

### III. Revolt: A Wager against the Absurd

Camus's contemporaries like Sartre, Ponty, and de Beauvoir have often tagged Camus as a confused philosopher who, simultaneously, talks about the meaninglessness and absurdity of the world on one hand and the necessity to create a moral ethics of revolt on the other. However, the problem is that these philosophers are partial in their assessments in many ways. First, they mistake by taking Camus as, exclusively, the writer of the absurd who doesn't have the freedom to think beyond the bounds of it. And if he does so, as Camus has done by evolving a more profound philosophy of the revolt, they consider that he is rejecting the absurd and flouting in the sphere of utopian morality. But the reality is that Camus never intends to remain at the point of the absurd. For him, the absurd, full of pessimism and despair, is indispensable and the first requirement for the creation of a true and relative ethics of revolt. Camus explains the same idea in an interview, on November 15, 1945, with Jeanine Delpéch, by saying that:

Accepting the absurdity of everything around us is one step, a necessary experience: it should not become a dead end. It arouses a revolt that can become fruitful. An analysis of the idea of revolt could help us to discover ideas capable of restoring a relative meaning to existence, although a meaning that would always be in danger. ("No, I am not an Existentialist" 346)

In another interview with Gabriel d' Aubarede on May 10, 1951, Camus clarifies his stand upon this 'absurd-revolt' conflict and rejects the partial assessment of his works as symbolic translations of the philosophy of the absurd as he states:

This word "Absurd" has had an unhappy history, and I confess that now it rather annoys me. When I analyzed the feeling of the Absurd in

*The Myth of Sisyphus*, I was looking for a method and not a doctrine. I was practicing methodical doubt. I was trying to make a “*tabula rasa*”, on the basis of which it would then be possible to construct something. (“Encounter with Albert Camus” 356)

The second argument in the defence of Camus can be given that these critics have mistaken the ideas depicted in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and other initial writings solely those of Camus. While Camus, many times, has rejected this subjective approach in writing and has proclaimed that “[he] should like to have been an objective writer” (“The Enigma” 159). Hence, merely writing about the absurd doesn’t make Camus the writer of despair. Camus emphasizes the same when he writes in his essay “The Enigma”:

Of course, it is always possible to write, or to have written, an essay on the notion of the absurd. But after all, you can also write about incest without necessarily having hurled yourself on your unfortunate sister, and I have nowhere read that Sophocles ever thought of killing his father and dishonring his mother. The idea that every writer necessarily writes about himself and depicts himself in his books is one of the puerile notions that we have inherited from Romanticism. (158)

Therefore, Camus becomes “a prophet of the absurd”, not by choice, but by an error of subjective approach of literary assessment (Camus, “The Enigma” 159). Moreover, the concept of the absurd was the only essence of Camus’s times. Like all men of his age Camus “grew up to the sound of the drums of the First World War, and [their] history since that time has remained murder, injustice, or violence” (Camus, “The Enigma” 160). Therefore, the absurd is an idea which he didn’t invent but merely “discovered in the streets of [his] time” (Camus, “The Enigma” 159).

Further, Camus's critics are forgetting the fact that absurd and revolt are inseparable, a fact which Camus is aware of from the very beginning. Even in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, it is evident that to be an absurd man, one has to be in a state of constant confrontation between the absurd reality and the desire to overcome it. Therefore, like the rebel, the absurd rejects and accepts at the same time. To make it more clear Camus writes in "The Enigma":

. . . how can one limit oneself to saying that nothing has meaning and that we must plunge into absolute despair? Without getting to the bottom of things, one can at least mention that just as there is no absolute materialism . . . , there is likewise no total nihilism. The moment you say that everything is nonsense you express something meaningful. Refusing the world all meaning amounts to abolishing all value judgment. (159-160)

Supporting Camus's reasoning, John Cruickshank also contemplates in the same tone and opines:

A 'philosophy of the absurd' runs into contradictions as soon as it is expressed in words since such expression assumes at least a minimum of coherence at the very centre of that incoherence which it sets out to analyze. A logically satisfactory analysis of the absurd would have to be silent and unexpressed. (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 95)

But Camus gives voice to the absurd and thus paves way for the creation of a positive ethics of revolt from the apparently pessimistic concept of the absurd.

No doubt, *The Myth of Sisyphus* ends with advocating quantitative morality as an ethics derived from the absurd, its implication in practical life during the Nazi

occupation of France makes Camus understand the inherent horrors in the theory of quantitative ethics and compels him to re-examine the consequences of the logic of the absurd. And it is from here that Camus endeavours to make resistance and revolt as the only legitimate ethics derived from the absurd. Here, the praiseworthy thing for Camus is that even after witnessing the bleak absurdity of the world, which reached a barbaric climax at the end of the Second World War; Camus remained uncompromised and authentic by not seeking refuge in any traditional morality or philosophy. On the contrary, he tried to create, from the ruins of individual absurdity, a humanist ideology of collective revolt. Jacob Golomb has beautifully expressed this idea in his book, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus*:

The impact of the war on Camus was no less decisive than on Sartre, although in response to it Camus did not turn to the authenticating politics of existentialist Marxism. He did, however, manifest a decided transition from the negative freedom and authenticity of the heroic but lonely individual to the socially conscious humanism of *The Rebel* and *The Plague*. (187)

### ***Letters to a German Friend – An Attempt to Revolt***

Though, the concept of revolt is the main argument dealt in his long essay *The Rebel*, the basis for this idea of revolt can be traced in Camus's four letters published as *Letters to a German Friend* and his essays, published under the title of "Neither Victims nor Executioners". Written after the publication of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *Letters to a German Friend* were written in 1943- 1944, during the German occupation of France. Cruickshank finds these letters as Camus's outcry of his "dissatisfaction with the possible practical consequences of the absurdist position" (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 91). Written in the guise of letters from an

ally of the French Resistance to an ally of the Nazis, these letters can be read “as a development of the ideas already expressed in *Caligula*, perhaps even as letters from Cherea to Caligula” (Foley 30). These letters are a substantial move away from the logical expression of the absurd towards dealing directly with its ethical and moral consequences.

The first letter opens with a recollection of the so called German friend’s blind nationalism who earlier says:

The greatness of my country is beyond price. Anything is good that contributes to its greatness. And in a world where everything has lost its meaning, those who, like us young Germans, are lucky enough to find a meaning in the destiny of our nation must sacrifice everything else. (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 5)

But for Camus, this judgement is only partially acceptable. While he accepts the world’s absurdity, he doesn’t take it as a recommendation for ‘everything is permitted’, and therefore, he replies, “No . . . I cannot believe that everything must be subordinated to a single end. There are means that cannot be excused” (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 5). Throughout the *Letters*, Camus repeatedly asserts the common intellectual background shared both by the German nihilism and Camus’s absurdism. However, both are different in their conclusions. Camus writes:

For a long time we both thought that this world had no ultimate meaning and that consequently we were cheated. I still think so in a way. But I came to different conclusions from the ones you used to talk about, which, for so many years now, you have been trying to introduce into history. (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 27)

The apocalyptic pogrom, generated by Nazism, compels Camus to change his sides and instead of approving this logical holocaust, Camus, very confidently, though at that time not with a logical argument which he tries to give later in *The Rebel*, chooses “a fierce love of justice” instead of power and glory (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 27). Making a direct contrast between the degenerated nihilism of German ideology and his positive absurdism, Camus retorts:

You never believed in the meaning of this world, and you therefore deduced the idea that everything was equivalent and that good and evil could be defined according to one’s wishes. You supposed that in the absence of any human or divine code the only values were those of the animal world – in other words, violence and cunning. (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 27)

Therefore, for the Germans (not the German people but the advocates of Nazism), “man was negligible” whose soul could be killed (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 27). For them, the only pursuit for the individual was “the adventure of power”, and the only morality was “the realism of conquests” (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 27). No doubt, logically Camus cannot refute the jungle-law of Nazism, but he rejects this consequence of the absurd and chooses the Resistance movement to fight against the Germans. Hence, as Cruickshank opines, “Starting from the same absurdist basis as the Nazis he (Camus) was now in the opposite camp. The only explanation he can offer is his passionate desire for justice” (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 91). Camus further explains that the difference in their conclusions lies in the fact that the Nazis “readily accepted despair” while he “never yielded to it” (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 27). Again, he opines that the Nazis take the unjust condition of humanity as an excuse to add

more injustice and despair, while Camus takes this appalling human situation as an opportunity “to fight against eternal injustice, create happiness in order to protest against the universal unhappiness” (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 28). As a result, instead of simply yielding to despair and injustice, Camus wants men to “rediscover their solidarity in order to wage war against their revolting fate” (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 28). Instead of despair and nihilism, he chooses “justice in order to remain faithful to the world” (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 28).

In this way, for Camus, the absurd becomes the originator of the ethics of human solidarity, a solidarity gained through the realization of collective suffering which becomes a step forward to Sisyphus’s individual suffering emphasized in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Thomas Busch seems to explain the same point when he inquires that the purpose of Camus’s separating himself from German nihilism can be accomplished “only if [his] experience of the absurd, and [his] experience being cheated, can lead to the further step that all people’s desires”, not just his own, “ought to be fulfilled . . . that the absurd should be diminished” not just in his life, but in “all lives. . . . This is what subsequent works, *The Plague* and *The Rebel*, seek to accomplish” (qtd. in Foley 33). In this way, a platform is raised for the creation of true rebel who affirms the man even in his enemy. Camus explains in the true soul of a rebel and says, “We want to destroy you in your power without mutilating you in your soul” (Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* 31). Friedman also emphasizes the same aspect of Camus’s letters and says that “*Letters to a German Friend* is a dramatic example of dialogue that affirms one’s enemy even while opposing him, respecting in him the humanity he fails to respect. . .” (258). However, Philip Thody blames Camus’s arguments as being “emotive than philosophical” which “come down

to saying that because a man wants a thing then it must exist” (81). But he seems to be partial here. No doubt, these letters are full of emotion, but they do not support the need of the existence of any prior morality. Camus exalts humanity for its capability of creation, if it ever desires, even out of the ruins of nothingness. He knows that man doesn't need the help of any outer superhuman ethics to deal with the human problems.

In this way, written during the practical implications of German nihilism, Camus's *Letters to a German Friend* indicates a desire and possibility to create positive ethics from the absurd. Therefore, those who consider that Camus has shifted from his earlier position of the absurd reasoning are wrong because it is “not a change in his thinking but a change in the focus of his attention” (Foley 33). He is aware of the fact that the absurd can't be overlooked, but he is equally determined to struggle against it. Therefore, he hasn't discarded Meursault or Caligula, but has simply determined to make Cherea more logical and eloquent over them.

### **Be not a Victim or an Executioner**

Like *Letters to a German Friend*, Camus's eight articles serially published in the *Combat* during November 19, 1946 to November 30, 1946, under the title “Neither Victims nor Executioners”, contribute in framing the idea of revolt which will be further elaborated in *The Rebel*. These articles are deep contemplations, on Camus's part, about the contemporary nihilistic and absolutist Europe which has been “divided between victims and executioners” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 257). In September 1945, Camus makes this note: “We are in a world in which we must choose to be either victim or executioner – there is no other choice. And the choice is not easy” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 257). But how could Camus, the hope of the times, tolerate millions of Jews being murdered, executed, or

deported? How could Camus, the defender of democracy, approve the absolutism of Stalin regime which had replaced justice with State and freedom with History by legitimatizing every kind of action realizing an indefinite end? How could Camus favour the unjust imperialism of France in Algeria? He couldn't. And that is why he makes a sound cry of alarm against this reign of terror. Rejecting both nihilism and political realism, Camus advocates an ethics of relative justice and freedom which, while ensuring morality and politics, proposes to be neither victims nor executioners and forcefully makes the case that nothing can justify murder.

“The Century of Fear”, the opening article of “Neither Victims nor Executioners”, elaborates the apocalyptic tendency of twentieth century which has, in the wake of nihilism and absolutism, threatened the entire planet with destruction by converting Hiroshima and Nagasaki into the heap of rubbish through atom bomb. Camus observes that the world is governed by nihilistic and absolute forces which are “blind and deaf to warnings, advice, and supplications” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 258). Dialogue is aborted and the reign of silence and fear is governing the world. Murder is legitimatized and human life is considered futile. In such situations, what Camus urges is not to blame fear but to realize it and rebel against it.

Camus has been criticized both by Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, because of his rejection of violence and murder. They charge him of “living in utopia” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 260). But Camus insists that the refusal of the theoretical justification of violence does not amount to pacifism. What he aspires for is “not a world in which people don't kill one another (we're not that crazy!), but a world in which murder is not legitimized” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 260). Diverting the Utopian charges towards Marxism and Capitalism, Camus explicitly claims that both “Marxist and capitalist ideologies . . . are based on

the idea of progress and both are convinced that “the application of their principles must inevitably lead to social equilibrium”; and therefore, both are “utopias of a much greater degree” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 261). He further argues that both of Marxists and Capitalists are using violence in the cause of an imagined non-violent future. Therefore, “the refusal to legitimize murder is no more utopian than today’s realistic attitudes” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 261). What Camus proposes, hence, is not absolute utopia, but “conditions for a modest political philosophy, that is, a philosophy free of all messianic elements and devoid of any nostalgia for an earthly paradise” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 261).

Camus’s critique of Marxism is more eloquent when he attributes to both Nazism and Marxism the common supposition i.e. “the end justifies the means”, which eventually legitimizes terror (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 262). He argues that both have embraced the efficacy of an action as an absolute end. For example, in nihilistic ideology, “everything is permitted, success is what counts”, in Marxist philosophy, “history is taken “as an absolute (first Hegel, then Marx: since the goal is a classless society, anything that leads to it is good)” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 262). In such conditions, the only hope lies, according to Camus, in liberal socialism which gives “priority to moral issues (the end does not always justify the means)” and which strives for the “legitimate desire” of invoking “a small number of principles more important than murder” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 263). However, Camus doesn’t favour Socialism blindly. On the other hand, he suggests that the socialists have to come out of the confusion that the ideals of revolution and socialism can’t be achieved without being a Marxist, because Marxism and these two ideals are, in Camus’s sense, “irreconcilable” (Camus,

“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 263). Making this argument more clear, Camus further explains:

. . . if Marxism is true, and if there is a logic to history, then political realism is legitimate. It is equally clear that if the moral values favoured by the Socialist Party are fundamentally right, then Marxism is absolutely false because it claims to be absolutely true. From this point of view, the well-known ideal that Marxism will ultimately be transcended in favour of a more idealist and humanitarian philosophy is merely a joke, an inconsequential dream. (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 263)

In such confusing contradictions, Camus finds the hope only in the socialists’ choice. Either they will admit the Marxist principle that “end covers the means, hence that murder can be legitimized” or they will reject Marxism as an absolute ideology and “limit their attention to the critical aspects, which is often still valuable” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 264). He further argues that if they choose the first option, they will come out of their moral dilemmas; if they choose the second, “they will demonstrate that . . . the end of absolute utopias” is upon us (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 264). And it is this second choice that paves way for Camus’s relative utopia, “one that is more modest and less ruinous” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 264).

After exposing the reality of Marxist ideology, Camus determines to expose the reality of revolution. In “The Revolution Travestied”, the 4<sup>th</sup> article of “Neither Victims nor Executioners”, he says, “Ideally, a revolution is a change of political and economic institutions intended to increase freedom and justice in the world.

Practically, it is a series of often unfortunate historical events that brings about this change for the better” (264).

He contemplates that contrary to its idealistic pattern, revolution has been the patron of war and bloodshed and therefore, has failed to realize its pre-supposed ideals of justice and freedom. He further argues that true revolution “makes no sense in the current historical situation” because of two reasons (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 264). First, the repressive apparatus of modern state, its force of tanks and planes, require similar weaponry power on the part of the would-be revolutionaries. Second, because of the increasing economic and political relationships among different nations, “we can no longer be solitary revolutionaries, because there is no place in the world today for either conservative or socialist politics within the borders of a single nation” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 265). Hence, the only revolution we can talk about is an international one. But, once again, Camus explains that both of the world powers i.e. Russia and America being equally powerful, “there is no possibility of an international revolution today without an extremely high risk of war” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 265). In such situation, revolution must either be accepted or rejected in toto. Camus writes, “If you accept it, you must consciously acknowledge responsibility for the war to come.” In its rejection, there remains two options – “either admit that you prefer the status quo” which is completely a utopian position as it assume that history is immobile, or else “you must redefine the word “revolution”” and accept Camus’s “relative utopia.” Hence, in Camus’s observation, the only real possibility, inspired by the spirit of reality, is neither carnage, nor the impossible dream of bringing history to an abrupt halt, but the relative utopia “that leaves some chance of human action” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 266).

Enhancing the sphere of his relative utopia, Camus claims that in the wake of internationalism, this new order has to be universal. And to achieve this objective, Camus suggests two alternatives. First is, one of the world powers i.e. Russia or America can unify the world with the help of her powers. However, Camus finds this option loathing, not on emotional grounds, but simply because “such unification cannot take place without war or, at the very least, an extreme risk of war”, a war that would leave “mankind so impaired and so impoverished that the very idea of a world order would surely be anachronistic” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 267). Separating himself from the Marxist utopia which is ready to ignore numberless deaths for the sake of future happiness, Camus retorts:

From the standpoint of Marxism, a hundred thousand deaths are nothing compared with the happiness of hundreds of millions. But the certain death of hundreds of millions of people is too high a price to pay for the supposed happiness of those who remain. (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 267)

Hence, however noble the desired ends of this unification may be, its means are so apocalyptic that they put success in doubt, and therefore, are not acceptable.

The second means of achieving universal order is that of international democracy. Although, Camus observes, the very establishment of the U.N.O. is determined for international democracy, the reality is that it has become the symbol of “international dictatorship” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 268). Therefore, the necessity of time is “to place international law above governments” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 268). It means that a parliament should be made through worldwide elections and that parliament should make laws which must be followed by all. Camus’s thoughts are very contemporary even today as the U.N.O. is remained

nothing but a puppet in the hands of U.S.A. and other veto powers. While in international law, war against a nation is prohibited, U.S.A. and England have made the whole world witness of their dictatorship by raising wars against Iraq, Afghanistan, and now, it might be against Iran. In such conditions, the only option that Camus (at that time) offers is “to resist this international dictatorship on an international level using means not in contradiction with the ends we seek” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 268).

Once again, rejecting the accusation of utopian thinking, Camus argues that the world being governed by anachronistic thinking, we have no choice but those of “anachronistic political thinking and utopian thinking” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 270). The first is killing us and “realism therefore forces to embrace the relative utopia”, proposed by Camus (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 270).

For the realization of international democracy, Camus offers a new Social Contract which will finally bring about lasting structural reforms tantamount to a revolution. He proposes the creation of world-wide labour communities which would be linked with international study groups. These labour organizations would bring relief to as many people as possible, whereas the study groups would attempt to define the values on which the new international order should be based. More accurately, the purpose of these groups should be to meet the confusions of terror with clear language and at the same time to set forth values for the creation of a peaceful world. Once again, stressing upon the indispensable nature of morality in politics, Camus strictly affirms, “. . . their first objectives could be to formulate an international code of justice whose first article would abolish the death penalty everywhere and to give a clear statement of the principles necessary for any civilization based on dialogue” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 273).

Fed up with a vast variety of philosophies, Camus claims that what is needed is not a new ideology but “a new way of life” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 273). The requirement is to reflect and clearly decide “whether we must add to the sum of human suffering for still indiscernible ends . . . or we must economize as much as possible on bloodshed and pain simply to give other generations . . . their chance” (Camus, “Neither Victims nor Executioners” 274). Talking in the voice of Mahatma Gandhi, who served his whole life for the sake of non- violence, Camus clearly states, “. . . I would never count myself among people of whatever stripe who are willing to countenance murder, and I would draw whatever consequence followed from this” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 274). Having decided his choice, Camus urges us to choose between “those who if need be would be willing to commit murder or become accomplices to murder, and those who refuse to do so with every fiber of their being” (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 275). No doubt, the first group is more powerful, but Camus is hopeful, if not about human condition then about man himself, and says:

But I have always believed that if people who placed their hopes in the human condition were mad, those who despaired of events were cowards. Henceforth there will be only one honourable choice: to wager everything on the belief that in the end words will prove stronger than bullets. (“Neither Victims nor Executioners” 276)

However naive or impractical Camus might have appeared to his contemporaries including Merleau-Ponty and Sartre, his new social-contract remains the only hope, not merely in 1940’s but even today and, might be, forever, for the peaceful co-existence of the world population. Camus didn’t believe in preaching and tried to work practically in accordance with his relative utopia. In 1948 and 1949, he

was at the centre of the formation of the new organization – the *Groupes de Liaison Internationale*, whose aim was to offer “concrete international friendship with non-bureaucratic material aid” and also “to let Europe know about the existence of non-conforming Americans and Soviet dissidents” who rejected all kinds of totalitarianism (Lottman 460). Similarly, in 1948, Camus openly supported the American man, Garry Davis, who by “renouncing his American citizenship to proclaim himself citizen of the world”, somehow, gave practicality to Camus’s vision of internationalism (Lottman 449). In marked contrast to Camus, and to his much distress, Sartre refused to accompany Davis and agreed with the communists that “the Gary Davis affair was nothing but hot air” (de Beauvoir, *Force of Circumstance* 180). Camus also established a newspaper, *La Patrie mondiale*, on December 22, 1948, with a group of young people who were none other than the members of the Council of Solidarity with Gary Davis. Its goal was to “combat all war psychosis and replace it with a peace psychosis” (Camus, *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944-1947* 301). While Camus is always blamed of being living in utopia, Camus always refutes this charge and once again writes in the article “What Is the UN Accomplishing?”:

In any case Davis is proposing a solution, and you are declaring it to be utopian. You remind us of the father who invokes “realities” to warn his children against being too adventurous. Sometimes, though, the child honors the family by disobeying the father and quitting the family grocery. In other words, history is never anything other than utopia made flesh. (*Camus at Combat* 303)

Though, Sartre did not respond directly to Camus’s “Neither Victims nor Executioners”, in his celebrated essay “What Is Literature?”, he rejected Camus’s idea of denying the legitimacy of violence and argued that albeit violence “under whatever

form it may show itself, is setback . . . it is an inevitable setback. . .” (qtd. in Foley 47). A direct response to “Neither Victims nor Executioners” was made by Emmanuel d’Astier de la Vigerie, editor of the Communist newspaper *Liberation*. His reply to Camus, published in the April 1948 edition of *Caliban*, was entitled “Wrest the Victim from the Executioners”. For d’Astier, it was necessary to recognize the legitimacy of violence for the realization of ultimate peace and happiness. “You flee politics”, wrote d’Astier, “and you take refuge in morality. What a long road travelled since *La Peste!*” (qtd. in Lottman 436). He found it shocking that Camus equated Capitalism and Communism. To it, d’Astier gave a rejoinder and argued that in refusing to choose, in trying to save bodies, Camus, “a lay saint”, becomes the unwitting accomplice of Capitalism (qtd. in Lottman 436). To this Camus replied quickly in the issue of the *Caliban*, dated June 15- July 15, 1948, in an article entitled “Where Is the Mystification?”. Refuting the charges of pacifism, once again, with more vigour and force, Camus objected the legitimacy of political violence:

I have never argued in favour of [non- violence]. . . . I believe that violence is inevitable; the years of Occupation taught me that. To be honest, during that time there were terrible acts of violence which caused me no problems. I will not therefore say that all violence must be suppressed, which although ideal, is utopian. I claim only that we must refuse all attempts to theoretically legitimize violence, whether as an absolutist state or in the interests of a totalitarian philosophy. (qtd. in Foley 48)

Accused of unwitting accomplice of Capitalism, Camus reminded d’Astier whose accomplice he was and wrote, “Those who claim to know everything and to settle everything end up killing everything. The day comes when they have no other

rule but murder, no other science than the poor scholastic arguments which occasionally serve to justify murder” (qtd. in Lottman 437).

In this way, all the messages of *The Rebel* have been fore-stated by Camus in these articles. He rejects the accusations of pacifism and utopianism while rejecting with equal force the political realism of contemporary Marxism.

### ***The Rebel* – A Theory of Constant Struggle**

Published in 1951, *The Rebel* is Camus’s most criticized philosophical work. However, Camus considers it his most favourite among all of his books. Talking about Camus’s objective behind writing this lengthy philosophical essay, Lottman writes:

Nothing less than to examine in depth and in history the theories and forms of revolt, in an attempt to discover why ideals are perverted – revolt becoming murder (Prometheus becoming Caesar) – and then to attempt to lay true paths to necessary revolt against our common fate from which crime – even legitimated, state-sponsored crime – would be rigorously excluded. (482)

What I personally feel after reading this lengthy philosophical essay on revolt is that it is an ambitious attempt, and a courageous one too, on Camus’s part to bring forth the reality of revolutions scattered throughout history. It is an enquiry into the very fact that how innocent and pure revolutionary ideals degenerate into absolute formulas, and how these formulas further transform into totalitarianism and the police-terror. The book is not relevant just for the 1940’s era when the so-called prophet of socialism i.e. Stalin and Franco, turned the revolutionary spirit into concentration camps, and that also, for the betterment of the people! It can also be taken as a guiding map to understand the contemporary world scenario where

thousands of millions of innocent people have been dumped for the sake of absolute ideals. Today, America with her European allies, is executing its totalitarian ambitions, though unlike Stalin and Hitler, in the disguise of attempting to restore democracy in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, and Iran. If only Camus were alive today, he would have been the most eloquent opponent of American policies.

Re-emphasizing the criminality of our times, Camus claims that “we are living in the era of premeditation and perfect crimes” where philosophy and theology become “perfect alibi” for the criminals and are used “even for transforming murderers into judges” (*The Rebel* 11). Yesterday, murder was put on trial; today it is the law. In such times, the most important question, according to Camus, is whether the contemporary political violence should be accepted with indifference or it should be revolted.

Camus observes this murderous situation as the result of taking the absurd complacently, which eventually ends up in nihilism. However, Camus, without refuting or reversing the position of the absurd described in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, tries to explain that the absurd does not lead to nihilism but to revolt. He logically summarizes the theme of the essay and says, “This essay proposes to follow, into the realm of murder and revolt, a mode of thinking that began with suicide and the idea of the absurd” (*The Rebel* 13).

No doubt, in its pure logic, the sense of the absurd makes murder a matter of indifference, as Camus explains:

If one believes in nothing, if nothing makes sense, if we can assert no value whatsoever, everything is permissible and nothing is important.

There is no pro or con; the murderer is neither right nor wrong. One is

free to stoke the crematory fires, or to give one's life to the care of lepers. Wickedness or virtue are just accident or whim. (*The Rebel* 13)

Hence, if we profess the absurdist position, we should be ready to kill. However, the reality is that this logic doesn't satisfy the absurd, because the absurd condemns murder. The final conclusion of *The Myth of Sisyphus* rejects suicide as the consequence of the absurd consciousness, because, for the very existence of the absurd, the confrontation between human questioning and the silent world is necessary. Suicide would mean the end of this encounter. Hence, "the absurdist reasoning recognizes human life as the simple necessary good . . . because without life the absurdist wager could not go on" (Camus, *The Rebel* 14). Now, if suicide is denied, the absurd can't be partial in accepting murder with indifference because "the moment life is recognized as a necessary good, it becomes so for all men. One cannot find logical consistency in murder, if one denies it in suicide" (Camus, *The Rebel* 14). Further, ". . . if one denies that there are grounds for suicide, one cannot claim them for murder. One cannot be a part-time nihilist" (Camus, *The Rebel* 15). Therefore, the absurd can't be blamed for the contemporary political violence and absolute nihilism which misuse the absurd philosophy as an alibi to justify contemplated murders. On the contrary, by realizing that the absurd is not the fate of an individual but is destined to all humanity, the absurd paves way for the orientation of the ethics of solidarity which ultimately rejects murder and permits the emergence of the ethics of revolt.

Defining the qualities of a real rebel, Camus observes that the rebel is, first and foremost, "a man who says no" but who also "says yes as soon as he begins to think of himself" (*The Rebel* 19). To make it clear, Camus takes the example of a rebel slave, who, by saying no to his master, affirms the existence of a value which he thinks is indomitable and must be respected. This negation affirms the existence of

limits and borderline on absolute freedom which must not be crossed. Therefore, “every rebellion tacitly invokes a value” (*The Rebel* 20). Camus opines that “rebellion is not, essentially, an egoistic act” (*The Rebel* 22). Undoubtedly, the rebel demands some values for himself, but those values are common to all men, including the master. Therefore, when the man rebels, he rebels for everyone. Though Sartre has also valued the concept of revolt, he hasn’t seen this revolt in its collective sense, which differentiates him with Camus. Contrary to existentialism, Camus, with this collective rebellion, affirms the validity of human nature, as he says:

An analysis of rebellion leads us to the suspicion that, contrary to the postulates of contemporary thought, a human nature does exist, as the Greeks believed. Why rebel if there is nothing worth preserving in oneself? The slave asserts himself for the sake of everyone in the world when he comes to the conclusion that a command has infringed on something inside him that does not belong to him alone, but which he has in common with other men – even the man who insults and oppresses him. (*The Rebel* 22)

It is because of the presence of certain common values that revolt can break out “at the mere spectacle of oppression of which someone else is the victim” (*The Rebel* 22). Having established this, Camus is able to put the basic question examined in this essay and says:

Man’s solidarity is founded upon rebellion, and rebellion can only be justified by this solidarity. We have then the authority to say that any type of rebellion which claims the right to deny or destroy this solidarity simultaneously loses the right to be called rebellion and actually becomes an accomplice to murder. In the same way, this

solidarity . . . only comes to life on the level of rebellion. . . .  
 [Therefore] to exist, man must rebel, but rebellion must respect the  
 limits that it discovers in itself – limits where minds meet and, in  
 meeting, begin to exist. (*The Rebel* 27)

Revolutionary thought, therefore is to be “in a perpetual state of tension” (Camus, *The Rebel* 27). Hence, in studying rebellion and its results, it has to be enquired again and again whether it remains faithful to its first noble promise or whether, through lassitude or folly, it forgets its purpose and plunges into a mire of tyranny or servitude.

Concluding the introductory part, Camus reaffirms the fact that the spirit of rebellion accomplishes in a process of thought that is already convinced of the absurdity and apparent sterility of the world. The only difference is this – in absurdist experience, suffering is individual, while from the moment rebellion begins, “suffering is seen as a collective experience – as the experience of everyone” (Camus, *The Rebel* 27). Therefore, Camus argues, the first thing that should be realized by a mind “overwhelmed by the strangeness of things” is the fact 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” (*The Rebel* 27). Here, individual unhappiness becomes collective unhappiness. Living the value of rebellion with Descartes’ ‘cogito’ i.e. ‘I think, therefore I am’, Camus explains that “rebellion is the common ground on which every man bases his first values. I rebel – therefore we exist” (*The Rebel* 27). Emphasizing again the presence of common values to all men, Camus declares that it is because of the presence of common values that men recognize themselves. Rebellion, though paradoxically, is an act which demands the same recognition; it is a demand for “clarity and unity” (Camus, *The Rebel* 29).

Metaphysical rebellion, which is a claim for unity and order on universal level, upraises against “the suffering of life and death...against the incompleteness of human life...” (Camus, *The Rebel* 30).

Camus observes that in its initial position, metaphysical revolt cannot be confused with atheism, because originally the rebel doesn't deny the validity of God. He simply talks to Him as an equal. But the problem starts when this effort is done for the desire to conquer. Camus realizes this reality and says, “The slave starts by begging for justice and ends by wanting to wear a crown. He too wants to dominate. . . . Human rebellion ends in metaphysical revolution” (*The Rebel* 31). Therefore, instead of realizing the ideals of true rebellion, revolution ends up in putting God to death and begins the desperate effort to create, at the price of sin, if necessary, the dominion of man. This is the reality of almost all the historical or political revolutions executed in the world. Camus is often mistaken by Sartre and other critics for his negative attitude towards revolution. But Camus doesn't mean that revolution is the anti-thesis of rebellion. He explains that the fault is not in rebellion but in the fact that in the course of time, “rebellion forgets its original purpose . . . and finally abandons itself to complete negation or total submission” (*The Rebel* 31). Thus, by rejecting the tension or the limit, for which the rebellion is evoked, it degenerates into either nihilism or totalitarianism which legitimizes murder and enslavement in the name of revolution. This, being the reality of the times, becomes the sphere of examination for Camus's *The Rebel*.

Before analyzing the tradition of revolution in history, Camus gives examples of two archetypes of metaphysical rebels, Prometheus and Cain. While Prometheus rebels against gods by stealing fire from heaven and giving it to humankind; his rebel is a creator of values since by denying supremacy of gods, Prometheus tries to give

value to humanity. On the other hand, Cain, by killing his brother Abel in the name of revolt against God, negates all values, whether social or spiritual, mundane or transcendent. He is the first nihilist whose revolt is an attack both on God and the values of human life. And the tragedy is that our history of rebellion, says Camus, “has far more to do with the children of Cain than with the disciples of Prometheus” (qtd. in Foley 60).

Camus begins his evaluation of the journey of metaphysical revolution with Sade, with whom, he thinks, “really begin the history and tragedy of our times” (*The Rebel* 43). Camus argues that the first coherent offensive to the value of metaphysical rebellion is that of Sade’s who deduced only the “absolute negative” from the sacred theory of rebellion (*The Rebel* 32). Sade’s *Dialogue between a Priest and a Dying Man* mocks the very idea of God and His grace. Camus points out the partial approach of Sade’s rebellion which, in the fury of its desire for limitless freedom, becomes the epitome of destruction. Sade uses the concept of God for his unbridled freedom. For him, God is “a criminal divinity who oppresses and denies mankind” (Camus, *The Rebel* 33). He derives the legitimacy of murder from the cruelty of God because “if God kills and repudiates mankind there is nothing to stop one repudiating and killing one’s fellow men” (Camus, *The Rebel* 33). Camus observes that Sade, by using God as an alibi for killing, repudiates man and morality. But with equal force, he repudiates the concept of God in the name of nature or instincts. Paradoxically, Camus examines, Sade’s rebellion aims for liberating humanity but ends up in libertine, solely because he forgets the limits. He talks about absolute freedom which has no alliance with virtue and justice. However, Camus makes us surprised by observing that this “addict of refined ways of execution” never justifies legal crime (*The Rebel* 36). He hates capital punishment because no one is so virtuous to have the

right of killing someone else after serious meditation. For Sade, it is an open battle where “you cannot simultaneously choose crime for yourself and punishment for others. You must open the prison gates or give an impossible proof of your own innocence” (*The Rebel* 36). Hence, in spite of his destructive rebellion, Sade is more moral than the later revolutionaries by accepting the game of murder impartially. He doesn't hesitate to accept personal annihilation after the total destruction and even realizes that there is no satisfaction after this bloody rebellion. Camus evaluates:

Sade's incontestable merit lies in having immediately demonstrated . . . the extreme consequences of a rebel's logic – at least when it forgets its true origins. These consequences are a hermetic totalitarianism, universal crime, an aristocracy of cynicism, and the desire for an apocalypse. (*The Rebel* 42)

However, Camus sarcastically goes on that it is our misfortune that Sade has been partially followed by the coming generations of revolutionaries as they accept his concept of his unbridled freedom but reject his hatred for meditated crime.

This task of rebellion is further carried out by the Romantics who, in Camus's opinion, are equally separated from the true rebellion by their preference for evil in the name of revolt. Romanticism, Camus states, with its “satanic rebellion” forgets its “positive content” and emphasizes on its “powers of defiance and refusal” (*The Rebel* 43). Like Sade, the romantics, in their rebel against death and injustice, exalt evil and murder. Their sole excuse is the same that of Sade's as Camus writes, “. . . human injustice is created in parallel creation, deliberate violence shall be its answer” (*The Rebel* 45). By this addition of despair into the already despaired world, rebellion reaches at such a point where there is no difference between evil and good.

Camus takes the example of Milton's Satan, who tries to justify his excesses in the alibi of the sorrows suffered by him. Hence, without exactly advocating crime, the romantics stress on paying homage to a basic system of revenge which they illustrate with the traditional images of the outlaws or the criminals with good conscience. Camus explains that "their works are bathed in blood and shrouded in mystery" (*The Rebel* 46). He declares that the purpose of romantic rebellion becomes not creation of values which it should be, but simply the defecation of moral and divine law. Observing further, Camus declares that this nihilistic heritage of Milton and other romantic rebellions (excluding Byron and Shelley) was claimed by Baudlaire and Lacenaire – "the poets of crime" (*The Rebel* 48). One part of Baudelaire's ideas opens way for the upcoming revolutionaries who will justify and commit murders in the name of humanity. Camus quotes Baudlaire's argument: "the real saint is someone who flogs and kills people for their own good" (*The Rebel* 49). In this sense, romantic rebellion strengthens nihilism by legitimatizing murder and evil in the name of rebellion against general evil.

No doubt, the romantic rebellion exalts evil and rebels against God, Armand Hoog observes that "God is not yet dead in them" (qtd. in *The Rebel* 50). But with Dostoevsky, Camus observes, the tone of rebellion changes forever. His immortal character, Ivan Karamazov in *The Brother Karamazov*, sides with mankind and declares man's situation as unjust. While Sade and the romantics plead for human evil in the response to divine evil, Ivan pleads for justice which he ranks above divinity. With Ivan, God is put on trial. For him, if evil is inevitable to divine creation, "such creation is unacceptable" (Camus, *The Rebel* 50). Thus, Camus analyzes, with Dostoevsky, the mysterious God and his grace is repudiated for the reign of justice. Camus further explains that while the romantic rebel revolts against "God for being

the fountainhead of hate”, Ivan explicitly rejects “God as the fountainhead of love”, because it is love which can make us consent to the injustice, even “to the death of innocent children” (*The Rebel* 51).

Ivan rejects the profound relationship, introduced by Christianity, between suffering and truth, and is ready to reject the truth of God (even if it exists) for the sake of justice as he declares, “If the suffering of children . . . serves to complete the sum of suffering necessary for the acquisition of truth, I affirm now onwards that truth is not worth such price” (qtd. in Camus, *The Rebel* 51).

Even if God does exist, Ivan rejects such God whose truth is paid by evil, suffering, and death of innocents. Hence, Ivan’s rebellion refuses divine salvation. His rebellion wants all or nothing. Camus contemplates that Ivan’s is the struggle between truth and justice where truth is unacceptable because it is unjust. Ivan declares openly, “All the knowledge in the world is not worth a child’s tears” (qtd. in Camus, *The Rebel* 51).

It can be said from the above discussion that while Sade’s rebellion is destined for the attainment of absolute freedom which justifies murder, Ivan aspires for absolute justice, even at the cost of the rejection of immortality. But this extreme determination results into the most controversial dilemma, since the aspirant of justice eventually reaches at the logic of murder. Ivan is caught in this dilemma. Camus argues that with the death of immortality, Ivan has to accept the death of morality also because, “if there is no immortality, then there is neither reward nor punishment” (*The Rebel* 52). Ivan, though with much desperation on his part, reaches at this nihilistic conclusion: “I believe that there is no virtue without immortality”, and also “I only know that suffering exists, that no one is guilty, that everything is connected, that

everything passes and equals out” (Camus, *The Rebel* 52). But if there is no virtue, there is no law and “All is permitted” (Camus, *The Rebel* 52).

From here on, Camus analyses the history of contemporary nihilism clearly marks its beginning. The very Ivan, who so vehemently takes the part of innocence, from the moment he rejects divine coherence and tries to live life according to his own rules, legitimizes murder. Starting from revolting against an unjust God, Ivan reaches at the law of murder. He consciously accepts his dilemma – to be virtuous and illogical, or logical and criminal. Ivan chooses, though this choice turns him mad, the later and allows his father to be killed.

But Camus argues that the real progress, achieved through Dostoevsky in the history of rebellion, is his urge to pursue this revolt to its bitter end for remaining in a permanent state of rebellion. This bitter end of metaphysical rebellion is metaphysical revolution where God has been overthrown and man has replaced Him. Unfortunately, this new god forgets the reasons of his becoming God and accepts murder and crime as permissible in the absence of immortality. It is because of this forgetfulness that a kingdom of Grand Inquisitors and Caesars is established. They, in the name of “unification of the world” and “universal happiness”, permit crime and prepare the way for universal massacre (*The Rebel* 55).

While Ivan couldn’t accept this absurdity of justice without God and got mad, Camus examines that Nietzsche dared to meet this absurdity face to face. He argues that Nietzsche realizes the apocalyptic consequences of this conflict, but with an eye of a diagnostician. He is ready to kill God and his morality, however, not to extol this cataclysm, but to transform it in a renaissance.

Nietzsche considered himself “the first complete nihilist of Europe” not by choice, but by condition of his times (Camus, *The Rebel* 57). With him, Camus

argues, Ivan's question "Can one live as a rebel?" becomes "Can one live, believing in nothing?" (*The Rebel* 57). And Nietzsche's answer is affirmative. For him, the only need is to accept nihilism in its final consequences and create values, not in the name of God, but in the name of man. Hence, Nietzsche accepts the entire burden of nihilism and rebellion. Camus examines that Nietzsche rejects both conventional morality and Christianity as they are special types of immoralities, unable to guide man because they are nihilistic in themselves. If nihilism is the inability to believe, Christianity and its morality reject the reality of man and "substitute the mere shadow of man for a man of flesh and blood" (Camus, *The Rebel* 59). Likewise, for Nietzsche, socialism and all forms of humanitarianism are nihilistic because of their denial of what is for the sake of what should be.

Relating Nietzsche to the trend of rebellion, Camus adds that Nietzsche is already a rebel by accepting the fact of God's death. However, Camus clearly states that it was not Nietzsche's project to kill God. He found him dead in his times. His contribution to rebellion is that he understood the consequences of God's death beforehand and realized the need to control and direct this rebellion so that it could be saved from apocalypse. In this way, Nietzsche's nihilism is not criminal and doesn't take God's absence as an excuse for murder. Camus presents his ideas as:

If nothing is true, if the world is without order, then nothing is forbidden; to prohibit an action, there must, in fact, be a standard of values and an aim. But, at the same time, nothing is authorized; there must also be values and aims in order to choose another course of action. (*The Rebel* 62)

From here on, Ivan's logic of 'if nothing is true, everything is permitted' is replaced with an equally profound logic of Nietzsche i.e. 'if nothing is true, nothing is

permitted'. Therefore, Nietzsche's rebellion opens the way neither to suicide nor to murder but to the superhuman task of creation for which he was always ready to die. He accepted the reality of this world and tried to find his salvation through this world only. His rebellion, in Camus's view, sums up in the word creation.

But Nietzsche is misused, misused by his progeny of murderers and tyrants. His will to power is misinterpreted as an excuse for oppression. He dreamed of "tyrants who were artists", but he forgot that "tyranny comes more naturally than art to mediocre men" (Camus, *The Rebel* 66). His insistence that the individual should go before the eternity of species is misinterpreted as a means of oppression in the name of this new God. Camus's indication is directly towards Hitler, who, with a blundering desire for power, adopted in Nietzsche's name the anti-Semitic deformity. Camus further regrets that a stubborn supporter of "the supreme equity of the supreme intelligence which is the mortal enemy of fanaticism", Nietzsche is set up, "thirty three years after his death, by his own countrymen as the master of lies and violence" (*The Rebel* 67). In this way, injustice is done to Nietzsche. His philosophy, brilliantly illuminated by the nobility and sufferings of an exceptional mind, has been demonstrated to the world by the hideous lies and corpses from concentration camps. Nietzsche rightly cries out: "My conscience and yours are no longer the same conscience" (qtd. in Camus, *The Rebel* 67).

But is there nothing in Nietzsche that can be used in support of definitive murder? Camus examines and declares that Nietzsche's complete affirmation says yes to murder also. Like others, Nietzsche forgets that rebellion is a negation of lie and crime, and complete affirmation will dupe its purpose. Actually, he believes too much in the goodness of man and imagines that man will not use crime as a means to attain to desired ends. But the 20<sup>th</sup> century proves him wrong by deploying every means to

attain its totality. Therefore, however partially Nietzsche has been interpreted; he unconsciously paves way for the creation of extremist ideology like Nazism where everything is permitted for the success of superman like Hitler. Camus rightly declares, “Placed in the crucible of Nietzschean philosophy, rebellion, in the folly of freedom, ends in biological or historical Caesarism” (*The Rebel* 71). And we have witnessed both in the persons of Hitler and Stalin, respectively. In this way, both negation and affirmation, in their absoluteness, lead to murder. While absolute negation affirms crime in the name of creating unity, absolute affirmation affirms murder to attain totality. Both are done in the name of infinite unity which has not yet been realized.

After going through the vast series of metaphysical rebellions, Camus concludes that the conclusions of these rebels have proved fatal to the rebellion itself, as all of them laid aside the burden of rebellion, rejected the tension and chose either the comfort of tyranny or of servitude. Once again, rejecting the argument that rebellion is atheism, Camus explains that it is a desire for a religion which seeks clarity. He says, “Rebellion is a form of asceticism. . . . Therefore, if the rebel blasphemes it is in the hope of founding a new god” (*The Rebel* 73). He further argues that the aims of rebellion are always noble, but the time when it reaches to its conclusions, it becomes ignoble. He explains:

Each time that it defies the total rejection, the absolute negation of what exists, it destroys. Each time that it blindly accepts what exists and gives voice to absolute assent, it destroys again. Hatred of the creation can turn to hatred of creation or to exclusive and defiant love of what exists. But in both cases it ends in murder and loses the right to be called rebellion. (*The Rebel* 73)

In this way, our history of rebellion is full of only those rebels who either want to die or to cause death. And unfortunately, all is done in the name of justice. Thus, rebellion forgot its beginnings and set out in search of world conquest by way of an infinitely multiplied series of murder. The rebel drove God from his heaven and adopted reason as a weapon to acquire irrational freedom. His rebellion has done nothing what was aimed at, but has added to irrational crimes, the crimes of reason. Starting from human solidarity, it has murdered rebellion itself and has left man, once again, alone.

The most important part of *The Rebel* is discussed under the chapter of “Historical Rebellion”. According to Camus, historical rebellion or revolution is the manifestation of metaphysical rebellion on the stage of history. And since “revolution is only the logical consequence of metaphysical rebellion”; it is, on historical scene, “the same desperate and bloody effort to affirm the dignity of man in defiance of the things that deny its existence” (*The Rebel* 76).

Camus observes that freedom is the motivating principle of all revolutions, without which justice seems inconceivable to the rebel’s mind. However, there comes a time when, like metaphysical rebellion, historical revolution betrays the value of rebellion and justice, instead of promoting freedom, demands the suspension of freedom. In such situations, “terror, on a grand or small scale, makes its appearance to consummate the revolution” which, on its part, “assumes the responsibility of total guilt” by adopting “murder and violence” (Camus, *The Rebel* 76).

Camus’s study of modern historical rebellion begins with the contemporaries of Sade i.e. the French revolutionaries and the regicides. Camus observes that long before January 21, 1793, kings were put to death in person, but not in principle. But the 1789 revolution is the starting period of modern rebellion as people of that period

overthrow the “principle of divine right” (Camus, *The Rebel* 82). Thus they added to traditional tyrannicide the concept of meditated deicide.

Being considered as the emissary of God, the king and his monarchy want to put grace before justice while rebellion is an attempt to seek justice even at the expense of grace. Camus has rightly quoted Michelet who observes the French Revolution as “the struggle between divine grace and justice” (*The Rebel* 82). Once this struggle becomes clear, rebellion provides preference to justice over grace by tottering the crown of God through making a direct attack on His representative of earth. Hence, revolutionary justice in 1789 shared a common attribute with grace it sought to replace as it wanted to be as total as God’s grace used to be. And this totality of justice was tried to achieve through the execution of Louis XVI.

Camus opines that this new religion of justice which finds its god in reason and whose representative on earth become the people, finds its truest expression in Rousseau’s *The Social Contract* (1762). Until Rousseau’s times, God created kings who, in their turn, created people. After *The Social Contract*, people create themselves before creating kings. As for God, there is nothing more to be said for the time being. Hence, Camus observes, “the will of the people was substituted for God himself” (*The Rebel* 85).

Though God is overthrown in the name of justice, the will of people has all the attributes of a divine entity. Like God, it becomes infallible and totally free. No doubt, *The Social Contract* introduces a philosophy of humanism in history, but it also ignores the rebellion’s aim and creates a new God, a God which excludes not only dissidents but also neutrality. Camus boldly argues that Rousseau is the first humanitarian philosopher who justifies the death penalty in a civil society and the absolute submission of the subject to the authority of the sovereign. This new dawn of

a new religion overthrows the religious scaffolds and builds its own altars and scaffolds where the masses of this new faith celebrate with blood and murder.

Camus is often criticized as a royalist by the pro-communists like Sartre and de Beauvoir, because of his opposition for the king's execution. Susan Dunn, though recognizes that "Camus was never a monarchist", yet persists in reading Camus as a sort of crypto-monarchist, who viewed the execution of Louis XVI as "the most significant and tragic event in French history" (143). However, Camus is not a monarchist. He simply wants to bring home this idea that principles for which the king was executed were no less absolute than those by which the king himself had ruled. The French Revolution, with its regicide, changed nothing but the hands in which power remained as absolute and infinite as it previously used to be. The king's inviolability was exchanged with "the inviolability and transcendence of the general will" (Camus, *The Rebel* 89).

Camus observes that Saint-Just's famous speech, during the King's trial, explains the basic ideas of Rousseau. Saint-Just opines that to let the people inviolable and sacred, the king has to be put out of the sphere of Common will because, "by his very existence he is a blasphemer against this all-powerful will" (Camus, *The Rebel* 88).

Though overtly looking, this shift from the sovereignty of the king to the sovereignty of people seems to realize the rebellion aim of freedom, yet with the same logic by which the king is erupted from the scene, individual freedom is also executed. In this new religion, power doesn't lie in people's hands, but in the Assembly which represents general will and which has preference over will of all. Camus bravely observes the "shocking hypocrisy" of the French Revolution which forgot its real principles and "found a new form of absolutism" (*The Rebel* 89-90).

This new religion of reason establishes the Republic of law and order, a Republic that is immortal, impassive, and unchallenged. Every law made by the Assembly is considered as the depiction of nature, and virtue becomes nothing but conformity with the law made by the Assembly. If any kind of disobedience to law emerges, it is not because the law is imperfect, as it is impossible to be imperfect, but solely because the citizens are virtue-less. And thus, as Camus dictates, “a principle of infinite repression” is established from the very doctrine of justice (*The Rebel* 93). Hence, revolutionary justice which aspires for freedom ends up in totalitarianism.

Camus doesn't doubt Saint-Just's intentions who simply wanted the unification of the world to realize human innocence. Even at the beginning, Saint-Just, together with Robespierre, pronounced against the death penalty and dreamed of a Republic of forgiveness. But this man of forgiveness puts totality of principles above justice and freedom and observes that factions divide the sovereign; therefore, they are blasphemous and criminal and should be annihilated. He exclaims: “Either the virtues or the Terror” (Camus, *The Rebel* 94). As absolute virtue is impossible because of individual differences; the republic of forgiveness leads, with implacable logic, to the republic of guillotine.

Comparing Saint-Just with his contemporary Sade, Camus observes that both start from very different formulas (as Sade's formula was ‘Open the prisons or prove your virtue’, Saint-Just's was ‘prove your virtue or go to prison’), both end up in “justifying terrorism – the libertine justifies individual terrorism, the high priest of virtue, State terrorism” (*The Rebel* 95). Therefore, both the revolution of reason and that of free individual will decide to suppress all alien elements and worked under the logic of guillotine. Marat, one of the proponents of terror exclaims, “Ah! What injustice! Who cannot see that I want to cut off a few heads [that of the dissidents] to

save a great number?" (qtd. in Camus, *The Rebel* 96). Camus signifies that all historical crimes are committed at this price; and like earlier revolutions, French Revolution also fails, because it exalts and transcends abstract principles.

The successors to the French Revolution, according to Camus, go a step further. While the 18<sup>th</sup> century still accepts the validity of formal virtue, Russian Communism denies the validity of every kind of formal virtue. Camus evaluates:

The regicides of the nineteenth century are succeeded by the deicides of the twentieth century, who want to make the earth a kingdom where man is God. The reign of history begins and . . . man, unfaithful to his real rebellion, will henceforth devote himself to the nihilistic revolution of twentieth century which . . . tried to achieve the unity of the human race through an exhausting series of crimes and wars. . . . All that was god's will henceforth be rendered to Caesar. (*The Rebel* 102)

Camus locates the final attempt of replacing the religion of virtue with religion of man in Hegel's philosophy. Hegel discerns the seeds of the Terror contained in the abstract principles of the Jacobins and rightly opines that "absolute and abstract freedom must inevitably lead to terrorism; the rule of abstract law is identical to the rule of oppression" (Camus, *The Rebel* 103). But like Saint-Just or Rousseau, he repeats the same mistake in the pursuit of unity. While Rousseau transfers the sovereignty of power from God to abstract laws, Hegel transfers sovereignty from abstract values to concrete history. He suggests of constructing a concrete society in which freedom can be reconciled with necessity. Hence, German philosophy substitutes the abstract reason of Rousseau by concrete universal reason.

Camus examines that with this reduction of reason to the sovereignty of history, values like truth, reason, and justice, which earlier were guiding principles for

any revolution, cease to be guides and become goals. These values were pushed for their realization to the end of history which, however, is impossible to come. Therefore, no value remained to work as a guide for the attainment of these goals. “The rule of action”, as Camus enquires, “has thus become action itself – which must be performed in darkness while awaiting the final illumination” which, however, never happens (*The Rebel* 104). And from here on, a disparity between means and ends begins, because in the absence of any guiding principle every action is just that realizes the ends. “With Napoleon and the Napoleonic philosopher Hegel”, Camus declares, “the period of efficaciousness begins” and from now onwards, “the spirit of rebellion is going to be profoundly transformed” (*The Rebel* 104).

Although, Camus affirms that in Hegel’s concept of dialectic, there is material that is in contradiction to what Hegel proposes; but like Nietzsche, Hegel also has been partially read, not with the head, but “with the heart and all its passions which can accept no kind of reconciliation” (*The Rebel* 105). Hence, the revolutionaries of 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> centuries borrowed from Hegel, not his reconciliation concept, but the weapons with which they finally destroyed the formal principles of virtue. The hatred of formal virtue, which is nothing but the degraded witness to divinity, has remained the only themes of history today. Thus, lies and violence are adopted with the same enthusiasm as values are. Earlier, violence is legitimized for the preservation of values; with Hegel, everything is permitted in the historical pursuit of values. Camus rightly argues, “Violence, in both cases, is the victor. The avoidance of the Terror, undertaken by Hegel, only leads to an extension of the Terror” (*The Rebel* 106).

Camus further assesses that despite the partial interpretations derived from Hegel by his followers, it can’t be denied that one aspect of his thought can lead to these appalling conclusions. John Foley wants to lessen the effect of Camus’s

criticism of Hegel by arguing that “the focus of Camus’s attention here is less on Hegel himself than on the massively influential interpretation of Hegel presented by Alexandre Kojève” (65). Kojève’s reading of Hegel, which has been called “the secret to contemporary French thinking about history”, emphasized a Marxist interpretation of “Hegel’s account of the Master and the Slave as a dialectic of human history” (Roth 94). But Camus clearly states that despite the fact that “Hegel’s face, which reappears in Russian Communism, has been successively remodeled by David Straws, Bruno, Bauer, Feuerbach, Marx and the entire Hegelian left-wing”, he is interested in Hegel only for his “real bearing on the history of our time” (*The Rebel* 106). He explains that Hegel’s *The Phenomenology* is “a meditation on despair and death” because of his dialectics of Master and Slave (*The Rebel* 107). According to Hegel, it is self-consciousness which differentiates man from animals and enables him to risk life for its realization and recognition by another self-consciousness or man. Therefore, “Fundamental human relations are thus relations of pure prestige, a perpetual struggle, to the death, for recognition of one human being by another” (Camus, *The Rebel* 108). In this struggle of recognition, there emerge out two kinds of consciousness – one is consciousness of a slave which, in the conquest of recognition, submits before the other one i.e. the master consciousness. However, the master’s autonomy is not absolute as he is recognized by slave consciousness which has ceased to be self-consciousness. Therefore, the master serves no other purpose in history but to arouse servile consciousness for rebellion.

If we compare Hegel’s account of Master-Slave dialectic with the account of the slave’s revolt discussed by Camus, the difference is evident. While for Camus, the legitimacy of the slave’s revolt depends upon its recognizing the rights of the master also, in Hegel, this solidarity is replaced with murder and submission.

Camus further criticizes Hegel's denial of all kind of transcendence and claims that "Hegel's undeniable originality lies in his definitive destruction of all vertical transcendence – particularly the transcendence of principles" (*The Rebel* 112). Though overtly he restores the immanence of the spirit, emphasis is placed on the end of history as a result actions are judged on the basis of their success and not in accordance with the revolutionary values. Camus observes that "the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, in their most profound manifestations, are centuries which have tried to live without transcendence" (*The Rebel* 112). Thus with Hegel's deification of history, the history of rebellion degenerated into either individual terror or state crime.

Camus's account of Hegel has received much criticism, though mostly a negative one, from Sartre to McBride. However, such criticism is overlooking the fact that Camus's critique is not against Hegel, but against the impact and contribution of his philosophy to contemporary ideologies of political violence and historical absolutism. These ideologies have used Hegel as an alibi for their extremism. Sartre and Jeanson criticize Camus for what they judged to be his "superficial reading of Hegel" (qtd. in Foley 112). The Sartrean scholar, William McBride, doesn't accuse Camus of misunderstanding Hegel, he finds Camus "guilty" and dismisses his account of Hegel as "abominable from a scholarly standpoint" (240). Similarly, Ronald Aronson dismisses Camus's account of Hegel as "a caricature" (*Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* 123). However, Camus is not so wrong in observing Hegel's account of dissolving all transcendence and replacing it with history. Furthermore, the most influential interpreter of Hegel, Alexandre Kojève, who had such an influence on French Marxism, declares in his lecture on Hegel, not opposite to that of Camus's observation:

. . . the transcendent universal (God) . . . must be replaced by a universal that is immanent in the World. And for Hegel, this immanent universal can only be the State. What is supposed to be realized by God in the Kingdom of Heaven must be realized in and by the State, in the earthly kingdom. And that is why Hegel says that the “absolute” State that he has in mind (Napoleon’s Empire) is the realization of the Christian Kingdom of heaven. (qtd. in Foley 67)

Therefore, Camus hasn’t said anything wrong about Hegel’s conceptions, because only these conceptions, though molded, give way to the formation of the absolute regime of Stalin and Hitler’s appalling conquests for the mastery over the world.

In between the theoretical formation of State terrorism laid by Hegel, and its practical implication authorized by Marx, Camus introduces individual terrorism of Russian Nihilism which, however has been imported from German and French ideologies, inspires values, even in abject negation. Camus writes:

The entire history of Russian terrorism can be summed up in the struggle of a handful of intellectuals to abolish tyranny, against a background of silent populace. Their attenuated victory was finally betrayed. But by their sacrifice and even by their most extreme negations they gave substance to a new standard of values or a new virtue which, even today, has not ceased to oppose tyranny and to give aid to the cause of true liberation. (*The Rebel* 118)

Camus’s indication, here, is towards the group of youthful Russian terrorists, Kaliayev, Dora Brilliant, and others, who assassinated the Grand Duke Sergei in

1905. Before coming on them, Camus gives a brief history of their predecessors like the Decembrists, Bielinski, Pisarev, Bakunin, and Nechayev.

Camus observes the 1905 Russian terrorists, under the title “The Fastidious Assassins”. He also writes a play, *The Just Assassins*, on the same subject. In the process of examining their purpose and action, Camus claims that with this group of terrorists, it happens for “the last time in our history” when “the spirit of rebellion encounters . . . the spirit of compassion” (*The Rebel* 137). They reluctantly accepted violence and murder against the absolute regime of Tzar, but never forgot the origins of their revolt which was for the betterment of common people. These destined executioners, who risked their own lives, “only made attempts on the lives of others after the most scrupulous examination of conscience” (Camus, *The Rebel* 137). Giving the example, Camus exalts Kaliayev who, with the full approval of his comrades, denied throwing the bomb on the Grand Duke Sergei, because the Duchess and two children were also riding in the Grand Duke’s carriage. After the assassination in the second attempt, the Kaliayev happily accepted the scaffold. “Such a degree of self-abnegation, accompanied by such profound consideration for the lives of others”, Camus observes, “allows the supposition that they lived the tension of rebellion, violence appeared inevitable to them but never justifiable” (*The Rebel* 138). Criticizing the historical absolutism, Camus argues that “mediocre minds . . . console themselves, in the name of history, with the thought that violence is necessary and will add murder to murder, to the point of making of history nothing but a continuous violation of everything, in man, which protests against injustice” (*The Rebel* 138). But the fastidious assassins forgot nothing and, incapable of justifying violence that was inevitable, they conceived the idea of offering themselves as a justification. They tried to justify “murder by suicide. A life was paid for by another life, and from these two

sacrifices springs the promise of a value” (Camus, *The Rebel* 138). Therefore, they don’t value any idea above human life, although they kill and die for the sake of ideas.

Apart from that, their devotion and loyalty for each other, once again, create the value of human solidarity which becomes the guide and basis for true revolt. Camus observes that the ancient value of ‘we are’ once more lives “at the culmination of nihilism and at the very foot of the gallows”; and these terrorists, “for the last time in our history”, demonstrate “that real rebellion is a creator of values” (*The Rebel* 141). Thus, “Kaliyev and his comrades triumphed over nihilism” (Camus, *The Rebel* 142).

But this triumph is to be short-lived as the later so called revolutionaries reinforce history and absolute values at the price of human lives. Camus opines that “the joint legacy of Nechayev and Marx will give birth to the totalitarian revolution of the twentieth century” (*The Rebel* 142). Once again, true revolt is betrayed in having cut off from its roots and surrendered to history. With the betrayal of one of the two aspects of revolt i.e. reason and value, revolt ends up in terror: either in the irrational terror of Nazism or the rational terror of Stalin. Once again, reminding us about the disfigured face of rebellion by political and historical revolution, Camus states, “All modern revolutions have ended in a reinforcement of the power of the State. Seventeen eighty nine brings Napoleon; 1848 Napoleon III; 1917 Stalin; the Italian disturbances of the twenties, Mussolini; the Weimar Republic, Hitler” (*The Rebel* 146).

While talking about the reasons for this degradation of a pure rebellion to the level of legitimized terror, Camus argues that the terrifying growth of modern State is the logical consequence of inordinate technical and philosophical ambitions. These ambitions are initiated by Marx’s prophetic dream and Hegel’s or Nietzsche’s over-

inspired predictions. They pave way for the erection of either a rational or an irrational State in the place of God – a State, in both cases, founded on terror.

Camus denies the Fascist revolutions of the 20<sup>th</sup> century the title of revolutions, because despite the efforts of Hitler and Mussolini to establish an empire on world level, Fascism denies reason and chooses only the irrational as its basis. However, Mussolini and Hitler find their guides in Hegel and Nietzsche respectively, and therefore, belong to the history of rebellion and nihilism. “They were the first”, says Camus in *The Rebel*, “to construct a State on the concept that everything was meaningless and that history was only written in terms of the hazards of force” (147).

Rausching, in his book *Revolution of Nihilism*, finds the First World War as the reason for Germany’s abject nihilism. He states, “In Germany, shaken to its foundations by a war without precedent, by defeat, and by economic distress, values no longer existed” (qtd. in Camus, *The Rebel* 147). Therefore, the deprived and defeated Germany of 1933 submitted herself to the degraded values of Hitler, equally devoid of all other values except that of success. Even the innocent cry of maternity made guilty. For example, “In Greece, a woman is asked by a German officer to choose which of her three sons taken as hostage should be spared; she chooses the eldest because he has a family, thereby condemning the two others as the German officer intended” (Lottman 382).

But this intense passion for nothingness of the Hitlerian regime, ultimately turned against itself, because Hitler didn’t believe in creating anything from destruction but in “universal suicide and the material and political destruction of the German nation” (Camus, *The Rebel* 154). Camus rightly defines Hitler when he says:

For himself, for his people, and for the world, he was nothing but the epitome of suicide and murder. Seven million Jews assassinated, seven

million Europeans deported or killed, ten million war victims are, perhaps, not sufficient to allow history to pass judgement: history is accustomed to murderers. (*The Rebel* 154)

But sarcastically enough, Camus suggests that in comparison to Fascism, Russian Communism exceeded in subverting the original rebellions ethics. While Hitler never aspired for unity of the world, Russian Communism used the revolutionary ambition of unity of the world as an alibi for its violent actions. Therefore, it happens first time in history that terror is rationalized by Russian Communism; and it justifies state terrorism in the pretension of definitive revolution and the unification of the world.

Examining this pretension in detail, Camus begins the longest, and also the most criticized section of the book, devoted to Marx and Marxism. Because of this particular section, the rightwing circles hail Camus, while the leftists condemn him. However, it should be noted that Camus's criticisms of Marx "are the outcome of serious consideration, not of out-of-hand rejection. Furthermore, he admires aspects of Marx's thought" (Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 109). Camus praises Marx for revealing the bourgeois hypocrisy "hidden behind the formal values of which the bourgeois of his time made a great show" and applauds Marx as "the incomparable eye-opener" who was the first to bring forth the decadence and immorality lay beneath the economic prosperity (*The Rebel* 168).

Furthermore, Camus affirms that Marx's real greatness lies in his emphasis on the ethical demands. The core aspect of Marx's belief was the profound belief in dignity of work and he "rebelled against the degradation of work to the level of a commodity and of the worker to the level of an object" (Camus, *The Rebel* 176). It was Marx who reminded the privileged that their privileges were not divine. It is to

Marx, Camus affirms, that we owe the idea that “when work is a disgrace, it is not life, even though it occupies every moment of a life” (*The Rebel* 176). It was Marx who demanded for the workers leisure and creation, and by doing so, reclaimed the dignity of man. Camus regrets that a person like Marx, who clearly says that “An end which requires unjust means is not a just end”, is ditched by his disciples who forget his ethical demands in their obstinate desire to realize his prophecies (*The Rebel* 177). Therefore, Camus realizes that like Nietzsche and Hegel, Marx’s aims are generous and universal but like both of the philosophers, Marx’s theory also has some loopholes which his followers take as excuses for their excesses. Hence, Camus is interested, not in how Marx’s ideology is manipulated by his followers but in the facts, present within Marx’s theory, which pave way for such manipulations. He points out, one by one, the contradictions in Marx’s philosophy and then goes on to give an explanation of the way in which various theories failed in practice.

Ironically, Camus observes that Marx’s theory of history is rooted in the Christian Messianism. The Christians were the first to see human life and the course of events as a history which is “unfolding from a fixed beginning towards a definite end, in the course of which man gains his salvation or earns his punishment” (Camus, *The Rebel* 157). Further, Christianity, because of its emphasis on historical reality, subdues nature so that a day can come when the world is totally destroyed and the day of judgement can be confirmed. Likewise, Marxism is interested in the end of history. Therefore, humanity marches through crimes, violence, and death towards this final consummation which will justify everything. Marx, unlike other revolutionaries, justifies the order of his times where Capitalism was engulfing the poor, so that the idea of revolution can be realized. Hence, Camus dares making the boldest of statements and says, “The most eloquent eulogy of Capitalism was made by its

greatest enemy. Marx is only anti-Capitalist in so far as Capitalism is out of date” (*The Rebel* 160). Furthermore, the so called anti-bourgeois philosophy of Marxism has borrowed its concepts like scientific materialism, progress, the future of science, and the cult of production and technology from that of bourgeois origins. It is the bourgeois optimism which finds future as the course of perfection and progress. Therefore, Camus observes:

Progress, paradoxically, can be used to justify conservatism. A draft drawn on confidence in the future, it allows the master to have a clear conscience. The slave and those whose present life is miserable and who can find no consolation in the heavens, are assured that at least the future belongs to them. The future is the only kind of property that the masters willingly concede to the slaves. (*The Rebel* 162)

And Marx, without any resentment, accepts this new God of Future which justifies all in the name of progress and future reconciliation. While the idea of history was present in the Jacobin version of revolution also, they had the values as their guide to reach that point. But with Hegel and Marx, the formal values are totally destroyed and they only extract the bourgeois ideas of progress and historic justification from their predecessors.

Camus finally argues that Marx is an heir before he is a pioneer, because his ideas of economic and scientific progress have been influenced by the bourgeois thinkers like Ricardo and Auguste Comte.

Although Camus claims that Marx’s theory of history and economic progress is rooted in bourgeois ideologies, he nevertheless acknowledges that the theory is also revolutionary. He argues that with the increase in the level of production, there also arise the antagonisms. For Marx, Capitalism is the last of these antagonistic levels of

production and it will finally prepare way for Communism. Camus further criticizes Marxism for its observing man only in the terms of historic determinism and in history, particularly in terms of economics. For Marx, everything revolves around man's requirements. Therefore, Marx sees history purely in the terms of economy and the class struggle generated by the unequal distribution of this economy. Marx and Engels say in the *Communist Manifesto*, "The history of all hitherto existing society is the history of class struggles" (204). No doubt, Camus recognizes the importance of economic production in the social set-up and suggests that Marx's entire edifice of purely economic explanation of history can be understood as a reaction to the economic inequality witnessed by Marx. Foley also justifies Marx and says, "It was his sensitivity to social inequality that led him to interpret history primarily in terms of class conflict" (71). But Camus equally recognizes the absurdity of this pure determinism which accepts man only in the terms of economy, rejecting his individuality and other concerns. Camus rightly comments in *The Rebel*, "To put economic determinations at the root of all human action is to sum man up in terms of his social relations. There is no such thing as a solitary man, which is the indisputable discovery of the nineteenth century" (167).

Pointing out another contradiction in Marx's theory, Camus declares that Marx himself sees history as a class struggle, but equally predicates that the conflict between bourgeois Capitalism and proletarians will bring Communism and will end all antagonisms. Camus does not refute the advent of a classless society in the place of classes, but he finds no reason that the classless society will not be confronted by "a new antagonism still to be defined" (*The Rebel* 190). Yet the essential argument of Marxist prophecy lies in this affirmation. That is why Camus states, "The end of

history is not an exemplary or a perfectionist value: it is an arbitrary and terroristic principle” (*The Rebel* 191).

Camus further reminds us of Marx’s pro-Capitalism tendency. Marx estimates that with the growing Capitalism, dissatisfaction among the proletarians will increase and the day of revolution will come when a huge army of oppressed slaves capture the handful of despicable masters. In Marx’s vision, Capitalism paves the way for the establishment of Communism where capital and labour, henceforth indistinguishable, will produce both justice and abundance. Camus points out that, Marx is “the prophet of production [who] ignored reality in favour of the system” (*The Rebel* 172). And unfortunately, there is no time limit for the realization of that system and it has been postponed until the end of history.

Criticizing Marx once more, Camus rejects Marxism as a scientific theory and argues that it is more Utopian than scientific. Echoing the ideas already discussed in “Neither Victims nor Executioner”, Camus states that in this Utopia, future is made both the ethics and the ends: everything is valid and becomes value which has to realize this particular end. Hence, Marx ultimately justifies totalitarianism in the name of future happiness. Camus rightly comments, “The demand for justice ends in injustice if it is not primarily based on an ethical justification of justice: without this, crime itself one day becomes a duty” (*The Rebel* 177). Marx might not want this, but one part of his theory justified crime which gave its full demonstration during the Stalin regime.

After bringing forth the germs of expediency in Marx’s own theory, Camus focuses on why and how Marx’s prophecies fail to be proved true. Like the Christians, who think the world in the terms of advancing to its destruction and towards the day of the Last Judgement, Marx prophesizes the end of history which will open way for a

classless society. The Russian Revolution of 1917 was taken as the partial realization of Marxist dreams. Marx declared that slowly, the revolution would consume all Europe and then all the world. In 1919, for example, the Bolshevik leader Nikolai Bukharin repeated Marx's belief and said, ". . . we have entered upon a period of revolution which may last fifty years before the revolution is at last victorious in all Europe and finally in all the world" (qtd. in Foley 72). The belief was further strengthened with the Spartakus movement. But the Spartakus movement was crushed, the French general strike of 1920 failed, the Italian revolutionary movement was strangled, Bela Kun in Hungary was defeated, and the Soviet Republic in Bavaria was short lived. In the face of such unimagined failures, it was recognized that the time was not ripe for revolution.

Therefore, the Russian Revolution remains alone, still far from the gates of heavenly future imagined by Marx. The day of this dream-fulfillment is again postponed. The basic reason, as Camus formulates, for the failure of Marx's prophecy of world revolution is the rapid transformation in economic and social relations which flatly contradicts with Marx's scheme. Marx imagines society only in two classes – Capitalists and proletarians while, with the rapid growth in industrialization, an intermediary class makes its advent on the social scene. Further, Marx treated the case of agriculture with frivolity and ignored the peasantry for the over-simplification of his schemes. This neglecting of Marx allows Camus to criticize him to the extent of saying that in one of its aspects, "the history of socialism in our times can be considered as the struggle between the proletarian movement and the peasant class" (*The Rebel* 180). A similar argument is made by David Mitrany:

For the sake of scientific production the Marxists accepted with equanimity, if not actually with eagerness, the destruction of the

peasantry as a class. But in the Eastern Europe, the whole social problem centered on the peasantry, who had the greatest needs and members; a revolutionary movement which left them out of account would have neither hope nor scope. (52)

Apart from neglecting the changing social and economic pattern, Camus realizes that Marx had also neglected the reality of nationalism which becomes a barrier in uniting the world- proletariats. Further, Marx forgot that extreme poverty and hunger, which he thought important for initiating the revolution, are “factors contributing to servitude not to revolution” (*The Rebel* 181). Camus favours Simone Weil’s ideas which expose the reality of industrial socialism. She writes in “Prospects: Are We Heading for the Proletarian Revolution?” (1958) that “industrial socialism has done nothing essential to alleviate the condition of the workers” (qtd. in *The Rebel* 183). Ultimately, Camus warns and says, “Unless it [Marxism] changes its principles and its path, it can have no other final result but servile rebellions, crushed by bloodshed, or the hideous prospect of atomic suicide” (*The Rebel* 186).

In the concluding part of the assessment of Marxism, Camus makes one more blow and declares that contrary to Marx’s assumption, “Marxism is not scientific: at the best it has just scientific prejudices” (*The Rebel* 187). Apart from using scientific reasons, Marxism has given reigns to the historic reasoning which, unable to be realized, has become a blind faith. To make it clearer, Camus explains that if the struggle waged by two or three generations brings forth the predicted classless society, then the struggle seems, somehow comprehensible to a person who thinks about his grand children. But if such a desired end fails to be realized, this prediction becomes a faith which accepts the necessity of killing and dying for its realization.

“This new faith”, Camus declares, “is no more founded on pure reason than was the faith of the ancients” (*The Rebel* 189).

Camus regrets that the profound values of justice and freedom, for which the path of rebellion begin, have been answered only by nihilism. And with Marxism, these values have been relegated to a place somewhere at the end of history which, however, will never come. Once more, Camus regrets that metaphysical rebellion has been cheated by forgetting its real purpose.

Camus has been often criticized for his treatment of Marxism in such a critical way. Aronson goes to the extent of saying that while observing Marxism, Camus’s sole purpose is to associate Marxism with murder i.e. “Marxism = murder” (*Camus & Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* 89). He even blames Camus of having ignored the socioeconomic concerns of Marxism. He says, “To Camus, Marxism was not about social change; it was nothing less – and nothing more – than a revolt that ‘attempts to annex all creation’” (*Camus & Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* 122-123).

However, such critics are forgetting the fact that Camus rejected Marxism as an absolute philosophy and respected Marx for his socioeconomic concerns. His support for Marxism can be observed through the pages of the *Combat* and “Neither Victim nor Executioners”. In the October 7, 1944 editorial of the *Combat*, Camus declares that the “Combat” movement believes in this statement: “Anti-Communism is the first step toward dictatorship” (*Camus at Combat* 62). Despite his rejection of Communism, he firmly declares, “. . . while we are not in agreement with the philosophy or practical ethics of Communism, we vigorously reject political anti-Communism because we know what inspires it and what its unavowed aims are” (*Camus at Combat* 63).

The difference between Camus's thinking and that of a Communist is that of method. Camus clearly says that the Communists' "adherence to a very consistent philosophy of history justifies their acceptance of political realism as the primary method for securing the triumph"; on the other hand, he "[does] not believe in political realism" (*Camus at Combat* 63). Hence, Camus is wrongly judged for his rejecting Marxism as a complete theory.

After discussing the theoretical part of Marxism, Camus examines its practical implications through Russian Communism in which both Lenin and Stalin have furthered the way toward valueless revolution. Though Camus argues that neither Marx nor Lenin has dreamed of such a terrifying apotheosis of Russian Communism as has been achieved under Stalin regime, yet it was Lenin himself who "took a decisive step towards establishing a military empire" (*The Rebel* 192-193). Lenin extracted only the idea of revolution and the virtue of expediency from the Jacobins, leaving the revolutionary values aside. In *Left-Wing Communism: An Infantile Disorder* (1920), he clearly declares: "One must be prepared for every sacrifice, to use if necessary every stratagem, ruse, illegal method, to be determined to conceal the truth, for the sole purpose of penetrating the labour unions and of accomplishing, despite everything, the Communist task" (qtd. in Camus, *The Rebel* 193).

With the same strategist mind, with which Lenin justified expediency, he succeeded in supporting the military powers and finally the State. Camus observes that in one of his most controversial of pamphlets, *The State and the Revolution*, Lenin uses Marx and Engels for the justification of the emergence of the proletarian State. While Engels has firmly established that the concept of the State and the concept of a free society are irreconcilable and with the disappearance of classes, the State will automatically disappear; Lenin wants to prove that "the proletarian State is

not a State organized on the lines of other States, but a State which, by definition, is in the process of withering away” (*The Rebel* 195). He necessitates the dictatorship of the proletarian State – first, to suppress or crush the remained bourgeois class; secondly, to socialize the means of production. With these accomplishments, Lenin’s State would begin to wither away. However, Camus observes that Lenin ends his pamphlet by “justifying the preservation, even after the socialization of the means of production and, without any predictable end, of the dictatorship of a revolutionary fraction over the rest of the people” (*The Rebel* 196). Hence, the defender of socialism, with such a systematic reasoning, succeeds in establishing the dictatorship of the State, the idea which cheats both Marx and Engels. The revolution, which started with the idea of providing justice and freedom to the proletariats, sums itself up into an endless strife between the proletariats and for the State established for the welfare of the proletariats.

Evaluating the reality of Russian Communism, Camus opines that once again the metaphysical rebellion is ditched by political ambitions, which “authorize injustice throughout the entire course of history” (of course) for the sake of a justice, yet to be realized in the indefinite “far-away future” (*The Rebel* 199). This pseudo-rebellion has acquired a new formula: “All freedom must be crushed in order to conquer the empire and one day the empire will be the equivalent to freedom” (*The Rebel* 199). In this way the way to unity passes through torture.

The idea of unity is the core of Camus’s philosophy and it can be discerned from the very earlier works by Camus. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus clearly explains that the advent of the absurd and its consequent revolt happens because of an aspiration for unity on Man’s part. Hence, metaphysical rebellion is a demand for unity. But in the passage of historical revolution, this demand has been wrongly

transformed into a quest for totality. Camus observes that while unity is not the rejection of dissents or doubts, totality demands a tight-agreement between the all powerful State and the masses, where the masses can't even think different from the State. Therefore, "totality is not unity" (Camus, *The Rebel* 207). He argues that Russian Communism, which is often considered as the culmination of metaphysical rebellion, has transformed the rebel's aspired unity into the State's imposed totality. Camus declares in *The Rebel*:

Historical thought was to deliver man from subjection to a divinity; but this liberation demanded of him the most absolute subjection to historical evolution. Then man takes refuse in the concept of the permanence of the party in the same way that he formerly prostrated himself before the altar. . . . The real passion of the twentieth century is servitude. (200)

Camus reminds us of George Orwell's critique of Stalinist Communism, *1984*, when he describes the means practiced by the Russian Communism under the Stalin regime to attain totality. The Stalin regime practiced execution, deportation, and exile of the dissenters who didn't fit in the State ethics. While in *1984*, Big Brother is always right; in the Stalin regime, the State is always right. People are turned into mere objects to be used as cogs into the State machinery. They are enslaved, not in their life only, but even in their deaths. Camus scrutinizes:

. . . the accused is never produced and killed before the eyes of the world unless he consents to say that his death is just and unless he conforms to the empire of objects. One must die dishonored or no longer exist – neither in life nor in death. In the latter event, the victim does not die, he disappears. If he is punished, his punishment would be

a silent protest. . . . [Therefore], he is simply replaced and thus helps to construct the machine of empire. . . . The concentration camp system of the Russians has, in fact, accomplished the dialectical transition from the government of people to the administration of objects, but by confusing people with objects. (*The Rebel* 204-05)

Camus quotes Saint Ignatius's words from *Spiritual Exercises*, to indicate the ravaged condition of truth under the totalitarian regime of Russia: "We should always be prepared so as never to err to believe that what I see as white is black, if the hierarchic Church defines it thus" (*The Rebel* 209). Hence, in the pursuit of totality, the totalitarian State tries to prove that "War is Peace; Freedom is Slavery" (Orwell, 1984 27) and also that "2+2 = 5" (Orwell, 1984 290). Camus claims that with this manipulation of truth through the tools of history and expediency, the world's greatest revolution, i.e. Russian Communism, has reversed the direction of pure rebellion. "It lays claim to justice", Camus declares, "despite an uninterrupted procession of violence and injustice" (*The Rebel* 206).

Camus is criticized both by Sartre and Francis Jeanson for his preference of unity over totality and refer him as a "beautiful soul"; that is, someone who attempts to "achieve personal wholeness by escaping from the world" (Jeanson 82-83). However, they are forgetting that Camus has never been an extremist and has always talked about a balance. Here also, in *The Rebel*, Camus claims, "To choose history, and history alone, is to choose nihilism, contrary to the teachings of rebellion itself" (212). Hence, in Camus's views, the total rejection of historical reality (as done by Fascism) or the total submission to historical rationality (as done by Russian Communism) ends into "the universe of the concentration camps" (*The Rebel* 212). However, Camus is quick enough to distinguish between the two and sarcastically

claims that it is not legitimate to identify “the ends of Fascism with the ends of Russian Communism” since the former exalts “the executioner by the executioner”, the later exalts “the executioner by the victims” (*The Rebel* 212). Therefore, the results of both are same i.e. nihilism. This lengthy observation on Marxism ends with a resentment over the differences between metaphysical rebellion and political revolution:

Rebellion’s claim is unity, historical revolution’s claim is totality. The former starts from a negative supported by an affirmative, the latter from absolute negation and is condemned to fabricate an affirmative which is dismissed until the end of time. One is creative, the other nihilist. The first is dedicated to creation so as to exist more and more completely, the second is forced to produce result in order to negate more and more completely. (*The Rebel* 217)

Once again observing the path of the degradation of rebellion, Camus argues that rebellion, unlike historical revolution, observes limits. It “says yes and no simultaneously” (*The Rebel* 217). But when it adopts the attitude of ‘all or nothing’, “it is at this point that it denies itself completely” (*The Rebel* 217). In this sense, rebellion in its authenticity, doesn’t justify purely historic concept. Hence, if revolution wants to be a complement for rebellion, it has to be creative and should accept either a moral or metaphysical rule to balance the insanity of history. Camus doesn’t favour resignation on the rebel’s part in the face of nihilism. He is determined to reborn the renaissance by creating “a new object of faith and a new impetus” (*The Rebel* 215). This new value is not partial and cannot be established from history alone, because “a thought which is derived from history alone, like that which rejects history completely, deprives man of the means and the reason for living” (*The Rebel* 215).

However, recommending history its share in the path of revolution, Camus adds that “instead of killing and dying in order to produce the being that we are not, we have to live and let live in order to create what we are” (*The Rebel* 218).

After giving a thorough description of metaphysical and historical rebellion, Camus tries to explain the real meaning of rebellion through creative art. He realizes that rebellion, in its pure sense, is an art of balance. Like rebellion, art “exalts and denies simultaneously” (*The Rebel* 219). But this relationship between art and rebellion has been ignored by all the revolutionaries throughout history, and instead of combating for the artistic unity of rebellion, they have sacrificed one or the other aspect of this balance for the sake of the other. Camus further argues that to create, one has to reject reality and also to exalt certain of its aspects. “Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it” (*The Rebel* 224). Hence, art leads us back to the origins of rebellion where the slave-rebel, simultaneously, demands for the realization of certain values and denies the master’s limitless authority. In this sense, creation, whether it is that of artistic or rebellious, has to respect the balance, “the uninterrupted tension between form and matter, between evolution and the mind, and between history and values. If the equilibrium is destroyed the result is dictatorship or anarchy, propaganda or formal insanity. In either case creation . . . is impossible” (Camus, *The Rebel* 235).

In the concluding portion of *The Rebel*, Camus once again reminds us that ours is a period of failed revolutions, of scaffolds, of police force, and of humanist executioners. He claims that “the kingdom of grace has been conquered, but the kingdom of justice is crumbling too. Europe is dying of this deception” (*The Rebel* 244). Questioning the justification of murder in the name of rebellion, Camus bluntly declares:

Logically, one should reply that murder and rebellion are contradictory. If a single master should, in fact, be killed, the rebel in a certain way is no longer justified in using the term 'community of men' from which he derived his justification. If this world has no higher meaning, if man is only responsible to man, it suffices for a man to remove one single human being from the society of the living to automatically exclude himself from it. (*The Rebel* 245)

As has been earlier described, Camus's purpose of this lengthy discussion is not that of a fault-finder, but that of a philosopher who sees the possibility, even among the wilderness, of a value that can save the world from abject nihilism – both rational and irrational – and can guide the rebellion to attain the form of true revolution. He is not talking in vacuum or making speculations in air, but he fully realizes that the job of a rebel is full of controversies. Explaining this, Camus clarifies that the birth of rebellion results from the presence of falsehood, injustice, and violence. The rebel can't, therefore, absolutely claim non-violence or lie, without renouncing his rebellion's cause and accepting evil and murder. But nor can he justify violence and murder committed in the process of rebellion, since it will reverse his cause. Therefore, he is in conflict. Camus recommends, in this state, that "his only virtue will lie in never yielding to the impulse to allow himself" being engulfed by "the chaos of evil" and if, ever, he has to kill, he will sacrifice his own life (*The Rebel* 250). However, this theory of sacrificing one's life in the behalf of murder is controversial. But by this, Camus simply wants to exalt the value of human life.

The conflict confronted by the rebel on metaphysical level is persistent on historical level also. Camus observes that a revolutionary can choose neither historical reality without justifying murder nor eternal life without consenting to violence and

murder. To make this conflict more transparent, Camus takes the example of two values i.e. justice and freedom. He observes that these values are the purpose of rebellion, but “the history of revolutions demonstrates, however, that they almost always conflict as though their mutual demands were irreconcilable” (*The Rebel* 251). Therefore, the problem lies not in these values but in taking them absolutely, without having any consideration for limits. Camus says explicitly:

Absolute freedom is the right of the strongest to dominate. Therefore, it prolongs the conflicts which profit by injustice. Absolute justice is achieved by the suppression of all contradiction: therefore it destroys freedom. The revolution to achieve justice, through freedom, ends by aligning them against one another. (*The Rebel* 251-252)

This conflict can be solved, Camus opines, only through the value of limits and relativity. No doubt, the rebel demands freedom, but not absolute one which will destroy others’ freedom. His claim for freedom is not partial but for all. “He is not only the slave”, Camus explains, “against the master, but also man against the world of master and slave” (*The Rebel* 248). Rejecting the absolute, Camus further stresses, “Absolute freedom mocks at justice. Absolute justice denies freedom. To be fruitful, the two ideas must find their limits in one another” (*The Rebel* 255). Reassuring his idea of limits, Camus further argues that “rebellion with no other limits but historical expediency signifies unlimited slavery” and if it wants to remain alive, it must return to “the sources of rebellion and draw its inspiration from the only system of thought . . . which recognizes limits” (*The Rebel* 258). He gives another name to the ‘value of limits’ – the law of moderation – which is nothing but a middle way between the rational and irrational or reality and morality. Once again, conflicting with the existentialists, Camus affirms the validity of human nature and argues that “it can’t be

said that existence takes place only on the level of essence. . . . But nor can it be said that being is only existence”, but meaning lies somewhere in the process of becoming, which revolves around a value already defined (*The Rebel* 259). Hence, Camus encourages us to be prepared for a renaissance beyond the limits of nihilism.

There is exaggeration in Cruickshank’s assessment that towards the end of *The Rebel*, “Camus allows himself a series of lyrical flights” (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 116). But he is not fair in commenting that “it is difficult to find a genuine link between the criticism he has made and the conclusions he draws” (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 116). The reason is that Camus has never been negative towards rebellion and just has tried to put forth the reasons for why historical rebellions, based on pure values, degenerated into abject nihilism. He might not have been successful in giving his contradictory arguments more power, but undoubtedly succeeds in giving a relative ethics of rebellion which respects limits and encourages us to lessen the sorrows of this world.

Unsurprisingly, Camus’s *The Rebel* received hostile criticism from Marxist-Leninist left, most notoriously from Sartre’s journal *Les Temps Modernes*. Camus’s talk of limits, moderation, and relative utopia has been interpreted as politically incompetent. It is argued that the book fails to give a clear alternative to the historicist thought it criticizes. Sartre assigned the job of reviewing *The Rebel* to his disciple Francis Jeanson who, under the title “Albert Camus – or the Revolted Soul”, wrongly criticized Camus on various levels. Jeanson’s fundamental argument is that Camus has totally denied history and has judged Hegel and Marx superficially. He argues that in doing so, Camus achieves the objectively reactionary task of condemning the Marxist experiment without providing anything positive to offer in exchange. He

ultimately condemns *The Rebel* as “this pseudo-philosophy of a pseudo-history of ‘revolutions’” which is above all “a faulted great book” (100-01).

Camus responds to Jeanson’s review and rightly argues that Jeanson fails to address the main question posed by the book and has misrepresented the argument of *The Rebel*. He argues:

Here, I really must protest and tell you clearly that such tactics are disgraceful. . . . In fact, *The Rebel* seeks to demonstrate – nearly a hundred quotations could prove it, if necessary – that pure anti-historicism, at least in today’s world, is as harmful as pure historicism. It is written there, for those who wish to read, that he who believes only in history marches towards terror and that he who does not believe in it at all authorizes terror. . . . (“A Letter to the Editor of *Les Temps modernes*” 114- 15)

Against the charges of renunciation of history for the sake of transcendental values, Camus responds that *The Rebel* denies the absoluteness of both history and transcendence as both justify nihilism and terror. Therefore, by “systematically suppressing one of the aspects of this double critique”, says Camus, Jeanson “sanctifies his thesis but shamelessly sacrifices the truth”, the truth that *The Rebel* “does not deny history . . . but only criticizes the attitude that aims to make history into an absolute” (“A Letter to the Editor of *Les Temps modernes*” 115).

At last, Sartre himself appears on the front to review *The Rebel*. He blames that Camus is anti-revolutionary and he has deviated from his earlier position which was shared by Sartre himself. He reproaches Camus and says:

Where is Meursault, Camus? Where is Sisyphus? Where are those heartfelt Trotskyists preaching permanent revolution? No-doubt

assassinated or in exile. There is in you a violent and ceremonious dictatorship, built upon an abstract bureaucracy which tries to make its morality the law of the land. (qtd. in Mairowitz 138)

Sartre further accuses Camus as a bourgeois and an enemy to the labourers. He gives the final twist in his criticism by stating the following argument:

I don't believe you are the brother of the unemployed Communist from Bologna or the miserable day-labourer in Indochina . . . struggling against the colonialists. May be you once were poor but you are not any longer; you are a bourgeois, like Jeanson and myself. (qtd. in Mairowitz 138)

This argument is supported by de Beauvoir in her memoirs. She writes, "While Sartre believed in the truth of socialism, Camus became more and more resolute champion of bourgeois values; *The Rebel* was a statement of his solidarity with them" (*Force of Circumstance* 271-72). Aronson also appears to repeat the arguments of the Sartrean camp when he observes that in the Caliban articles, Camus, moving in the opposite direction to Sartre, writes:

Camus's article demonstrates his post-1945 moderation and appreciation for the positive features of bourgeois democracy. While Sartre's alienation from bourgeois society sharpened, Camus was moving in the opposite direction – and, it can be argued, each was shaping himself against the other. ("Sartre, Camus, and the Caliban Articles" 5)

We can clearly argue, without being prejudiced, that all the charges against Camus are partial and the result of a misunderstanding. It is not Camus who is deviating from his earlier stand, but Sartre, who, earlier talks about existential

freedom which denies every absolute; and, later, becomes the mouthpiece of the absolute historicism of Marxism. He forgets that existentialism and Marxism are incompatible as Ronald Aron has made it clear: “Sartre’s desired synthesis of existentialism and Marxism is impossible” (qtd. in Foley 200). I think that Camus is more authentic and is nearer to the existential authenticity by rejecting political expediency (accepted by Sartre) and supporting integrity of man.

Hence, it can be argued that Camus has tried to provide a political and, as well as, a moral platform, not “up in the air” as Jeanson ironically comments, but in the very presence of the absurd which enlivens the hope for man on this earth (188). This concept of revolt, which has been championed by Camus throughout the pages of “Neither Victims nor Executioners” and *The Rebel*, finds its fictional as well as realistic representation in Camus’s classic novel *The Plague*.

### ***The Plague* – A Triumph of Human-Solidarity**

Published in 1947, in the post-war France, *The Plague* gained immediate acclaims and is considered, till today, the “classic of world literature” (Judt, Introduction vii). The book is the finest example where human solidarity has been depicted in constant revolt against the absurdity of human situation.

Literally, *The Plague* is nothing but an absorbing narrative of the arbitrary appearance of the plague in the streets of the Algerian city Oran, its periodic lethal intensity, and its equally arbitrary disappearance. The appearance of the plague is introduced with the death of a few rats, later numerous. Soon, human beings also begin to die, stricken by inflammatory swellings in the groin and armpit. With the number of deaths increased, the disease is officially declared as plague. Oran is quarantined; its gates are closed and guarded; and its people are locked within with their exile and, of course, with the plague. In the time of plague, the team of Dr.

Rieux, Tarrou, Rambert, and Grand tries to fight with it. Eventually, the plague disappears slowly with the same arbitrariness with which it had earlier arrived.

However, Camus's purpose, here, is not to give a chronicle of an epidemic. On the other hand, *The Plague* has allegorical implications which provide multiple layers of meaning to the narrative. Camus indicates the symbolic nature of *The Plague* through the epigram which he takes from Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe*. The epigram is like that: "It is as reasonable to represent one kind of imprisonment by another, as it is to represent anything that really exists by that which exists not" (Camus, *The Plague* 4).

First and foremost, the novel is the symbolic representation of the four years of Nazi occupation of France, the subsequent collaboration, and the Resistance against the occupation. In France, the advent of Hitlerian soldiers is often termed as the advent of plague. It is because of this affinity between plague-gripped Oran and the Nazi-occupied France that the book received immediate success. There are enough analogies to declare *The Plague* an allegory of Nazi-Occupation. For example: the public confusion at the announcement of the plague, the authorities' reluctant behaviour at its prevalence, the restrictive measures, the mass burial of the victims of the plague, the quarantine camps, the growing resistance of the people against the plague, Cottard's misuse of the plague situation, and many more.

However, Camus has been criticized by some critics, including Sartre, de Beauvoir, Jeanson, Barthes, Cruickshank, and Susan Dunn, for not providing any historical or political context to situate the plague, and thereby, implicitly positing the plague as natural. They argue that Camus should have put the responsibility for the havoc of plague on the shoulders of certain people. Simon de Beauvoir claimed that "to treat the Occupation as the equivalent of a natural calamity was merely another

means of escaping from History . . . and the real political problems” (*Force of Circumstance* 138). Jeanson criticized Camus on the same grounds in his review for *The Rebel* and claimed that *The Plague* provided evidence of Camus’s exit “from history” (82-83). In his reply to Jeanson, Camus claims:

After all, nobody, except in your journal, would have thought to dispute the fact that if there is an evolution from *The Outsider* to *The Plague*, it is towards solidarity and participation. To claim otherwise is either to lie or to dream. (“A Letter to the Editor of *Les Temps modernes*” 112)

Years later, Sartre repeats the concerns of de Beauvoir and Jeanson and exclaims, “When I think of Camus claiming . . . that the German invasion was like the plague – coming for no reason, leaving for no reason - . . . what a shmuck! The German invasion was an invasion of men, and it was eventually defeated by men” (qtd. in Foley 51). Cruickshank also rejects the validity of *The Plague* as an ideal image for the Occupation and comments:

By using the symbol of the plague, however, he puts war and its attendant evils on a level with natural catastrophes such as earthquakes, or avalanches – phenomena beyond the apparent responsibility of man. He equates war with the plague, evil with illness, and then looks around for humanist medicaments. . . . I am unable to avoid the conviction that Camus’s symbol of the plague is inadequate at the Occupation level. I find [it] appropriate in the context of suffering but unsatisfactory before the fact of wrong-doing. (*Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* 177)

Even Roland Barthes, the exponent of deconstruction, finds in *The Plague* an “anti-historical ethic and an attitude of political solitude” (Camus, “Letter to Roland

Barthes on *The Plague*” 339). This same argument, occasionally, resurfaces among Camus’s more recent critics as well. Susan Dunn, in the same tone, asserts that the novel treats Nazism “in terms of a non-ideological and nonhuman plague” (150).

No doubt, the given arguments are, somewhere, right; but it can’t be denied that these critics have ignored the fact that *The Plague* is also the symbol of the absurdity of human condition in general. Tony Judt rightly comments in his Introduction to *The Plague* that as “disease, separation, and exile are conditions that come upon us unexpectedly and unbidden . . . they are an illustration of what Camus meant by the ‘absurdity’ of human condition” (x). Refuting the charges of misappropriation and negligence, Camus himself writes in his “Letter to Roland Barthes on *The Plague*”:

*The Plague*, which I wanted to be read on a number of levels, nevertheless has as its obvious content the struggle of the European resistance movements against Nazism. The proof of this is that although the specific enemy is nowhere named, everyone in every European country recognized it. . . . In a sense, *The Plague* is more than a chronicle of the Resistance. But certainly it is nothing less. (349)

Further, rejecting the charges that the novel depicts the alienation of an individual amidst the absurd, Camus states:

Compared to *The Stranger*, *The Plague* does, beyond any possible discursion, represent the transition from an attitude of solitary revolt to the recognition of a community whose struggles must be shared. If there is an evolution from *The Stranger* to *The Plague*, it is in the direction of solidarity and participation. (“Letter to Roland Barthes on *The Plague*” 339)

This transition, from individual to collective realization and reaction to the absurd, is evident throughout the novel. Dr. Rieux recognizes the absurdity of human condition, but is equally sensitive for his fellow men. He is determined “for his part to reject any injustice and any compromise” (Camus, *The Plague* 12).

Hence, Camus’s preference of not giving the plague the sole name of Nazism enhances its sphere and qualifies it as the symbol of all tyrannies – from Hitlerian to Stalinist. Camus gives the same argument and says that terror has multiple faces. He retorts:

Still another justification for my not having named any particular one [is], in order better to strike at them all. Doubtless this is what I’m reproached with, the fact that *The Plague* can apply to any resistance against any tyranny. But it is not legitimate to reproach me or, above all, to accuse me of rejecting history – unless it is proclaimed that the only way of taking part in history is to make tyranny legitimate. (“Letter to Roland Barthes on *The Plague*” 340)

I want to add another justification to Camus’s not providing any reason to the emergence of the plague. Nazism, like the absurd, was irrational and unbidden. It was the product of a frenzy which denied all reason and made the irrational its sole purpose. Therefore, the plague as depicted in the novel with its arbitrariness and irrationality, rightly symbolizes Nazism. Moreover, Camus’s purpose, here, is not to depict the reasons for the absurd but the emergence of a positive value of solidarity and collective revolt against the absurd. Aronson also argued the same and noted, “*The Plague* was not at all a reflection on the causes of the pestilence, whether human or natural, but, rather, the story of the collective spirit of combating it” (Camus & Sartre: *The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* 56).

Hence, apart from its multiple layers of meaning, *The Plague* is a vibrant example of collective struggle against the absurd, and that also, not in the hope of a victory in the end but with the realization of defeat beforehand. However, this “endless defeat” can’t stop Dr. Rieux and Tarrou to fight against the plague, as Dr. Rieux tells Tarrou, “But that is not a reason to give up the struggle” (Camus, *The Plague* 98). The plague, therefore, puts the whole Oran in a situation of collective pain, exile, separation, and morality. Actually, it makes the inhabitants of Oran more concerned about their real or ethical morality which comes out into the form of collective resistance and struggle. Camus writes:

One must fight, in one way or another, and not go down on one’s knees. The whole question was to prevent the largest possible number of people from dying and suffering a definitive separation. There was only one way to do this, which was to fight the plague. (*The Plague* 102)

Even Rambert, who is caught in the plague-affected Oran by chance, ultimately decides not to leave Oran and work in Dr. Rieux’s volunteers’ team. He declares to Dr. Rieux, “I always thought that I was a stranger in this town and had nothing to do with you. But now that I have seen what I have seen, I know that I come from here, whether I like it or not. This business concerns all of us” (Camus, *The Plague* 162).

Apart from an example of human resistance in the face of the absurd, *The Plague* is also a critique of the ‘philosophical suicide’ of theistic existentialism. As has already been discussed in *The Rebel*, Camus proposes a theory of moderation which denies extremity. While, in *The Rebel*, the target was Marxist historical absolutism, here the target of criticism is traditional Christianity which takes a leap of

faith in the absolute transcendence in the face of the absurd. For this reason, Camus considers *The Plague* his “most anti-Christian work” (qtd. in Foley 50). Pierre- Henri Simon also consents to this consideration and says, “*The Plague* is the most anti-Christian of all his books, because it is the one which affirms in the clearest manner a pure humanism, a religion of human nobility without God and even against God” (qtd. in Hanna 149).

The absoluteness of Christianity is represented through the character of the Jesuit priest, Father Paneloux, who sermons people to take the plague as “the scourge of God” which should be responded with a resignation to God’s will (Camus, *The Plague* 74). He preaches that this calamity is a means of purgation for their sins. But Camus finds the Christian response to the fact of human suffering unacceptable. This becomes evident through the characters of Dr. Rieux and Tarrou. Dr. Rieux shares his objection against Father Paneloux’s attitude with Tarrou and says, “. . . since the order of the world is governed by death, perhaps it is better for God that we should not believe in Him and struggle with all our strength against death, without raising our eyes to heaven and to His silence. (Camus, *The Plague* 98)

Camus’s rejection to the Christian complacency becomes particularly evident in the exchange of dialogues between Father Paneloux and Dr. Rieux, immediately after the slow and torturous death of a child from the plague. Dr. Rieux, dejected and outrageous, asks the Priest, “Ah, now that one, at least, was innocent, as you very well know!” (Camus, *The Plague* 168). For the Priest, the only answer is that of complete subjugation to God’s will as he replies, “I understand. . . . It is outrageous because it is beyond us. But perhaps we should love what we cannot understand” (Camus, *The Plague* 169). However, Dr. Rieux, like Ivan Karmazov, rejects the truth of such God which doesn’t hesitate to torture innocent children. He abruptly says to the Priest,

“No, Father . . . I have a different notion of love; and to the day I die I shall refuse to love this creation in which children are tortured” (Camus, *The Plague* 169). Hence, it can be argued that for Camus, both Christianity and Marxism are absolute forms in different ways and both are ruinous for humanity, if completely accepted.

In this sense, *The Plague*, even in the consistent havoc of the absurd plague, “dramatizes the victory of human spirit and solidarity over that which would threaten and dismember it: a plague, an enemy occupation, existence itself” (Gary 165).

After going through Camus’s concepts of the absurd and its resultant revolt, depicted throughout the pages of his various literary and philosophical works, it can be safely argued that Camus’s purpose is not to declare merely the absurdity of the world – a declaration that has, somehow, given ways to two World Wars, but to assure that a positive ethics of solidarity and revolt can be discerned through the very logic of the absurd. Again, Camus denies the irrational absoluteness (both of the historical and the transcendental) in the name of revolution and succeeds in creating a just ethics of limits which strives for both justice and freedom.

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