

## **The Meaningless Life Is Not Worth Living: Critical Reflections on Marcel's Critique of Camus**

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*Abstract:* Gabriel Marcel (1889–1973) and Albert Camus (1913–1960) both resist categorization as thinkers. Marcel may be regarded as a “Christian existentialist,” though he eventually questioned this label, and Camus has been viewed as the “philosopher of the absurd,” though he soon grew uneasy with this designation. Indeed, it is often overlooked that Camus’s thought underwent a remarkable shift from a preoccupation with the ineluctability of absurdity to a concentration on the possibility of revolt. It is also underappreciated that Marcel presented a detailed critique of Camus’s thought, though the reverse did not happen. The purpose of this paper is to outline Marcel’s critique of Camus and to examine its merits and demerits. The question is what role, if any, Marcel’s critique played in the passage of Camus’s thought from solitary resignation to the absurdity of the world to collective revolt against the injustice of human beings to their fellows.

### **Introduction: A Hint at a Missed Opportunity**

In March, 1940, Albert Camus, having earned a diploma in philosophy from the University of Algiers (1936) and working mainly and mostly as a journalist in his native Algeria, settled in Paris to seek his future as a writer. He had previously published two slender collections of lyrical essays, *L'Envers et l'Endroit/The Wrong Side and the Right Side* (1937) and *Noces/Nuptials* (1939), with a small Algerian press, but he was generally unknown to the reading public of metropolitan France. Yet he had also been working on other manuscripts. By May, 1940, Camus had completed *L'Étranger/The Stranger* and, by February 1941, he had finished *Le Mythe de Sisyphe/The Myth of Sisyphus*, two works that would become seminal for the philosophy of the absurd and existentialism, two major strands of twentieth-century philosophy. Soliciting support for the publication of these manuscripts, Camus disseminated them to various intellectual and literary figures, including the established philosopher, playwright, and critic Gabriel Marcel. In a letter of March 7, 1942, to Jean Grenier, his teacher, mentor, and friend, Camus recorded Marcel’s reaction to *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

What did Gabriel Marcel write to me? An irritated and definitive letter. After having read the half of my essay, he asked how I could have thought that he would have approved of such a position, what my purpose could have been in submitting it to him, and he described in a very harsh way the intellectual attitude that my essay revealed. He finished by explaining my point of view as the result of hasty readings and a lack of experience that, he hoped, I would correct. You can believe that I am not exaggerating at all. A few years ago, such a letter would have thrown me off. It made me reflect. I responded to him, and

in return I received a letter in which he asked me very graciously whether I wanted to start a colloquium with him on the themes of my essay. Unfortunately, I was in bed [sick] then and could only thank him.

I am telling you this in detail because it is a curious adventure. I think that the reaction of G.M. would be that of many people of his stature and it does indeed show the limits of my essay.<sup>1</sup>

Despite this apparent setback, the renowned house of Gallimard published *The Stranger* in May of 1942 and *The Myth of Sisyphus* in December of that year. At the same time, one cannot help but wonder what might have happened if there had been a personal encounter between Camus and Marcel. It is also unfortunate that there seems to be no extant evidence of the concrete content of the exchange between Camus and Marcel over *The Myth of Sisyphus*, not to mention *The Stranger*.<sup>2</sup> Yet the very unrealized potential of this lost opportunity provides an intriguing starting point for an examination of the relationship between these two pivotal figures of twentieth-century thought.

## I. Camus's Philosophy of the Absurd

In his unforgettable and inimitable novel *The Stranger*, Camus creates the character Meursault to give expression to the feeling of absurdity. Meursault is a peculiar man who, by his own account, lives a life of immediacy, indifference, and insensitivity. He reacts unsentimentally to his mother's death, his girlfriend's affection, and his male companion's brutality. He callously helps his pal abuse his mistress, depravedly kills her brother, feels no remorse for anything, and regrets nothing. At first sight, his behavior seems easy to explain, apparently because Meursault, though an intelligent and perceptive man, lives an unreflective and unregretful life. He has given up his studies, lost the habit of examining himself, and insists that he has always been right about everything. On closer scrutiny, however, Meursault also displays a remarkable capacity for reflection on himself, observation of others, and recollection of things. He displays sympathy to a lonely neighbor, explains movies to a dull colleague, and cautions his pal against prematurely shooting a potential assailant. Finally, his killing of the Arab on the beach does not occur without forethought. Thus Meursault is not at all bereft of sentiments. Indeed, he claims to be just like everybody else, a kind of everyman, but, above all, one who seeks to live and to die like "a man."

Yet Meursault's worldview then poses serious problems when he expresses his opinions on "existential" matters, that is, when he attempts to articulate the notion of the absurd. He claims, for example, that nothing matters, that life is absurd, that people never change their lives, that a man's dog is worth as much as his wife, and that, because everyone is equally guilty and condemned to die, it does not matter how long one lives or how one dies. He also denies the existence of God, rejects the sacrifice of Jesus, and asserts that life is not worth the trouble of

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<sup>1</sup> Albert Camus and Jean Grenier, *Albert Camus–Jean Grenier: Correspondance 1932–1960*, ed. Marguerite Dobrenn (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), pp. 68–69, and *Correspondence, 1932–1960*, tr. Jan Rigaud (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2003) p. 48. All translations in this paper are my own unless otherwise noted.

<sup>2</sup> The Camus-Grenier correspondence suggests the possibility that Marcel received *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *Caligula*, and *The Stranger* from Camus and/or Grenier and that he read them, but it is a fact that Marcel read *The Myth of Sisyphus* and reacted to it in his letter to Camus. See Albert Camus and Jean Grenier, *Correspondance*, pp.50, 52, 60, 64–65, and 68–69, and *Correspondence*, pp.34, 36, 42, 44–45, and 48–49. I am presently looking into the possibility that more of the Camus-Marcel correspondence on *The Myth of Sisyphus*, as well as, perhaps, on the other two works, has been preserved at the *Centre de documentation Albert Camus* in Aix en Provence, France.

having lived it. And yet, as a condemned murderer desiring pardon but expecting execution, he seems to find the tranquility to accept the alleged indifference of the world. Thus Meursault presents himself as a man who lives a meaningless life, contemns “the dark wind of fate,” dies a happy death, and would gladly do it all over again. The man was happy, and he died.<sup>3</sup>

In his book of essays *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus turns from a depiction of *the feeling of absurdity* to an analysis of *the concept of the absurd*.<sup>4</sup> The irony is that Meursault emerges as a kind of “existentialist” hero *sui generis* in *The Stranger*, whereas Camus criticizes the *existentialist* thinkers in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Bracketing whether in his “Explication de *L’Étranger*”/“Explication of *The Stranger*” (1943) Sartre was right that *The Myth of Sisyphus* provides the template for an understanding of *The Stranger*, one notes that, while there are many overlappings and underlappings between these texts, one common theme stands out, namely, both the novel and the essay exhibit a preoccupation with the ineluctability of the absurd, even as a careful reader is led to seek an acceptable mean between the one extreme of proclaiming that life is meaningful because God exists and Christ has saved humanity and the other extreme of claiming that life is absurd because God does not exist and Christ has not saved anyone. Meursault condemns himself to death because he kills a man *and* because he fails to provide a plausible alternative to the convincing narrative that an aggressive prosecution presents to the pliant jury. It is ridiculous to say, as he does to the court: “It was because of the sun.”<sup>5</sup> Sisyphus, who is not a thinker but a doer, also presents no articulate alternative to nihilism and rationalism other than revolt against absurdity and scorn for fate.<sup>6</sup>

Yet there is a great contrast between the hero Sisyphus and the anti-hero Meursault. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus argues that what he refers to as “the absurd” is generated by what he regards as the confrontation between human rationality and irrational reality (*MS*, pp.21, 28, 30–31, 54). He asks whether the absurdity of existence dictates suicide and answers that from the fact that life has no meaning, that is, no *objective* meaning in the absolute sense of *the* meaning of life, it does *not* follow that life is *not* worth living (*MS*, pp.3–4, 8, 119–123). The response to the absurd that Camus advocates is not suicide but revolt (*MS*, pp.52–55, 60–66, 87–89, 101–106, 113–118). Yet he also argues that “the absurd walls” of the irrational world prevent human reason, which longs for a lucid and unitary understanding of existence, from attaining true knowledge of the self, the universe, and God (*MS*, pp.10, 20, 22, 27). Finally, he criticizes various thinkers for committing what he refers to as “philosophical suicide,” that is, for trying to bridge the gap between human understanding and incomprehensible reality by resorting to a cheap easy leap to something transcendent, for example, the absolute, the divine, another life, another world, and forms, ideas, or essences (*MS*, pp.28–29, 33–34, 36–37, 41–47, 49–55, 64, 104–105). In this regard, Camus has first and foremost (and accurately or inaccurately) the “existentialists” from Kierkegaard to Heidegger in mind (*MS*, pp.22–50). Given the great contrast between Meursault and Sisyphus, *The Stranger* seems to present a rebel without a cause and *The Myth of Sisyphus* a cause without a rebel.

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<sup>3</sup> See my study “‘Mais personne ne paraissait comprendre’ (‘But no one seemed to understand’): Atheism, Nihilism, and Hermeneutics in Albert Camus’s *L’Étranger/The Stranger*,” *Analecta Husserliana* 109 (2011), pp.133–152.

<sup>4</sup> See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, tr. Justin O’Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991), pp. 6, 10–12, 15, 21–22, and 28–50. The work is henceforth referenced in the text as *MS*.

<sup>5</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger*, tr. Matthew Ward (New York: Vintage International, 1989) p.103.

<sup>6</sup> See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, esp. pp.119–123 (the myth itself comes at the end of the book of essays).

Yet Camus's entire philosophy is much more structurally nuanced and teleologically ordered than his early works alone might suggest. As several entries from his *Carnets/Notebooks* indicate, Camus had, from the early years on, conceived a grand five-part plan for the composition of his works from *The Stranger* to *The System*, which he never composed:

Without sequel

First series. Absurd: *The Stranger*—*The Myth of Sisyphus*—*Caligula* and *The Misunderstanding*.

Second series. Revolt: *The Plague* (and annexes)—*The Rebel*—Kaliayev.

Third series. Judgment—The First Man.

Fourth series. Love sundered: The Stake—On Love—The Charmer.

Fifth series. Creation corrected or The System: Big novel + great meditation + unplayable play.<sup>7</sup>

The date of this exemplary passage is June 17, 1947, but it is impossible to dismiss it as a reading back into the late 1930s of what Camus had only first conceived in the late 1940s. The reason is that, of the works that are named, the first that he completed was *Caligula*, which was finished in its first version in 1938 and performed in a later version in 1945. It would be an error, of course, to presuppose without further ado the correctness of the given periodization.<sup>8</sup> It is clear, however, that there is a distinct development here. On this wider horizon, and despite the understandable moral support that Camus expressed for the much maligned Meursault in the Preface (1955) to the American edition of *The Stranger* (1956),<sup>9</sup> *The Myth of Sisyphus* already moves beyond *The Stranger* by suggesting that there must be a viable alternative to the view that human life is worth living because God makes it so and the view that human life is not worth living because God does not exist. Even Meursault, the inarticulate articulator of absurdity in *The Stranger*, at least hints at this possibility, albeit in the default mode.

## II. Camus's Turn from Absurdity to Revolt

The history of thought is full of thinkers whose thinking evolved in phases from one point to another. In some cases, the later thought is different from and consistent with the earlier, in other cases, the later is different from but inconsistent with the earlier, and, in still other cases, the later contradicts the earlier. For example, Kant's thought developed from its pre-critical phase as dogmatic metaphysics into its critical expression as transcendental philosophy. Husserl moved from phenomenology designed as descriptive psychology to phenomenology reconceived as transcendental idealism. Wittgenstein moved from his picture-theory of language to his account of

<sup>7</sup> Albert Camus, *Carnets Janvier 1942–Mars 1951* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p.201, and *Notebooks 1942–1951*, tr. Justin O'Brien (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1966), p.158.

<sup>8</sup> See, e.g., Ronald Strigley, *Albert Camus' Critique of Modernity* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011), pp.1–16, esp. 4–7.

<sup>9</sup> See Albert Camus, "Préface à l'édition universitaire américaine [of *The Stranger*]," in *Albert Camus: Théâtre, récits, nouvelles*, ed. Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), pp.1928–1929, and "Preface to the American University Edition [of *The Stranger*]," in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, ed. Philip Thody and tr. Ellen Kennedy (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1969), pp.335–337. Henceforth, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* will be referred to in the footnotes as *Lyrical*. Some conservative and religious critics of *The Stranger* had attacked Meursault as *une épave* or "a piece of social wreckage."

languages based on the concept of language-games. And Heidegger moved from a preliminary emphasis on *Dasein* to a renewed focus on *Sein*. Yet, in each case, it was not a matter of casting aside *tout court* what had gone before, but rather of negating it, preserving it, and taking it to a deeper and higher level. What is true of the thinking of these thinkers also holds for that of Camus. In his case, however, the shift from absurdity to revolt is gradual, so that it is a good idea to trace the main stations of his development by judicious references to selected sources.

In *L'Étranger/The Stranger* (1942), the author lets the protagonist suggest that there must be a third way between the first view that human life is worth living because God exists and Jesus Christ has saved humanity and the second view that human life is not worth living because it is going to end with a full stop at some point. It is one of the novel's strengths that the protagonist *feels* the absurd but does not *conceptualize* it. Thus the author presents the readers with an existential task that they are challenged to address in a way that may or may not resemble the way of Meursault.

In *Le Mythe de Sisyphe/The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), Camus sows the seeds of revolt in the face of the absurd by rejecting traditional attempts to solve the problem of absurdity with leaps of faith, especially with "philosophical suicide," by drawing three consequences from the absurd, "my revolt, my freedom, and my passion," and by arguing that "it is revolt that gives life its value" (*MS*, pp.28–50, 64 and 88, and 55, respectively). In fact, it is often overlooked that on the first page of this work Camus says: "But it is useful to note [...] that the absurd, hitherto taken as a conclusion, is considered in this essay as a starting-point" (*MS*, p.2). The "Preface" added in 1955 confirmed what he had already indicated, namely, that the nihilism of the absurd is the beginning but not the end of "wondering whether life has a meaning" (*MS*, pp.v–vi).

In *Caligula* (1941/1945), Camus lets his characters reduce the absurd to the absurd.<sup>10</sup> The play begins with the death of Caligula's sister Drusilla, with whom he has lived in incest. With this death Caligula experiences the absurdity of human existence. Death is, according to him, "only the sign of a truth [...] which is quite simple and quite clear, a little stupid, but difficult to discover and heavy to carry," namely, that "human beings die, and they are not happy."<sup>11</sup> Yet Cherea, both the intimus and the enemy of Caligula, expresses a different view, an opposing one. When Caligula asks him why he refuses to assent to the absurdity of human existence, Cherea answers:

Because I desire to live and to be happy. I believe that one can be neither the one nor the other by pushing the absurd in all its consequences. I am like everyone else. To feel myself free, I sometimes wish for the death of those whom I love, I covet women whom the laws of family or of friendship forbid me to covet. To be logical, I would have to kill or to possess. Yet I judge that these vague ideas are not important. If everyone tried to realize them, we could neither live nor be happy. Once again, it is this that matters.<sup>12</sup>

Caligula responds that Cherea must believe in "some higher idea." This seems to mean that Cherea rejects the absurd and accepts absolute, eternal, or divine values: God or something comparable. Yet Cherea denies this, though he affirms that he believes that "some actions are more beautiful

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<sup>10</sup> For reasons that cannot be pursued here, this is true, but less evidently so, of Albert Camus, *Le Malentendu/The Misunderstanding* (1944). See Albert Camus, *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, tr. Stuart Gilbert (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1958), pp.75–134.

<sup>11</sup> Albert Camus, *Caligula*, in *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, Act I, Scene IV.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, Act III, Scene VI.

[*bel*: fine, good, noble] than others.”<sup>13</sup> In the end, Cherea’s choice of revolt limits Caligula’s reign of absurdity, for he suggests that, even in a world without God or anyone or anything transcendent, some acts, choices, and values are better than others. This play is a crucial part of the evolution of Camus’s thought, because its own development stretches from its conception in 1936/1937 to its publication in 1944 and its performance in 1945.<sup>14</sup>

In *Lettres à un ami allemand/Letters to a German Friend*, Camus asserts unambiguously that there is something meaningful in this life. In the “First Letter” (composed July, 1943, and published 1944), he distinguishes between a world in which, because everything has lost its meaning, some seek a meaning by killing others for their own nation, and a world in which there is hope because others have the courage to die for truth and not for falsehood, regardless of what their own nation stands for.<sup>15</sup> In the “Second Letter” (composed December, 1943, and published 1944), Camus writes that the rejection of the distinction between truth and falsehood, virtue and vice, and right and wrong would only be justified if “nothing had any meaning,” but that “there is something that still has a meaning,” and that therefore this rejection is cynical and unacceptable.<sup>16</sup> In the “Third Letter” (composed April, 1944, and published 1945), Camus states that during the time of the Resistance “we never lost sight of an idea and a hope [...] the idea and the hope of Europe,” and argues that one must choose between the National Socialist vision of Europe as a German fortress based on uniformity, tyranny, and strength, and the European vision of Europe as a place of diversity, freedom, and knowledge.<sup>17</sup> In the “Fourth Letter” (composed July, 1944, and published 1945), Camus indicates that he has chosen justice, humanity, and solidarity “to remain faithful to the world” because, although he believes that “this world has no ultimate meaning,” he knows that “something in it has a meaning and that is the human being, because the human being is the only creature to insist on having one.”<sup>18</sup> If by the philosophy of the absurd one understands the view that there is nothing meaningful in this life (*à la Meursault*), then the author of these letters is not an advocate of the philosophy of the absurd, especially in light of his key distinction between the claim that “this world has no ultimate meaning” and the claim that “something in the world has a meaning.”

In his articles in the Resistance newspaper *Combat* (1944–1947), Camus continues in the same manner. For example, in the article “Le Pessimisme et le courage”/“Pessimism and Courage” (November 3, 1944 [not September, 1945]), he responds to recent articles by critics intent on showing that “pessimistic philosophy,” for example, the philosophy of the absurd and existentialism, was “in essence a discouraged philosophy” advocated by those who “do not believe that the world is good” and who are “destined to serve tyranny.”<sup>19</sup> The critics, for example, George Adam and Gaston Rabeau, had named Nietzsche, Heidegger, Sartre, and Malraux, but Camus understood that he too was meant. Without defending existentialism, which he had sharply attacked in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and from which he would consistently distance himself in

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

<sup>14</sup> See Albert Camus, “Author’s Preface” (1957), in *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, pp.v–vii.

<sup>15</sup> See Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, ed. Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi (Paris: Gallimard, 2006), pp.9–13, and Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, ed. Justin O’Brien (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1961), pp.5–11. Henceforth, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* referred to in the footnotes as *Resistance*.

<sup>16</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp.14–19, and Albert Camus, *Resistance*, pp.12–19.

<sup>17</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp.20–24, and Albert Camus, *Resistance*, pp.20–25.

<sup>18</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp.25–29, and Albert Camus, *Resistance*, pp.26–32.

<sup>19</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp.421–423, and Albert Camus, *Camus at “Combat”: Writing 1944–1947*, ed. Jacqueline Valensi and tr. Arthur Goldhammer (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006), pp.99–101. Henceforth, *Camus at “Combat”: Writing 1944–1947* referred to as *Camus at “Combat”*.

statements that he made in interviews during the 1940s,<sup>20</sup> Camus deftly deflects the criticism by defining the issue, namely, “whether the human being, without help from the eternal or from rationalist philosophy, can create his own values.”<sup>21</sup> The point, he argues, is that, “if the age is afflicted with nihilism, it is not by ignoring nihilism that we will discover the morality that we need.”<sup>22</sup> Again Camus does not advocate the view that there are no values because there are no transcendent values.

In “Remarque sur la révolte”/“Remark on Revolt” (1945), Camus emphasizes how his move from a preoccupation with the ineluctability of absurdity to a concentration on the possibility of revolt is the defining movement of his philosophical development. He also clarifies the transition from a solitary philosophy of the absurd to a collective philosophy of revolt thus:

At least here we have a first progress that the spirit of revolt brings to bear on a reflection that was first penetrated with absurdity and with the apparent sterility of the world. In the absurd experience, the tragedy is individual. Starting with the movement of revolt, it has a consciousness of being collective. It is the adventure of all. The first progress of a mind struck by this estrangement is to recognize that it shares this estrangement with all human beings, and that human reality in its totality suffers from this distance in the relation of itself and the world.<sup>23</sup>

Camus further argues that the category of the absurd, as a concept or as a feeling, is inadequate as a guide for human action because it leaves no room for values or for value judgments:

Let us retain, in any case, this first step, which revolt brings to bear on a spirit left in an absurd world. For the absurd is contradictory in existence. It excludes, in fact, the judgments of value and the judgments of value *are*. They are, because they are bound to the very fact of existing. It is necessary, then, to replace the absurdist line of reasoning with its equivalent in existence, which is revolt.<sup>24</sup>

This strong statement of the pivotal shift in Camus’s thinking from the absurd to revolt does not imply that revolt “replaces” (*déplacer*) the absurdist line of reasoning by abolishing, negating, or rendering the absurd itself harmless for human existence and ethics. Rather, the relationship between the absurd and revolt, as moments of the human condition, is dyadic and chronic.

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<sup>20</sup> See, e.g., Albert Camus, *Albert Camus: Essais*, ed. Roger Quilliot and Louis Faucon (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.1424–1427 (Interview with Jeanine Delpéch, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, November 15, 1945), pp.1427–1429 (Interview with *Servir*, December 20, 1945), and 1925–1928 (Last Interview, December 20, 1959, *Venture*, Spring-Summer, 1960); Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp.655–658 (November 15, 1945) and pp.659–661 (December 20, 1945), and vol. IV, pp.661–664 (December 20, 1959); and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, pp.345–348. Later Camus would characterize his own writings thus: “I understand that you could see in me what I should prefer to call ‘an existential writer’ rather than ‘an existentialist writer’. I simply insist on being precise. [...]” See Albert Camus, “Letter to Hazel Barnes, October, 1959,” quoted in Hazel Barnes, *The Story I Tell Myself: A Venture in Existentialist Autobiography* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1997), pp.160–161. The point is that there is a way to write about *existence* in a *non-existentialist* manner.

<sup>21</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, p.422, and Albert Camus, *Camus at “Combat”*, p.100.

<sup>22</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp.422–423, and Albert Camus, *Camus at “Combat”*, p.100.

<sup>23</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, p.327.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, p.337.

In *La Peste/The Plague* (1947), Camus narrates the suffering, that is, imprisonment, exile, and oppression, which the citizens of Oran experience when a devastating plague strikes the city. Yet the novel also dramatizes the solidarity of the human spirit in the face of the forces that would drive it into solitude, namely, lethal epidemic, enemy occupation, and empty existence.<sup>25</sup> In this regard, Camus later says, in a letter to Roland Barthes (January 11, 1955), that, “if there is an evolution from *The Stranger* to *The Plague*, it is in the direction of solidarity and participation.”<sup>26</sup> Earlier he indicates, in his notes from April 1941, that it is also a movement from a passive acceptance of the world of tragedy to an active revolt of the spirit against it.<sup>27</sup> In “L’Énigme”/ “The Enigma” (1950), Camus, comparing Paris to a literary Platonic cave in which superficial journalists determine the public perceptions of literary figures, criticizes the failure of French readers to realize that his attitude toward the absurd and the absurd line of reasoning was in a process of constant change.<sup>28</sup> For the first time, he expresses his frustration with the public perception of himself as a philosopher of the absurd because it fails to do justice to the full range of his thought. According to Camus, “everyone wants the man who is still searching,” referring to himself, “to have already reached his conclusions.”<sup>29</sup> Contrasting the character that he has and the one that society thinks he has, Camus observes that, while “it is always possible to write, or to have written, an essay on the notion of the absurd” (an evident reference to *The Myth of Sisyphus*), “one cannot always be a painter of the absurd,” and that “no one can believe in a literature of despair” (a possible reference to *The Stranger*).<sup>30</sup> Thus it is due to “the modern mania of identifying the author with his subject matter” that “one” becomes “a prophet of the absurd.”<sup>31</sup> But he asks: “Yet what else have I done except reason about an idea that I discovered in the streets of my time?”<sup>32</sup> Camus had, after all, not “invented” the absurd; Malraux and Sartre, in *La Tentation de l’occident/The Temptation of the West* (1926) and *La Nausée/Nausea* (1938), respectively, had done that. Camus does, however, admit to having “nourished this idea,” but notes that his whole generation did this as well.<sup>33</sup> From these remarks, it becomes evident that Camus’s originality lay in the fact that he “simply set [the idea of the absurd] far enough away that [he] could deal with it and decide on its logic.”<sup>34</sup> Yet it was more convenient for “a hurried journalist” to exploit a cliché than to explain a nuance: “One has chosen the cliché: there I am, absurd as ever.”<sup>35</sup> For Camus, on the other hand, “the absurd can be considered only a point of departure,” and thus not a conclusion to which he argues.<sup>36</sup> Hence he asks: “In any case, how can one limit oneself to saying that nothing has meaning and that we must plunge into absolute despair?”<sup>37</sup> The implication is that Camus never did any such thing, for he rejects, as he always did, *absurdism* as *nihilism*, arguing that “at the moment at which one says that everything is nonsense one expresses something meaningful.”<sup>38</sup>

<sup>25</sup> See Albert Camus, *Carnets Janvier 1942–Mars 1951*, pp.66–72, and *Notebooks 1942–1951*, pp.48–54.

<sup>26</sup> Albert Camus, *Théâtre, récits, nouvelles*, p.1974, and Albert Camus, *Literary and Critical Essays*, p.339.

<sup>27</sup> See Albert Camus, *Carnets Mai 1935–Février 1942*, pp.229–231; *Notebooks 1935–1942*, pp.193–195.

<sup>28</sup> See Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, pp.602–607, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, pp.154–161.

<sup>29</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, p.602, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, p.155.

<sup>30</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, pp.604–605, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, p.158.

<sup>31</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, p.605, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, p.159.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*

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

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

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.* The French is striking: “On a choisi la formule: me voilà absurde comme devant.”

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.* Cf. also Albert Camus, *Essais*, pp.1926–1927.

<sup>37</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, p.605, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, p.159.

<sup>38</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, p.606, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, pp.159–160.



The point is that to refuse the world all meaning is to abolish all value judgments. But living is impossible without value judgments, because living itself is a value judgment. Therefore “the literature of despair” is “a contradiction in terms.”<sup>39</sup> Camus concludes: “I have sought only reasons to transcend our darkest pessimism.”<sup>40</sup>

In *L’Homme révolté/The Rebel* (1951), the last chapter of which is entitled “Beyond Nihilism,” Camus’s thought comes full circle from absurdity to revolt. Arguing that the absurd, “considered as a rule of life,” contradicts itself, does not provide values, encourages despair, presupposes nihilism, and, as one—admittedly intense—attitude, emotion, or perception among others, amounts to a malady that would render the human being completely inadequate to the exigencies of the times,<sup>41</sup> Camus says:

[...] nothing remains [in the absurdist attitude] which can help us to respond to the questions of the age. The absurd, like methodical doubt, has wiped the slate clean. It leaves us at an impasse. But, like the doubt, it can, in returning upon itself, open up a new investigation. The reasoning then pursues the same course. I proclaim that I believe in nothing and that everything is absurd, but I cannot doubt my proclamation and I must at least believe in my protestation. The first and only evidence that is thus given me, at the interior of the absurdist experience, is rebellion. Deprived of all knowledge, incited to murder or to consent to murder, I have at my disposal only this evidence, which is only reinforced by the anguish that I suffer. Rebellion is born of the spectacle of irrationality, confronted with an unjust and incomprehensible condition. But its blind impulse is to demand order in the midst of chaos, and unity in the very heart of that which comes and goes. It protests, it demands, it insists that the outrage be brought to an end, and that what has up to now been built upon shifting sands should henceforth be founded on rock. Its concern is to transform. But to transform is to act, and to act will, tomorrow, be to kill, and it still does not know whether murder is legitimate. Rebellion engenders exactly the actions that it is asked to legitimate. Therefore rebellion must find its reasons within itself, since it cannot draw them from anywhere else. It must consent to examine itself in order to learn how to act.<sup>42</sup>

Camus can hardly have provided a better statement of how a concentration on the possibility of revolt has superseded a preoccupation with the ineluctability of absurdity. It is consistent with his assertion that “in all the books that I have written since [*The Myth of Sisyphus*], I have attempted to pursue this direction,” following which, “even within the limits of nihilism, it is possible to find the means to proceed beyond nihilism” (*MS*, p.v). By “nihilism” Camus means the rejection of absolute, eternal, or divine values, which, as far as he was concerned, had been dispelled or distorted by his contemporaries of the Right and the Left (*Ibid.*). Yet he refused to be caught between the rock of the eternal, external, and vertical transcendence of Christianity and the hard place of the historical, internal, and horizontal transcendence of Marxism. Thus he can claim that

<sup>39</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, p.606, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, p.160.

<sup>40</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. III, pp.605–606, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, p.160.

<sup>41</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*, tr. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage International, 1991), pp.9–11.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, p.10.

he has “progressed beyond several of the positions that are set down” in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, while having “remained faithful [...] to the exigency that prompted them” (*MS*, p.vi). Unfortunately, the bitter altercation between Camus and Sartre that *The Rebel* set off in *Les Temps modernes* (1952) and elsewhere seems to have prevented a clear discernment and judicious discussion of the evident development in Camus’s thinking.<sup>43</sup>

To eliminate any possible lingering doubt in this regard, it should be noted that, already in his early review of Sartre’s *La Nausée/Nausea* in *Alger républicain* (October 20, 1938), Camus had said: “To realize the absurdity of life cannot be an end, but only a beginning. This is a truth that nearly all great minds have taken as their starting point. It is not this discovery that interests me, but the consequences and the rules of action that one draws from it.”<sup>44</sup> Also, in response to the question, in an interview in 1945, whether “a philosophy that insists upon the absurdity of the world” does not “run the risk of driving people to despair,” Camus responded:

Here I can only reply on my own behalf, measuring the relativity of what I say. Accepting the absurdity of everything around us is one stage, 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, though a meaning that would always be in danger.<sup>45</sup>

In addition, in response to the question, in an interview in 1951, whether people should regard his books, whether novels or plays, as “symbolic translations of the philosophy of the absurd,” Camus states that “the word ‘absurd’ has had an unhappy history,” that “now it has come to annoy” him, and that a clarification of his position on the absurd is in order:

If one posits that nothing has any meaning, then one must conclude that the world is absurd. But does nothing have a meaning? I have never thought that one could rest on this position. Even as I was writing *The Myth [of Sisyphus]*, I was thinking about the essay on revolt [*The Rebel*] that I would later write, and in which I would attempt, after having described the different aspects of the feeling of the absurd, to describe the different attitudes of *Man in revolt [l’Homme révolté]*. (That is the title of the book that I am completing.) And then there are the new events that enrich or correct what has come to us through observation, the continual lessons that life offers, which one has to reconcile with one’s earlier experiences. This is what I have tried to do ... though, naturally, I still do not pretend to be in possession of any truth.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>43</sup> See the collection of sources edited by David Sprintzen and Adrian van den Hoven in *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation* (Amherst, New York: Humanity Books, 2004), as well as the account of events provided by Ronald Aronson in *Camus and Sartre: The Story of a Friendship and the Quarrel that Ended It* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

<sup>44</sup> Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, pp.795–796, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, pp.201–202.

<sup>45</sup> Albert Camus, *Essais*, p.1425, Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, p.656, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, p.346 (Interview with Jeanine Delpech, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, November 15, 1945).

<sup>46</sup> Albert Camus, *Essais*, pp.1342–1343, and Albert Camus, *Lyrical*, p.356 (Interview with Gabriel d’Aubarède, *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, May 10, 1951).

Therefore, there is adequate evidence from all periods of his literary and philosophical output to show that, to the extent that Camus can be regarded as “a philosopher of the absurd” at all, it is not in the sense that he advocates the absurd and the absurd line of reasoning, but in the sense that he articulates the former and criticizes the latter. Thus, his message is one of how human beings can move from the despair of solitude to the hope of solidarity, and how they can do this through immanent humanism. It is equally evident, however, that Camus wants to accomplish his goals without any reference to eternal, external, and vertical transcendence, and that is where, of course, his differences with Marcel enter into the picture.

### III. Marcel’s Critique of Camus

Here it is not possible to provide a general introduction to Marcel’s whole philosophy, out of which naturally his critique of Camus’s thought organically arises. The tenuous connection suggested by their brief exchange of 1942 regarding *The Myth of Sisyphus* must suffice. Aside from Marcel’s occasional remarks on Camus in *Le Mystère de l’être/The Mystery of Being* (1951),<sup>47</sup> and his other remarks on him in the context of the controversy over the location of Camus’s *L’État de siège/State of Siege* (1948),<sup>48</sup> Marcel’s critique of Camus’s thought has three clearly discernible parts, two of which are found in *Homo Viator: Prolégomènes à une métaphysique de l’espérance/Homo Viator: Introduction to a Metaphysic of Hope* (1945) and one of which is located in *Les Hommes contre l’humain/Man Against Mass Society* (1951).

In *Homo Viator*, Marcel delivers a critique of Camus’s thought in two parts. In the first part, “The Refusal of Salvation and the Exaltation of the Man of Absurdity” (December, 1943), Marcel pairs Camus with Georges Bataille (1897–1962).<sup>49</sup> He criticizes Bataille for his “refusal of salvation,” evident in his *The Interior Experience* (1943), the first volume of his *Summa Atheologica* (1943–1945), a central tenet of which is, to paraphrase Maurice Blanchot, that ‘the principle of all spiritual life is the absence of salvation and the renunciation of all hope’ (*HV*, pp.178–193). According to Marcel, “at the root of Mr. Bataille’s book [...] there is what one might call a general declaration of absurdity,” though he admits that “this formula itself needs to be amended” (*HV*, p.193). Selecting several passages from *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Marcel criticizes Camus for his specification of the formula: “[...] Mr. Camus tells us that absurdity, the sin without God, is a state in which life has to be lived” (*HV*, p.194). Marcel begins with a contrast between his praise for Camus’s desire for lucidity and his blame for his passion for absurdity (*HV*, pp.194–195). The ten main points of his critique follow, accompanied by provisional comments; a final assessment is reserved until the conclusion of the paper.

First, *the notion that only the meaningless life is worth living*: Marcel criticizes Camus not for asking “whether life should have a meaning in order to be lived,” but for allegedly answering that “on the contrary [...] it can be lived all the better for having no meaning” (*HV*, p.195). In light of the development of Camus’s thought from *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* to *The Plague*

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<sup>47</sup> See Gabriel Marcel, *The Mystery of Being*, vol. 2, tr. René Hague (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2011), pp.172–177. Unless otherwise noted, all quotations of Marcel’s works are from the English editions cited, though slight modifications have been made in some cases.

<sup>48</sup> See Albert Camus, “*L’État de siège*,” *Les Nouvelles littéraires*, November 11, 1948, and Albert Camus, “Why Spain?” (orig. 1948), in *Resistance*, pp.75–83.

<sup>49</sup> See Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator: Introduction to the Metaphysic of Hope*, tr. Emma Craufurd and Paul Seaton (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine’s Press, 2010), pp.178–204. The work is henceforth referenced in the text as *HV*.

and *The Rebel* documented above, however, it is hard to grant any validity to this critique. Indeed, it is hard to know what to make of it. After all, Camus gradually makes it adequately evident that he draws a clear distinction between the search of the existentialist philosophers for *the* meaning of life and the hope of human beings for *a* life of meaning.

Second, *ethical and metaphysical nihilism*: Marcel connects the scene at the end of *The Stranger*, in which Meursault declares to the prison chaplain that he had led “a life of absurdity,” with Camus’s comment in his Appendix to *The Stranger*, “Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka,” that “in a world in which everything is given and nothing explained, the fruitfulness of a value or of any attempt at metaphysics is a meaningless notion” (*HV*, pp.196–197). Marcel argues that it makes no sense to speak of such a world and states that he “cannot see why positive values cannot be established in an irrational world” (*HV*, p.197). Yet that “positive values” can, and indeed must, be established in an “irrational world,” is at least implicit in Camus’s *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and it becomes explicit in his *Letters to a German Friend* at the latest.

Third, *celebration of absurdity*: Making a more direct attack on “the exaltation of the human being of absurdity” that he attributes to Camus, Marcel focuses on Camus’s claims that revolt “gives life its worth,” that “death and absurdity are [...] the principles of the only reasonable liberty,” and that the “refusal to hope is the persistent evidence of a life without consolation,” so that “the thing that matters is not to live as well as possible but to live as much as possible” (*HV*, pp.197–198). Marcel counters that there is an “ambiguity” in the notion of “quantity” that Camus advances because it is not clear whether “intensity” or “extendedness” is meant; that it is out of honesty and pride that Meursault “refuses to imagine a metaphysical background from which some light might shine forth to transfigure the scene,” so that the only alternative is “not only to proclaim the nameless absurdity of such a situation, but also to become so rooted in it as to make it one’s own, to assume and in a sense to exalt it”; that the world of Meursault according to Camus is a world without value, without friendship, and without love; that “there has never been so radical a monism as that of Mr. Camus”; and that, “if the author seems to forget [all this], he only does so in faithlessness to the principle that he himself has laid down” (*HV*, pp.198–199). This critique appears to rest on an untenable conflation of the author and his character. Or does any reader seriously think, for example, that Camus believes, as Meursault says he (Meursault) does, that, since all human beings are going to die at some point, it does not matter when or how they die?

Fourth, *seduction of the youth*: Marcel expresses concern about how seductive, contagious, and intimidating the attitude of the scornful rebel, who rejects compassion and stifles communication, can be, especially for young people. “Why,” he asks, “in a sudden rush of pride, should they not [...] embrace this world of absurdity which is suggested to them, or [...] brandish the torch of revolt in their turn?” (*HV*, p.199). In this regard, he realizes the thanklessness of his task, for, if he seeks to refute the philosophy of the absurd, he may be accused of “bad faith, cowardice, and stupidity” (*HV*, pp.199–200). This is, after all, what Meursault does to the prison chaplain who seeks to convert him. On the other hand, as Plato shows in his *Apology* for his mentor, there is something genuinely Socratic about “corrupting the youth” (a bogus charge in any case), especially if it involves liberating the young from the caves into which their “education” has put them.

Fifth, *“the hardened denier” of grace*: Marcel says that he is “as pessimistic as possible” about the possibility of convincing his adversary, that no argument can succeed against “such a hardened and such a narrow will,” and that arguments do not work “like a magical charm” but rather require “a certain receptive power, an open-mindedness that cannot but be lacking in this case” (*HV*, p.200). As a result, Marcel argues, “only grace can have any effect here,” whereas “the

hardened denier,” “by definition,” can only have “a very inadequate idea of its action,” cannot imagine “the ontological change which grace is able to bring about,” and denies what he or she does not understand (*Ibid.*). In fact, Camus does not believe in any eternal, external, and vertical transcendence, and he does not trust in divine assistance to human effort. Indeed, in *The Plague*, Dr. Rieux admits to Father Paneloux that he has not found grace,<sup>50</sup> and Camus once unequivocally stated that Dr. Rieux represents himself.<sup>51</sup>

Sixth, *pure objectivity and pure scholarship*: Turning to the other, “much more important,” question, namely, of determining how to protect oneself and others against “the contagion” of the absurd and revolt, Marcel distinguishes three ways in which, he claims, “this evil thing,” that is, the view of life as “a prison in the midst of a world destitute of all the attributes which by common consent were formerly regarded as its glory,” can “infect” people (*HV*, p.200). Referring to this view as “the preconceived opinion” that is “in no way that of a scholar in search of pure objectivity,” Marcel calls it “the claim not to allow oneself to be consoled,” and says that “this claim implies a pride quite foreign to the pure scholar” (*HV*, p.201). Thus “the first way of infiltration” is by “the refusal to consider the signs, numerous enough for whoever takes the trouble to notice them, of a supernatural intervention which is regarded as being lowering for those who accept it or adapt their lives in accordance with it” (*Ibid.*). Marcel judges that young people, who lack the life experiences to show them otherwise, are especially susceptible to this temptation (*Ibid.*). Yet it is hard to deny that Camus is “a scholar in search of pure objectivity” in so far as he repeatedly appeals to evidence in his arguments against the faith-based attempts to overcome the absurd by appealing to “supernatural intervention.”<sup>52</sup>

Seventh, *a transcendent meaning*: Marcel describes the second way in which “the evil” of which he speaks can “infiltrate our very foundations” (*HV*, p.201). When existence is devastated by such events that human beings no longer see anything around them but “the undefined no man’s land of universal inanity,” they can find themselves “in danger of sinking into absolute nihilism” or “plunged into inescapable despair,” and this is enough for the question to arise “about the meaning or absurdity of life” (*Ibid.*). “But,” Marcel observes, “the problem is always the same [...] and it is not and cannot be a problem of truths” (*Ibid.*). For Marcel, there is a difference between appealing to “a superior code of ethics,” based, for example, on “sincerity,” which is “self-delusion,” and acting according to genuine virtues, for example, courage, which are “essential conditions of values” and only become “true values” when they are applied in “a world which [is] not absurd, in a world which [has] meaning in itself—and a transcendent meaning in relation to my personal aims” (*HV*, p.202). Marcel charges “the nihilist of today” with “offering an apologetic in reverse, an apologetic of absurdity for which the total absence of value becomes the supreme value” (*Ibid.*). According to Marcel, this contemporary nihilism feeds, in turn, solipsistic idealism, which, in “the archetypal error,” “the unforgivable sin—intellectual sin, metaphysical sin,” and in a perversion of secular ontology, elevates the individual ego above Being (*HV*, p.203). Yet it is abundantly evident that Camus does not advance “an apologetic of absurdity for which the total absence of value becomes the supreme value.” Rather, he advocates genuinely humanistic values instead of falsely divinized ones, warning, especially in *The Rebel*, that history

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<sup>50</sup> See Albert Camus, *La Peste*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, p.185.

<sup>51</sup> See Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: Une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), pp.419 and 802 (Letter to Pierre Borel, October 15, 1948).

<sup>52</sup> See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, pp.4, 6, 9, 11, 15–16, 28, 35–36, 46, 49–50, 52, 60–61, 78, 83, 105, 115, and 135.

shows that the latter can be detrimental to and even destructive of the former. In brief, Camus is trying to show that human values are possible, indeed, necessary, without vertical transcendence.

Eighth, *the misdiagnosed malady*: Marcel explains “the third way of infiltration,” namely, “the *tedium vitae*, the boredom and disgust with living, which claims as its victims hundreds of thousands of human beings who do not ever know how to recognize the disease that is attacking them” (*HV*, p.203). He observes that this *tedium vitae* “is only made possible by the rupture, or more exactly the loosening, of the ontological bond that unites each particular being to Being in its fullness” (*Ibid.*). He criticizes not Camus (directly) but psychiatry and psychoanalysis for not getting beyond “the most superficial stratification of human reality and human ills” because they have failed to diagnose “this fundamental lesion” (*Ibid.*). In a sense, of course, Camus pleaded “guilty” to a part of this charge, admitting that, intent and effect being two different things, in “reasoning” about the absurd he too had also “nourished” the idea of it.<sup>53</sup>

Ninth, *advocacy of suicide*: Marcel insists that “the essential point” is that “the traumatization should be recognized as a traumatization, that the anomaly should be seen to be an anomaly” (*HV*, p.203). His point is that the view that life is absurd and meaningless is the “anomaly” that leads to the “traumatization” of the human being. He argues that the only way to address it is to secure “the human order,” the “notion that is attacked from all sides today” (*HV*, p.204). Yet Marcel claims that Camus’s questioning of the essence of the human being does not work: “Has Mr. Camus any suspicion that the spiritual attitude that he advocates is at bottom only a more subtly destructive equivalent of the suicide against which he has taken up his position?” (*Ibid.*). Marcel answers for Camus: “In reality what is prescribed for us is the restoration of dogmatics of which all the foundations have been systematically undermined” (*Ibid.*). Marcel claims that Camus’s approach results in “a vicious circle” that begs the question: “If these dogmatics are to be reconstituted, do they not presuppose the conviction of which they are to be the justification?” (*Ibid.*). Intent and effect can, of course, be two different things. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, however, Camus makes it very clear that he condemns both physical and philosophical suicide.

Tenth, *a narcissism of nothingness*: In summary, Marcel links Bataille’s “refusal of salvation” and Camus’s “exaltation of the man of absurdity” thus:

[...] I should say that the mode of thought of which I have tried today to analyze two particularly significant manifestations can be conceived either as a perverse but fascinating game, or, at a deeper level and more truly, as the end of a process of auto-destruction which is going on within a doomed society, within a humanity which has broken, or which thinks that it has broken, its ontological moorings. However this may be, it is nothing but a pure and simple imposture to claim to hold up as some unheard-of metaphysical promotion, or as a triumph of pure lucidity, the really blinding gesture by which all that humanity has ever acquired is swept away and we are thrust headlong into the dungeon, itself a sham, of a narcissism of nothingness, where we are left with no other resource but to wonder tirelessly at our courage, our pride, and our stubbornness in denying both God and the being full of weakness and hope, which, in spite of everything and for ever, we are.<sup>54</sup>

<sup>53</sup> See Albert Camus, “L’Énigme,” p.605, and “The Enigma,” p.159.

<sup>54</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, p.204.

Camus's philosophy of the absurd amounts, in Marcel's memorable phrase, to a "narcissism of nothingness" based on the human hubris of denying both divine transcendence and human nature. Again, this charge appears to rest on an incomprehensible conflation of Camus and Meursault.

In the second part of his critique of Camus in *Homo Viator*, "The Rebel (A Study of Albert Camus's *The Rebel*)" (1951) (*HV*, pp.261–278), Marcel reiterates and reinforces his critique, whereby it is not exactly evident to what extent he is aware of the fact that Camus's emphasis from *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* to *The Plague* and *The Rebel* has shifted from the absurd to revolt. Yet Marcel does observe that "*The Rebel* is the most important work of Albert Camus because it is his most mature work and the one that allows us to understand most clearly the problem on which he has meditated ever since he began to reflect" (*HV*, p.261). He goes on to remark that he is talking of a "problem" and not a "solution" because "it is far from certain that a solution is conceivable—even though the author seeks to persuade himself otherwise" (*Ibid.*). In this critique, Marcel does not systematically address Camus's arguments in *The Rebel*, and he writes for pages at a time without mentioning Camus or *The Rebel*. This part of his critique also has ten main points, which again follow, accompanied by provisional comments; final assessment is again reserved for the conclusion of the paper.

First, *a lack of rigor*: Distinguishing "three essential phases" in the line of thought of *The Rebel*, namely, a definition of "the movement of consciousness" that is called *revolt* or *rebellion*, a consideration of the history of revolt or rebellion, and an attempt to reestablish revolt or rebellion in its purity and truth, Marcel denies that Camus's analyses possess "all the desirable rigor" and asserts that his definition of a *rebel* is "vague and inadequate" (*HV*, pp.261–262). While it cannot be a topic of this paper, it is clear that here there is in general a great deal of overlapping between Marcel's critique of *The Rebel* (1951) and the criticisms of Francis Jeanson and Jean-Paul Sartre in their critical contributions to *Les Temps modernes* (1952).<sup>55</sup>

Second, *a neglect of the existential character of revolt*: Marcel criticizes Camus's intellectualism: "I would say that the existential character of revolt has not yet been adequately brought to light. One loses sight of the essence of revolt when one simply situates it on the plane of judgment or speech. Revolt is an *act*; it cannot be grasped as such except in so far as it is understood as an act. Judgment or speech should not be considered here, except in so far as they are acts that announce other acts" (*HV*, p.262). This particular point of Marcel's critique directly anticipates the specific criticism that Jeanson and Sartre would level in their subsequent essays in *Les Temps modernes*, namely, that Camus had become "a soul in revolt" who failed to grasp that the only meaningful revolt or rebellion is not that which is merely conceived in theoretical consciousness but that which is also carried out in the practical world (the term "*l'âme révoltée*" was part of the title of Jeanson's original essay).<sup>56</sup>

Third, *no recognition of absolute, unconditional, trans-historical values*: Marcel agrees with Camus that revolt requires values or justification (*HV*, p.262). On the other hand, he argues that Camus does not go far enough in this regard, because he does not recognize "the absolute assurance" and "a certain unconditional character" that the values and justification of revolt must have and that reveal its "existential distinctiveness" (*HV*, pp.262–263). Yet Marcel also concedes that history shows that "it is not thus that things ever happen and they cannot happen that way"

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<sup>55</sup> See David Sprintzen and Adrian van den Hoven, *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*, pp.79–105, 131–161, and 163–203.

<sup>56</sup> See *Ibid.*, p.79.

(*HV*, p.263). Thus at least Marcel now admits that Camus recognizes the need for values, but he still faults him for lacking a sense of the alleged necessity for absolute, unconditional, and trans-historical values.

Fourth, *revolt and resentment*: In a minor point (about which he writes a lot), Marcel agrees with Camus that “it is illegitimate to necessarily equate revolt with resentment” (*HV*, p.264).

Fifth, *the legitimate versus illegitimate role of violence in revolt and rebellion*: In a major point, Marcel agrees with Camus that “what internally purifies the act of revolt is the fact that the rebel deliberately risks his life” (*HV*, p.265). For Marcel, however, because “there is not, and there cannot be, violence without culpability,” “the ethical problem of revolt shows itself to be, properly speaking, insoluble” (*HV*, pp.265–266). In this respect, what Marcel and Camus have in common is that they do not want to have anything to do with an emotional exhortation to or intellectual celebration of the “liberation (or ‘progressive’) violence” that would haunt the world in the time of the Cold War and decolonization (and that Merleau-Ponty, Sartre, Fanon, and others would support), or, for that matter, of the virulent neo-tribalism that keeps entire regions of the world in chronic crises.

Sixth, *incoherence of different concepts of revolt*: Marcel finds that Camus establishes no concrete connections between “metaphysical revolt” and “ordinary revolt,” and that, although “this basic question” is “far and away the most important one,” “it does not seem to have even occurred to Camus,” and, “at the level of reflection on which he operates, this question cannot occur” to him (*HV*, p.266). Again, Camus’s critics from the Left, who branded him “the soul in revolt,” would share this concern.

Seventh, *no awareness of the alleged need to move from history to God*: Marcel agrees with Camus that it makes no sense to revolt against God if one denies that he exists, but he disagrees with him by arguing that atheism entails a kind of nihilism (*HV*, pp.266–271). Marcel also agrees with Camus that another form of nihilism is the kind that results from “the divinization of history” and the enslavement of the human being to its laws (this phenomenon would be the topic of Karl Popper’s *Poverty of Historicism* [1957]) as well as from the “‘theocratic’ totalitarians of the 20th century” (*HV*, pp.271–272). Yet Marcel does not find that Camus adequately elucidates “the meaning or the properly metaphysical foundation” of the opposition between the human being and history, something which, according to Marcel, can only be done if one reestablishes “the vertical dimension of history,” “the relation of the human being to God” (*HV*, p.272). Again, however, Camus is having none of it, neither of the eternal, external, and vertical transcendence of the Right nor of the temporal, internal, and horizontal transcendence of the Left. For Camus, Marcel’s move from history to divinity would be a remedy as bad as the malady.

Eighth, *the lack of connections between premises and conclusions*: Reiterating an earlier point in more detail, Marcel says about a point that is “at the core” of Camus’s book: “It is impossible not to recognize the total lack of proportion between, on the one hand, the admirably vigorous and pertinent critique that he delivers against the contemporary deviations and perversions of the authentic attitude of revolt, and, on the other hand, the positive conclusions at which he wants to arrive. He does not succeed in connecting them, it seems to me” (*HV*, p.275). Jeanson and Sartre would disagree with Marcel’s praise of Camus’s premises but agree with his critique of his conclusions. They would suggest that Camus’s proposals for authentic revolt are doomed to fail because they are based on his misunderstandings of actual rebellion. For them, Camus’s inability to propose a viable solution to the impending Algerian War (1954–1962: a native son, he visited the country in 1956), for example, was much more about his failure to



understand the nature of revolution in general than about the inherent intractability of this conflict itself in particular.

Ninth, *the primacy of life over revolt, not vice versa*: Marcel argues that Camus's claim that revolt is "the very movement of life" is erroneous, that "the truth is much more complex," and that "every sincere and genuine taking-up of a position in favor of life necessarily presents itself as a revolt or rebellion" (*HV*, p.276). Marcel sees revolt as serving life, whereas, he feels, Camus conveys the impression that life serves revolt. This is interesting, suggesting, as it does, that Camus has gone from being fixated on the absurd to being equally fixated on revolt. For Camus, in fact, these two dimensions of human existence are distinct but inseparable. Again, revolt does not annihilate the absurd.

Tenth, *a failure to recognize "authentic transcendence"*: Marcel denies that revolt can be "the final word," because, he asserts, it can never be anything more than "a tragic *recuperation*," so that "the rebel" emerges not as a saint but as a sinner (*HV*, pp.276–277). For Marcel, "only authentic *transcendence*, that is, vertical transcendence, can constitute the sort of permanent invisible counterweight without which revolt, even when it is conceived with the profound honesty that we admire in Camus, cannot fail to fall into despair" (*HV*, p.277). By "authentic, vertical transcendence" Marcel means "the transcendence, holiness, and sanctity of Christ and the martyrs," because, he says, "humanly speaking, revolt's chances are nil" (*Ibid.*). One must acknowledge that, in this respect, and it is not a minor one, Camus has more in common with Meursault than with Marcel.

At the end of his critique of him in *Homo Viator*, however, Marcel grants Camus one thing that he has hitherto denied him, namely, that "everything, including his style, shows that for him, despite everything, despair does not have to and cannot be the last word" (*HV*, p.277). Marcel does not say that "Albert Camus is a Christian who does not know it," but he does say that what prevents him from adhering to the "true religion" are the theological or institutional "materializations" that "for him and for a multitude of others" "intercept the true light" (*HV*, pp.277–278). This critique is partly valid, in so far as Camus preferred the common-sense skepticism of ordinary people to the supposed but unsupported certainties of philosophers and theologians, especially with respect to any superficial or tendentious answers to the first and final questions of human existence. Thus, Camus says of himself: "I do not believe in God *and* I am not an atheist."<sup>57</sup> He was also not a Christian, but he was not anti-Christian. But Marcel is also correct in observing that it was the theodicy problem that Camus could not get beyond.<sup>58</sup>

The third part of Marcel's critique of Camus's thought is found in *Man Against Mass Society* (1952), Part Two, Chapter One: "The Philosopher and the Contemporary World".<sup>59</sup> Criticizing "the philosopher's *refusal* to accept this world," Marcel asserts that "a theoretical attitude of refusal" is expressed in "a philosophy of the absurd [...] such as Albert Camus has

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<sup>57</sup> Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1951–1959*, p.112, and *Carnets III Mars 1951–Décembre 1959*, p.128 (November 1, 1954): "Je ne crois pas à Dieu et je ne suis pas athée."

<sup>58</sup> See Gabriel Marcel, *A Gabriel Marcel Reader*, ed. Brendan Sweetman (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2011), p.92: "A man like Albert Camus, for instance, cannot see how a God worthy of that name can tolerate the sufferings of children." See also Oliver Todd, *Albert Camus: Une vie*, p.419, and *Albert Camus: A Life*, tr. Benjamin Ivry (New York: Alfred Knopf, 1997), p.230: "I am [...] Augustine before his conversion. I am debating the problem of evil, and I am not getting past it." See finally Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. II, pp.470–474 ("The Unbeliever and the Christians" [1948]).

<sup>59</sup> See Gabriel Marcel, *Man against Mass Society*, tr. G. S. Fraser (South Bend, Indiana: St. Augustine's Press, 2008), pp.76–98. The work is henceforth referenced in the text as *MMS*.

attempted to define [it] in his *Myth of Sisyphus*” (*MMS*, p.86). “In relation to this philosophy of the absurd,” Marcel asks two questions, first, “whether any philosopher is really qualified to pass the verdict on the universe that the universe is absurd,” and, second, admitting for the sake of argument that the universe is absurd, “what practical consequences such a verdict entails: what does it imply that we should do?” (*Ibid.*). Conceding that his position has moral integrity if not metaphysical defensibility, Marcel finds that “this attitude of Camus is also extremely simple-minded” because it is not based on “*secondary reflection*,” or because Camus never asks himself the “fundamental question [...] by what right am I qualified to pass this sort of verdict on the world?” (*MMS*, p.87). Thus he tries to impale his adversary on the horns of a dilemma:

Of two things, one:—either I myself do not belong to the world under discussion, but in that case have I not every reason to suppose that it is impenetrable to me and that I am not qualified to judge its value—or, on the other hand, I really am a part of the world, and, if the world is absurd, so am I too absurd.<sup>60</sup>

Marcel admits that Camus might be able to concede this much, but then counters that it would be a destructive concession:

Again, of two things, one: either I am myself absurd in my ultimate nature—in which case so are my judgments absurd, they negate themselves, it cannot be conceded that they have any form of validity—or, on the other hand, we have to admit that I have a double nature, that there is a part of me that is not absurd and that can make valid judgments about absurdity: but how did this aspect of me, which is not absurd, get there? I cannot even admit the possibility of its existence without beginning to formulate a kind of dualism that, in some sense, splits my original assertion of the *total* absurdity of the universe apart.<sup>61</sup>

In any case, according to Marcel, Camus’s judgment of the absurdity of the universe is on unsound grounds. In addition, Marcel claims, one cannot say that the universe is absurd unless one can compare it with some idea of order or rationality to which one observes that it does not conform; but one can do no such thing; therefore it makes no sense to say that the universe is absurd (*MMS*, pp.87–88). For Marcel, then, Camus’s position amounts, in the final analysis, to Gnosticism or Manichaeism, neither of which is tenable (*MMS*, p.88). Yet the problem with this critique is that all the difficulties that Marcel identifies in the position that the world is absurd also arise analogously on the hypothesis that the world is rational. Camus already recognized this in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. That is why he goes out of his way to make clear that he does not attribute *absurdity* as an objective quality to the world or to the human beings as existing independently of each other.

Having shown, he thinks, the internal incoherence of Camus’s position, Marcel poses the second question, asking what “the attitude of the philosopher as such” should be, if it cannot be that of Camus (*MMS*, p.88). Here he assumes for the sake of argument that the philosopher may have the right to pass the verdict that the universe is absurd, and asks what practical consequences

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<sup>60</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Man against Mass Society*, p.87.

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

such a verdict entails: “what does it imply that we should do?” (*MMS*, p.88). At this point, Marcel claims, somewhat surprisingly, that the actions that this attitude implies are completely indeterminate, concedes that they can involve either withdrawal from the world into one’s own private life or involvement in the struggle against the evils of abuse, disease, and injustice, and suggests possible courses of action that have, as a matter of fact, a lot in common with the actionable causes that were championed by Camus—whom he oddly does not even once mention again (*MMS*, pp.88–98).

In light of this overview of Camus’s works and of this survey of Marcel’s criticisms, the question is: Does Marcel’s critique of Camus do justice to the breadth and depth of Camus’s thought as representing a gradual development from a fixation on solitary resignation to the absurdity of the world to a focus on collective revolt against the injustice of human beings to one another?

#### IV. Conclusion: Cross Purposes

The evidence indicates that it is difficult to answer this question in the affirmative. Thus a detailed point-by-point rebuttal of Marcel’s criticisms of Camus might not serve the best philosophical purposes, whereas a response to their pivotal point, that is, the question of the connection between the human being’s response to the absurd and the human being’s relationship to the transcendent, would make more sense. Yet a genuine encounter in the sense of a mutual exchange between Marcel and Camus, even and especially on this decisive point, did not take place. There is also no coherent connection between Marcel’s critique of Camus’s thought and Camus’s move from a preoccupation with the ineluctability of absurdity to a concentration on the possibility of revolt. There is, first, no evidence that Marcel recognized the evolution of Camus’s thought from absurdity to revolt. There is, furthermore, no evidence that Camus responded to Marcel’s critiques of his thought. There is, finally, no evidence of any influence of Marcel’s critique on Camus’s thought. Thus it is highly unlikely that Marcel’s reaction to Camus’s thought provided the impetus for Camus’s move from the absurd to revolt. In the end, the relationship between Camus and Marcel appears to have had nothing to do with Camus’s turn from absurdity to revolt, which was evidently an independent development.

It remains an open question, then, whether Marcel’s critique does justice to Camus’s thought as a whole or rather only to that very early part of it that represents Camus’s preoccupation with the ineluctability of absurdity. Camus and Marcel agree that the meaningless life is not worth living, but they disagree on what makes a life meaningful, and meaningful to the point of worth living. According to Camus, absurdity consists in the inconsistency between the indifference of the natural universe and the incomprehensibility of the human condition, or, more succinctly, between the human desire for sense and the natural lack of it. For Camus, absurdity is *relational*, that is, it is neither *in* the natural world nor *in* the human being, but rather *between* them. That is why Marcel’s logical dilemma argument does not work cogently against his position (*MMS*, p.87). According to Marcel, on the other hand, the antidote to absurdity is a matter of fidelity to human immanence and hope for divine transcendence, and only these two virtues make genuine, that is, Christian, charity possible. The transcendent in the eternal, external, and vertical sense is supposed to provide a bridge of meaning between the human being and the natural world. Remarkably,

Marcel, whom Simone de Beauvoir credits with having coined the term (1945),<sup>62</sup> does not accuse Camus of “existentialism.” Indeed, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus associates the existentialists with the “irrational” demand for eternal, external, and vertical transcendence, and, in *The Stranger*, he lets Meursault reach for a much more modest sort, namely, temporal, internal, and horizontal transcendence.

In a sense, though, Camus too is a *homo viator*, a fellow-traveler with Marcel, who, echoing some of Camus’s statements about himself and his journey in *The Enigma*, says this:

A journey implies both a starting point and a point of arrival. Now, although upon reflection I may to some extent manage to reconstitute the conditions under which my quest began and thus to mark the approximate point of my departure, I find [...] that it is absolutely impossible for me to state precisely, not only to others but also to myself, where I hope to arrive. [...] The truth is that the words *point of arrival* no longer have any meaning for me, and [...] it would probably be possible to show that there is also an illusion in picturing a point of departure.<sup>63</sup>

Given his move from the absurd to revolt, Camus would, in the spirit of *The Enigma*, surely agree. According to Pierre Colin, for instance, “Marcel’s philosophical project [...] aims to overcome the opposition between a rationalism concerned with abstract intelligibility and a philosophy of the absurd” (*HV*, p.307). Yet this was Camus’s own philosophical project starting with *The Myth of Sisyphus*, where he criticizes “existentialism” for not having taken the absurd seriously enough and phenomenology (and other rationalist systems) for having jumped too quickly and easily to the transcendent in the form of essences (or God or Being), that is, to what Marcel, who is not mentioned there, later calls “the vertical transcendent.”<sup>64</sup> Thus Camus and Marcel share a commitment to “the concrete examination of the individual, as opposed to all idealism based on the impersonal or the immanent” (*HV*, p.130), but they differ on an answer to the question of a vertical relationship between concrete immanence, on the one hand, and encompassing transcendence, on the other. The fact that Camus and Marcel differ in their approaches to the relationship between the concrete individual’s values and the sources of these values’ legitimation, is, of course, a given. For Marcel, what validates values must be something that is absolute, divine, eternal, and transcendent, whereas for Camus it cannot be anything but what is relative, human, temporal, and immanent. For Camus, however, the lack of faith in and hope for vertical transcendence does not at all result in a total loss of transcendence. Rather, resisting the temptations of nihilism in all its forms, the sense of the absurd that such a lack generates reinforces for him the urgent need for horizontal transcendence as expressed by charity, humanity, and solidarity. In fairness to Marcel, however, one should also recognize that it is a serious question whether Camus (or anyone) can dispense with all forms of vertical transcendence in favor of a

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<sup>62</sup> See David Cooper, *Existentialism: A Reconstruction* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990/1999), p.1, and Patrick Baert, *The Existentialist Moment: The Rise of Sartre as a Public Intellectual* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2015), p.105.

<sup>63</sup> Gabriel Marcel, *Homo Viator*, p.128.

<sup>64</sup> In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus does not mention Sartre by name (but see pp.15 and 68), so that in that work he is not thinking of “existentialism” as *atheistic* existentialism in the sense of the latter’s later *Existentialism Is A Humanism* (1946). Rather, the dominant sense of “existentialism” in *The Myth of Sisyphus* is Kierkegaard’s *theistic* existentialism.

sense of horizontal transcendence that is primarily and ultimately a matter for each and every individual human being to determine.<sup>65</sup> For what is there, then, to prevent the complete collapse of the distinction between immanence and transcendence? Thus, it is no accident that, on this key issue, as on several others, Camus is caught in the crossfire between critics from the Left, for example, Sartre, who conceives of human transcendence in terms of human freedom, and critics from the Right, for example, Marcel, who argues that the finite, imperfect, and temporal human being must be viewed in relation to the infinite, perfect, and eternal divine being.

In this regard, it is telling that, among the leading thinkers of the twentieth century, Camus's consistent record of humanitarian intervention, for example, his pioneering journalistic engagement for the oppressed Berbers of Kabylia in the 1930s (see *Algerian Chronicles*), his important work in the French Literary Resistance in the 1940s (see again his writings at *Combat*), his frustrated efforts toward a peaceful solution to the Algerian conflict in the 1940s and 1950s (see again *Algerian Chronicles*), and his highly influential writings against the death penalty in the 1950s (see *Reflections on the Guillotine*)—not to mention his rigorous unmasking of mass murder as a supposedly legitimate means of social revolution at a time when “liberation (progressive) violence” was a sacred dogma of the intellectual and literary Left (see again *The Rebel*)—is second to none and was widely known during his lifetime. Yet Marcel mentions none of this lived evidence from the *vita activa* in his critique of Camus. While it is true that Marcel was under no obligation to do this, precisely because this evidence was part of the public record, the uninformed or underinformed reader of today may get the impression that Camus must have been a defeatist, a pessimist, and an idle theoretician, whereas his whole life's work is actually a powerful expression of the active, passionate, and rebellious affirmation of life in the face of the nihilistic forces of absurdity, oppression, and totalitarianism.

For *The Stranger*, Camus creates the character of Meursault not to celebrate but to scrutinize, and, ultimately, to criticize, the unexamined life. The point of Camus's works is neither to tell anyone what *the meaning of life* is nor to tell anyone that life has *no meaning*. Rather, it is to help the readers to live *a meaningful life* or, more pluralistically, *meaningful lives*. Camus never says, in his own voice, that life is absurd or meaningless or not worth living. Meursault does that in *The Stranger*. But Meursault is also a misogynist, a racist, a murderer, and a terrible philosopher, one who thinks, for example, that because all human beings are going to die at some point, it does not matter when and how they do. Camus is none of these things, and he does not think like this. In Plato's *Apology of Socrates*, the great Athenian philosopher argues that “the unexamined life is not worth living for a human being” (38a). That is exactly what Camus shows the readers in *The Stranger*. It is Meursault, not Camus, who is the “narcissist of nothingness,” at least until his “epiphany,” if one can call it that, at the very end. It is hermeneutically untenable to identify the author of *The Stranger* with its chief character. If one must imagine Sisyphus happy, then one cannot imagine Meursault happy.

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus criticizes Kierkegaard's existentialism, Jaspers's philosophy of existence, Heidegger's existential hermeneutics, and Husserl's existential phenomenology, because, he argues, their searches for *the meaning of life* get in the way of living

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<sup>65</sup> Here as elsewhere, I employ the distinction between “vertical transcendence” and “horizontal transcendence” to express what Camus describes as the difference between “vertical transcendence” (“transcendance verticale”) and “living transcendence” (“transcendance vivante”). See Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, e.g., pp.142, 145, 166, 200, 209, 258, and 288, and *L'Homme révolté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1951), e.g., pp.184, 187, 213, 253, 264–265, 323, and 360. The point remains that Marcel accepts a “vertical transcendence” that Camus rejects. The topic of transcendence (and immanence) in Marcel and Camus would properly be the topic of another paper in its own right.

*a meaningful life*. He agrees with the premises of the existentialists of the nineteenth century, for example, Kierkegaard, but disagrees with the conclusions of the existentialists of the twentieth century, for example, Sartre.<sup>66</sup> For his part, Marcel argues that it is not possible for a human being to live a meaningful life without a hope in the possibility of opening vertically to something or someone externally and eternally transcendent. Compared to and contrasted with their French contemporaries, for example, Sartre and de Beauvoir, Marcel and Camus have a great deal in common. But they do not share the belief that it is a transcendent God who makes each and every human life worth living. Readers of sound mind and good faith must judge whose opinion is true and whose is false, and in the end the choice may well be a matter of grace or not. Thus, the lasting merit of Marcel's critique of Camus is to bring the distinction between hope for vertical transcendence and reliance on horizontal transcendence to adequate presence. Yet to criticize Camus for advocating the absurd is to miss the point, namely, that he articulates the absurd in order to overcome it in a sustainable fashion, that is, without taking a leap of faith by positing anything beyond the evidence of his own experience. He did not make the attempt lightly. After all, he composed his thesis for his *diplôme d'études supérieures* in Philosophy at the University of Algiers in 1936 on the topic of Christian metaphysics and Neo-Platonism, and he included a chapter on Augustine's reception of Christianity and Neo-Platonism as well as a concluding statement on faith and reason in Augustine's thought.<sup>67</sup>

What began with an inquiry into whether Marcel's critique of Camus had any influence on the development of Camus's thought from absurdity to revolt has thus ended with a systematic examination of the substantive points of Marcel's detailed critique of Camus's philosophy. Yet this stage of the study too is not only an end but also a beginning. Indeed, the real task has only just begun, and that task is to initiate and to conduct the philosophical dialogue on the topics of *The Myth of Sisyphus* that Marcel offered to engage in with Camus in their original correspondence of 1942. The open-ended purpose of this paper is to extend an invitation to readers of both philosophers to contribute to what promises to be a valuable discussion.<sup>68</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> See Albert Camus, *Essais*, pp.1926–1927, and Albert Camus, *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. IV, p.663.

<sup>67</sup> See Albert Camus, *Métaphysique chrétienne et néoplatonisme*, in *Oeuvres complètes*, vol. I, pp.999–1072, esp. pp.1062–1072 and 1072, and *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*, tr. Ronald Srigley (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2007), esp. pp.115–130 and 127–129.

<sup>68</sup> This is the repeatedly revised version of a paper that was first presented at the 89th Annual Meeting of the American Catholic Philosophical Association (Gabriel Marcel Society Satellite Session), Boston, October 9, 2015. A second version was presented at the 9th Annual Joint Meeting of the Albert Camus Society U.K./U.S., London, November 12, 2015. A third version was presented at the International Camus Conference at the Jagiellonian University, Cracow, February 26, 2016. I wish to thank Peter Francev, Maciej Kałuża, Geoffrey Karabin, Simon Lea, Brendan Sweetman, and an anonymous reviewer for *Marcel Studies* for their comments and criticisms. All shortcomings rest with me.