectuals to contemplate their existence in the silent hours which most hardworking people are barely afforded. In fact it would seem that, after the ravages of the second world war, existentialism as an intellectual community (with which Camus was at the time often lumped in) was accused of being overly individualist and therefore not sufficiently politically engaged.<sup>10</sup> And yet this initial appearance, both on the part of Camus and of the existentialists of his time, may be said to be mistaken on closer inspection. In the first place, the history of political engagement on the part of (post-)existentialists, especially after but also during World War II, speaks against the charge that their thought must have egoistic or apolitical consequences following from their individualist outset. Sartre, for instance, not only became a vocal proponent of Communism, but also in 1968 he stated he was retiring as an intellectual and became active as a journalist, even distributing (including by hand) Maoist papers such as *La Cause du Peuple*.<sup>11</sup>

Camus, similarly, was no stranger to political engagement, though for most of his life he would not place himself within any concrete political party.<sup>12</sup> Camus did join the Communist Party in the mid 1930's, but was expelled in 1937 because of his insistence against party support of the French government in Algeria, due to its suppression and immiseration of the Muslim majority there.<sup>13</sup> This experience may have been a major factor in Camus' ensuing weariness of party affiliation. In addition the theme of political cynicism involved – wherein the Communist Party was content to drop the Arab nationalists, with whom had they until then been rallying, for the sake of their larger political agenda – will prove to have greatly informed his thought on proper political action in the coming analysis.<sup>14</sup> Outside of party

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<sup>9</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, trans. Hazel E. Barnes (Simon and Schuster, 1992), 91.

<sup>10</sup> Thomas Flynn, *Existentialism: A Very Short Introduction* (Oxford University Press, 2006), 13.

<sup>11</sup> Ronald Aronson, 'Sartre and the Radical Intellectuals Role', *Science & Society* 39, no. 4 (1975): 436.

<sup>12</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 30.

<sup>13</sup> *Ibid*, 29-30.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid*, 37.

affiliation, Camus already wrote and edited for the French Resistance newspaper *Combat* during the second world war and the occupation of France, and would continue to write for various political newspapers and journals for the rest of his life.<sup>15</sup>

These historical facts of course do not definitively prove anything about the content of Camus' philosophy, or that of the existentialists at the time, but it makes plausible the claim that they were versed in political thought. And it makes it all the more of interest to investigate the explicitly political philosophical work of Camus: namely, *The Rebel*.<sup>16</sup> My aim in this research project, then, is in large part to defend Camus' work against claims, such as those made by Sartre himself, concerning his post-existentialist oeuvre's "political irrelevance".<sup>17</sup> It is to dispel the assumption of those who know his work only second-handedly (or who have read him but are simply not yet convinced) that he is not worth reading if one is concerned primarily with social issues. Another potential hurdle for some to take Camus seriously as a political philosopher, however, may be his style of writing. Camus wrote even his explicitly philosophical (and political) works very poetically, and remained for the most part on a level of description that seems highly abstract. Even if it is granted that Camus had political intentions in his writing, it may still be suspected that his conclusions were either very general, open to interpretation or intentionally difficult to grasp, such that his work would not be considered useful for directing any political action in either a real or a modern context. Generally, when it concerns serious political action and relevant theory as its background, what may be valued most are concrete precepts about how society is meant to be structured, how people should conduct themselves towards each other, how government power should stand in relation to the people and how political goals can or should be attained. These are in my view the rough markers of a practical and political philosophy which can actually come to claim a role in concrete human practices. I intend to investigate Camus' philosophy along these criteria.

Therefore the question I shall be answering through my research is the following: What concrete political principles can be drawn from Camus' post-existentialist philosophy? Through attempting to pull the implication of particular political/ethical principles from an

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<sup>15</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 13, 30, 46.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, trans. Anthony Bower (Penguin Classics, 2013).

<sup>17</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 116.



analysis of Camus' work, especially in *the Rebel*, I will argue that it is not only political in its conclusions and consequences, but that it is furthermore coherent in its political message and leads logically (and sometimes explicitly) to conclusions about justice, right action and human worth which can be put to practical use. In fact, I shall argue that if put into practice today, many of the implications of Camus' political thought would still be groundbreaking in terms of social emancipation, economic emancipation and societal structure. Camus is not only interesting to read politically, he is important to read politically, particularly so as to not take/support mistaken or self-defeating political action.

I shall carry out my research through a close reading of two of Camus' most robust philosophical works: *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*, where the former is used mainly to explicate the post-existentialist basis and premises of his philosophy, the introduction of the concept of 'the absurd' the dawning of the notion of 'rebellion' or 'revolt'.<sup>18</sup> The latter, meanwhile, will serve as the basis for a thorough analysis of the concept of 'rebellion', and subsequently 'revolution', which I will argue are central to understanding the political philosophical message which Camus brings to the table.<sup>19</sup> Camus' political thought stems from the premises and consequences of rebellion. Its premises lie in the absurd, while the logical consequence is revolution. Through rebellion, for Camus, political activity aimed towards establishing a (more) just society and a better condition of living for humanity are inspired by the experience of repression.<sup>20</sup> Such repression is both metaphysical, from the hopelessness of existence quite generally, and physical, originating from the power of other humans. Both forms are captured in the experience of the absurd, and in both cases it turns the still individualistic post-existentialist perspective towards the collective of humanity, where "suffering is seen as a collective experience".<sup>21</sup> This is then the beginning of what I will call the 'political project' of humanity in Camus' view. This project is then of course in need of concrete principles to guide itself.

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<sup>18</sup> Already in *The Myth of Sisyphus* are the concepts of 'the absurd' and 'revolt/rebellion' brought into relation by the writer.

Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 40-41.

<sup>19</sup> In *The Rebel*, Camus reveals the logical relationship between rebellion and revolution.

Camus, *The Rebel*, 9, 58.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid*, 9.

I will begin my investigation by seeking to prove the centrality of the concept of rebellion for Camus and his post-existentialism. I will first explicate what the concept of rebellion entails. I will then argue that for Camus rebellion is the only proper (in his words, 'decent') response to the experience of the absurd condition which he takes to be a fundamental quality of human existence.<sup>22</sup> As a result, knowing how to live as a post-existentialist in his tradition will require understanding rebellion, not only in its premises but also in the (political) implications to be drawn from them.

Next I will show how, besides being central to Camus' views on how the human individual should live, rebellion is distinctly collectivist and political in character. Not only is the absurd a 'collective experience', the response to it ought also to be social in a significant sense. I will argue that on Camus' view rebellion logically terminates in the attempt to establish a new order of justice and, more concretely, new government, whose goal is naturally to achieve a better condition of living for all.<sup>23</sup> The explication of this goal will pass through the concept of revolution as the logical consequence of rebellion in its quest to upset an unjust established order.<sup>24</sup>

Having shown that Camus' philosophy is indeed political in nature, it becomes necessary to extrapolate its concrete consequences. What particular political principles, what principles of action and of justice, can be drawn from it? To answer this question I will first investigate Camus' criticisms of historical revolutions, to get at the characteristic failings of revolutionary efforts which in his view come to undermine themselves. Put simply, in order to see what for Camus is right in political action and in government, we must first see how these things can go wrong. This will help infer the positive conclusions by negation of the mistakes identified in the principles of 'failed' revolutions. I will argue that, on Camus' view, revolution undermines itself when it forgets in its principles and actions the premises of rebellion which inspired it in the first place.<sup>25</sup> Such a mistake will, inevitably, lead a revolution and a government to betray the people it set out to save. I will end this section

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<sup>22</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 17-18.

<sup>23</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 59-60.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid*, 11.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid*, 13.

with a summation of political principles and characteristics of government which in this sense forget the premises of rebellion.

Finally, I will in the final section of the investigation lay out Camus' concretely positive political view in the form of particular principles for both political action and government. I will illustrate both the principles of proper political struggle and of the proper shape of political society even further by reference to concrete examples. In the case of rebellious struggle I will do so through an illustrative vignette centered on the characteristics of the LGBTQIA+ movement and their apparent approach to social emancipation. I will argue that their hyper-inclusive perspective is indicative of the broadly humanist character of Camus' ideas about political action. On the side of societal structure I will argue that a form of democratic socialism, explicated by reference to critical theorist Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi, is in line with the principles implied by Camus for government and the social order.<sup>26</sup> I will conclude that Camus' political principles center on the dignity of humanity and forbid in any way to trivialize or instrumentalize human life. This precludes the possibility of the theoretical justification of murder and subjugation, leading to the abolishment of the death sentence, essentially limited violence in political struggle and the dismantling of systems which repress difference (of opinion and lifestyles) in the populace. The principles, I will argue, imply an abolishment of capitalism and its subjugation of workers to production, but also deny the legitimacy of authoritarian government, even if it is socialist.

In the conclusion the results of my research will be recapitulated once more. I will reiterate the main beats of the argument and the political principles thereby deduced. I will end by pointing to the function which philosophy of the kind provided by Camus can have for society, particularly for political activity aimed at improving the world. The philosophy which I now begin to unpack aims to provide a deeper understanding of the motivations which already cause us to act, and therefore to aid us in acting more self-consciously and more consistently, to the benefit of our just ends.

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<sup>26</sup> Nancy Fraser, Rahel Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, ed. Brian Milstein (Medford, MA: Polity Press, 2018).

# I. Rebellion is Central to Camus' Philosophy

## I.1. The Concept of Rebellion

Rebellion, for Camus, is in the first instance a form of refusal which also has a positive content.<sup>27</sup> A rebel is someone who refuses to accept a certain kind of treatment or state of affairs, for the more or less conscious reason that some matter of value demands it. And herein lies the positive content of the refusal. Rebellious refusal to put up with something (any longer or at all) is active refusal, as opposed to passively 'refusing to do anything', remaining inert. It says that something is actively worth resisting, and therefore introduces some value for the sake of which it is worth doing so.<sup>28</sup> Rebellion has both positive and negative content. Negatively, it denies that something is acceptable, while positively it postulates a standard under which this 'something' is unacceptable. If the slave refuses to follow any longer the orders of their master, it is at the very least because they feel some kind of deep revulsion at the order. This revulsion implies a standard of decency, which the master's order violates.

But, moreover, in the case of rebellion Camus claims that the standard of value invoked is of a universal character. It isn't just the idiosyncratic preference of the individual, such as what food is not worth eating because it isn't tasty. Rather the value referred to is one which is supposed to be common to all humans: a standard to which anyone can be held and which refers to the interests of everyone.<sup>29</sup> In other words the value referred to in rebellion is a human value, or a human right.<sup>30</sup> It is a right because, more than a mere ideal which is the subject of personal striving, it implies an entitlement to respect and protection that can be made against others (and for the sake of others).

"The transition from facts to rights is manifest, as we have seen, in the act of rebellion, as the transition from 'this is how things should be' to 'this is how I want things to be', and still more, perhaps, the conception of the submission of the individual to the common good."<sup>31</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 1.

<sup>28</sup> *Ibid*, 1-2.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

Rebellion's positive content is stating a right which is shared by virtue of humanity and its value, meaning that it refers to a common good to be defended. So when the slave rebels against the master, they refuse not just on their own behalf but on behalf of every human being (even the master): 'no one should be made to follow this order'. And because it refers to an inherent value or right of oneself and others as human beings, the rebellion will also quickly expand beyond refusal in the particular case, reaching to any and all infractions which violate that right or deny that value. The slave quickly goes from protesting their being forced to follow a particular order to refusing their status as a slave entirely.<sup>32</sup> The final resolution taken up by rebellion in this case is that no one should be a slave, because all humans are of equal moral worth and within this worth lies the basis for a right to self-ownership (my wording).

A given rebel slave might not be able to formulate this exact thought to themselves, but they imply as much when they refuse to follow orders even under threat of death. In such a case it is no longer for their own self-interest, but for something over and above themselves that they say 'no': it is for their value and dignity as a human being, within which they identify themselves with all other humans.<sup>33</sup> This sense of identification is shown also in the fact that people will take up rebellion for the sake of others. At times revolt is brought about not (just) in the victim but in the spectator of mistreatment, when a certain 'spectacle' of wrongness awakens in even the hitherto passive viewer the sense of a common value that demands protection. It is worth noting here that Camus' treatment of rights significantly subverts their perhaps traditional individualistic character. For him, while certainly the rebellious claim to a human right "springs from everything that is most strictly individualistic" in someone, it at the very same time calls upon a value which refers to oneself and others as equal bearers of it.<sup>34</sup> It therefore introduces to the individual something of value about oneself which goes over and above 'you' as an isolated particular: 'a common good' of which one is but an aspect. So this right which springs from the individualistic perspective also in a way "undermines the very conception of the

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<sup>32</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 2.

<sup>33</sup> *Ibid*, 3.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*, 3-4.

individual.”<sup>35</sup> What exactly this ‘human value’ or ‘common good’ is will become clearer as we explore the significance in Camus’ existentialism of the rebellion which defends it.<sup>36</sup>

## **I.2. The Concept of the Absurd**

Now that we have a sense of what rebellion means in Camus’ work, I will demonstrate the pivotal role it has in his existentialist thought. Why is rebellion a central concept for Camus, why does understanding its premises and consequences become paramount to figuring out how us humans should live? The beginning of the answer to this question lies in metaphysical rebellion, which perspective on human existence is Camus’ justification for deciding to go on living as a human being in the first place.

Metaphysical rebellion is the attitude of refusal of the human being in regards to ‘the world’, ‘nature’ or ‘reality’. Camus characterizes humanity as having an inherent rational drive to make sense of the world, making it intelligible and safe through the deduction and use of laws. Human reason, to put it differently, means to ‘unite’ the world into a coherent whole within which it can feel at home.<sup>37</sup> Humans wish to understand reality and to be able to place themselves harmoniously in it, only then will human intelligence feel at ease. Relatedly though more practically, one could only feel entirely safe from chance or misfortune if full mastery of reality were achieved through knowing its workings entirely. Only the intelligence which knows everything can anticipate every outcome and bend every eventuality to its liking. The unknown, for humans, inherently represents danger and fear while what is understood is safe and under control.

Yet, Camus claims, neither control nor homeliness can truly be our part. While our reason longs to understand the world, to find meaning and safe direction in life through the construction of a holistic, coherent theory, the world resists ever being caught in its entirety. We rationally long for unity, but reality is neither rational nor unitary. This becomes especially clear when we try to make ourselves part of this unity. In a clever passage, Camus points out the contradiction of “a mind that asserts total unity and proves by its very

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<sup>35</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 3.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 4.

<sup>37</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 14-15.

assertion its own difference and the diversity it claimed to resolve.”<sup>38</sup> Perhaps more direly: while human science may claim to explain reality, its only certain aspects are descriptive. Explanations of empirical facts however are maintained on practical effectiveness and are properly speaking only ever unfalsified, not proven true. Scientific theories are ultimately just poetry, explaining through metaphor causal processes which can never actually be perceived.<sup>39</sup> And should we still have any confidence in said metaphors, it is quickly remarked that our theories constantly shift in the face of new experiences.<sup>40</sup> What in the history of science gives us the right to expect that reason can ever come to a full, coherent and undisputed picture of reality?<sup>41</sup> According to Camus, the answer is ‘nothing’.

It is this state of human being which Camus dubs ‘absurd’, and which forms the basis for metaphysical rebellion. ‘The absurd’ denotes a relation between the human and the world. The human is rationally driven and wants to unify the world in their understanding, the world is irrational and therefore resists said unification.<sup>42</sup> “The absurd is born of the confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.”<sup>43</sup> The absurdity of human existence lies in our inherently longing for something, in a sense more than we long for anything else, which by the nature of reality we can never receive. We are doomed to be frustrated in our deepest desires: meaning, security, understanding, certainty, control, etc.

So the basis for metaphysical rebellion is this: the state of human existence is itself unjust. Metaphysical rebellion, for Camus, is the human being challenging the world for denying it what it believes (or feels) it is owed. If the rebel slave cries out for freedom and the rebel worker cries out for bread, the rebel human cries out for meaning, and to not be negated in their desire for a good life.<sup>44</sup>

To be clear, the linkage drawn here between the political, social world and the metaphysical plane is one of conceptual and relational consistency. Rebellion, as a concept, in both cases is refusal in defense of human dignity spurred on by the sense that oneself and/or others

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<sup>38</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 15.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>40</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>41</sup> Where the claim is to explanation, establishment of causal relations, and not to the practically impossible but theoretically imaginable task of exhaustive description of phenomena.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid, 17.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid, 22.

<sup>44</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 12.

deserve better. The relation hereby challenged is one of power or 'sway', of oppressor and oppressed. The difference being how literally these terms ought to be taken. We will return to the issue of difference between the metaphysical and the social near the end of this chapter.

The demand of 'a good life', while it may at first seem like an entitled claim, should be clarified as demanding the possibility of a reasonably satisfying life. The reason why this possibility is in jeopardy has to do with both a lack of meaning and with mortality. When Camus speaks of the injustice of the 'death sentence' which hangs above every human's head, he means that humans are doomed to die too soon.<sup>45</sup> When human life is bereft of the meaning that would have been granted by a coherent and intelligible world, it becomes impossible to measure quality of life. The person cannot find in the world any justification for a standard which puts a given act or experience above any other in terms of value.<sup>46</sup> Every act or experience is as good as any other, so they are of equal quality.<sup>47</sup> Beyond the fact that this cripples one's ability to choose based on anything but personal preference, it also means that the only way to improve a life is to increase the quantity of experiences in it. That is to say, the longer the lifetime the better: "[...] what counts is not the best living but the most living. It is not up to me to wonder if this is vulgar or revolting, elegant or deplorable."<sup>48</sup> Finally, since the theoretically possible amount of experience, in both length and variety, is infinite, one always dies with an infinity of life-bettering experiences unexplored. From the 'absurd perspective', humans can in fact only die prematurely.<sup>49</sup>

### **I.3. Reason and the Rule of Decency**

It may be asked at this stage whether the lack of rational unity in the world truly implies a total absence of meaning or value. Can there not be such a thing as loose, disjointed valuations, for instance those of differing cultures, which are valid for their respective contexts and nothing more? What of personal values, which individuals hold but never seek to justify within the grand scheme of the world? For Camus this objection misunderstands

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<sup>45</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 12, 35.

<sup>46</sup> Ibid, 50.

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

<sup>48</sup> Ibid, 45.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid, 46-47.



what values and meaning are about. They are about justification and explanation, which to him are either logically/rationally founded or they are fraudulent.<sup>50</sup> They would be fraudulent because they would violate the one principle of human action which Camus takes pains to establish from the outset: decency.

The rule of decency is to live by those things that are known for certain and whatever is deduced from them logically.

“I must sacrifice everything to these certainties and I must see them squarely to be able to maintain them. Above all, I must adapt my behaviour to them and pursue them in all their consequences. I am speaking here of decency.”<sup>51</sup>

It is this requirement which should clarify why, on Camus' view, the unification of the world through reason would be necessary for any meaning or value to be upheld. Because failing a comprehensive 'theory of everything' within which they are couched, accounts of value and meaning would always lack the kind of justificatory ground that decency demands. To fulfill said demand of rational action, we can only permit ourselves to act on values which are- or are derived from certain facts. An exhaustive explanation of existence, the objective of scientific pursuits, could achieve this by starting out from the basic facts of empirical observation and constructing a theory which through reason and logic alone gave everything, including human life and action, a proper place. However, we have already seen that this is not possible, because science for the purpose of its explanatory aims makes use of metaphor and therefore posits entities and occurrences which we cannot perceive (much less be certain of).<sup>52</sup> As such objective value and meaning derived from a 'theory of everything' is an impossibility: already with Kant's introduction of the 'noumena' did it become clear that reality is not transparent to us in all its workings, since aspects of it are not given in experience but presupposed by it.<sup>53</sup>

So then how do cultural or personal values fare in relation to the demand of decency? As it happens, they fare just as badly if not worse. Matters of value or meaning can obviously not be simply perceived, so they must be arrived at by a process of reasoning. Yet if this process

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<sup>50</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 7.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid, 18.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid, 16-17.

<sup>53</sup> Immanuel Kant, *The Critique of Pure Reason*, trans. J. M. D. Meiklejohn (Auckland: The Floating Press, 2009), 345-346.

of reasoning does not eventually terminate in a matter of certainty, the accepted values will not be the consequence of a certain fact and therefore not fulfill the demand of decency. Once again, I cannot permit myself to act according to a certain value or principle, if I cannot say without subterfuge that I have deduced said value to be justified based on what I know for sure. "The principle can be established that for a man who does not cheat what he believes to be true must determine his action."<sup>54</sup>

If I live by such a value-laden principle as 'love thy neighbor' because I read it commanded in the Bible, or because my family who have raised me told me this, while refusing to undertake the exhaustive logical/rational justification of these sources, I am 'cheating'. I am fooling myself and others if I claim that my beliefs about value are well-grounded. If I do undertake to justify myself however, as we've demonstrated along with Camus, I will be sorely disappointed by unconfirmable metaphors and an infinite regress (or vicious cycle) of reasons. I will come to find that the Bible is correct because it is the word of God, and the word of God is unquestionable because the Bible says so. Or I will come to find that the best reason science or philosophy can give me for taking up the values of my culture or my family is that this practice has proved to be beneficial to the propagation of the species or the stability of society. It thereby presupposes that I would care about the human species or society and introduces yet another value as a reason for the former. This chain could continue indefinitely. These are just examples of course, but with them I seek to illustrate Camus' general point: once we try to be decent and guide ourselves only by what we know for sure, along with what follows logically from it, we are no longer able to uphold any values, be they universal in intent or not.<sup>55</sup> Meanings and values more limited in scope are just an additional step away from being justified, because only an exhaustive and clearly true explanation of the world could ground meaning and values without needing to appeal to anything outside itself for the sake of its own rational legitimacy.

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<sup>54</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 7.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid*, 17-18.

#### I.4. Metaphysical Rebellion

We have been exploring metaphysical rebellion and its basis in the absurd in order to answer why rebellion as a concept is pivotal to Camus' existentialism. Having now understood what the absurd position of humanity is, we are faced with two related sub-questions. The first is: assuming human life is aimless and terminally limited as Camus describes it, should we go on living at all? It is in fact this question, that of suicide, that Camus considers the primary (if not the only) serious philosophical question.<sup>56</sup> The second question confronting us is: where could rebellion come from in the first place if in the absurd all values are delegitimized? How rebellion can sustain this premise without destroying or betraying itself will be an ongoing question throughout this investigation of its political consequences. But in the context of this chapter we will limit ourselves to finding out how rebellion could still arise at all from the confrontation with a lack of meaning and value. As will soon become clear, Camus' reason to continue living is rebellion, or 'revolt'.<sup>57</sup> And it is in supporting this claim that we also find what motivation rebellion can obtain if not a standard of value to be found in the world.

Camus, as stated, does think there is a reason to go on with life as a human even if it is absurd. His reasoning is that suicide is inconsistent with postulating that life is absurd. To commit suicide would be to take the human out of the absurd relation between human and world.<sup>58</sup> Recall that the absurd is the relation between the human reason and desire for unity and the world's silence. Suicide, then, is a way of attempting to resolve the contradiction, or of refusing it. Another manner of doing this would be to give up one's rational aims and deifying the irrationality of the world. One could cease caring about consistency or justification and instead take Kierkegaardian leaps into faith: "The believer possesses the eternally certain antidote to despair, viz. possibility; for with God all things are possible every instant. This is the sound health of faith which resolves contradictions."<sup>59</sup> This is what Camus calls 'philosophical suicide': destruction of one's rational thought instead of one's body.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>56</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 5.

<sup>57</sup> *Ibid*, 41-42.

<sup>58</sup> *Ibid*, 40.

<sup>59</sup> Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling/The Sickness Unto Death*, trans. Walter Lowrie (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2013), 313.

<sup>60</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 32.

Both forms of suicide, Camus says, are inconsistent with the absurd. They are, in a sense, forms of denial and flight. Camus does not condemn them as much as he emphasizes that these actions do not follow, logically, from the premise that life is absurd, and instead try to undo it. What is consistent with the statement that human life is absurd is to live the contradiction which that statement entails. The first step in that is to continue living.<sup>61</sup> The second step is to rebel. To rebel, in this case, is to insist on one's rational aim as a human being, while simultaneously sticking to the facts which tell one that this aim is doomed to frustration and failure.<sup>62</sup> Even knowing we are doomed to die, we attempt to live as long and as well as we can. This is what it means to truly embody the contradiction of human existence: living with the aim which one knows one is denied by the world. Even when the world utterly denies us a sense of meaning, we insist on the meaning of our own existence by continuing it in spite of everything. For Camus, human life gains meaning as soon as the humans who possess it decide, though the world has put nothing special in it, that it is worth struggling to defend it: "I continue to believe that this world has no ultimate 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."<sup>63</sup> By refusing hope and meaning from outside themselves, humans can imbue their lives with at least the meaningful nobility of a metaphysical rebel.

One might still object that the concept of rebellion seems out of place here. Rebellion, for Camus, is a response to injustice. But how can reality itself be unjust? What kind of refusal can take place on the metaphysical stage, especially if one believes that there is no agency to 'the way of the world'? The proper response to this is that because in this case rebellion is metaphysical; a struggle which plays out primarily in the mind and disputes only over the significance of things, the target of rebellion need only be represented. Camus is tracing a rebellious shift in metaphysical perspective. Simply put the master against which the human rebels is God or, to put it in more secular terms, 'the world'. The refusal of metaphysical rebellion comes down to refusing to recognize God as the source of value and meaning, after which indeed the master against which one revolted in the first place is negated. But Camus stresses that in the beginning of metaphysical rebellion this agency is not denied but rather

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<sup>61</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 40.

<sup>62</sup> *Ibid*, 39-40.

<sup>63</sup> Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1961), 29.

confirmed so that it can be criticized.<sup>64</sup> God must first be addressed as the representative of creation so that human existence can be called unjust. Up until the human finally decides to overthrow God explicitly, which entails an attempt at taking His place, rebellion does not deny divinity or some other metaphysical order. Rather, it stares it in the face in order to accuse it.

Even blasphemy, which is certainly a rebellious act carried out to mock God, has as of yet “no thought of disputing the power or position of the deity”.<sup>65</sup> Rebellion starts out from faith; belief that there is an ‘order of things’, and merely demands that things be better.<sup>66</sup> Failing this, even the scorned reaction of humans who praise and practice what was ‘evil’ in the order of things is still “a participation in holiness.”<sup>67</sup> Only the very final conclusion of metaphysical rebellion is the negation of God or the order in the world.<sup>68</sup>

### **I.5. Metaphysical Revolution**

It is in the negation of God or of order that the absurd position of humanity is fully brought to a head. That blasphemous form of rebellion is merely reactionary. Praising evil to undermine a false sense of goodness still buys into the established dichotomy of the two. The bitter end of metaphysical rebellion is ‘metaphysical revolution’: overthrowing God and thereby the very distinction between good and evil.<sup>69</sup> All standards of value are destroyed, or at least equalized, and the rebel human stands alone in deciding how to live. And live they must if they wish to remain consistent with themselves. After all, they rebelled against God for the sake of the dignity in human life which demanded to be- but was not acknowledged by the world. Yet at this stage all that has been won is the assurance that we should live, along with the absolute freedom that comes with the death of external values, i.e. moral laws and customs.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>64</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 13.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>66</sup> Ibid, 13.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid, 32.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>69</sup> Ibid, 35.

<sup>70</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 43.

Camus warns us against supposing that this freedom is a blessing and not a severe burden.<sup>71</sup> The struggle of the human in their absurd existence is not over with the death of God, it is only just beginning. Because now they need to go on living, and “to live is also to act.”<sup>72</sup> To act is, inevitably, to recommend by one’s choice one option over its alternatives. Action as well as deliberate inaction imply evaluations, which imply laws of action. Without God or any moral order present, the human is solely responsible for these decisions. They have taken the place of God and, by their actions, must establish laws of action all on their own.<sup>73</sup> The one thing that still binds the rebels, on pains of consistency, is their commitment to rebellion and their reason for rebelling. The dire question that Camus puts to the metaphysical rebels is: how can you act and choose while staying true to the premise that no value or coherence exists out in the world? Will you not be forced, based on this premise, to practice or at least to tolerate any conduct, even murder? Will not the only rule you can still accept be that everything is permitted? Will your rebellion therefore not devour itself, allowing the death of humans for the sake of the dignity in human life?<sup>74</sup>

It is because of this seeming contradiction, this plague on the mind of the rebel who decides to live and follow their premises through, that rebellion becomes central to Camus’ existentialist thought. After all, for Camus, all other rebellion must be logically derivative of the metaphysical kind. Every instance of rebellion has at least a vague sense of the dignity of the human being, and it is this dignity which inspires metaphysical rebellion. Exploring rebellion in its premises and consequences will therefore be paramount for understanding how, for a post-existentialist in Camus’ tradition, one could live actively without becoming trapped in an ethical dilemma. This is what John Foley means when he says that Camus wanted to dispense with the mere ‘complacencies’ of absurdism in favor of its ‘exigencies’. He criticized other thinkers for stating nothing more than that life is absurd, not noting “the challenge posed by the absurd to the supposed rationality of our moral and political beliefs.”<sup>75</sup> Camus saw that there was not only a reason to live and a single human value to be found in the absurd condition, there was simultaneously a distinct ethical challenge in it which needed to be addressed. People should live but they also need desperately to figure

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<sup>71</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 44.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid, 34.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid, 35-36.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid, 36.

<sup>75</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 55-56.

out how to live. As we shall see in the next chapter, this challenge would not remain purely individual. Among the consequences of rebellion must be not only personal ethical conclusions but also distinctly collective and socially constructive ones. The new rules, provisions (of freedom and physical means to life) and confirmations of human value will need to be established for a collective 'us' and not for an egoistic 'me'. Rebellion, I will claim, is political in nature.

## **II. Rebellion is Political**

### **II.1. A Collective Ontology in Rebellion**

What is paramount to understand, in the first instance, is that in rebellion the absurd becomes a 'collective experience':

"Therefore the first step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men and that the entire human race suffers from the division between itself and the rest of the world."<sup>76</sup>

The reason for this, to recall what we have touched on in the last chapter, is that in rebelling against the absurd state of their existence human beings necessarily state their humanity (or their personhood) and the value they see in it as the basis for their indignation. And this is of course a category, and a value, which they hold in common with everyone else.<sup>77</sup> As such rebellion takes a collectivist turn, and it does so in proportion to the realization – of those who rebel – of their shared dignity that must be defended. In other words, the more one realizes why one is rebelling, the more one sees one's action and speech as being not just on behalf of oneself but on behalf of everyone.

It should be emphasized that this is more than a mere claim of relational social ontology, within which someone learns to form empathetic connections with others or in which one has relations of dependence on individuals and a social system. Camus here establishes, metaphysically, a collective human identity of existential struggle, on the basis of which

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<sup>76</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 9.

<sup>77</sup> *Ibid*, 4-5.

solidarity is meant to be developed.<sup>78</sup> His wish is “that men rediscover their solidarity in order to join the fight against their revolting fate.”<sup>79</sup> What is established and detailed in Camus’ analysis of metaphysical rebellion is a process through which this collective identity is realized in the experience of an individual. It seems obvious that Camus’ existentialism is highly individualistic in its outset, such as how in the myth of Sisyphus it is clear that as a subject of the absurd, Sisyphus is ‘a solitary figure’.<sup>80</sup> As an example of Camus’ absurd hero, he is initially poised as an isolated individual struggling with reality and his position in it. But Camus points out that this struggle is in fact collective in nature.<sup>81</sup> And as soon as the absurd hero realizes this, as soon as they become rebellious and thus resist their fate for the sake of something in themselves, they become conscious (to some degree) of a value which is common to all humans.<sup>82</sup> They therefore become conscious of all other humans in this moment, and in a way that they might not have been before. Now all individuals around yourself are interpretable as falling under the same morally significant category as you. Thus the collective of ‘humanity’ is established in individual experience. Camus drives the point home in a clever twist on Descartes’ ‘cogito ergo sum’: “*I rebel – therefore we exist.*”<sup>83</sup>

The moment of rebelling is the moment that one stands up to state that one’s condition is unacceptable and that there is something in oneself, namely their desire to live with purpose and satisfaction, which demands to be respected and defended at all costs. Even against an indifferent world and/or a violent master.<sup>84</sup> In this moment it becomes clear that what is of infinite value within oneself also exists within everyone else, and so the rebellion can never be that of just one person for themselves. Rather, rebellion must be for everyone. It must stand in recognition of the collective value of humanity that is represented in every individual. As will become more apparent in the following chapter, this aspect of rebellion which has an eye for every individual and their claim to respect and protection is of essential importance to Camus. This is because it stands as the basis for his attempt to construct a political ethic based on human solidarity which, in an explicitly disorderly and valueless

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<sup>78</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 4-5.

<sup>79</sup> Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 27-28.

<sup>80</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 28.

<sup>81</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 4.

<sup>82</sup> *Ibid*, 9-10.

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*, 1-2.



world, still does not license murder and oppression for the sake of dominion or some sense of 'salvation'.<sup>85</sup> As Thomas Busch puts it:

“The argument will work to Camus’s purpose only if my experience of the absurd, and my experience of being cheated, can lead to the further step that all people’s desires, not just my own, ought to be fulfilled, which will produce then the conclusion that the absurd should be diminished not just in my life, but in all lives. The argument will work only if there is some sort of identity or important linkage established between my life and others’ lives.”<sup>86</sup>

As we have already seen, this linkage is indeed established in Camus’ analysis of rebellion, where the experience of existential frustration is turned into active refusal to give up on oneself. And with oneself comes everyone else, becoming visible and demanding of protection along with the ascension of one’s self-respect. Were there any doubt that this was the nature of Camus’ own views on the matter, beyond our interpretation his very own political engagement displays the same theme of collectivism. Of the French Resistance newspaper *Combat*, for which he edited and wrote, he said it shared “most of our [communist] comrades’ collectivist ideas and social programme, their ideal of justice, and their disgust with a society in which money and privilege occupy the front ranks”.<sup>87</sup> He himself would later avow a form of “liberal socialism” which “tends to invoke the French collectivist tradition that has always made room for individual freedom[...].” So while maintaining a value of individual freedoms which may cause tension with political collectivism, he certainly did not shy away from a worldview in which collective identity and motivation played a major role. For our current purposes, we must simply keep in mind this collectivist aspect which Camus introduces into rebellion. Because, in combination with one other element of rebellion, it leads to the inevitable conclusion that metaphysical rebellion, if completely and logically followed through, has the political task of establishing new government as its consequence.

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<sup>85</sup> John Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 30-31.

<sup>86</sup> Thomas Busch, ‘Albert Camus: Absurdity, Solidarity, and Difference’, *Circulating Being: From Embodiment to Incorporation: Essays on Late Existentialism* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1999), 9.

<sup>87</sup> Albert Camus, *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947*, ed. J. Lévi-Valensi; fwd D. Carroll; trans. A. Goldhammer (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2006), 263.

## II.2. A Collective Task in Revolution

Recall that rebellion, according to Camus, has both a negative and a positive content. It has a negative element of refusal, refusal 'to put up with' something or to give up on one's dignity, and a positive element which is that very dignity one ascribes to oneself. But the dynamic of positives and negatives in rebellion goes even deeper than this. The absurd, which is the factual basis for metaphysical rebellion, can similarly be understood through a tension between positives and negatives, between refusal and affirmation. Negatively, humans are refused a reasonable world in which a rule of value can be found waiting for them to deduce it, scientifically or logically.<sup>88</sup> Yet this implies an open space in which 'all is permitted', thereby positively affirming human freedom: "[...] if there is no virtue, there is no law."<sup>89</sup> This sense of freedom comes with an important caveat, however. Because in rebelling, we may remember, one chooses to live. On the greater, collective scale, humanity rebelling means that everyone should choose to live, and every human who does rebel does so on behalf of everyone. But "to live is also to act".<sup>90</sup> And to act as a rational human being, which is after all what one values in oneself and chooses to fight for, means to adopt a rule of action: a law. Thus, with no law readily available which is so to speak 'justified by the world', the humans who rebel together and on behalf of each other are tasked with establishing their own rules of action. This, according to Camus, is the logical conclusion of metaphysical rebellion: "metaphysical revolution", in which any old sense of value based on a belief in the rational unity of the world is overthrown and humanity puts whatever principles of action they can derive from what is left in the open space.<sup>91</sup> Revolution here is meant very much in a sense reminiscent of its original meaning in astronomy: "it is a movement which describes a complete circle, which leads from one form of government to another after a total transition."<sup>92</sup> Humans who rebel reject the so called 'order' they were faced with. Camus describes Dostoyevsky's character Ivan Karamazov as rejecting the law of God *even if* He did exist, on the grounds that this law apparently involves "the death of innocent children."<sup>93</sup> The implications to be drawn from this are rich, but the bottom line is that the rebel rejects

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<sup>88</sup> Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 50.

<sup>89</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 34.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid*, 34.

<sup>91</sup> *Ibid*, 35-36.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>93</sup> *Ibid*, 33.

the idea that there is law or order already in the world, because even if the world as they find it has a sense of order it is not one which they can understand or accept. This is really merely an escalation of what we have said before: not only can we not scientifically understand the world as an ordered whole, we also cannot accept that there is an order on faith because said order would be morally offensive to us. And this means that a rebel, already at the metaphysical (but of course also on the political) level is someone who must logically reject and destroy the established order. In turn, after they have uprooted the old system, because they still want to live and want for others to live, they are then tasked with building something new. "Now that God is dead, the world must be changed and organized by the forces at man's disposal."<sup>94</sup>

Remember here that the absurd is a collective experience, and that what is taken up in rebellion is the value of humanity as a totality of individuals. Each has their own dignity and, owing to the newfound lack of values and pre-established order, each is essentially both free and in need of new principles of action. Rebellion is not complete, therefore, without establishing for everyone new government which enshrines as sacred only the human, their freedom, their struggle and their destiny. And here rebellion becomes concretely political, because the talk of changes in government can no longer remain just metaphorical terms of metaphysics. If these are the only legitimate sources of value and action-guidance, then no other law which deviates from them can be recognized. The trouble, of course, is with deciding who the human is, what their destiny is and, most importantly, what kind of freedom they have. If history has shown anything, it is that humanity can be marked off in many ways which legitimize what would otherwise be murder and oppression, and that essential freedoms can be taken away for the sake of some other freedom which is deemed more important or more real. Yet whether appealing or repugnant, consistent or self-undermining, rebellion culminates in political action, specifically in revolution. "Actually, revolution is only the logical consequence of metaphysical rebellion, and we shall discover, in our analysis of the revolutionary movement, the same desperate and bloody effort to affirm the dignity of man in defiance of the things that deny its existence."<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>94</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 61.

<sup>95</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

What rebellion often is then, according to Camus, is a sort of incomplete attempt at revolution.<sup>96</sup> The requirement for a rebellion to become political, to become a genuine attempt at revolution, seems to be that the rebellion follow through its premises to their proper consequences. And for that, of course, it must also (usually) come to some initial understanding of said premises. The premises being a lack of objective order and one's own reasoned, in some sense moral instinct which calls out for order and justice. The less one is aware of these premises, the more one's rebellion is only an "incoherent pronouncement" of a vague but powerful moral sense.<sup>97</sup>

To give an example, the slave rebellion of Spartacus likely only grasped in small part the absence of objective order in the world and mostly sensed simply that the slave and the master were in fact equals.<sup>98</sup> This rebellion came nowhere close to the realization of the absence of order which would be required to set out to establish a whole new political system. Because the order of the world was not doubted (leave alone refuted) to that extent, no new order or justice needed to be established. As a result, a rule of equality was applied which denied the status of the slave as a slave, but which returned the treatment received by the slaves in kind, 'an eye for an eye'.<sup>99</sup> The masters, once conquered through violence, were made into slaves themselves, and nothing in political society structurally changed as a result: "The slave army liberates the slaves and immediately hands over their former masters to them in bondage."<sup>100</sup> But this would not do to make the rebellion revolutionary and therefore truly political in aspiration. "To allow a principle to triumph, another principle must be overthrown."<sup>101</sup> The sense of equality felt by the slaves could not fully triumph because, metaphysically and subsequently practically, the slaves could not call into doubt and destroy the old system of value which legitimized slavery in order to put the new principle of equality in its place. They could only reproduce the order which they did not actually reject. In effect any rebellion which does not grasp the absence of objective order and the unjust position of the human person, and to the extent that it does not, falls short of

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<sup>96</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 60.

<sup>97</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

<sup>98</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid*, 61.

<sup>100</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

<sup>101</sup> *Ibid*, 62.

accomplishing its goals. Metaphysically it already cannot, in such a case, avail itself of the open space provided by the absurd in order to build something new.

Ultimately, this limited rebellion is represented by Camus as having been fated to be struck down, because it was not up to the task of overthrowing the order of power, upon which those originally in power reinforced their dominion over them: "In revenge for the once crucified citizen, Crassus crucified thousands of slaves. The six thousand crosses which, after such a just rebellion, staked out the road from Capua to Rome, demonstrated to the servile crowd that there is no equality in the world of power and that the masters calculate, at a usurious rate, the price of their own blood."<sup>102</sup> Those who rebel in a system without fundamentally questioning and overthrowing it will only be crushed and made an example of by those who hold authority in- and benefit from the system. Their aspirations fall short, already at the metaphysical level, where they leave in place an unfounded order of values and principles. Thus they cannot even fully conceive of-, leave alone accomplish, a political project of establishing new principles and new government.

Thus rebellion can be said to be political in the following sense, that when logically followed through in sufficient recognition of its premises, and to the degree that it is such, it has as its consequence the political project of establishing new principles of action and of justice. This metaphysical revolution, however, cannot usually be contained to the theoretical realm because of its direct implications for human action. As a result, at least in a world with social orders which still base themselves on unfounded principles such as divine will and natural order, metaphysical revolution will inevitably lead to actual revolution and the establishment of new government. Conversely, every rebellion which aims at fundamentally changing government and the principles on which it functions has metaphysical rebellion (even if in part unwittingly) as its basis and undertone.

The beginning of rebellions which are genuine attempts at such political and metaphysical revolution, Camus finds around the time of the French Revolution.<sup>103</sup> As he sees it, with the willingness to overthrow and execute their royalty, the representatives of God on earth, this

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<sup>102</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 63.

<sup>103</sup> *Ibid*, 64.

rebellion showed that it was starting to try and overthrow the whole established order on the metaphysical stage and therefore shows the first signs of revolutionary aims.<sup>104</sup>

“In fact, if God is denied, the king must die. Saint Just, it seems, was responsible for Louis XVI’s death; but when he exclaims: ‘To determine the principle in virtue of which the accused is perhaps to die, is to determine the principle by which the society which judges him lives’, he demonstrates that it is the philosophers who are going to kill the king: the king must die in the name of the social contract.”<sup>105</sup>

The social contract between members of society, the new manner of choosing and legitimizing government, once accepted must remove all earthly representatives of the previous political order. This is revolution intended as the aforementioned “movement which describes a complete circle, which leads from one form of government to another after a total transition.”<sup>106</sup> But of course historically even such ‘metaphysically conscious’ revolutions (my wording) have not been quite so complete, have often relapsed into *ancien régimes* or been bastardized into new oppressive systems of government. Rebellion, and the ensuing revolution, would not be so interesting for our purposes if it provided us with political principles which are self-undermining, or which we could not expect to undergird a sustainable political society. As such we need to account for history’s ‘mistaken’ or flawed revolutions and explain how, even if they grasped to some degree the premises of rebellion, they applied them wrongly and/or lost sight of them along the way. It is precisely this which we will undertake in the next chapter, where we will lay out Camus’ account of how rebellions (and revolutions) ‘go wrong’, causing them to advance flawed and destructive principles. This, in turn, should help us better understand what a proper revolution would look like for Camus and what principles would follow therefrom.

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<sup>104</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 65-66.

<sup>105</sup> *Ibid*, 66.

<sup>106</sup> *Ibid*, 59.

### III. Mistaken Rebellions

#### III.1. The French Revolution

Camus begins his discussion of unsuccessful revolutions where we left off in Chapter II, in the French Revolution. Not only was this the starting point for rebellion coming into its own as an active attempt to overthrow political and metaphysical order, it also functions, because of this, as an essential exemplar for the difficulties and the costly mistakes involved in establishing a wholly new government and sense of justice.<sup>107</sup> And the essential mistake which was made in this- as well as in other revolutions to come was, in short, to deny individuals and factions of people their freedom and their difference by insisting on an impossible human or national unity.<sup>108</sup> The nostalgia we found already in the original experience of the absurd reappears here.<sup>109</sup> But now, instead of simply believing in an illusory source of unity and human essence such as God, it seeks to simply construct the unification of humanity itself.<sup>110</sup>

Camus identifies already in the writings of Rousseau the germ of the ideas which will animate this project. In Rousseau's *The Social Contract*, after all, it is established that the source of justice and all its principles and laws is not God but instead 'the general will'.<sup>111</sup> This will is then represented as the collective rational decision of the whole of humanity, or at least the whole of a human community, as to what is right and just.<sup>112</sup> The exercise of political power, governmental law and intervention are therefore justified not by a higher divine command but simply "from general consent" of this collective "body politic".<sup>113</sup> Yet it is important to note that the consent referred to herein is not the actual unanimous decision of a huge collective of people at a particular moment in time, but rather the represented (or, dare we say, imagined) decision of 'the people' were they all to be fully rational and

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<sup>107</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 64, 69.

<sup>108</sup> *Ibid*, 82.

<sup>109</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>110</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>111</sup> "I hold then that Sovereignty, being nothing less than the exercise of the general will, can never be alienated, and that the Sovereign, who is no less than a collective being, cannot be represented except by himself: the power indeed may be transmitted, but not the will."

Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, trans. G. D. H. Cole (London & Toronto: J.M. Dent, 1923), 22.

<sup>112</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 68.

<sup>113</sup> *Ibid*, 67-68.

virtuous. As Camus quotes Rousseau: “‘Under the law of reason, nothing is done without cause.’”<sup>114</sup>

Already the issue with this doctrine may seem obvious. Because “who will interpret the will of the people and pronounce judgement”?<sup>115</sup> This judgement itself comes down to establishing what human nature is and what rational desires it entails. When it came to the French Revolution, it was the National Constituent Assembly (and its successors) which, by its origin as a collective of representatives from all parts of the country, could in their own eyes lay claim to the ‘general will’.<sup>116</sup> And once again, because the revolutionary conclusion that no foundational divine power existed had already been reached, the task of the Assembly could not be to justify their decisions and their conceptions of human nature by an outside source. Their conception of justice must be reflected in the consent and the actions of the people or it would not exist at all. As such the government’s task became to simply make it true that every human under their rule consented to their laws.<sup>117</sup> The crucial thing about this is that, since the general will is represented as that which everyone should rationally want, anyone who would disagree or disobey is simply irrational and at the same time a threat to the proof of the overall rationality of ‘the people’. As such any dissent is both illegitimate and dangerous, needing to be quelled so that the principles of justice are properly reflected in everyone. In other words, the government’s task became to demand absolute obedience of the people, to the complete exclusion and suppression of opposition or dissent:

“Rousseau is, in fact, the first man in modern times to institute the profession of civil faith. He is also the first to justify the death penalty in a civil society and the absolute submission of the subjects to the authority of the sovereign.”<sup>118</sup>

Saint-Just, member and president of the National Convention (a successor government to the National Constituent Assembly) and for Camus seemingly the protagonist of the French Revolution, took this task of establishing the general will as the law’s means of justification to its logical conclusion. If the law is only derived from- and justified by the will of the people

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<sup>114</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 67.

<sup>115</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>116</sup> *Ibid*, 71.

<sup>117</sup> *Ibid*, 69.

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid*, 68.



as a homogenous whole, then the actual populace cannot even be consulted on any issue. Because actual opinions would differ, which would destroy the rational unity on which the law relies. Even though the government had ostensibly been elected democratically, it could not thereafter concern itself with the opinions of actual citizens. They had to enforce their own conception of the general will in a single voice. And since the general will was actually sovereign, essentially anything of which the state approved was, by their unconstrained sovereignty, justice. This meant it was necessary to rule arbitrarily, and so the government afforded itself absolute power.<sup>119</sup> Similarly, criticism or resistance to the law must be utterly destroyed, such that no factions exist within 'the people'.<sup>120</sup> We can see how quickly this leads to what became known in this period as 'the Terror', that is, the systematic murder of thousands of people. Ultimately, the Terror rode on a flawed metaphysical assumption.

The wrongful assumption that the 'all' of humanity can be unified and homogenized into a 'general will', wherein no reasonable person would actually differ in opinion or desire, leads to the licensing of ultimate exclusion: namely, exclusion from the class of civilized humanity and therefore from protection against the death sentence. A mistaken attempt at the emancipation of all humanity leads merely to the oppression and death of progressively more human beings, as the French Revolution's periods of Terror candidly showed. What it truly means for humanity to be, as Rousseau puts it, "forced to be free" is for humans to be continually slaughtered.<sup>121</sup> After all, the freedom provided under the general will both requires and presumes the unity of the people. And without said unity there can be no justice on this account. Therefore justice, on this view, demands the termination of difference. And because difference is in reality everywhere, the application of this doctrine to reality will lead to death being everywhere:

"From the moment that laws fail to make harmony reign, or when the unity which should be created by adherence to principles is destroyed, who is to blame? Factions. Who comprises the factions? Those who deny by their very actions the necessity of unity. Factions divide the sovereign; therefore they are blasphemous and criminal.

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<sup>119</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 71.

<sup>120</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>121</sup> Jean Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*, 18.

They, and they alone, must be combatted. But what if there are many factions? All shall be fought to the death. Saint-Just exclaims: 'Either the virtues or the Terror.'<sup>122</sup>

Because he insisted there be one rational human nature, which for everyone entailed the same conclusions about good living and about the right, for Saint-Just everyone being virtuous meant everyone being the same. If people were different, they were criminal or at least suspect. It is this dangerous tendency on the part of the French Revolution that it is paramount for us to understand. Ultimately the problem lies in losing sight of part of the premises of rebellion: the negation and refusal of a singular human nature and the value-laden guidance to be drawn from it is forgotten in favor of insisting fancifully that reason can simply be made to rule on earth. The essential tension between the human insistence on reason and the world's irrationality is in some sense not upheld when the revolutionaries claim there to be a universal human nature and a general human will which is single minded as opposed to diverse. The initially noble aim of establishing justice on purely human terms turns sour because in its fervor and pride it refuses to face up to reality. "No one will dare to imagine that, since factions exist, the principles are conceivably wrong."<sup>123</sup> Instead, the factions must be blamed and executed even though they can never actually be made to cease to exist, all in defense of "an ideal city" where everyone is the same and these principles rule as necessarily as natural laws.<sup>124</sup> This goal implies endless killing. In fact, logically, since the law in this case cannot truly justify its killing until it is done with the unending task of eliminating opposition, it remains in a state of killing apparent innocents. So the true implication is endless murder.

Not only will such laws, according to Camus, go on to kill the very people they claim to represent and protect, but in the world as it actually is such a 'pure' homogenous morality will eventually perish itself under its own fanaticism. Saint-Just, the spokesman of virtue and universal principles, agreed to die to the general will if that was what it decided.<sup>125</sup> And because the general will is not actually derivable from "the people", because actually there are only factions and no universal agreement, he simply agreed to die to majority decision, which is swayed by one faction or another. Because he himself disavowed any faction, it was

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<sup>122</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 76.

<sup>123</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>124</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid*, 80.

inevitable that he should be condemned. Even the National Convention and its constituents could not in reality be exempted from factionalism. There would be dissent within the government too and a majority would eventually turn against Saint-Just. In him, the concept of formal universal principles itself, along with the sense of justice it implied, agreed to die in prideful and stubborn adherence to a unity that cannot actually exist. It could not accept that the world is the way it is, bereft of rational unity, putting itself under the guillotine of a partisan government which in some sense it still insists is the general will.<sup>126</sup> It sticks to its dream to the bitter end, dying to its own lie. The case of Saint-Just demonstrates that political idealism, when it does not face up to reality and therein forgets part of the premises for its own rebellion, becomes both metaphysically and practically self-undermining. Metaphysically, it betrays and denies the humanity it sought to protect. Practically, it is doomed to lose power to those 'political realists' who guide themselves by nothing but the matters of fact and readily avail themselves of useful partisanship.

### **III.2. Authoritarian Socialism: Intellectual Roots**

Yet there is another form of mistaken revolution, in a sense far more radical through its total embrace of nihilism. This form of revolution, which is marked by what Camus disapprovingly dubs 'political realism', is for him incarnated in the movement of authoritarian socialism inspired by the works of Karl Marx and given shape (for instance) in the Communist Russian Revolution of 1917.<sup>127</sup> Another term used by Camus to denote the same tendency in practical thought as 'political realism', whose wording likely makes more explicit the derogatory intent, is 'political cynicism'.<sup>128</sup> I will henceforth use the two terms somewhat interchangeably, but it is useful to note at the outset that 'political realism' gets more at the pretensions of the attitude while 'political cynicism' seeks to state explicitly its true character. The following section seeks to elaborate the exact meaning and implications of political cynicism, as well as its intellectual roots, as Camus would have it. But already it can be said that, simply put, political realism or cynicism denotes the view that 'the ends justify

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<sup>126</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 81.

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, 141. The use of the term 'political realism' here should not be confused with its modern use for the style of studying international politics in the tradition of Bernard Williams and the like.

<sup>128</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

the means'. So long as the end is good and right, any means necessary can and must be employed to achieve it. Put differently, political realism is the political principle of efficiency. And it is politically cynical because it results in the primary rule of politics being that of power and cunning: in its eyes efficiency is *the* political good. We will now delve into the precise logic of these conclusions. We will explore the intellectual and ideological origin of authoritarian socialism and, through this, come to an understanding about political cynicism in both its premises and its consequences.

We have already seen in the last section that the French Revolution failed in its aspirations because it tried to dispense not only with God, but with human difference and individual freedoms as well. On the one hand, authoritarian socialism would continue and further radicalize this tendency to deny human freedom. But on the other hand it would strive a step further than French Jacobinism ever did. The revolution against the king had, after all, simply tried to replace God with secular but still transcendent principles. Of course they attempted to establish a fully human justice, a justice that was of this world, by the introduction of the 'general will' or 'the will of the people', but this conception in turn had need of the concept of human virtue and universalist rationality. This meant that ultimately a principle over and above actual living humans was put in charge of defining and controlling them. "Seventeen eighty-nine does not yet affirm the divinity of man, but the divinity of the people, to the degree in which the will of the people coincides with the will of Nature and of reason."<sup>129</sup> As such an otherworldly entity, the ideal rational man, still rules the real and diverse world of humans. "God, for the Jacobins, is not completely dead, any more than He was for the romantics. [...] Reason, in a certain way, is still a mediator. It implies a pre-existent order."<sup>130</sup>

It is this established order which later revolutions would go on to definitively destroy. Revolution, after all, must move to confront the absence of order (a premise of rebellion) and provide its answer. The history of failed revolutions, according to Camus, has thus been a history of failing primarily to give the right answer to this problem. The French Revolution went back on itself as a metaphysical revolution by claiming that there must be some established order after all, or we would be lost to factions. Political cynicism, for instance in

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<sup>129</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 73.

<sup>130</sup> *Ibid*, 83.

authoritarian socialism but also in fascism, answers that indeed there is no order and therefore the only rule is that of power and cunning put to the service of humanity as material beings.<sup>131</sup> But how is this conclusion reached? For this Camus refers us first to German Idealism, in particular to Hegel and Marx.

Hegel is represented by Camus as the first to systematically and influentially lay out the idea that without God, without pre-existing transcendent order and “under the empty sky, there is only a master and a slave [...]”<sup>132</sup> What is meant by this is that for Hegel there is only material reality and the human experience of/within it. Human existence therefore is not already transcendentally established as meaningful or valuable. And so consciousness manifests itself primarily as a desire to be human in a meaningful and valuable sense as opposed to it simply feeling validated in its existence immediately and constantly.<sup>133</sup> Self-identification, here, is primarily a prospective desire to identify oneself.<sup>134</sup> One can certainly distinguish oneself from the world and thereby see oneself as a particular, but one cannot by oneself provide any meaningful content to this distinction. Thus the desire, and thereby consciousness, is trained on the means to recognition. And this is then found in other consciousnesses, since these can recognize each other’s desire to be recognized in the same way they recognize their own.<sup>135</sup> To truly exist, then, means to exist in the eyes of others.<sup>136</sup> “Only in association do we receive a human value, as distinct from an animal value.”<sup>137</sup> But it is not enough, thinks Hegel, that one’s desire is seen for one to achieve human meaning or value, since for this of course the desire must also be fulfilled. One must prove oneself against others, to show that one is more than a mere animal. And the way to do so is invite death (or at least the risk of death), as opposed to animals who instinctively seek to avoid death at all times, merely for the sake of an abstract goal which one holds. This is the condition of rational autonomy: to choose to die or risk one’s life is to prove one is not led

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<sup>131</sup> “[...] it is legitimate to identify the means employed by both [authoritarian socialism and fascism] with political cynicism which they have drawn from the same source, moral nihilism.” Camus, *The Rebel*, 192.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid*, 88.

<sup>133</sup> G.W.F. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, trans. A.V. Miller (Oxford University Press, 1977), 12.

<sup>134</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 89-90.

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

<sup>136</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 19.

<sup>137</sup> *Ibid*, 90.

by mere instinct. What needs to be proven by each against others, then, is the willingness to die for the sake of oneself and one's actualization as a human being.<sup>138</sup>

And this is where violence comes in, because one needs to prove at the same time the consciousness of the other, to make sure that one can be seen. So the willingness to die must exist on the part of both parties.<sup>139</sup> The desire for recognition devolves into a "life-and-death struggle" between human beings for the sake of recognition.<sup>140</sup> This struggle will only terminate when everyone's desire to be recognized is satisfied by being 'seen' by everyone else: "In that everyone wants equally to be recognized by everyone, the fight for life will only cease with the recognition of all by all which will mark the termination of history."<sup>141</sup> But of course this end goal is problematized by death, which means that the person one kills to prove oneself can then no longer recognize anyone, and that dying oneself terminates the consciousness one was trying to prove.<sup>142</sup> Thus the only time anyone is recognized initially is when one of the two engaged in a struggle does not have the courage to risk their life (be it because they are weaker physically or mentally) while the other does, and therefore the one willingly relents to the power of the other.<sup>143</sup> In this way the will to exist as a valuable human has become the will to power, power primarily over others, and the relation of master and slave is manifested in the relation between winner and loser in violent struggle.<sup>144</sup>

Finally, however, the master in this relation does not actually fully achieve recognition and the accompanying satisfaction. After all, they are recognized in their humanity and their autonomy only by beings which they themselves do not recognize as autonomous: they have, in order to prove themselves and to achieve satisfaction, forced the other to give up on their desire to be recognized since they were forced to give up life-or-death struggle. As such, the master is recognized only by a being which is not worthy of recognizing others, a consciousness which has already been negated.<sup>145</sup> Their autonomy is therefore only negative: they are free only in that they are not made to relent to others. Since the master cannot consent to be a slave and they cannot seemingly win recognition any other way, they

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<sup>138</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 113.

<sup>139</sup> *Ibid*, 113.

<sup>140</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114 ; Camus, *The Rebel*, 90.

<sup>141</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 91.

<sup>142</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 114.

<sup>143</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 115 ; Camus, *The Rebel*, 91.

<sup>144</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 91.

<sup>145</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 116-117 ; Camus, *The Rebel*, 92.

are condemned to live unsatisfactorily or to be overthrown. Meanwhile the only one at least capable of one day realizing their human value is the slave.<sup>146</sup> They were utterly denied, first by nature, which did not give them meaningful humanity outright and which threatened their existence through death, and then by the master whose violent oppression denied their desire, their humanity and their freedom still further. Yet through this the slave is able to realize for the first time the human totality: the denial they have experienced is identified with the denial of everyone else's desire and human value. And henceforth they can wish and struggle for the emancipation of humanity from both nature and the masters. For Hegel this struggle for total emancipation from oppression is seemingly the driver of history, while for Camus it signifies the birth of the rebel class.<sup>147</sup> On both counts there is established a dialectic of master and slave which will drive history on the basis of power. Each time a specific opposition between master and slave, be it metaphysical or physical, is dissolved into a synthesis, it is replaced by yet another distinction marked by power. The mastery of the principle of God over humans was replaced by the Jacobins with the mastery of the principles of virtue and the rational man. The mastery of kings and feudal lords was (mostly) resolved but gave way to the mastery of the bourgeoisie. These movements in the struggle for power would then supposedly cease only at the end of history, when finally the master-slave dialectic resolves entirely and power is equal for everyone in the 'City of Humanity', the 'absolute State'.<sup>148</sup> In this city human value would be finally realized for everyone, as everyone could be recognized by each other and "each individual consciousness will be nothing more than a mirror reflecting another mirror, itself reflected to infinity in infinitely recurring images."<sup>149</sup>

It was according to Camus the solitary role of power in driving history, its entirely necessary movements through dialectical stages and finally the idea of the end of history in which human value would finally be universally achieved through the termination of the master-slave distinction which was to become crucial to the interpretation of Hegel's work by his successors.<sup>150</sup> And it is their interpretation and extrapolation of Hegel's theory of history in which the faults of the failed revolutions thereafter lie: if history is on a necessary course

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<sup>146</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 92.

<sup>147</sup> Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, xxviii ; Camus, *The Rebel*, 92.

<sup>148</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>149</sup> *Ibid*, 93.

<sup>150</sup> *Ibid*, 95.

and any negation in the form of slavery and death is merely a preparation for the end of history which will set everything right, then everything is permitted and power will be used with impunity on victims who need not even be pitied.<sup>151</sup> Already we get a sense of cynicism here, in a scheme which seems ultimately to recognize nothing but power as it efficiently drives history forward. But we may not yet see it as particularly political, or as motivated towards particular actions. To see how political cynicism and authoritarianism follow, and to track the intellectual legacy of Hegel, we must move on to the works of Karl Marx.

What Marx primarily took away from Hegel is the doctrine of 'dialectical materialism': the view that reality "is a perpetual process of evolution, propelled by the fertile impact of perpetual antagonisms which are resolved each time into a superior synthesis which, itself, creates its opposite and again causes history to advance."<sup>152</sup> For Marx is it the antagonisms between production and distribution, and the force of class struggle which follows from it, which explains the course of history entirely.<sup>153</sup> The production of the goods necessary for life falls out of line with the distribution of said goods, or the production of surplus, as well as the means of production, are distributed into the hands of very few, while the class of deprived producers grows, giving increasingly stronger impetus for the struggles of the working class. Each new level of production ends up arousing 'antagonisms' which destroy the corresponding society in order to make way for yet another level of production. "Capitalism is the last of these stages of production because it produces the conditions in which every antagonism will be resolved and where there will be no more economy."<sup>154</sup> Thus history logically and necessarily advances through purely material conditions and their changes to the final revolution and the end of history.<sup>155</sup> The last society to be destroyed in a revolutionary movement of one society to the next is capitalism, after which comes a political society with no economy (communism).

There is an issue, however, first of all with the level of determinism at play in Marx' theory. Camus interprets Marx as saying that the human mind is determined entirely by exterior reality, specifically historical economic conditions. Historic developments and the human

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<sup>151</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 95-96.

<sup>152</sup> *Ibid*, 146.

<sup>153</sup> Karl Marx, *Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Volume I*, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore & Edward Aveling (Moscow: Progress Publishers), 319 ; Camus, *The Rebel*, 150.

<sup>154</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 146.

<sup>155</sup> *Ibid*, 151-152.



actions in it are therefore entirely explainable by economic conditions following each other logically. “For him, man is only history, and in particular the history of the means of production.”<sup>156</sup> Yet if this were the truth, and the human mind had no other content than the reflection of material conditions following each other logically such that it could not interfere in history with its own unique inventions, then supposedly one true thought on these conditions must lead straight to a perfect understanding of the whole of the material economic reality through an interminable logic. Since clearly such an ‘entire truth’ has not been reached, either there has never been a true affirmation (which seems absurd) or human minds are not perfectly logically determined by external material conditions. Thought can therefore intervene in history.<sup>157</sup> What Camus calls ‘pure determinism’ is false because human thought, at the very least, is an independent force with explanatory value.<sup>158</sup> Even if human thought is itself a material or chemical process, it does not follow purely economic logic and thus its contents and conclusions are not determined solely by economic conditions. Human minds can respond to material reality in multifarious ways. But on the determinism as Marx would have it, reason has no power of its own to generate meaningful principles or actions, i.e. unique thought and the ensuing real world changes. External material- or economic relations generate it all. Camus is at odds with this conclusion on the part of Marx, that ideas do not interfere significantly in history and help explain it. “We can admit that economic determination plays a highly important role in the genesis of human thoughts and actions without drawing the conclusion, as Marx does, that the German rebellion against Napoleon is explained only by the lack of sugar and coffee.”<sup>159</sup>

This ‘pure determinism’ on the part of Marx will have far-reaching consequences. Through it Marxism goes past the ordinary premise of rebellion, which is that there are no pre-established transcendent values or order, to the point of saying that in addition no such values or order could ever be established. Total negation, or nihilism, here takes yet another form. It is the total negation of transcendent principles to the detriment of the ability of the human mind to establish them for itself. If principles are deceptive, only the reality of poverty and work is true. “If it is then possible to demonstrate that this suffices to explain

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<sup>156</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 147.

<sup>157</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>158</sup> *Ibid*, 148.

<sup>159</sup> *Ibid*, 147-148.

the past and the future of mankind, then principles will be destroyed forever and with them the society which profits by them. This in fact is Marx's ambition."<sup>160</sup>

Human thought/reason is deliberately taken away from its place as a determinant of history and action and is simply placed under the rule of history. Thought must, within this theory, be unable to establish its own transcendent principles so that the revolution of shifting material (economic and social) relations can establish on its own the equality of humanity and justice to reign in the world. = Reason is condemned for having justified the status quo and it is discredited for being determined by it. Supposing that reason can intervene in history, that ideas can give shape to reality, will only lead to complacency and the justification of relations of matter and power which in fact give rise to said ideas.<sup>161</sup> The fundamental flaw of this, of course, is that Marxism is itself an idea which gave shape to reality, and in attempting to erase the efficaciousness of thought it denies also the value of human beings which only thought can establish, and which was its original motivation in its capacity as rebellious theory. What will be left are material changes without normative principles and with only a single goal of equality (or at least redistribution and social balancing) in mind, meaning that again an 'any means necessary' will appear, people will be terrorized and humanity will be harmed for its own sake. In fact, according to Marx, the situation of the proletariat must be made continuously worse. More capital must be driven into fewer and fewer hands so that eventually private property "is only separated from collective ownership by the existence of one single man."<sup>162</sup> At this point the masses will be so impoverished and wealth so centralized that only some manner of state capitalism must be overthrown by an inevitable insurrection in order for communism to reign. At best Marx's theory would thus itself justify complacency in regards to the ravages of capitalism.<sup>163</sup> Due to its determinism and due to the loftiness of the end it prophecies, Marxism looks on the sufferings of the working class with a certain degree of indifference. The intention of Marx's theory may not have been to justify indefinite tyranny and denial of human value. Yet, as Camus notes, the underlying logic necessary for such a form of government were already present in Marxism, and differing interpretations were possible.<sup>164</sup> The miscalculation on the

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<sup>160</sup> Camus, *The Rebel* 149-150.

<sup>161</sup> *Ibid*, 149.

<sup>162</sup> *Ibid*, 152.

<sup>163</sup> *Ibid*, 154-155.

<sup>164</sup> *Ibid*, 156.

part of Marx, in not expecting such interpretations to be made and politically followed through, would have been to misunderstand the kind of nihilism of which his theory was an example. Paradoxically, the denial of all values and justice as well as of the human ability to establish new principles by one's own power of freedom, does not lead to a reserved quietude but to the most ambitious and unlimited of actions.

### **III.3. Authoritarian Socialism: Political Cynicism**

The contradiction of nihilism and the political cynicism it inspires consists in simultaneously believing that there are no transcendent values or principles in the world and not being able to stand the current state of the world, one's own- and others' treatment in it. Nihilism, after all, is pure negation of everything, and it could not negate the entire world as it is without also wishing furiously that it were different. Therefore in denying everything that is, nihilism sets all its hopes on the future. "The future is the only transcendental value for men without God."<sup>165</sup> The implication of this is a desperate desire to establish a completely just world by any means necessary. The cynical law of efficiency here manifests itself radically. The world must be changed no matter what, although there are no principles to guide the struggle to come. Revolution becomes its own justification and the only good there is in an otherwise valueless world, because it will establish through destruction of everything past and present a world of the future which is furnished entirely by humankind's design and reason (and therefore finally just). Any means can be employed for the sake of this revolution and every revolutionary is ultimately nothing more than expendable ammunition. Thus terror is unleashed on the world in its most cynical form, caring not for its victims nor its perpetrators, nor even for its beneficiaries which may become victims at any point. Hannah Arendt also seems to have grasped this consequence of absolute relativity in politics, quite strikingly, when she stated that "the totalitarian belief that everything is possible seems to have proved only that everything can be destroyed".<sup>166</sup> In cynical politics, not only can any means necessary be employed, but human beings are also means. And if

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<sup>165</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 116.

<sup>166</sup> Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Cleveland: World Publishing Company, 1958), 459.

they can be used freely today for the world of tomorrow, then all humans can in theory be destroyed.

But this is the opposite of what rebellion was premised on. And yet it is precisely this political cynicism which finds its underlying logic in Marx. Because of historical determinism, human autonomy in history is denied. In other words, Marx's 'teleological socialism' results in authoritarian socialism because it is logically inconsistent with 'absolute ontological freedom'.<sup>167</sup> Humans are led by economic forces and cannot claim to co-create historical developments. In addition, because humans are merely means to an end, i.e. the end of history and the dissolution of class society, they are also permanently deprived of the value of human life. Finally, in promising a utopia, he provided the basis for claiming that any act committed to the end of that utopia would be proven justified once that future had come to fruition.<sup>168</sup> If utopia must be established by any means necessary, and if it is established only by the changes in material, economic relations, than the law which rules is once again the law of power and cunning. Force may be used, it may be used against anyone, and the need for power implies also the need to quell dissent and bend others to one's will.<sup>169</sup> "It is precisely this that Camus finds objectionable in Marx – whether one seeks to create history's end by giving history an end one desires, or one claims to have determined the nature of that end in advance of its coming into being, Camus asserts that when we live towards ends, the bodies pile up".<sup>170</sup>

So Marxism is used not only to passively justify the course of history and the sufferings involved in it. It is hereby also used to justify actively submitting others to servitude in support of the final utopia. If the advancement of industry and the concentration of wealth into a central point are necessary for collective ownership to come, an authoritarian government which controls the means of production and the economy can fulfill both these roles with maximal efficiency and certainty. "The authoritarian socialists deemed that history was going too slowly and that it was necessary, in order to hurry it on, to entrust the mission of the proletariat to a handful of doctrinaires."<sup>171</sup> The law of efficiency and the desperate

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<sup>167</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 123.

<sup>168</sup> *Ibid*, 158.

<sup>169</sup> *Ibid*, 141.

<sup>170</sup> *Ibid*, 124.

<sup>171</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 165.

need for a justice promised in the future, which was spurred on by historic materialism and nihilism, thus motivated through a logical sequence from the workings of Marxism an active movement towards authoritarianism. This form of political cynicism, recognizing no other value or justice than what will exist in the future, cannot be made to care significantly about the suffering caused along the way. "In this New Jerusalem, echoing with the road of miraculous machinery, who will still remember the cry of the victims?"<sup>172</sup>

Could at least eventually the coming of a utopia resolve these issues? It seems not, because it is unlikely that the authoritarian socialist government would even in principle ever give up their absolute power. In one of his pamphlets, Lenin, the architect of the Russian Revolution, writes that "power is necessary to crush the resistance of the exploiters 'and also to direct the great mass of people of the population, peasantry, lower middle classes, and semi-proletariat, in the management of the Socialist economy.'"<sup>173</sup> This statement from a leader of the socialist authoritarian government provides no clear point of end for the authoritarian rule and no clear beginning for the actual utopia. It seems as if authoritarian government could be prolonged indefinitely.<sup>174</sup> And this is true not only in this particular example but indeed in principle.

This is because authoritarian socialism can only become successful if either it gives up world domination or it gives up justice completely, even as an eventual goal. Beginning realistically from a national front, it can either decide to continue to attempt to rule the world by force, which will lead only to the ruin of the world through an infinite or an apocalyptic (atomic in the Russian case) war that does not ever come to ruling over everyone in peace and justice, or it can decide to give up imperialism and rule in national dictatorship while believing fervently that someday capitalism will resolve itself and justice will come as the compensation for all the citizens who are now oppressed.<sup>175</sup> In either case authoritarian socialism as a political principle (or system of principles) is forced to reject part of itself, and this is because it rests on false premises: it rests on the total malleability, unfreedom and disposability of humanity (paradoxically, for its own sake). This is in direct opposition to the original premises of rebellion which, while proclaiming the negation of a transcendently

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<sup>172</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 156.

<sup>173</sup> *Ibid*, 176-177.

<sup>174</sup> *Ibid*, 177.

<sup>175</sup> *Ibid*, 182-183.

given human nature or purpose, or of transcendent values, also affirms human freedom (which is born from said negations) and its capacity to establish on its own the value of human life and the limits on action which follow therefrom. Authoritarian socialism, in rejecting natural human freedom in favor of 'infinite malleability', sets itself up for contradiction, ending up with only the choice between betraying humanity and its mission in two separate ways: by indefinite national tyranny or by anything from indefinite international war to total (atomic) annihilation.<sup>176</sup>

It should be noted for clarification here that there is a distinct difference between the rebellious and the authoritarian denial of 'human nature'. The rebellious attitude is to deny that a human nature is given in any but the negative sense that humanity is free to establish its own nature. That is, each human being is in the first instance existence without essence but is therefore able to establish its own essence and to stand for it.<sup>177</sup> Authoritarianism, on the other hand, denies human nature in the sense that it proclaims there to be no such thing, at least not until after its domination is successful. As a result it proclaims that humans cannot choose their own essence or their own destiny, and can be molded and directed as befits the political goals of the (pseudo-)revolutionary authority. "If there is no human nature, then the malleability of man is, in fact, infinite. Political realism, on this level, is nothing but unbridled romanticism, a romanticism of expediency."<sup>178</sup> When all values are denied, all limits postponed to the end of history, there is nothing but the law of expediency. When expediency is everything, humanity is betrayed and the revolution that was started for its sake is faced with only the most desolate of choices (as seen above). This kind of failed revolution, by insisting that a new, truly just order comes to reign in the world of humanity by any means necessary and without any room for entropy or possibility of failure, definitively closes the door on that just world ever coming to be. If a 'kingdom of justice' or a 'universal City' must come absolutely, deterministically, no matter how, then it is either awaited by a world of malleable pawns or seized through the limitless sacrifice of disposable tools.<sup>179</sup> In either case there are then no more valuable humans identifiable in the world for whom this paradise is supposed to come. "He who loves his friend loves him in the present

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<sup>176</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 183-184.

<sup>177</sup> Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 438.

<sup>178</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 184.

<sup>179</sup> *Ibid*, 185.

and the revolution only wants to love a man who has not yet appeared.”<sup>180</sup> In short, if people are to be treated with limitless injustice so that they can one day receive justice, the revolution has turned against itself and no such justice will ever come of it.

In Marx’s thought the movement of rebellion turning against itself is therefore prepared, because it deifies history and negates all transcendent values and principles along with the mind’s ability to establish them anew. As a result the only justice is that which is to come, finally, in the termination of history. Meaning that positive value can be assigned to whatever advances history and humanity towards this promised future. This is the cynical Utopianism of which Camus speaks: any policy is permitted, any suffering justified, by the perfect society that is to come. Human beings, for whom this society is supposedly the home and the salvation, where they are finally actualized, where humans are actually human again and no longer slaves of a predatory economy, are nevertheless viewed by this very same theory as disposable or unreal while they suffer for this salvation. “[T]he religion of humanity will be effectively founded on the blood and suffering of humanity.”<sup>181</sup> The contradiction must at this point become quite apparent. Again a rebellion taken up in the name of human value fails to recognize that value in its subjects, and quite universally so at least until the coming of the utopia after the final revolution. In fact, rebellion suppresses rebellion in this case, because the subjects of history who suffer under revolutionary dictatorship, will naturally want to affirm their value through a rebellion of their own.<sup>182</sup> But for the sake of the coming Utopia this rebellion, these people, must be suppressed or destroyed. In familiar but profound fashion, Camus demonstrates that Marxist logic culminates in the very tyranny and dehumanization for which it sought to provide the cure. Who would expect that a ‘temporary’ dictatorship so cruel and callous would properly distribute the capital it had ceased, instead of exercising never ending repression on its citizens?

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<sup>180</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 185.

<sup>181</sup> *Ibid*, 145.

<sup>182</sup> *Ibid*, 187.

### III.4. Sartre's Defense of History

As it happens, Sartre, with whom Camus would be in disagreement throughout their respective intellectual careers, defended both Marxism and the Communist revolutions at the time against Camus' criticisms.<sup>183</sup> He accused Camus of being 'hostile to history', and argued that within the current historical context the only freedom which people have "is nothing but the free choice to fight in order to become free", implying that the value and freedom of humanity was only attainable through conflict and that Camus was engaged in useless transcendentalism.<sup>184</sup> But the claim that true human value is only achieved through conflict, or perhaps rather through rebellious struggle, is not necessarily inconsistent with Camus' claims against Marxism and authoritarian socialism. In fact we have already seen from the outset that it is only actions which for Camus can create values and principles, so it is true in this sense too that human freedom is only established in revolt.<sup>185</sup> As such rebellion is necessarily historical, even if it is metaphysical in motivation. Thus the claim that Camus is hostile to history and only interested in transcendent values which lie outside it seems to hold little water. Finally, if what Sartre really means by his statement on freedom is that humans have no autonomy until conflict is over and the Marxist prophecy of universal revolution is fulfilled, then he falls prey to the same mistakes as Marx by using human value to justify its own indefinite postponement.

It is not the same to say that humans today are continuously denied in their value and freedom, and therefore must fight through some measure of violence to affirm it, as it is to say that humans today are utterly empty of freedom or common value until a whole new world order is established. The latter is problematic because it justifies 'any means necessary' to save humanity, to the detriment of any visible target of salvation. Sartre at the time remained ambiguous on this point, however.<sup>186</sup> Ronald Santoni seems to agree with Camus' criticism of the denial of freedom and the ambiguity of Sartre's answer to it. While discussing the theme of "necessary" violence in Sartre's 'Rome Lecture' of 1964, he asks, "what is the sense of the word 'necessary' in this context? It is surely not a 'necessary' that

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<sup>183</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 123.

<sup>184</sup> Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation, eds & trans. D. Sprintzen & A. van den Hoven (New York: Humanity, 2004), 146.

<sup>185</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 11.

<sup>186</sup> Foley Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 123.



precludes freedom to do otherwise in this situation. That would violate Sartre's ontology."<sup>187</sup> Sartre, who famously stated that humans are 'radically free', seems here in danger of contradicting himself through his allegiance to both political and theoretical Marxism.<sup>188</sup> In the end, as Santori recounts, Sartre would go on to advance the claim that means and ends cannot be neatly separated, that ends inform and guide means, and that for revolutionary praxis "all means are good except those that denature the end"<sup>189</sup>. But this amounts to saying that 'any means necessary' for the revolution are justified, which is the one politically cynical principle Camus despised the most.

The problem of 'any means necessary' policy is that it is action-guidance by means of a goal and a goal alone, to the exclusion of an underlying value or limit. And that means that the policy is inflexible in the most harmful of ways: it is able, in fact it is obliged, to accomplish its goal to the detriment of the value that underlies that goal. If the goal is to feed someone such that they can continue to live, one can of course make this person into a slave such that none of their autonomous action can undermine their being fed. One can force the person to live exactly as one says, because one knows that this life will involve stable acquisition of sustenance. But the issue is that this authoritative policy, if pushed to the degree of subjugation, destroys the human that one is attempting to feed and replaces them with an automaton. The whole reason as to why they needed to be fed, because they are a worthwhile human being, is here undermined because all that is remembered is the goal. Of course for Camus this same conflict is found at the purely metaphysical stage: humanity must establish its existence, its value and its freedom in an unjust world which tends to deny these, but it cannot resort to 'any means necessary' because those means can involve the outright denial of any human nature, or individual value or freedom, for the sake of the metaphysical goal. If in order to establish the condition for humanity's sense of purpose and identity they must first be enslaved totally, there will be no recipients left for that purpose because now humanity consists of objects.<sup>190</sup> As such neither physical nor metaphysical ends can justify 'any means'. Physical ends have need of underlying reasons, of values, and metaphysical ends have need of themselves. In this sense Camus would likely agree with

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<sup>187</sup> Ronald Santoni, *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent* (University Park, PA: Penn State University Press, 2003), 48.

<sup>188</sup> Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 509.

<sup>189</sup> Ronald Santoni, *Sartre on Violence: Curiously Ambivalent*, 147.

<sup>190</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 196.

Sartre that 'ends and means cannot be neatly separated'. But he draws quite different conclusions about revolution because he sees that ends which justify any means will never be satisfactorily achieved since they are fraudulent ends from the outset. To not undermine our motivators requires limits. Even if that complicates and frustrates struggle for the important ends, flaunting all limits is at odds with reality and with logic and will come to haunt us in the form of hollow (nihilistic) pursuits.

What follows then from this investigation into the logic of self-undermining revolutions is a provisional, likely incomplete but useful list of characteristics of societies and political struggles not properly built on rebellion and its fundamental premises: unlimited use of power and violence, the trivialization or theoretical justification of human suffering and death (be it by reference to transcendence or by Utopianism), the complete denial of individual freedoms in favor of collective goals, intolerance of dissent, intolerance of difference, political realism which recognizes no limits to political action and has as its only rule the law of power and cunning: any effective method can be used, and must be if one has a goal in mind. By negation, we should then start to understand what, according to Camus, both political action and political society should in fact look like. In the next section we will undertake the elaboration, first of principles and examples of proper rebellious struggle, and second of principles and examples of truly just society and government.

## **IV. The Principles of Rebellion**

### **IV.1. Limits to Violence**

The first thing to note about Camus' positive opinions on rebellious struggle and possible revolutionary action is his insistence on the limitation of violence, and of any other political means which harm or disrespect humanity.<sup>191</sup> We may infer from our findings in the previous chapter why Camus is so particular about this. Limitless violence, it was shown, leads rebellion down a path of universal destruction, both metaphysically and in practical reality. If rebellion accepts, through its actions, that it can sanction murder to establish new justice, then it strips human life of its value which is meant to be common to all. Once it has

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<sup>191</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 48.

done this, logic dictates that the rebellion is now for no one.<sup>192</sup> But we should pay close attention now to the extent of the limitation hereby imposed. Not only is limitless killing bad, the theoretical justification of any single murder or of the use of violence more generally is impermissible because it leads down the same path: to say one killing is 'justified' leads logically to the conclusion that human value is relative instead of absolute, which contradicts the premises of rebellion. "The consequence of rebellion [...] is to refuse to legitimize murder because rebellion, in principle, is a protest against death."<sup>193</sup> We must remember that rebellion is premised on the condition of the absurd, without established moral or political order. Thus if human value became relative, it would be relative either to a new false God (as with the Jacobins' god of reason and virtue) or to the law of efficiency (as with authoritarian socialism). As such the value of human life must be absolute and murder must be impermissible.

Yet Camus is also not a pacifist, and he is not naïve about the realities of political action and social struggle.<sup>194</sup> "If rebellion exists, it is because falsehood, injustice and violence are part of the rebel's condition. He cannot, therefore, absolutely claim not to kill or lie, without renouncing his rebellion and accepting, once and for all, evil and murder."<sup>195</sup> In our real world, filled as it is with injustice and skewed relations of power, it is entirely against reality to say that any form of rebellion must avoid violence and death. To do so would be to ask oneself and others to condone injustice so as to not get one's own hands dirty. Camus' contemporary Merleau-Ponty is particularly radical on this exact point:

"We do not have a choice between purity and violence but between different kinds of violence. Inasmuch as we are incarnate beings, violence is our lot . . . Violence is the common origin of all regimes. Life, discussion, and political choice occur only against a background of violence. What we have to discuss is not violence, but its sense or its future."<sup>196</sup>

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<sup>192</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 196.

<sup>193</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

<sup>194</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 41.

<sup>195</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 227.

<sup>196</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Humanism and Terror: An Essay on the Communist Problem*, trans. J. O'Neill (Boston, MA: Beacon, 1969), 109.

Camus disagreed in large part with the consequences drawn by Merleau-Ponty, especially with his suggestion that violence can be legitimate if it is 'progressive' and that this justification can only be truly judged when 'history is over'.<sup>197</sup> But it would seem difficult for him to deny the reality, forcefully stated by Merleau-Ponty, in which violence marks in some sense every political situation, and in which the genuine emancipation of everyone would be impossible without violent conflict with established systems of power. Rebellion thus reaches a difficult ethical impasse, where it sees violence and related methods of political action (such as lies) as both "necessary and inexcusable".<sup>198</sup>

Camus' answer to this dilemma is to say first of all that because violence and murder are on his view necessarily unjustifiable, they must only ever be employed in a way which establishes their very inexcusability. That is to say, whoever takes to committing murder must simultaneously affirm, through action, that taking a life destroys rebellion as opposed to serving it.<sup>199</sup> Not only must it be a last resort, even its final necessity must not excuse it. This means, shockingly, that the rebel who kills must also annihilate themselves in the process: "If the is finally forced to kill, he will accept death himself."<sup>200</sup> This may immediately appear to be an unacceptable conclusion to some. It is one thing to say that the rebel cannot be allowed to justly kill. It is quite another to say that they may not live with guilt, while tending continuously to their limits. It is one thing to say that someone who kills must be ready to die, another to say that someone who kills out of sheer lack of other options but to accept evil passively is then obligated to kill themselves. Yet this would seem to be what Camus is saying. The seemingly unacceptable consequence, even for rebellion itself, would be that humans would be condemned to die when they were forced to kill for their life or their freedom, which seems in fact to contradict the value of humanity as a premise of rebellion in some way. As Herbert Hochberg notes, it would be a sort of "self-imposed capital punishment".<sup>201</sup>

It is for this reason, that it seems to go even against Camus' own professed philosophy of action which he was so careful to lay out, that I propose an alternative interpretation. To

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<sup>197</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 40-41.

<sup>198</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 119.

<sup>199</sup> *Ibid*, 224.

<sup>200</sup> *Ibid*, 227.

<sup>201</sup> Herbert Hochberg, 'Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity', *In Contemporary European Ethics – Selected Readings*, ed. J. Kockelmans (New York: Anchor, 1972), 345.

motivate this interpretation I will first highlight a few key passages where Camus further addresses the idea of sacrifice which is necessary to rebellious murder.

“Just as the rebel considers murder as the limit which he must, if he is so inclined, consecrate with his own death, so violence can only be an extreme limit which combats another form of violence, as, for example, in the case of an insurrection.”<sup>202</sup>

“Authentic acts of rebellion will only consent to take up arms for institutions which limit violence, not for those which codify it. A revolution is not worth dying for unless it assures the immediate suppression of the death penalty; not worth going to prison for unless it refuses in advance to pass sentence without fixed terms. If rebel violence employs itself in the establishment of these institutions, announcing its aims as often as it can, it is the only way in which it can be really provisional.”<sup>203</sup>

“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.”<sup>204</sup>

These passages may imply that Camus' stance on murder is not quite as harsh as it seems at first sight. It appears that what Camus is saying is that self-sacrifice, the willingness to stake oneself against the harm done to another in order to affirm the inherent value of both parties, can be fulfilled in the context of struggle where oneself and the other both carry risk. It is not justifiable for a rebel to kill someone to advance their goals, keeping themselves in a safe position of superiority the entire time. It is only tolerable for a rebel to stake their life against that of another when the struggle for the establishment of human value and freedom comes to this extreme. This is the difference between the executioner and the militant rebel. To kill from safety, bereft of risk or repercussion, implies the sacrifice and devaluation of another life. To kill 'in the hazards of a struggle' implies instead that the rebel sees no difference between their own life and the life of the person with whom they are in conflict, in terms of value. Therefore they insist that both parties take on the same risk of death. In this sense it is implied that murder involves self-annihilation, that the value of a human life cannot be compensated with ends but only with means, the means being another

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<sup>202</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 233.

<sup>203</sup> *Ibid*, 233-234.

<sup>204</sup> *Ibid*, 234.

human life. The result, who lives or dies in the struggle, should be of no concern to the logic of rebellion: what matters is that both parties, or at least the rebel, had already consented to die, which sets the absolute limit which Camus insists on for murder.

In rebellion, principles and institutions which embody those principles are inevitably at stake, and the only principles worth consenting to die for are those which involve the common value of humanity. Violence and murder must be absolutely limited to those occasions where it is necessary and worthwhile, too, to stake one's own life and one's own freedom. No end and no institution is worthwhile if it involves the cold killing of helpless adversaries or innocents. If a principle or institution requires it, it is inherently and logically against rebellion and the common value of humanity. Conversely, if such means are employed to establish an institution or a principle, by an inevitable process of logic it will turn out to deny human value and to betray rebellion. Means and ends are here, in rebellion, inextricably linked in terms of values. The means are only sanctioned by the end, but the end is also only judged worthy of the means if the means are in fact congruent with the end and logically function on the same motivating value. This stands in stark opposition to the authoritarian and nihilistic principle of 'any means necessary', where the end is judged so just or necessary that any means may be employed to achieve it. Then unavoidably means are sanctioned which not only are themselves unjust and destructive, but which transform the end itself into something unjust and reveal the whole underlying logic of both means and end to involve a total denial or absence of underlying values. In such a case just destructive acts and desolate results remain. It is this outcome which Camus seeks to avoid when he pleads, in a sense, for the principle of 'a life for a life', where only those prepared to die in the process can resort to killing. It is intended as a limiter to the means employed, which therefore protects not just the rebel but the rebellious end from becoming compromised by false logic. Established order is challenged and (hopefully) overthrown through actions which imply that no harm or death incurred in the process is truly permissible, even if it becomes necessary. Because it is impermissible for humanity to suffer and die, rebels may only fight, not execute their opposition, and they may only fight so long as they find opposition (and to the degree that they do). The requirement of risk of death implies the risk of failure taken on the part of the whole rebellion, since the limits to rebels' tactics mean that not only are they necessarily individually vulnerable to death or

harm as they fight, they are also vulnerable to the very tactics they choose not to employ. They are vulnerable to political cynicism and to cynical violence. But this is the price rebellion must be willing to pay, according to Camus, in return for its dignity and the dignity of humanity.<sup>205</sup>

## **IV.2. The Inclusivity of Struggle**

Beyond the limitation of means, there is one other principle of rebellious struggle which appears to be central for Camus: its inclusivity. What is paramount is that rebellion is taken up for the sake of the human value in everyone, and therefore it ought also to include everyone.<sup>206</sup> And in practice this must be understood not just as fighting for every individual as a member of the human species, having regard for them only in their generalized aspect. We may recall that the French Revolution failed in part because of its insistence, against factions, on a homogenous human nature.<sup>207</sup> The solution then seems clear: in accordance with human freedom as established by rebellion we ought to admit only of a human nature which cements this freedom and which therefore makes human difference a principle to be celebrated instead of suppressed.<sup>208</sup> It is in the context of this principle of the inclusivity of social struggle that I now introduce a concrete example of what I consider to be political action in accordance with rebellion: the LGBTQIA+ movement.

The LGBTQIA+ movement exemplifies Camus' political values in that they practice to its extreme inclusive struggle and openness to revision and critical thought. As much as they are mocked for being 'the skittles squad', for 'inventing a new pronoun every day' and as much as some may bemoan their demands of affirmation as confusing or impractical, it is precisely in the breadth of their struggle that a real potential for human emancipation in general lies. It is the will to fly a thousand flags, to turn factionalism into its own universalism, which holds the logic capable of defending humanity without jeopardizing its particularity and diversity. In advancing a never ending scheme of identities they affirm that we are the same precisely in how we are all different, in our capacity to look in the mirror and identify

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<sup>205</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 125.

<sup>206</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 196.

<sup>207</sup> *Ibid*, 76.

<sup>208</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

ourselves freely and our inability to be consistently homogenized. This also does justice to Camus' ideas about the human creative capacity, wherein humanity is, and should be enabled to, always look at reality as they find it and, while accepting its facticity, add something to it in an effort to improve it.<sup>209</sup> Camus finds this tendency, this simultaneous affirmation and partial negation of the world in its unjust or imperfect qualities, in artistic expression.<sup>210</sup> But I suggest it may also be seen in the transgender or nonbinary person who, accepting the material conditions of their bodies, attempt still through (partially aesthetic) transformative actions to reproduce themselves in a new way which they prefer and in which they feel more at home. They thereby seem to be engaged in creative activity, as they readily play with and transform the social conventions of gender through dress, expression or even surgery.

Perhaps nowhere else will one also find a greater understanding of the struggle in displacement, urging proponents of the LGBTQIA+ community to avoid falling into essentialism and therefore priming them for the universal struggle of humanity. There is no shortage of intellectual activity within the movement which aims at ever expanding understanding and accommodation of difference in identity, condition, manner of expression, or manner of experience.<sup>211</sup>

No better person is there, too, to fight for everyone than someone who is not sure who or what they truly are (other than someone who wants to be themselves). An undesignated, undecided person is in principle an ally to everyone, and it once again reminds us of Camus' own aversion to partisanship, and his will to be part only of a political group of "those who are not sure they are right".<sup>212</sup> The LGBTQIA+ movement has proved precisely by constantly changing even its very own name and abbreviation, which of course is meant to properly designate what struggles it includes, that it is not necessarily as dogmatic as its critics might insist it is.<sup>213</sup> It has shown itself open to the revision of principles, so long as the fundamental principles of respect for personhood, respect for attempts at meaning and respect for

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<sup>209</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 97.

<sup>210</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 208-209.

<sup>211</sup> Tina Goethals, Elisabeth De Schauwer, and Geert Van Hove, 'Weaving Intersectionality into Disability Studies Research: Inclusion, Reflexivity and Anti-Essentialism', *DiGeSt. Journal of Diversity and Gender Studies* 2, no. 1–2 (2015): 75–94.

<sup>212</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 30.

<sup>213</sup> 'Gender Dogma Threatens to Pulverize Women's Rights | Opinion', *Newsweek*, 21 March 2022, <https://www.newsweek.com/gender-dogma-threatens-pulverize-womens-rights-opinion-1689424>.



difference remain consistently in view. With these central values in mind, which it derives from the origins of its incarnation, the community seems caught up constantly in a whirlwind of self-criticism in spite of which it demands to move forward as best as possible. The standing intuition seems to be that 'at the very least we can agree that things can and must be better', that space is necessary for our differences to breathe, and that the filling of this space will be deliberated on as an ongoing part of the process.

As such, just as for Camus the rebel must always remember the premises of their first step into obstinate action; the positive power of freedom and affirmation along with the negative power of refusal and the negative state of denial and displacement, the LGBTQIA+ community remembers and draws upon its origin of fear, frustration and confusion.<sup>214</sup> It chooses love and affirmation as calls to action precisely because they do not yet exist: neither identity nor the identified truly exists before the struggle starts. But as soon as they have seen themselves, even slightly, they have a subject of struggle which can only be multiplied in the faces of yet more people. Negatively, we are undesignated and unsure 'by nature', while positively we are free to designate ourselves and affirm those traits, those clothes, that body, that relationship, that community in which we feel comfortable and strengthened in our will to life. We are also free to change and exchange all these things as we see fit, keeping in clear view the negation in which we live that makes 'who we are' a constantly moving target. Camus wants rebels to will to live, in the first instance, and to fight for life and dignity without ever forgetting that neither of these were a given. To want to live you must also want to be yourself, and for this you have to recognize yourself.

The great contribution of the gays, the transgenders, the lesbians, the non-binary folk, the asexuals, the community whose point it perhaps is that I cannot ever completely enumerate them with confidence, is to remind us that also this self-recognition is not to be taken for granted. Camus urges us to insist on justice even though it does not reign currently in the world, to every human life the greatest satisfaction to the degree possible despite the fact that we will fall short of the ideal.<sup>215</sup> The LGBTQIA+ community can be interpreted as making a similar and related demand which rides on the same fundamental principle of human value: to insist on ourselves as we find ourselves despite having no set designation,

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<sup>214</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 11-12.

<sup>215</sup> Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 28.

to give everyone the space to identify and express themselves to the best of our ability despite the fact that perhaps no one will ever fully understand themselves or each other. They are exemplary rebels, because they exemplify the struggle to be oneself (which includes but is not limited to being alive) in a world where that means both a continuous investigation and a continuous protest against denial.

Herein lies the potential for a universal struggle for the sake of all humankind; investigating, affirming and demanding the unique worth of everyone, for so long as they stay true to their own logic. Now, just as much as- if not more so than ever before it is paramount that they and those communities/movements like them be preserved against homogenization and oppressive violence. Because if we do not choose for them, if we neglect them, we choose against them, risking the doom of being not simply confused but despairingly confused, shaping ourselves to foreign standards that we worship but do not understand and thereby ultimately remaining confused and affirming only that we are nothing. The alternative to rebellious inclusion and affirmation of self and difference is an exclusion which will ultimately exclude us all, since we are really not homogenous, and which will therefore ultimately deny us all. It may be noted that there are still many contemporary threats the movements' type of inclusive and transformative struggle, most prominently and recently in the USA.<sup>216</sup> The LGBTQIA+ community holds the potential to stay true to the premises of rebellion and to follow them through, despite the attendant hardship and confusion. At least it is a confusion that affirms, as opposed to a proposed simple 'catch-all' system of social standards which feigns identification but really spreads confusion in the much more negative sense that no one really 'fits in', wherefore all are kept stuck in exclusion and become more lost than ever.

### **IV.3. Democracy and an Open Society**

The consideration of the more distinctly political, societal principles to be extrapolated from Camus to some degree can be inferred from not only the failed revolutionary governments of the previous chapter but also the proper forms of rebellious action just considered. The

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<sup>216</sup> 'Analysis | Florida's Law Limiting LGBTQ Discussion in Schools, Explained', *Washington Post*, accessed 30 June 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2022/04/01/what-is-florida-dont-say-gay-bill/>.

obvious general principle is that government power may never be unlimited, such that it must abide by and support the inherent freedom of each separate human individual. In the first place, in line with his rejection of the theoretical justification of murder, Camus is strongly opposed to the death penalty in that it represents the state's formal justification (in a court of law) of the inexcusable death of a human being.<sup>217</sup> Not only does it ostensibly deny the inherent value of human life by supposing there may be political justifications for killing someone who, for all intents and purposes, is even already subdued by the state, it also violates the very next political principle of importance: that of democracy.<sup>218</sup>

Democracy is in the first place entailed by Camus' insistence on the freedom and unique value of each individual, which implies that each should have their needs tended to and be in control of their own life as far as possible.<sup>219</sup> This means that in the structuring of society, in its tending to the needs of everyone and its control imposed onto the citizens through law, each person's voice must be heard. Therefore they all require equal participation in political society, presumably through voting. This implies a sort of sub-principle which is additionally responsible for the unacceptability of the death sentence in rebellious thought: the open society. After all, a democratic society cannot function properly if political differences in opinion are not properly respected (to the degree that they do not themselves undermine democracy). We have already seen, again, in the French Revolution the culmination of the attempt to do away with factions.<sup>220</sup> The desire to root out factions within political society is at odds with the reality that human beings are different, and a government which does not respect difference will terrorize its citizens and in the end be overtaken by one faction or another.<sup>221</sup> Finally then, rebellion is aimed at a democratic society which is open to factions attempts to the best of its ability to reconcile the needs of all, avoiding (for love of humanity in each individual) also neglecting its minorities. All of this means that the society must be open both to differing opinion and to political change based on those opinions. And this is also why the death penalty must be abolished: it precludes the possibility that the criminal of today is vindicated tomorrow and restored in the freedom. In an open democratic society, what is the law at one point in time can change through for

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<sup>217</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 103-104.

<sup>218</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>219</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 220.

<sup>220</sup> *Ibid*, 77.

<sup>221</sup> *Ibid*, 81.

instance the assertion and increased understanding of the perspective of a particular social group. As such the death sentence, from the proper rebellious perspective which implies that the law may always turn out to be 'wrong', is always at risk of killing an innocent person. It is no coincidence that the killing of innocents and criminals who could be rehabilitated was the main concern of Camus in his opposition to the death penalty.<sup>222</sup> Ultimately, the death penalty is always just a potential tool for a state to become more totalitarian, by eliminating difference so that it cannot speak, even from prison.

#### **IV.4. Democratic Socialism**

Thus far the political principles put forward have not been very transformative as set against our current political context in at least the Western world. But we embark now on the explication of more radical principles, and the concrete examples of what kinds of policies they might lead to. It has already been stated that government must affirm human value and must enact or allow the instrumentalization of its people. From this was drawn the principle of democracy. However, in addition to this human beings must also be affirmed in their ability freely to create and improve the human realm of living through their rational (rebellious) pursuit of unity. One concrete way in which this pursuit is significantly manifested, besides art, according to Camus is productive labor. Camus agreed with Marx on one thing at least, and that was his exaltation of 'work'. "The very core of his theory was that work was profoundly dignified and unjustly despised."<sup>223</sup> And herein lies part of Camus' criticism of capitalism: he too objects against the "degradation of work to the level of a commodity and of the worker to the level of an object."<sup>224</sup> Productive labor, according to Camus, is the most direct way in which humanity could interfere in history and, by their both affirming and partially negating the material world, rationalize it through the work of hands into something more of use to humanity (the product of their labor). This is the realization of the tension between negation and affirmation which Camus mentions again and again when referring to rebellion: the worker says 'yes' to the world by working in it and applying their hands to it, and says 'no' in that they want to improve on it and fit it to the ideal form in

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<sup>222</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 105.

<sup>223</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 157.

<sup>224</sup> *Ibid*, 157.

their minds (as an artist would as well).<sup>225</sup> In this way the laborer would be affirming both their own human value and freedom, as a creator, as well as the value of all others in society for whom they produce the goods they do. And this metaphysical end is achieved by the most concrete physical action which, while establishing a value which in some sense transcends it, takes its place in the course of history. Yet the economic and societal structure of capitalism is currently in the way of the realization of this potential, because it does not allow the worker to control his own process of creation:

“But art and society, creation and revolution must [...] rediscover the source of rebellion where refusal and acceptance, in unique and the universal, the individual and history balance each other in a condition of the most acute tension. Rebellion, in itself, is not an element of civilization. But it is a preliminary to all civilization. Rebellion alone, in the blind alley in which we live, allows us to hope for the future of which Nietzsche dreamed: ‘Instead of the judge and the oppressor, the creator.’ This formula certainly does not authorize the ridiculous illusion of a civilization controlled by artists. It only illuminates the drama of our times in which work entirely subordinated to production, has ceased to be creative. Industrial society will only open the way to a new civilization by restoring to the worker the dignity of a creator; in other words, by making him apply his interest and his intelligence as much to the work itself as to what it produces.”<sup>226</sup>

In abstract, this argument seems to imply that when productive work is allowed not only to be carried out but to be directed – the process itself being contemplated and given shape – by the workers, then humanity generally is once again capable of choosing their life and their activity affirmatively and making it truly ‘their own’. As a result the workers are enabled by society to affirm life, to find meaning in their projects and the effort of their bodies which stands against an uncaring universe with the profound intention to make this world a home as much as possible.<sup>227</sup> This intention could then instantiate a world where production is performed by people in order to provide for- and support one another. The worker would be a creator and not just a producer because they, through their productive work, would be similarly to the artist taking reality as it is and adding to it something new in the form of an

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<sup>225</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 217.

<sup>226</sup> *Ibid*, 216-217.

<sup>227</sup> *Ibid*, 9, 11.

intentional artifice which aims to make reality better and somewhat more unified: production and the product standing now in service explicitly of the will of worker and consumer alike, both then instantiate a clear common value and solidarity. Finally, at least to the degree that it is possible in a still imperfect and irrational world, 'to each according to their need (and value)'.

This stands opposed to capitalist society, where one is alienated from one's production through becoming an increasingly small and directed part of the process, wherein as a result the main reason for participating in production is for the sake of oneself. It also stands against authoritarian socialist society in a similar sense, where one is still employed as a cog in a machine of progress through production with little choice or direction as of yet, and where one's activity stands in service of an indistinct far future through which one's own needs and value are instead obviated. In either case production, similarly to the previous analysis of revolution, does not truly stand in service of humanity, which it only could if it stood in simultaneous service to the worker and the consumer/general society. In particular, then, this argument pleads for both worker and consumer, but perhaps primarily the worker, to be given a measure of control over the process of production. Given the prevalent and likely unreversible upscaling and labor division of modern production, this argument from Camus could be argued to speak more concretely in favor of the democratization of the workplace (or similar socialist policies). Inclusion of not only workers but consumers also may justify something akin to a stakeholders model of corporate responsibility and accountability, wherein even general society may at times weigh in on the decision-making processes of corporate entities.<sup>228</sup> It is often complained of stakeholder theory that it would collapse the 'free' market into an almost state-run economy, but since we are considering here the revolutionary movement brought about by rebellion and its premises and principles, the radical nature of the proposed model is not an automatic ground for dismissal.

Camus wants to say that the worker should learn from the artist, both in taking the direction of their productive labor and in making it into the endeavor of adding, through human

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<sup>228</sup> R. Edward Freeman, 'Stakeholder Theory', in *Wiley Encyclopedia of Management* (John Wiley & Sons, Ltd, 2015), 1–6.

artifice, some manner of reason, justice and solidarity to the world: “In this way it will bestow on everyone the dignity which rebellion affirms.”<sup>229</sup>

Finally, then, we are brought to the point of arguing, from Camus’ perspective, for the concrete political and economic organization of democratic socialism. Because although Camus criticized authoritarian socialism and the Communist Party quite explicitly for destroying the freedom of the human beings they were professing to support, he admitted in speaking for his newspaper *Combat* that they indeed agreed with the Communists on their “collectivist ideas and social programme, their ideal of justice, and their disgust with a society in which money and privilege occupy the front ranks”.<sup>230</sup> Camus too envisaged then at least a “collectivist economy”, even if along with it he insisted on a “liberal politics”, by which he seemingly meant the kind of democracy of which we have been speaking: with an equal voice in government for all and an open platform for political speech which does not seek to crush dissent.<sup>231</sup> In light of this, I will shortly lay out some key features of a democratic socialist society, using the constructive critical theory of Nancy Fraser established in conversation with Rahel Jaeggi.<sup>232</sup>

In their joint work, Nancy Fraser and Rahel Jaeggi first touch on the point that both capitalist and non-capitalist societies seem to have markets, and that it is thus not necessary for a socialist society to have no market for the buying or trading of goods whatsoever.<sup>233</sup> Yet a distinction is made between capitalist and non-capitalist markets: capitalist societies subject to the workings of the market the flow and distribution of raw materials, social surplus (the surplus value generated through production and distribution), capital goods (machinery, tools and equipment for production), credit and the like. Meanwhile a socialist society would hold precisely these goods in common and would distribute them through ‘non-market mechanisms’ (such as democratic planning), presumably in an evenhanded way and so far as possible according to the need of each. It would still, then, make use of the market to distribute consumer goods: the goods provided by the use of raw materials, capital goods and the like in order to directly serve human needs, but not the goods necessary for

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<sup>229</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 217.

<sup>230</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 69.

<sup>231</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>232</sup> Fraser, Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*.

<sup>233</sup> *Ibid*, 23.

production.<sup>234</sup> Note at this point that this distribution of goods is aimed precisely at what is important to Camus: through the democratic direction of the means of production as well as the social surplus engendered by that production the worker dually gains control over their creative labor.<sup>235</sup> Either through voting or through being merely given the means to produce for themselves they will first gain the ability to some extent to direct their own process of creation, affirming their freedom and allowing them to establish by choice their own value to others (in choosing what and/or how to produce). It also allows the worker to establish others as valuable by choosing to create what they need or have a use for. Second, the worker will gain a say in the allocation not just of the wage they earn as under capitalism, but of the surplus which the products of their hands generate. This will further cement the worth of the worker, as well as everyone engaged in the democracy and the market, who are all established in solidarity with each other to be equally valuable members of society through an equal say in the investment of the social surplus. The essentiality of the democratic distribution of social surplus is notably grasped by both Jaeggi and Fraser and by Camus. Camus complains, in concert with Marx, of how capitalist society degrades the worker 'into an object', and therefore bars him from being a being with choices and considerations of value to make.<sup>236</sup> Meanwhile Jaeggi states, with Fraser's agreement, that the "removal of fundamental questions from the purview of human determination, the ceding of them to an impersonal mechanism geared to the maximal self-expansion of capital – this really is perverse."<sup>237</sup> Thus they both see that what is valuable about the democratic intervention in the economy, especially in the allocation of the final reserve of value it produces, is how it legitimizes the worth and the autonomy of the human being and of its contribution to the collective project of painstaking improvement. In affording this kind of participation to everyone, in allowing everyone equally to direct and partake in production and thereby to feed in human solidarity on the joy of creation in a still otherwise meaningless and hostile world, it seems that democratic socialism indeed would stay true to the premises of rebellion.<sup>238</sup> It would, in light of rebellion's principles on violence, be a tense and risk-involved venture to fight to achieve it. Indeed it would be very difficult, especially

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<sup>234</sup> Fraser, Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 23-24.

<sup>235</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 217.

<sup>236</sup> *Ibis*, 157.

<sup>237</sup> Fraser, Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 25.

<sup>238</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 214.



since Camus was convinced a socialist political transformation would only be successful if it were internationalist, carried out on the world stage.<sup>239</sup> And yet for Camus even the venture would be better for our dignity than complacency in capitalism or a cynical revolution. It would be a revolution, and a subsequent society, which at last “will exclude nothing.”<sup>240</sup>

## **Conclusion:**

In my research I have aimed to find out what concrete political principles can be drawn from Camus’ post-existentialist philosophy. I have found that Camus was certainly, among other things, a political thinker, and that from his work concrete political principles and their concomitant actions and societal structures can be deduced. I’ve begun my investigation by explicating rebellion as a tense combination of denial and affirmation, a form of refusal for the sake of something of value.<sup>241</sup> I have then argued that that value is the value of human life, and that therefore rebellious struggle is a collective form of struggle with an eye to the ‘we’.<sup>242</sup> Since what it negates is a previously established order, and since what it negates in protection of is the value in a collective which must still go on to act, I have argued that rebellion is political in its consequences. Rebellion culminates logically in revolution, which entails, both physically and metaphysically the establishment of a new order (of government and of justice).<sup>243</sup> The more concrete principles derivable from and for this political venture are to be found in the original premises of rebellion which must never be denied. Their denial leads inevitably to either the construction of a new illegitimate formal order (such as formal virtue) or to political cynicism.<sup>244</sup> In either case some sense of human value and freedom are denied, and innocent humans are subjugated, terrorized and killed.<sup>245</sup> To avoid such self-undermining revolution, both rebellious action and the ‘revolutionary government’ at which it aims must stay true to the premises of rebellion. This is then achieved through an approach which refutes the injustice in the world but not the whole world, not human

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<sup>239</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 43-44.

<sup>240</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 248.

<sup>241</sup> *Ibid*, 2.

<sup>242</sup> *Ibid*, 10.

<sup>243</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

<sup>244</sup> *Ibid*, 143, 145.

<sup>245</sup> *Ibid*, 58.

beings.<sup>246</sup> It will limit itself in the means, especially violent means, which it may use, accepting thereby a great deal of risk as to success for the sake of consistency with itself.<sup>247</sup> The struggle, which thus aims to be inclusive of the needs of everyone, will lead most likely to a democratic socialist societal structure.<sup>248</sup> Such a structure would introduce democratic control into the allocation of goods which is commonly in capitalism regulated by the market, thereby giving the worker (and the citizen generally) the control over the means of production and the social surplus.<sup>249</sup> This control will then in turn allow humans to realize what Camus conceives of as their 'creative power': through reason to improve the world with the work of their hands and their political choices, all in human solidarity.<sup>250</sup> This society then fully affirms the human being in its autonomy and its inextricable value.

Camus' philosophy thus can be put to use both for criticizing and for guiding political action. It allows one to evaluate the alternatives present in every action and every choice of ideology which comes with political engagement. And it is my view that this philosophy does, to a degree, already presume the person reading it to at least have preexisting political motivations. After all, Camus never seeks to justify thoroughly the value of human life, but instead states that it is a fundamental premise of rebellion which motivates it, and that indeed it is an instinctive sense brought up by the experience of injustice.<sup>251</sup> This, however, I would argue is not a problem for the kind of philosophy practiced here but rather an advantage. It may be hubristically arrogant of philosophers to think that they can jumpstart rebellious political struggles. A staunchly Marxist-Leninist friend of mine, who is not otherwise engaged in philosophy, has remarked to me several times while I discussed my work on this thesis that he does not care about ideas. He cares about actions, and about people going hungry and dying. What I take him to mean is that philosophical ideas are largely unnecessary to motivate social struggle, since when people are simply materially deprived this ought to be enough to revolt. I tend to agree that we cannot claim to be the impetus of struggle. That is, as Camus sees it too, the sheer experience of deprivation, of frustration and oh humiliation which marks the wrongs done to people. I do disagree with

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<sup>246</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 236.

<sup>247</sup> Foley, *Albert Camus : From the Absurd to Revolt*, 125.

<sup>248</sup> *Ibid*, 36.

<sup>249</sup> Fraser, Jaeggi, *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, 23-24.

<sup>250</sup> Camus, *The Rebel*, 214, 217.

<sup>251</sup> *Ibid*, 4.

him on one thing, however, which is his claim that philosophical ideas are not subsequently useful. I am partial to Nancy Fraser's defense of her own work in *Capitalism: A Conversation in Critical Theory*, in which she claims to be aiming "to provide a big picture within which people actually engaged in social struggles and critiques of capitalism of various kinds can locate themselves and begin to conceptualize or imagine their relations to one another."<sup>252</sup> If we assume, as I think we should, that individuals will raise themselves up to resist without us already, then our role is creating opportunities for such resistance to further comprehend itself and the world around it. Ideas are of value and they do seem to guide actions in a significant sense. But the point is not for academics to lead the charge with their most coherent ideas. It is simply to connect the rebels to each other and to their own goals in an ever tighter way. We may help them to understand their struggle as shared with yet others, or to identify false ideologies which will turn out self-undermining. Camus seems to have attempted such a project in the most ambitious form possible: he has attempted to represent the sharedness of the human struggle, and to criticize every major ideology which was at large at the time. Sartre remarked at one point that Camus gave off the impression "that civilisation had been stuck on top of him" and that "he did what he could with it, which is to say, he did nothing."<sup>253</sup> I do not know if the attempt was as unfruitful as Sartre suggests. But I am certain that he was right to try.

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<sup>252</sup> Gaël Curty, 'Rethinking Capitalism, Crisis, and Critique: An Interview With Nancy Fraser', *Critical Sociology* 46, no. 7–8 (1 November 2020): 1336.

<sup>253</sup> Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus – A Life*, trans. B. Ivry (London: Vintage, 1998 [1997]), 415–416.