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Meeting the Absurd: Camus and the Communication Ethics of the Everyday

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MEETING THE ABSURD:
CAMUS AND THE COMMUNICATION ETHICS OF THE EVERYDAY

A Dissertation

Submitted to the Department of Communication & Rhetorical Studies
McAnulty College and Graduate School of Liberal Arts

Duquesne University

In partial fulfillment of the requirements for
the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

By

Brent C. Sleasman

December 2007

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2007

Meeting the Absurd:

Camus and the Communication Ethics of the Everyday

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ABSTRACT

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By

Brent C. Sleasman

December 2007

Dissertation Supervised by Dr. Ronald C. Arnett

The metaphor of the absurd, as well as the work and thought of Albert Camus, has primarily served as a secondary resource within the communication discipline. This project contributes to the conversation about the absurd in an effort to further the study of communication ethics by placing Camus in the foreground. The metaphor of the absurd provides an opportunity to examine philosophical hermeneutics in relation to Camus's insights. The work of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, emphasizing the role of metaphor and how it connects the absurd as used by Camus to our current postmodern moment, provides the methodological framework for this project. While many differences exist between the historical moment of Camus and the contemporary postmodern moment, both represent a time in which there is no longer paradigmatic certainty.

Through an exploration of Camus's three cycles of work addressing absurdity, revolt, and judgment, this project firmly places Camus's engagement within the context of the study of communication ethics. Through his implicit work as a philosopher of communication Camus provided an example of a person with deep ethical commitments who navigated through the chaos of a moment of metanarrative decline. In our own moment of narrative and virtue contention, Camus's voice should again be heard as we seek to take communicative responsibility in an age of absurdity.

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	Page
Abstract	iv
Acknowledgment	vi
1 Meeting the Absurd: Camus and the Communication Ethics of the Everyday	1
2 Meeting the Absurd: Recognition	33
3 Meeting the Absurd: Response	77
4 Meeting the Absurd: Acknowledgement of Consequences	122
5 The Communication Ethics Turn Toward Responsibility	154
Works Cited	191

Chapter One

Meeting the Absurd:

Camus and the Communication Ethics of the Everyday

“Of the few scholars still interested in Camus, most esteem his literary genius but denigrate his importance as a philosopher” (Golomb 268).

“If one could say just once: ‘This is clear,’ all would be saved” (Camus, “The Myth of Sisyphus” 27).

Absurdity, for Albert Camus, represented “the conclusion arrived at by those who had assumed the possibility of a total explanation of existence by the mind who discover instead an unabridged gulf between rationality and experience” (Cruikshank 49). Out of this tension between the way one desires the world to appear and the harsh truth of human existence emerges the metaphor of the absurd. The metaphor of the absurd is not exclusively found within the domain of philosophy since it is deeply tied to one’s lived experience. But the reverse is true as well; absurdity is not merely a metaphor concerned with human existence having no philosophical justification. The interest that Albert Camus held in the idea of the absurd is not surprising since he was both a philosopher and a participant in the ongoing communicative tensions within his own culture resulting from his role in the French Resistance during World War II, along with his work as a journalist, playwright, and novelist. This interaction between Albert Camus, the

metaphor of the absurd, the philosophy of communication, and communication ethics provides the framework for the central question guiding the research of this dissertation: “How can Albert Camus’s use of the metaphor of the absurd assist a human communicator in engaging the historical moment from an existential ethical perspective in a time of narrative and virtue contention?”

Introduction

The metaphor of the absurd emerges out of the interplay of philosophy and the ethical communicative practices embodied by Camus, supporting the notion that he can serve as a model of a philosopher of communication for our postmodern age. For the purposes of this dissertation, “absurdity” can be considered as a background concern while “the absurd” is an issue that is faced in a given moment. During a time of intense involvement with the French Resistance throughout the German occupation of France during World War II, Camus worked as a journalist for an underground newspaper called Combat. Through his writings for this paper, Camus continually demonstrated his commitment to the communicative practices necessary to navigate the absurdity of everyday life in order to make an ethical difference. Camus demonstrated his commitment to engaging his moment from a philosophical perspective through the writing of the essays “The Myth of Sisyphus” and The Rebel, his novels The Stranger, The Plague, The Fall, A Happy Death, and The First Man, and his plays “Caligula”, “The Misunderstanding”, and “The Just Assassins.” Following the liberation of Paris by the Allied forces, Camus provided evidence of his commitment to ethical practice when he wrote on September 4, 1944, as he shared his vision for post-war France, “[T]he affairs of this country should be managed by those who paid and answered for it. In other

words, we are determined to replace politics with morality. That is what we call a revolution” (“Morality” 28). As opposed to falling into despair and failing to act, Camus believed revolt represented an appropriate response to absurd circumstances.

The overwhelming burden that Camus felt for the future of post-war France did not immobilize him, leaving him incapable of making a decision about how to act in a given moment. Instead, he allowed the tensions of the moment to propel him to productivity, engaging his moment through a variety of communicative exchanges. Camus sought the freedom to respond to the moment as was necessary and rejected being labeled by any one particular system of belief. He did not “belong to any school of thought” and held, along with Franz Kafka, a “marked dissatisfaction with traditional philosophy [which was] superficial, academic, and remote from life” (Kaufman 12). Although Camus did not write explicitly about communication ethics, his keen interest in the implications of deeply philosophical ideas revealed within everyday life and his commitment to an ethical philosophy that was not “superficial, academic, and remote from life” invite him into a conversation about communication ethics within this contemporary moment of narrative and virtue contention.

While the work and thought of Albert Camus has primarily served as a secondary resource within the communication discipline, this project connects his use of the absurd with the formal study of communication ethics by placing Camus in the foreground. The metaphor of the absurd provides an opportunity to examine philosophical hermeneutics in relation to Camus’s insights. The work of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer, emphasizing the role of metaphor and how it connects the absurd as used by Camus to our current postmodern moment, provides the methodological framework for this project.

While many differences exist between the historical moment of Camus and the contemporary postmodern moment, both represent a time in which there is no longer paradigmatic certainty. The metaphor of the absurd is evident throughout the entire life of Camus. While the following section is not an effort to make false connections between Camus's experiences and his use of the metaphor of the absurd, it is an effort to illustrate that Camus faced many situations of absurdity throughout his life and personal meeting of the absurd.

Meeting the Absurd

Albert Camus was born on November 7, 1913, in Mondovi, Algeria, and died on January 4, 1960, in Sens, France. Within a year of his birth, in 1914, his father was killed in the Battle of Marne (France) during World War I. Left fatherless, Camus's mother moved him and his brother into the home of his grandmother. "Grandmother Catherine Sintes was a harsh woman...the return of Catherine Camus with two infants, exceeded her understanding... The children's mother was a passive witness to the brawling and beating, restrained by fatigue, by fear of the old woman, and the inability to express herself sharply and effectively" (Lottman 21). The absurdity of losing one's father and being raised by an illiterate mother and grandmother formed the early years of Camus (Lottman 18). If any opportunities were to come for Camus, he would have to overcome the family circumstances and create opportunities for himself, despite the absurdity of the situation. McBride writes, "For Camus, then, it is not the world but the human condition that is absurd. The world itself is simply unintelligible" (5). A further example of the randomness of life impacted Camus when he was a teenager. He was an avid soccer player until he was struck with tuberculosis (Lottman 43). From this point on, "Life in

the sense he knew it seemed to come to an end, when it should just be beginning” (Lottman 45). Although he was not yet writing about absurdity, Camus was gaining first-hand knowledge about the concept that would come to define his work.

Until this point in his life, absurdity for Camus was witnessed only within his lived experience. As he continued his academic training these personal experiences would be textured as he encountered ideas of many thinkers including St. Augustine and Fyodor Dostoevsky. From 1918 through 1923 Camus attended primary school. Upon completion of this phase of his education he held various jobs including selling spare parts for cars, working in a marine broker’s office, acting as a clerk, and “taking post” in a meteorological office (Cruickshank 13). He completed his formal education in 1936 with a dissertation which addressed the beliefs of Plotinus as they related to the Christian faith of St. Augustine. While completing his education Camus was building a reputation for his skills and interest in the theater. In 1935 he founded the “Theatre du Travail” (later reorganized into the “Theatre de l’Equipe”). Within this context Camus first adapted and performed works by Dostoevsky. Although it was not published until 1944 or performed until 1945, Camus wrote the play “Caligula” during this time of productivity in the theater as well.

In addition to his work within the theater, Camus’s existing writing includes novels, book length philosophical essays, newspaper editorials and articles, personal notes, and correspondence. His most famous works include the novels The Stranger (1942), The Plague (1947), The Fall (1956), A Happy Death (1970, posthumously), and The First Man (1995, posthumously); the essays “The Myth of Sisyphus” (1942) and The Rebel (1951); the plays “Caligula” (written 1938, performed 1945), “The State of Siege”

(1948), “The Just Assassins” (1949), and “The Misunderstanding” (1958); and the collection Resistance, Rebellion, and Death (1961). All of these writings connect Camus to the central question guiding the research of this dissertation which addresses the engagement of an absurd historical moment through an exploration of the interplay of Albert Camus and the study of communication ethics. In the introduction to The Rebel, Camus meets the absurdity of his moment as he wrote, “The purpose of this essay is once again to face the reality of the present...it is an attempt to understand the times in which we live” (3). Camus, along with many others of his era, could have chosen to ignore “a period which, in a space of fifty years, uproots, enslaves, or kills seventy million human beings” (Rebel 3). But instead of ignoring the moment, Camus believed that he had to make the choice to engage the moment as it actually appeared before him. This commitment held by Camus illustrated his willingness to engage the world as it actually existed and not the way in which he hoped it would appear. Arnett and Arneson write, “We are not saying that one must like or approve of a given historical moment. We are suggesting, however, that any historical moment must be taken seriously and responded to, rather than ignored” (Arnett and Arneson 37). The Rebel was one of Camus’s entrances into the ongoing conversation of his historical moment and represented his best effort to “face the reality of the present.”

Camus worked from a position situated within a larger context or narrative and he came to embody the particular narrative that he represented. Camus’s commitment to living out his political and philosophical beliefs despite the absurdity of his historical moment, while contributing to his eventual broken relationship with Jean Paul Sartre, demonstrated his belief that words and actions should be consistent with one another.

Aronson writes, “In the end Camus and Sartre split not only because they took opposing sides but because each became his own side’s intellectual leader” (2). Perhaps in less turbulent times the two could have remained friends, but the politics of their everyday lives and the situation in post-war France made that option impossible. In our current moment many would simply “agree to disagree”, but within a moment possessing an “unabridged gulf between rationality and existence” (Cruickshank 49), this split further accentuated the absurdity of their time. Eventually the two differing approaches to post-World War II France led to a permanent end to the friendship:

In a philosophically intense and personally brutal argument, the two main voices of postwar France intellectual life publicly destroyed almost ten years of friendship. At first reluctantly and hesitantly, and then with a rush that seemed uncontrollable, Sartre and Camus also shattered their political milieu and any traces of what was once their common project of creating an independent Left. (Aronson 2)

The focus of their conflict intensified around the publication of Camus’s The Rebel. By this point in time Sartre had become one of many “apologists for Stalin” (Lottman 523) while Camus was growing more and more hostile towards Communism. “The author’s [Camus’s] unambiguous stand against Stalinism was bound to receive sympathy and approval from conservatives, from anti-Communists of all types” (Lottman 522). While either man could have compromised to save the relationship, each recognized that the conflicting narratives could not be resolved, so both chose to live consistently within his given position while living in tension with the other person. While their debate was philosophically grounded, their concerns were communicated in a very public context.

Camus's commitment to allowing philosophical ideas guide his communicative choices and actions, even when it required ending a close friendship, provides support of his functioning as a philosopher of communication with deep ethical concerns. While one cannot psychologize (Arnett, Dialogic Confession 12) about how these personal experiences impacted Camus's philosophy and writing, what a person sees and hears rhetorically guides and influences the work one is able to accomplish.

Camus's string of broken relationships with his first wife, co-workers, and most famously Sartre (e.g. Lottman 359) does not invalidate his ability to shed light upon a discussion of commitment to dialogue, a major concern of many who work with the ideas surrounding communication ethics. In fact, Camus's commitment to living out philosophical and ethical commitments in everyday life, while often leading to broken relationships, further textures his understanding of absurdity – that some times the things that make sense intellectually cannot be maintained in the “everydayness” of living. Herbert Lottman, writer of the first biography on Camus, provides a coherent picture of Camus's understanding of dialogue in which Camus does not believe that dialogue could begin with silence (525). From this position Lottman writes that Camus was committed to “combat silence and fear, to defend dialogue” (429). As Camus aged, his health always in question, he made an intentional effort to “take more interest in other people and other things” (Lottman 509). Camus was willing to stand his ground in the face of adversity. In fact, Simone de Beauvoir suggests that part of the reason that Camus had an eventual falling out with Jean Paul Sartre was due to his inability to compromise (Lottman 536). The foreground of Camus's actions was firmly rooted in the background of his philosophical understanding of the world. Lottman suggests that Camus

understood the German occupation of France in both a real and metaphorical sense. The metaphor of occupation for Camus revealed that simultaneously everything stopped and everything continued. This dialectical tension of action and inaction is another example of the elements working in Camus's life as he engaged the world. The absurdity of the human condition is further illustrated through the manner in which Camus died. On January 4, 1960, while traveling with his good friend and publisher, Michel Gallimard, Camus was killed in a car accident that had no apparent explanation (Lottman 698). These tensions that existed unresolved, in both his work and his life, further texture the emergence of Camus's use of the metaphor of the absurd.

The Absurd and Albert Camus within Communication Scholarship

The writings of Camus, both the fiction and nonfiction, have served as required texts within an undergraduate communication ethics course functioning as "humanities case studies" (Bell and Sleasman 35). When researching scholarly journals within the formal discipline of communication the name of Albert Camus rarely appears in a title of an article and within book length critical studies Camus primarily serves as a secondary source. While the work of communication scholars such as Ronald C. Arnett references the ideas of Camus (Communication and Community, Dialogic Confession, Dialogic Education, Dwell in Peace, and Dialogic Civility with Pat Arneson), it is again in a secondary fashion and only one directly addresses the metaphor of the absurd (Communication and Community). One recent doctoral dissertation from within the communication discipline situates the work of Camus, specifically The Plague, within the wider study of communication ethics (Cook 150-180) but again, Camus's work simply illustrates the larger point of that particular project and does not receive primary focus.

In one of the very few examples of published communication scholarship that directly addresses Camus's work, Beverly M. Matherne explores "The Misunderstanding" as it relates to the topic of hope. Camus himself addressed many concerns central to communication ethics and the philosophy of communication including the ethical response to a given moment in spite of its absurdity. This dissertation provides evidence of the significance of the metaphor of the absurd for the current postmodern moment through the direct engagement of the thought and writings of Albert Camus. Camus's commitment to working through real world examples further supports his connection to the formal study of communication ethics and the philosophy of communication within a postmodern moment.

Through the connections between Camus and a French contemporary who is drawn upon extensively within the communication discipline, Jacques Ellul, it is possible to further situate both the work of Camus and the metaphor of the absurd within contemporary communication scholarship. An interesting similarity between the two is that while Camus and Ellul shared a philosophical interest in existentialist ideas, Camus distanced himself from the existential movement and through secondary research Ellul has been distanced from the movement as well (e.g. Eller). Each man was a unique thinker, both sharing an interest and dependence upon the writings of Søren Kierkegaard (e.g. Eller). The philosophical commitments of Ellul mirrored many of the concerns addressed by Camus. Troup writes:

[Ellul] advocates a robust role for rhetoric that values the word, speech, and its necessary role in rescuing society from the brutalizing bureaucracy and self-

validating technology. He promotes public dialogue and believes it can be meaningful; more and less than a mask for the will to power. (43)

There are several basic experiences that each man shared that had a great impact upon the standpoint with which he engaged the world. As stated previously, what a person sees and hears rhetorically guides and influences the work one is able to accomplish.

Therefore, considering that Camus and Ellul shared similar life experiences it is not surprising that many of their philosophical commitments are similar as well.

Jacques Ellul and Albert Camus were born under the French flag in consecutive years (Ellul in 1912 and Camus in 1913). Both were born to immigrant parents and raised as a French citizen in a poor family. There are several implications of this similarity in experience. This shared nationality within a modern European context was defined by geographic heritage and led to the two being situated within similar economic circumstances and a shared historical moment. This also allowed both Camus and Ellul to be products of the French educational system. Clifford G. Christians links the political involvement of Ellul and Camus when he writes, "During World War II, along with Camus, Malraux, and Sartre, [Ellul] was a leader in the French Resistance, operating from a small farm outside Paris" ("Ellul" 158). This political involvement of each demonstrates the desire to work through the implications of one's philosophical positions in the midst of everyday circumstances, and not function as a philosopher removed from daily life. In an effort to respond to the historical moment within a volatile political climate, both were actively engaged in the political process. This led to the identification and subsequent disillusionment and break with the French Communist party. Camus and Ellul were each active in the French Resistance movement and were interested in the

development of post-World War II French politics. Camus and Ellul each looked into the abyss of human existence, living through France during WW II, and responded in unique and different ways.

While many similarities existed in the lives and works of Ellul and Camus fundamental differences exist as well. When Camus addressed the topic of hope, it was with the knowledge that life was meaningless and only a cautious, realistic hope remained as an option. Camus also did not appeal to anyone or anything beyond human existence to bring hope into the world. In contrast, Ellul responded to the human crises that he faced by relying upon his religious faith, a faith that he believed existed beyond human construction. In the preface to Hope in the Time of Abandonment, Ellul wrote:

I am to speak of hope, but not as an affair of the intellect. For me it came by unforeseen paths, in the course of a severe trial in which everything was once again called into question. This involved not only my deepest personal attachments, and the significance of whatever I might undertake to do, but also that which constituted the very center of my person. (v)

Ellul did not believe that life was hopeless. It is evident throughout his writing that this hopefulness was tied to his religious faith. Ellul believed that human life had meaning. In What I Believe, he wrote, “I believe that life has meaning...I reject absurdity” (13). Ellul’s complete rejection of the major metaphor of Camus’s work is the strongest support found for their fundamentally different responses to their shared experiences. They provide an example of how two opposing worldviews can emerge from a shared experience. And although they did not share a similar response to their respective historical moment, they each functioned as a philosopher of communication by

demonstrating a constructive approach to the engagement of daily life with a deep commitment to ethical living. The fact that each man had similar life experiences but responded in different ways further illustrates the absurdity of human existence; there is not one appropriate response for a situation that is encountered. Within a moment of virtue and narrative contention, a multiplicity of options is available when one is attempting to make an ethical decision.

Ellul himself recognized the theme of the absurd within the work of Camus, specifically within The Plague (Technological Bluff 200). The recognition by Camus of the human's freedom to rebel was also known by Ellul. In The Autopsy of Revolution Ellul demonstrates awareness of Camus's The Rebel (3). In this text Camus "distinguishes between rebellion and revolution....As distinct from political revolution, true rebellion denies 'a future of reconciliation' in which social unity is achieved and problems resolved" (Stanley 79). Stanley, whose article is included within a collected work edited by communication scholar Clifford G. Christians, continues by exploring the seemingly irresolvable tension between freedom and rebellion. One must have freedom in order to rebel against that freedom (80). This tension between freedom and restraint is a topic of great interest within the discipline of communication (Arnett, "Practical"). Such tensions demonstrate the interest in dialectical thinking within communication scholarship. Ideas from philosophers of communication such as Ellul and Camus inform present scholarship and provide further texture for these contemporary concerns.

As they each engaged the moment, both Camus and Ellul showed evidence of dialectical thinking as well as a commitment to dialogue. Ellul's writing, such as his essay "On Dialectic" included in Jacques Ellul: Interpretive Essays (Christians and Van

Hook), works through ideas in a dialectical fashion. Much of Camus's thought about dialogue is evident in his writings found in Combat, an underground newspaper that supported the French Resistance Movement during World War II. While Camus's work has not received adequate attention within communication scholarship, in addition to his use of the metaphor of the absurd and his commitment to dialectical thinking, his interest in ethics, hope, freedom, his practical outworking of philosophy, and his connections to Jacques Ellul assist in reconceptualizing Camus as a philosopher of communication with a deep ethical commitment. Each engaged the metaphor of the absurd; Camus embraced the metaphor as a description of his moment while Ellul rejected the metaphor within his life and work. While Camus's commitment to dialectical thinking did not represent a unique response to his historical moment, his commitment to dialogue combined with his acceptance of absurdity provides a theoretical connection to our present moment of narrative and virtue contention.

The Absurd: Meeting Narrative Decline

The current postmodern moment is one in which the grand narrative of the past is in decline. Lyotard wrote, "The grand narrative has lost its credibility, regardless of what mode of unification it uses, regardless of whether it is a speculative narrative or a narrative of emancipation" (37). There is resonance between this moment of narrative uncertainty and Olivier Todd's explanation of the absurd for Camus, which may be understood in terms of the "nonsensical," "contradictory," "false" and "unreasonable" (144). Camus explored the notion of absurdity as "the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart" ("Myth" 21). Within this confrontation is an effort to discover whether life holds any meaning. This tension,

and the quest for meaning, is extremely prevalent within the current postmodern moment that lacks an overriding metanarrative that guides both public and private communication. In “The Myth of Sisyphus” the realization that life has no meaning is illuminated by Camus’s explanation of the metaphor of the absurd. This philosophical essay was “a formally perfect sketch, and sometimes a philosophical prose poem, falsely cold seeming and strongly autobiographical” (Todd 142). Todd further explains the metaphor of the absurd as “a contradiction between the irrational character of the world and every thinking man’s desire for clarity” (145). In an interview, Camus explains:

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 can help discover ideas capable of restoring a relative meaning to existence, although a meaning that will always be in danger. (Lyrical 346)

The metaphor of the absurd, and Camus’s subsequent explorations of revolt, provides a commonplace for discussion and debate, a necessary ingredient for public dialogue (Arnett and Arneson 49). His use of revolt provided a necessary and rhetorical reaction to the changing historical moment and served as an embodiment of the metaphor of the absurd through his further engagement and action within an ever-changing moment.

The metaphor of the absurd, and its connection to our present moment, is further textured when interpreted through the lens of this moment of metanarrative decline and narrative tension. In such a moment there is always an inherent risk in attempting to implement a template that is appropriate in one narrative within another, very different, narrative structure. It is not uncommon to find many people within our American culture

who become overly concerned with convenience and finding a “quick fix” while a willingness to take the time to find an appropriate and ethical response to even basic decisions is often lacking. These unreflective decisions often emerge out of a longing to satisfy personal desires and are motivated by nothing more than personal preference, lacking any connection to or consideration of a larger life narrative. These decisions could be considered groundless, thus leaving one with only personal preference. If someone does not work from a grounded standpoint, in future moments he or she will be tempted to either implement the previously successful model or he/she will again be tempted to work from personal preference. Alasdair MacIntyre uses the term “emotivism” to indicate decision making that is “*nothing* but expressions of preference, expressions of attitude or feeling” (After Virtue 12). Either way, one will lack the coherence and fidelity suggested by Walter R. Fisher that gives meaning to one’s personal narrative and in turn, his or her life. The attempt of Albert Camus was to engage life through the lens of a metaphor that both expressed his own foundation as well as provided a framework in which he could find meaning for his own existence. The effort of Camus to create a consistent narrative from which to work would be applauded by Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, who recognize the connection between emotivism and an individualistic society. These authors write in the Good Society that in their academic project, “We described a language of individualistic achievement and self-fulfillment that often seems to make it difficult for people to sustain their commitments to others, either in intimate relationships or in the public sphere” (5). In contrast to working from within a narrative structure and recognizing one’s horizon, reliance upon the self has the great potential to create an individualistic and groundless culture. This

individualism can also lead to a Culture of Narcissism in which “the world appears as a mirror of the self” (Lasch 33). Bellah, Madsen, Sullivan, Swidler, and Tipton, write, “[M]any of us have felt, in times both of prosperity and of adversity, that there is something missing in the individualistic set of values, that individualism alone does not allow persons to understand basic realities of their lives, especially their interdependence with others” (Habits ix). While Camus often struggled with how to situate himself within a wider narrative, his commitment to dialogue allowed him to avoid falling into this culture of narcissism.

In addition to the metaphor of the absurd providing insight into our current historical moment, Camus also provides an example of a person working from a constructive perspective as he was willing to draw upon the thought of many contemporaries and historical scholars as he engaged his own time in history. Of those who influenced Camus’s thinking about the absurd, there are five names that appear to have greatly impacted not only his life’s work, but more importantly his understanding of the absurd: Blaise Pascal (1623-1662), Søren Kierkegaard (1813-1855), Fyodor Dostoevsky (1821-1881), Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900), and Franz Kafka (1883-1924). The following was the age of each upon his death: Pascal was 39, Kierkegaard was 42, Dostoevsky was 59, Nietzsche was 44 at the time of his well-documented mental breakdown and 55 at the time of his death, and Kafka was 40 years old at the time of his death. The average age at the time of death for the five men mentioned above is 47 years old – the same age that Camus would have been if he had lived to experience his next birthday. While it is a fruitless and unproductive effort to ask “what might have been?” it is interesting to note the tragically short lives of each and how they were able to gather

around the theme of absurdity. One could consider the idea that brilliant scholars who live abbreviated lives represents an aspect of Camus's absurdity, illustrating that life is without order and one must make the most of the time one is given. An overview of the thought of each of these men is provided next as his ideas relate to Camus's use of the absurd.

Pascal's influence on Camus and his writings may be explained in terms of individualism, choice, and the paradoxes of the human condition. It is through the outworking of these ideas that Pascal is considered one of the precursors to existentialism. The paradox of living is what provided the foundation for Camus's understanding of the absurd. One of Pascal's most well-known portions of the Pensees is commonly referred to as "Pascal's Wager" in which he provides a choice between a belief in God or a denial of God's existence. Cruikshank wrote, "Having faced a dilemma similar to part of the dilemma outlined by Pascal, Camus wagers in the opposite direction....[H]is decision to stake everything on immediate physical life is the result of arbitrary choice" (35). Lavine describes Pascal as "expressive of absurdity" during the time of Descartes (331). Camus praised this "beloved philosopher" in a letter to a friend; Camus wrote, "If you knew how ravishing Pascal is . . . clear, profound, and unforgettable about the human heart and in his despairing glory" (Todd 30). While Camus did not share the religious convictions of Pascal, it is evident in The Stranger that Camus shared with Pascal an interest in the individual's reaction to the human condition.

The influence of Kierkegaard, "widely known as the 'father of existentialism'" (Eller 57), can be traced to his early existential themes of the response of the individual to the human condition as hopeless and full of anxiety and despair. The publishing of

Camus's The Stranger was critiqued as "the sign of Kierkegaard's arrival in France" (Lottman 268). Lavine explains Kierkegaard's view of life as "inexplicable, and wholly absurd" (331). Kierkegaard's writings were responding to crisis, and what ought to be done. Much like Camus, Kierkegaard's writings demonstrated an interest in how one responds to everyday events, and while deeply philosophical, his ideas were not esoteric and unrelated to the lived situation. While Camus did not directly cite Kierkegaard when discussing despair in The Rebel, Kierkegaard's exploration of the topic provides helpful insights into an understanding of the topic. Kierkegaard wrote in The Sickness Unto Death, a text dedicated to the question of despair, "If there is to be any question of a sickness unto death in the strictest sense, it must be a sickness of which the end is death and death is the end. This is precisely what despair is" (17). One way in which Kierkegaard makes use of the metaphor of despair "is abandoning the project of achieving the salient good because one finds oneself powerless to achieve it" (Hannay and Marino 331). When engaging absurdity, one does not respond with "I'll never..." but seeks to encounter life on its own terms and respond in an ethical and productive manner without falling into a perpetual state of despair.

Camus commented that Dostoevsky's novel The Possessed "is one of the four or five works that I rank above all others" ("Foreword" The Possessed). Camus adapted this work for the theater and it represents one of his most cherished publications. As he worked through the implications of the absurd in "The Myth of Sisyphus" Camus wrote, "And probably no one so much as Dostoevsky has managed to give the absurd world such familiar and tormenting charms" (110). While Camus himself was an atheist, he could constructively work with the religious themes of Dostoevsky's novels. Camus

wrote, “It is possible to be Christian and absurd” (“Myth” 112). While Camus never accepted the narrative of the Christian faith for himself, when speaking to a group of Christians he stated that he believed the tension of the differences allowed for “real dialogue, [and] that falsehood is just as much the opposite of dialogue as is silence, and that the only possible dialogue is the kind between people who remain what they are and speak their minds” (“Unbeliever” 70). With Dostoevsky, Camus shared an interest in humanizing the ideals of the absurd, as seen in his memorable characters in The Stranger and The Plague.

It was Nietzsche who provided inspiration for Camus. For Camus, Nietzsche “nourished his suspicions of all traditional morality” (Todd 142). Camus’s concern with responding to the historical moment turned more so on morality than philosophy. In exploring this notion, Camus searched for a way one should live in such an absurd world. “Trying to sketch out a morality, he turned back to Nietzsche: ‘What matters is not eternal life but eternal liveliness’”(Todd 145). Much like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche was responding to crisis and prescribing what ought to be done, which can be understood as a concern for the ethical response to the historical moment. Lavine comments:

For Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, and for the existentialism which follows them, the crisis of the modern world is a problem concerning the individual, the human self. The consciousness of the human subject is the only key to the diagnosis and possible cure of the problems of the modern era. (326)

Kaufmann found that Camus’s “The Myth of Sisyphus” “sounds like a distant echo of Nietzsche” (21). Camus shared with Nietzsche an interest in not only the implications of one’s philosophical position but also a deep concern for ethical conduct in the midst of

daily living. One major difference between Camus and Nietzsche was that Camus did not give into despair and succumb to the dead end of nihilism. Camus did not become immobilized by his understanding of absurdity but discovered that the meaning found in one's life is created by the individual, thus moving him towards greater productivity and away from total cynicism. For Camus, resignation and hope went hand in hand where each keeps the other healthy.

The final influence, Franz Kafka, created the most problems for Camus during his lifetime. Since Kafka was a Jewish writer, a chapter on Kafka's work within the original version of "The Myth of Sisyphus" had to be eliminated before it was allowed to be published in German occupied France in 1941 (Lottman 262). This essay would appear later in "a free zone magazine" and in subsequent editions of the text (Lottman 265). Two themes of interest to Camus are evident in the writings of Kafka. First, Camus comments that within Kafka's work "You recognize a theme familiar to existential philosophy: truth contrary to morality" ("Myth" 133). Second, he is captured by Kafka's interest in maintaining hope in an effort to overcome the despair that often presents itself in the absurd conditions of everyday life. Camus wrote, "Within the limits of the human condition, what greater hope than the hope that allows an escape from that condition" ("Myth" 135). Camus's work in the French underground demonstrates his commitment to perform what he thought was the truthful, ethical act even when illegal. This concern for legality provides evidence that Camus recognized the limits that one's situatedness presents. While Camus searched for meaning in life he never abandoned the notion that a realistic hope existed. After suffering in several concentrations camps during World War II, Viktor Frankl wrote, "the sudden loss of hope and courage can have a deadly effect"

(75). Camus, along with Kafka and Frankl, represent a commitment to a hope that takes the challenges of life head-on, and maintains hope in spite of the absurdity of the moment

While the personal notebooks of Camus reveal a variety of different influences upon his work, it is primarily through the ideas of Pascal, Kierkegaard, Dostoevsky, Nietzsche, and Kafka that Camus discovered the most texture for his understanding of the metaphor of the absurd. The variety of ideas and metaphors that he engaged through his own reading of the work of other novelists and philosophers allowed him to respond to his historical moment in a more appropriate manner. By his constructive use of the ideas Camus demonstrated the significance of the absurd for his own moment, as well as providing insight into how the absurd is connected to our own postmodern moment.

A potential hazard in navigating the current postmodern moment is the risk of falling into despair due to the overwhelming availability of options from which to choose on a daily basis. The absurdity of this situation is that the world does not slow down so that a person has enough time to make a decision. Camus himself raised the question “How, in fact, can we avoid falling into despair? Those we love have often been in danger before, from illness, death or madness, but we ourselves and the things we believe in have still lived on” (Notebook III 149). When considering the collapse of a metanarrative within this postmodern moment, one can relate to Camus’s entry entitled “Letter to a Man in Despair” in which he wrote, “Often, the values on which our life is built has almost collapsed. But never before have these values and those we love been threatened all together and all at the same time. Never before have we been so completely handed over to destruction” (Notebook III 149). Although Camus was often discouraged by the way things were happening in the culture around him, he did not give

up his fight to find and create meaning through his own actions and existence. The emergence of the metaphor of the absurd within the work of Albert Camus provided an opportunity for him to make sense of his historical moment, a moment of virtue and narrative contention. The similarities found between Camus's moment and the present postmodern moment, also a moment of virtue and narrative contention, allow for this same metaphor of absurdity to invite meaningful conversation about how to engage the present moment from an existential ethical perspective.

Engaging the Absurd: The Role of Metaphor

What the thought of Camus suggests is not that the world should always be viewed through the lens of the metaphor of the absurd but that we should allow the communicative space for the emergence of metaphors that help make sense of the moment before us. Arnett and Arneson write, "applying concepts [metaphors] from a historical era other than our own requires concepts from a given theory to meet the needs (answer commonsense questions) of the present historical moment or we invite an interpretation of communication that is static and dangerously anachronistic" (32). Camus's philosophical commitments kept his ideas grounded in everyday living as he worked out the implications of the metaphor of the absurd. Through an understanding of the metaphor of the absurd as it is evidenced in the writings of Albert Camus, one can be better prepared to appropriately engage the current postmodern moment, and thus avoid becoming an anachronism.

One way in which an individual navigating through the postmodern moment can function as an anachronism is by assuming an approach to life that fails to engage life on its own terms and therefore inviting cynicism. Camus did not encourage an optimistic

outlook that held unrealistic expectations for living. Arnett and Arneson write, “A wedding of hope and cynicism within a dialogic perspective is guided by a metaphor, not of unlimited potential, but of hope within limits” (25-6). When one willingly recognizes the limits of a given moment while at the same time attempting to respond ethically and productively, one is walking in the land of Martin Buber’s “unity of contraries.” This dialectical tension is “lived out in the confusion of contradictions, not in the certainty of YES or NO” (Arnett and Arneson 142). As stated previously, resignation and hope went hand in hand for Camus. This tension helps each keep the other portion healthy and provides limits within the optimism or unrealistic hope that many possess while engaging absurd circumstances.

When viewing events in everyday life within a postmodern moment it is necessary to recognize the limitations inherent in any given perspective. For Hans-Georg Gadamer this limited perspective is considered the “horizon” which is “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Truth 302). When a person recognizes the bias one holds and the perspective from which one views the world the fact that he or she is situated within a larger narrative framework becomes apparent. Arnett writes, “We limit interpretive vision by our situatedness while we open possibilities due to our situatedness” (Dialogic Confession 182). Through the interplay between one’s horizon and the given historical moment a new understanding of existence can come into view through the engagement with the metaphors that emerge. Albert Camus recognized the inherent limits of the human condition and his work reflected his desire to engage his moment in a manner that was faithful to his embodied tradition, or story, and was also appropriate for the moment before him; an approach to

living that connects him with the study of philosophical hermeneutics. Arnett writes, “Philosophical hermeneutics provides interpretive freedom with horizon or story limits. As one takes a communicative text seriously, one brings a story-rich tradition to the text” (Dialogical Confession 182). The philosophy of communication, as explored within this project, is directly tied to Gadamer’s notion of Philosophical Hermeneutics. Gadamer wrote:

Philosophical hermeneutics takes as its task the opening up of the hermeneutical dimension in its full scope, showing its fundamental significance for our entire understanding of the world and thus for all its various forms in which this understanding manifests itself; from interhuman communication to manipulation for society; from personal experience by the individual in society to the way in which he encounters society. (Philosophical 18)

While Camus was writing before the work of either Gadamer or Paul Ricoeur was published, overall the critical approach taken within his work consistently demonstrates a commitment to philosophical hermeneutics as explored by these two scholars.

As stated earlier, Camus’s engagement with his historical moment eventually led to a conflict of philosophical positions with celebrated individuals like Jean Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir. A given philosophy of communication can assist in providing insight into “how” a person lives life and engages a given moment. Camus’s friendship-ending disagreement with Sartre was driven by a difference in philosophical beliefs that were more theoretical in nature. But it was also driven by a difference in ethical beliefs that played out in the everyday life and politics of post-World War II France. This concern for ethics demonstrates how a study of philosophically driven communication

ethics is not about process, but is deeply concerned for the content of communicative exchanges. Along with the contributors to Communication Ethics in an Age of Diversity, Camus sought to “develop constructive responses to the challenges of [his] unique age” (Makau and Arnett viii). The interplay of the philosophy of communication and communication ethics is evidenced through an analysis of the life of Albert Camus. In an effort to appropriately engage the moment in which he was situated, Camus worked out the implications of the metaphor of the absurd. It was through this metaphor that the world made sense to Camus. As his moment changed, he also began working with the metaphor of revolt. This should not be viewed as moving away from using the absurd but as adding further texture to his understanding of absurdity.

For Camus, metaphors mattered. While he did not write specifically about the topic of metaphors, he understood that through his use of the metaphor of the absurd he was bringing content to the ongoing discussion and thus avoided expressionism and emotivism. Through the lens of the metaphor of the absurd Camus addressed the historical moment as it actually existed before him. He accepted the absurdity of his historical circumstances and allowed an organic metaphor to emerge from within the chaos of his moment. Camus did not attempt to judge the moment from an objective position but attempted to engage the moment from his particular standpoint thus experiencing the metaphor prior to his reflective understanding about it. Through these commitments the thought and writing of Camus can be firmly situated within the discipline of communication building upon his strong association with the study of communication ethics. Camus functioned as a philosopher of communication by working out the ethical implications of his unique historical moment through the use of the

metaphor of the absurd. As stated previously, “absurdity” can be considered as a background concern while “the absurd” is an issue that is faced in a given moment in which there is a loss of hope in paradigmatic predictiveness. Camus wrote, “[N]ever perhaps at any time has the attack on reason been more violent than in ours” (“Myth” 22). The metaphor of the absurd emerged as Camus engaged his particular historical moment of narrative and virtue contention while at the same time being unpredictable, irrational, and violent – a time much like our contemporary moment.

One can better interpret Camus’s engagement of the historical moment through an understanding of Gadamer’s use of the term “horizon” which indicates “the range of vision that includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point” (Truth 302). Recognizing the horizon of Camus assists in attempting to situate him within a specific historical moment. To fully understand how he engaged his moment in history “we must place ourselves in the other situation in order to understand it” (Gadamer, Truth 303). In addition to the work of Gadamer, Paul Ricoeur’s work addressing metaphor provides the methodological framework for this dissertation. From the standpoint of a constructive hermeneutic, metaphor serves as a sort of interruption to the routine of daily living. Ricoeur wrote, “For this is the function of metaphor, to instruct by suddenly combining elements that have not been put together before” (33). Michael Hyde, in his work addressing “rhetorical interruptions” suggests, “[S]hould it not be the case that when conscience calls, rhetoric ought to answer, even if the word of the poet is yet to come and even if what one has to say is out of step with the party line?” (77). Combining these ideas, one can come to the conclusion that an understanding of metaphor can allow the world to be reinterpreted in a new and different fashion.

As the events of the twentieth century unfolded leading to the decline of the modern era, questions asking whether meaning was found within metanarratives or within human experience began to receive considerable attention. While Albert Camus sought to challenge previously held notions of meaning (i.e. the metanarrative of religion) he did not make a postmodern turn and believe that meaning was found by situating oneself in a story or narrative tradition. While he sought to challenge previously held assumptions, he ultimately placed his trust in people and not in stories. Therefore, it can be said that Camus was asking a good question (where is meaning found?) but discovered a modern answer (meaning is found in people as opposed to narratives or stories).

Throughout his life's work, Albert Camus made use of metaphorical distinctions to emphasize the general themes of his writings. These metaphors emerged at a relevant moment in history in which they connected Camus's own experience with historical circumstances. A dual commitment to engage a given moment on its own terms and allow organic metaphors to emerge through that engagement allows one to respond from an existential ethical perspective in a time of narrative and virtue contention. These commitments allow a person to respond ethically to changing circumstances in an appropriate manner. Metaphors mattered for Camus. Our ongoing engagement with relevant metaphors matter for us today as well.

Absurdity and the Continual Existential Relevance of Metaphor Engagement

The following section provides an overview of how the use of the metaphor of the absurd by Albert Camus can inform an existential ethical response within a postmodern moment of narrative and virtue contention.

Building upon the foundation established in this chapter, chapter two explores the emergence of the metaphor of the absurd within the work and thought of Albert Camus and how he came to *recognize* that metaphor. Camus functioned as both an ethical practitioner of communication as well as a philosopher of communication. Through his work as a journalist, playwright, theater director, and author of literary and critical works, Camus served in a variety of communicative roles in the public sphere. Camus's first cycle of work including "The Myth of Sisyphus," The Stranger, "Caligula," and "The Misunderstanding," provided the most thorough treatment of his use of the metaphor of the absurd. An exploration of these four texts, and the main metaphors that emerge from them, provide an opportunity to connect his early work with the contemporary postmodern moment. The content of each text is summarized under the heading of "Narrative" while the analysis of each follows under the heading of "Narrative Engagement". This approach is taken for both the works of fiction and non-fiction.

Chapter three explores Camus's ongoing *response* to a changing historical moment. As he attempted to work out the ethical implications of the absurd for the changing historical moment, Camus began to work with a derivative metaphor, revolt. A notebook entry dated June 17, 1947, stated, "Second series. Revolt: The Plague (and annexes) – The Rebel – Kaliayev" [a character from Camus's play The Just Assassins] (Notebook V 158). This chapter provides an exploration of how Camus's use of the metaphor of revolt does not represent his abandoning of the absurd but an effort to further texture his understanding by engaging an ever-changing moment. In the "Preface" to the first English edition of "The Myth of Sisyphus", Camus made the connection between the absurd and revolt when he stated "For me 'The Myth of Sisyphus' marks the beginning

of an idea which I was to pursue in The Rebel” (v). The metaphor of revolt supports the idea that Camus was committed to working out the ethical implications of his ideas in the midst of a changing historical moment. The content of each text is summarized under the heading of “Narrative” while the analysis of each follows under the heading of “Narrative Engagement”. This approach is taken for both the works of fiction and non-fiction.

Chapter four provides an exploration of the *consequences* of living in an age of absurdity. Camus’s novel The Fall provides a fictional example of what occurs when taking action in the midst of absurdity. This exploration is followed by a twentieth century case study that sorts through the implications of Camus’s use of the metaphor of the absurd. As briefly described earlier, following the publication of The Rebel, Camus had a very public and bitter debate with Jean Paul Sartre. This debate illustrates both the absurdity of the moment as well as provides further texture to one’s understanding of the metaphor of the absurd. This chapter makes further connections between the work of Camus and the contemporary postmodern moment. The deeply held ethical convictions of Camus, while leading to the end of his friendship with Sartre, provide further evidence that he can serve as a philosopher of communication in a postmodern context. The content of The Fall is summarized under the heading of “Narrative” while the analysis follows under the heading of “Narrative Engagement”. The same pattern is followed for the letters that provide the substance of the debate between Camus and Sartre.

Chapter five explores the contributions that an understanding of Albert Camus as a philosopher of communication provides for the communication discipline, specifically for the study of communication ethics. Two novels published after Camus’s death, A Happy Death and The First Man, demonstrate the importance of responsibility in the

context of communication ethics. A brief summary of each chapter of this dissertation is provided followed by a connection to Camus's emerging concerns with responsibility. This final and concluding chapter draws together the ideas presented in the dissertation and provides a summary of the main contributions of the work. The central metaphors of Camus are provided in an effort to answer the guiding research question which seeks to connect Albert Camus's use of the metaphor of the absurd to the current postmodern moment within the context of the study of communication ethics.

Conclusion and Implications

The metaphor of the absurd provides a lens through which one can engage the current postmodern moment permitting him or her to make ethically informed choices when confronted with a multiplicity of options. Approaching this moment from the standpoint of communication ethics allows for a reflective choice to be made by an informed participant of the moment. This chapter provides an exploration of a research question representing a crisis within contemporary human communication. An overview of how this question is currently being addressed within the literature found within the field of communication is also provided. In an effort to situate the metaphor of the absurd as well as the work of Camus within the wider study of communication ethics, the ideas of Paul Ricoeur and Hans-Georg Gadamer's philosophical hermeneutics are presented as a framework for methodology. Finally, an outline of the larger project that encompasses the completed dissertation provides the direction of subsequent chapters.

The metaphor of the absurd as well as the work and thought of Albert Camus has primarily served as secondary resources within the communication discipline. This project contributes to the conversation about the absurd in an effort to further the study of

the communication ethics by placing Camus in the foreground. In the essay, “Communication Ethics: The Dialogic Turn”, Arnett, Arneson, and Bell, provide a hermeneutic entrance into the ongoing discussion of communication ethics through the use of categories and context. The hermeneutic entrance of this project is through a given metaphor announced through the work of Camus himself. The overall contribution of this project is that it provides an introduction to the metaphorical entrance into an ongoing conversation about communication ethics. This dissertation, however, assumes that every metaphor generated by Camus worked within the shadow or was interconnected to Camus’s major theme of the absurd.

Chapter Two

Meeting of the Absurd: Recognition

“The misery and greatness of this world: it offers no truths, but only objects for love. Absurdity is king, but love saves us from it” (June 1938, Notebook II).

One meets the absurd within a given historical moment when confronted with the inherent contradictions of human existence. Albert Camus was able to meet the absurd through his engagement of the historical moment as it actually existed before him as a moment of narrative and virtue contention. Through his work as a journalist, playwright, and novelist he consistently demonstrated recognition of the moment as opposed to ignoring the uniqueness of the moment or attempting to make the moment into something that it was not capable of being. Camus’s historical moment was one filled with unpredictable actions, irrational decisions, and violent acts by individuals and governments. Within such a context, the absurd can be understood as a time of narrative and virtue contention in which there is a loss of trust in paradigmatic predictiveness. Camus worked from a constructive critical perspective and textured his understanding of absurdity through reliance upon historical voices that preceded his own existence. This nuanced understanding of the absurd allowed him to approach the topic from a variety of perspectives. Through his philosophical essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” he was able to lay a solid foundation of the concept while through his fiction, including the novel The

Stranger and the plays “The Misunderstanding” and “Caligula,” he was able to introduce the metaphor of the absurd to a wider audience. Throughout his life, Camus lived amidst the tensions found in an absurd moment; he understood that life and relationships were part of a complex world that did not allow for simplistic answers. Through his communicative meeting of the absurd, Camus serves a model of a philosopher of communication for a postmodern age; an age that can also be considered an age of absurdity. Camus’s fiction and nonfiction demonstrate his communicative meeting of the absurd and provides the content of this chapter as the guiding question is explored: “How did Camus’s communicative meeting with the absurd assist in his ability to engage the historical moment of metanarrative decline from an existential ethical perspective?”

Introduction

Absurdity, within the work of Camus, can be understood as the state of human existence that is relentlessly caught in the midst of irresolvable tension and contradiction. The metaphor of the absurd emerges out of the interplay of philosophy and the ethical communicative practices embodied by Camus, supporting the notion that he can serve as a model of a philosopher of communication for our postmodern age. For Albert Camus, absurdity was a given within lived experience. It was within the philosophical essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” that Camus made his best attempt at an analytical exploration of the concept of absurdity. Within this essay Camus provided the theoretical background for his understanding of the metaphor of the absurd and attempted to explain the notion of the absurd. His choosing of the myth of Sisyphus was apt due to Sisyphus’s condemnation by the gods to roll a rock to the top of the mountain. Sisyphus was required to engage in the futile and hopeless labor of pushing an enormous boulder only

to a fulcrum point where it returned to its original position at the bottom of the mountain. Camus explored absurdity as a desire by humanity for a clear understanding in a world lacking universality and where contradiction is a given. It was in this type of world that Albert Camus was committed to taking action; a point that reinforces the significance of both the metaphor of the absurd as well as the role that Camus can play in helping one navigate through this moment of narrative and virtue contention. Within the work of Camus, the metaphor of the absurd emerges in those moments in which one appears caught in a contradiction beyond resolution.

A notebook entry from June 17, 1947, stated, “First series. Absurd: The Stranger – The Myth of Sisyphus – Caligula and The Misunderstanding” (Notebook V 158).

These four projects, connected by Camus and considered by him to be his first cycle of work, are the primary focus of attention within this chapter, although in an effort to texture the understanding of the metaphor of the absurd this project will go beyond these four works as necessary. Camus stated in a 1945 interview, “Accepting the absurdity around us is one step, a necessary experience” (Lyrical 346). Arnett assists in expanding one’s understanding of absurdity when he writes, “Perhaps life is only absurd when we deny the presence of absurdity and when we are overwhelmed by it” (Communication 140). Camus believed that absurdity should be engaged as a given within everyday life. Absurdity invites something more profound than a decentering; in an age of absurdity one loses one’s focus of attention as if in an existential fog. Since one can not avoid or escape absurdity, the only ethical option available is communicative engagement. The inherent contradictions of human existence are inescapable and therefore one must choose to recognize, embrace, and engage the absurd in order to discover and create

meaning in life. Camus viewed the Greek mythological character of Sisyphus as one who recognized and embraced his own fate, thus allowing him to be productive in the midst of absurdity. This absurdity for Camus was “the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart” (“Myth” 21). As an artist, Camus did not address the concept of absurdity in a linear fashion nor give an explicit definition of the concept. He attempted to paint a picture that generally pointed toward an understanding of absurdity that highlighted the tension between one’s desire for clarity and the unexplainable nature of human existence.

In addition to the “Myth of Sisyphus” Camus textured his understanding of the absurd through the novel The Stranger and the plays “The Misunderstanding” and “Caligula.” Within these four works, Camus made passing reference to the topic of revolt which serves as the basis for chapter three. While these comments about revolt are important, they are most fitting as a transition to Camus’s wider discussion of revolt found in chapter three of this dissertation. First, within this chapter, an overview of the content of “The Myth of Sisyphus” provides an introduction to Camus’s exploration of the absurd. Next, an overview of the plotlines of each of the three works of fiction, The Stranger, “The Misunderstanding”, and “Caligula,” provides deeper insights into how Camus conceptualized the metaphor of the absurd. Each section begins with a narrative summary of the main points and characters within the story and is followed by a narrative engagement of how the work textures an understanding of the metaphor of the absurd. The conclusion provides a metaphorical connection between the work of Camus and the contemporary postmodern moment as well as a transition to the following chapter addressing revolt.

“The Myth of Sisyphus”

Camus stated in the “Preface” of the “The Myth of Sisyphus” that “The fundamental subject of ‘The Myth of Sisyphus’ is this: is it legitimate and necessary to wonder whether life has a meaning” (v). Through this exploration, Camus provided the foundational philosophy for his understanding of the absurd. When the essay was prepared for publication in the United States several other short essays were included along with “The Myth of Sisyphus” published under the title The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays. The essay first appeared in France in 1942 and was published in English in 1955. This section focuses upon the specific essay entitled “The Myth of Sisyphus” since that provides the most compelling foundation for Camus’s understanding of absurdity. This essay was divided into five parts: “An Absurd Reasoning,” “The Absurd Man,” “Absurd Creation,” “The Myth of Sisyphus,” and an appendix which addressed “Hope and the Absurd in the Work of Franz Kafka.” A brief overview of the major arguments of the essay is provided next followed by a critical examination of Camus’s communicative meeting with the absurd.

Narrative

The opening part, “An Absurd Reasoning,” is broken down into four sections: “Absurdity and Suicide,” “Absurd Walls,” “Philosophical Suicide,” and “Absurd Freedom.” Suicide must be addressed as a viable option for escaping this absurd human condition when recognizing and accepting, with Camus, that life holds no meaning. In the opening part this quest for meaning led Camus to begin the essay with the profound statement, “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide” (3). He emphasized that his purpose was to provide a description of the absurd, “There will be

found here merely the description, in the pure state, of an intellectual malady” (2). This “intellectual malady” can be understood as the struggle that humans experience when seeking clarity in a world full of contradiction and irresolvable inconsistencies. In such a world of chaos, it is no surprise that Camus chose to begin with suicide, which offers an escape from the tensions of life. When one accepts Camus’s belief that absurdity within life can be assumed, it becomes evident why he considered suicide such an important philosophical concern. For Camus, life was absurd. Therefore, the challenge posed by human existence was whether one chooses to recognize and meet the absurd head-on and engage life on its own terms. Attempting to escape from this impasse, while enticing, must not be the final choice or solution. The notion of suicide is a call to play life backwards, asking what renders such a decision, the answer is the absurd; that there is no clarity in what it means to play life forward.

Within the section addressing “Absurd Walls” Camus restated that he was not interested in a philosophy that was removed from everyday life, “I am interested – let me repeat again – not so much in absurd discoveries as in their consequences” (16). These discoveries are found within the limits of everyday life, “This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and the rest is construction” (19). But this world does not bring meaning and clarity to one’s life, “Forever I shall be a stranger to myself” (19). Camus continued with his description of absurdity in the midst of this strangeness, “[W]hat is absurd is the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart” (21). The most one can hope for in such a circumstance is to learn from the example of Kierkegaard who “for a part of his existence at least, does more than discover the absurd, he lives it” (25). The “absurd

walls” indicated in the title represent the limits that one finds oneself within in a moment of absurdity. It is within these walls that one must make an effort to find meaning in life.

Living in the midst of absurdity can lead some to consider not only physical suicide but philosophical suicide as well. While Camus recognized that for Kierkegaard absurdity was part of his lived existence he was critical with some elements of the philosophy of Kierkegaard, going as far as calling it “philosophical suicide” (28) because it “suggest[s] escape” (32). Kierkegaard, according to Camus, “[H]as found nothing in experience but the confession of his own impotence and no occasion to infer any satisfactory principle. Yet without justification...suddenly asserts all at once the transcendent, the essence of experience and the superhuman significance of life” (32). Camus criticized this position because “[n]othing logically prepares this reasoning. I can call it a leap” (33). Camus rebuked Kierkegaard, and anyone else awaiting some transcendent Being to interfere with life. Camus stated, “I risk this shocking statement: the absurd is sin without God” (40). The absurd was, and is, the fate of all humankind; to wait for someone outside of human existence to provide clarity was the equivalent of denying the absurdity of one’s existence.

Camus was critical of those who considered themselves existentialist philosophers, writing, “Now, to limit myself to existential philosophies, I see that all of them without exception suggest escape” (32). As stated earlier, Camus’s interest was seeking a way to engage life in spite of absurdity, *not* create a justification for a planned escape. It is in his description of the absurd that Camus reveals his strength. Within the “Myth of Sisyphus” he dedicated several pages to the topic of phenomenology, focusing primarily on the works of Edmund Husserl. Camus provides the following description of

the term, “[P]henomenology declines to explain the world, it wants to be merely a description of actual experience. It confirms absurd thought in its initial assertion that there is no truth, but merely truths” (43). In this brief section on phenomenology, he did not find many positive attributes of Husserl’s approach. Camus synthesized his reservations about placing too much emphasis upon a phenomenological method when he wrote, “To say that everything is privileged is tantamount to saying that everything is equivalent” (45). Even in the midst of the existential fog of absurdity, Camus believed that the “absurd is lucid reason noting its limits” (49). A paradox of absurdity, according to Camus, is found in the fact that only through a clear understanding of the confusing circumstances can one take action in the midst of absurdity.

Within the final section of part one entitled “Absurd Freedom” Camus reinforced the notion that absurdity is pervasive, “I can refute everything in this world surrounding me that offends and enraptures me, except this chaos, this sovereign chance and this divine equivalence which springs from anarchy” (51). The recognition and acceptance of this absurdity also invites one to accept that life holds no meaning except for that which is created by living life to its fullest, “I don’t know whether this world has a meaning that transcends it. But I know that I do not know that meaning and that it is impossible for me just now to know it. What can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms” (51). As Camus developed this theme in the essay, he continued by stating, “It now becomes clear, on the contrary, that it [life] will be lived all the better if it has no meaning” (53). But this question of freedom, for Camus, did not extend to wider discussion of freedom as an ontological philosophical problem, “Knowing whether or not man is free doesn’t interest me. I can experience only my own

freedom” (56). Camus’s attention remained focused upon the certainty he held that life was absurd; while questions of freedom may have been important for some philosophers, Camus was only interested in the implications of absurdity for everyday life.

Within the second part of the essay, entitled “The Absurd Man,” Camus addressed the topics of “Don Juanism,” “Drama,” and “Conquest.” Camus was fascinated by the character of Don Juan who “reminds one of those artists who know their limits, never go beyond them, and in that precarious interval which they take their spiritual stand enjoy all the wonderful ease of masters” (70). Don Juan chose to meet the moment, or in his case the women, present before him and “does not think of ‘collecting’ women. He exhausts their number and with them his chances of life. ‘Collecting’ amounts to being capable of living off one’s past. But he rejects regret, that other form of hope” (72). Camus focused upon Don Juan because he did not live off of personal inertia but chose to engage the moment and opportunities as they existed before him.

The second section of this part addressed “Drama” which was central to Camus’s insistence upon living out absurdity as opposed to merely understanding it from a distance. In order for an actor to fully embrace the perspective of a character and “ceasing to admire the play, the mind wants to enter in” (77). Drama forces one to attend to the moment before him or her, “Above all, it directs our concerns toward what is most certain – that is, toward the immediate” (78). This willingness to live out many lives as well as the attention to the immediate moment led to direct conflict with the Christian Church, “The actors of the era knew they were excommunicated. Entering the profession amounted to choosing Hell. And the Church discerned in them her worst enemies” (83).

This section further illustrated Camus's antagonism with organized religion, especially the Christian Church.

The final section of part two was entitled "Conquest." Camus placed a variety of words in the mouth of "the conqueror" including, "Beware of those who say: 'I know this too well to be able to express it.' For if they cannot do so, this is because they don't know it or because out of laziness they stopped at the outer crust" (84). Through the voice of the conqueror Camus was able to restate the importance of focusing on the present moment, "I have no concern with ideas or with the eternal. The truths that come within my scope can be touched by the hand. I cannot separate from them" (89). Camus concluded the second part by stating that the examples of Don Juan, the actor, and the conqueror are simply illustrations of absurd characters. While each example represents someone who lacks hope in eternal values or ideas, "Being deprived of hope is not despairing" (91). While despair is an available option, Camus believed one could avoid falling into despair while in the midst of absurdity.

Part three, entitled "Absurd Creation," is further divided into three sections: "Philosophy and Fiction," "Kirilov," and "Ephemeral Creation." Camus provided a strong connection between the characters he created and his own being by writing, "The idea of art detached from its creator is not merely outmoded; it is false" (96). For this connection to exist, one must write in the midst of absurd circumstances, "If the world were clear, art would not exist" (98). The act of writing begins when a person recognizes the gulf that exists between rationality and existence and starts out "from the basic disagreement that separates man from his experience in order to find a common ground" (99). Not every author seeks to work out the implications of this tension; in fact "The

great novelists are philosophical novelists – that is, the contrary of thesis-writers” (99). Among the list Camus provided of great novelists were the names of Kafka and Dostoevsky.

Kirilov, a central character of Dostoevsky’s The Possessed, provided the focus for the second section of this part. Kirilov is an advocate of “logical suicide” (105). Camus expanded upon the theme of Dostoevsky’s novel, “If God exists, all depends on him and we can do nothing against his will. If he does not exist, everything depends on us. For Kirilov, as for Nietzsche, to kill God is to become god oneself; it is to realize on this earth the eternal life of which the Gospel speaks” (108). Kirilov believed that his death represented an act of freedom in a world without a God. Therefore, “The theme of suicide in Dostoevsky, then, is indeed, an absurd theme” (109). Kirilov’s action represented, for Camus, an attempt to demonstrate the absurdity of existence by acting in complete freedom to take one’s own life. The poetic nature of Dostoevsky’s work led Camus to state, “[N]o one so much as Dostoevsky has managed to give the absurd world such familiar and tormenting charms” (110). While Camus did not share Dostoevsky’s religious convictions, his constructive philosophical approach allowed him to find value in Dostoevsky’s exploration of an absurd life.

The final section of this part, “Ephemeral Creation,” began by stating “At this point, I perceive, therefore, that hope cannot be eluded forever and that it can beset even those who wanted to be free of it” (113). The goal, in an age of absurdity, is to maintain action within limits. And it is this action that produces exceptional works, “After all, ironic philosophies produce passionate works” (116). These “ironic philosophies” contribute to the diversity of human existence because they are representative of a

multiplicity of human experiences. The only limit placed upon one's creativity is death, "Outside of that single fatality of death, everything, joy or happiness, is liberty" (117). Camus believed that focusing upon any life beyond the one he was living (i.e. a religious afterlife) shifted his focus of attention from the only life over which he had control, his everyday temporal existence.

The fourth part, "The Myth of Sisyphus," which gives the entire essay its name, explores the world as one full of contradictions and yet with each human being longing for a resolution to take place to make sense of these various contradictions. Unfortunately, viewing life from the perspective of Camus, this resolution never occurs and one is left only with the hope of being able to make sense of life and create meaning in the midst of contradictions. While it is possible to see how maintaining hope in this context is futile, it is still necessary. Hope, for Sisyphus, was directly connected to his choice to take action in spite of the overwhelming circumstances. Sisyphus was condemned by the gods to "ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of the mountain, whence the stone would fall back of its own weight. They had thought with some reason that there is no more dreadful punishment than futile and hopeless labor" (119). While the fate of Sisyphus was determined by someone else, it was his own choice to triumph in the face of adversity. Meaning in life for Sisyphus would only come if he was able to persevere in the midst of overwhelming obstacles. This myth served as a metaphor for life for Camus. The fate of every human being is determined by forces beyond one's control; although as an atheist Camus did not believe this fate was determined by gods or a God.

The appendix addressing “Hope and the Absurd in the Works of Franz Kafka” served as the fifth and final part of the “The Myth of Sisyphus.” Camus considered the work of Kafka to be symbolic in nature; in fact, “it would be wrong to try to interpret everything in Kafka in detail...A symbol always transcends the one who makes use of it and makes him say in reality more than he is aware of expressing” (124). Within this symbolic work of Kafka is “a theme familiar to existential philosophy: truth contrary to morality” (133). Within this absurd situation, Kafka still found room to address the topic of hope, “[T]he more tragic the condition described by Kafka, the firmer and more aggressive that hope becomes” (134). This concern for hope held by Kafka led Camus to write, “Within the limits of the human condition, what greater hope than the hope that allows an escape from that condition?” (135). This hope for Kafka was grounded in the reality of everyday life. Camus drew the section addressing Kafka’s work to a close, and therefore concluded the entire essay, by simply stating, “I also know that I am not seeking what is universal, but what is true. The two may well not coincide” (136). While Camus believed that Kafka, like Kierkegaard, avoided full engagement in the midst of absurdity and offered hope as a means of escape, Camus was still enamored with Kafka’s descriptions of an absurd life.

For Camus, the Greek character of Sisyphus served as an apt example of his understanding of absurdity. Much like the fate of Sisyphus was predetermined before he began his quest to push the boulder to the top of the mountain, absurdity is a given within everyday life. One’s choice is whether or not to engage life and avoid the temptation to escape from the absurd circumstances of the human condition. Camus considered suicide to be a form of escape; physical suicide represented an effort to escape living in the midst

of absurdity while philosophical suicide, found in Kierkegaard's "leap of faith," represented an effort to escape intellectually engaging absurdity. Sisyphus met life on its own terms and found meaning for life within the limits of his existence. Through this exploration Camus provided a compelling description of absurdity that resonates with the circumstances of the current postmodern moment of narrative and virtue contention.

Within "The Myth of Sisyphus" Camus explored absurdity, suicide (both physical and philosophical), existentialism, phenomenology, meaning, and hope. Working as an artist, Camus was providing a mental picture of absurdity through his vivid descriptions of its very nature. The metaphor of *meaning* provides a point of connection between "The Myth of Sisyphus" and this project and will be addressed later in this chapter as a way in which this work of Camus can be situated within the overall dissertation.

Narrative Engagement

When examining the work of various scholars in reference to Camus's use of the absurd, one encounters a variety of attempts to explain and define Camus's use of the metaphor of the absurd. Camus himself never offered an explicit definition of the term 'absurd' within his work. What he did provide was a broad description of how the metaphor of absurdity surfaces within everyday life; in other words he painted a picture of absurdity within the human experience. In an effort to fill the void left by Camus, many scholars have made an effort to define what Camus "meant" by his use of the term. Both Joseph McBride and Solomon equate the absurd specifically with the idea that life holds no meaning (McBride 3-8; Solomon 34-35). Cruickshank writes that the absurd represents "the absence of correspondence or congruity between the mind's need for coherence and the incoherence of the world which the mind experiences" (41). These

two attempts to define the metaphor of the absurd are representative of the various works addressing Camus. Joseph McBride critiques Cruickshank's understanding of absurdity when he writes:

But what does Camus mean when he says that man's existence is absurd? This is also a crucial question, but one that philosophers have almost invariably answered either inaccurately or with insufficient precision...Cruickshank [is incorrect] when he asserts that it is "the conclusion arrived at by those who had assumed the possibility of a total explanation of existence by the mind who discover instead an unabridged gulf between rationality and experience." (6)

While the meaninglessness of life is a component of Camus's absurdity, to suggest that it supplies a full definition misses the complexity of his use of the term. For the purposes of this dissertation, Cruickshank's suggestion that life is riddled with contradictions provides the most helpful starting point for examining Camus's own words about the metaphor of the absurd.

While absurdity for Camus may have been a given, not everyone chooses to accept this reality. Joseph McBride writes that in "The Myth of Sisyphus" there "is a distinction between the 'fact' of absurdity and the awareness that some people have of this 'fact'" (4). Camus most often used the phrases "of absurdity" or "the absurd" when making any direct use of the term. The preposition "of", as in "that elusive feeling of absurdity" ("Myth" 12), suggests that absurdity is something that influences the way in which one engages the world, whether or not it is recognized. The article "the" suggests a fact of existence, again, whether or not it is recognized as such. In order to accept, embrace, and engage absurdity, one must recognize it; resulting in a de-centering, or

“defamiliarization” (Resseguie) within life. Although the following notebook entry was recorded several years prior to the publication of the works contained in the cycle of the absurd, it reveals several of the key elements developed in the works contained in that cycle. In a notebook entry from September 7, 1939, Camus wrote:

If it is true that the absurd has been fulfilled (or, rather, revealed) then it follows that no experience has any value in itself, and that all our actions are equally instructive. The will is nothing. Acceptance everything. On one condition: that, faced with the humblest or the most heart-rending experience, man should always be “present”; and that he should endure this experience without flinching, with complete lucidity. (Notebook III 143)

This entry provides background for the opening sentence of “The Myth of Sisyphus” which Robert C. Solomon considered to be “arguably the most striking sentence in the history of philosophy” (38). As he explores this question, Camus focused attention upon the character of Sisyphus, a man condemned by the gods of Greek mythology. Camus wrote, “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy” (“Myth” 3). To commit suicide would indicate that one has not endured “this experience without flinching and complete lucidity.” Suicide indicates an elimination of one’s physical presence in the world, thus making it impossible to be “present” to face the “the humblest or the most heart-rending experience.” Meaning in life is found by standing in the face of the inevitable (Frankl 111) and making an intentional effort to overcome the absurd forces at work that are beyond one’s control.

The absurd for Camus is a given within everyday life. While humans may hope for a life that provides a unity of meaning, what is revealed instead is an absurd existence resulting in contradictions in every aspect of living. In November 1942, Camus wrote in an entry in his notebook:

Development of the absurd:

- 1) if the basic concern is the need for unity;
- 2) if the world (or God) cannot suffice.

It is up to man to forge a unity for himself, either by turning away from the world, or within the world. Thus are restored a morality and an austerity that remain to be defined. (Notebook IV 41)

While absurdity was inescapable for Camus, people still attempted to appeal to a God that may bring a sense of meaning and clarity to one's life. For an atheist like Camus, this move was pointless and only illustrates that many people would rather attempt an escape from absurd living as opposed to engaging life on its own terms.

The reality of the absurd provides a common theme that ties together the works that are contained in Camus's cycle of the absurd. Cruickshank defined absurdity as "the absence of correspondence or congruity between the mind's need for coherence and the incoherence of the world which the mind experiences" (41). While some scholars have highlighted the philosophical shortcomings of the way in which Camus engaged the absurd (i.e. Cruickshank and Joseph McBride), this chapter illustrates the way in which Camus engaged the metaphor of the absurd as consistent with his own work and helpful for the current postmodern moment.

Whether one is considering Sisyphus's "ceaselessly rolling a rock to the top of a mountain" ("Myth" 119), Meursault's engagement with his surroundings in The Stranger, Jan's inability to announce his name upon arriving at his mother and sister's inn in "The Misunderstanding," or Caligula's inability to limit his will to power, each text within the cycle of the absurd explored the various aspects of the limitations of human existence in the midst of absurdity. Camus provided a variety of insights into how to understand and engage an age of absurdity. Through an exploration of his ideas and an evaluation of how those ideas connect to our present moment it is possible to connect the metaphor of the absurd, and the wider work of Camus, to the present postmodern moment. Camus engaged the absurd in both his fiction and nonfiction. A brief summary of each work will next be provided followed by an analysis of how that work nuances the metaphor of the absurd. Each section begins with a narrative summary of the main points and characters within the story and is followed by a narrative engagement of how the work textures an understanding of the metaphor of the absurd.

The Stranger

Camus textured his philosophical understanding of absurdity with a story that focuses upon an indifferent main character set against the background of normal, everyday events. Joseph McBride calls The Stranger, written in 1942 and translated into English in 1946, "one of the most widely read, and arguably the most influential, philosophical novel of this [the twentieth] century" (8). The story tells about the character's failure to engage life in a "common sense" fashion assisting in illustrating the absurdity of human existence. A failure to be reflective about his engagement ultimately

leads the central character to his own death. In many ways, this story can serve as a parable of the paradox of human existence in an age of absurdity.

Narrative

The story, told in two parts, is shared from the perspective of the main character, Meursault, who encounters the major events of the story with a certain level of indifference. The first line of the novel states, “Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe. I don’t know.” (3). After going through the appropriate routine in response to his mother’s death – speaking with the funeral director, staying with his mother’s casket for an all-night vigil, and attending the funeral – Meursault returns home, and realizing it is Saturday heads for the beach, where he reconnects with a former coworker, Marie. They spend the afternoon swimming together and later that evening attend a lighthearted movie. After spending the night with Marie, Meursault spends Sunday relaxing in his home. At the conclusion of the day, “It occurred to me that anyway one more Sunday was over, that Maman was buried now, that I was going back to work, and that, really, nothing had changed” (24).

In addition to Marie, the character of Salamano plays a minor role in the novel. Salamano is a neighbor of Meursault’s who is constantly at odds with his dog. Camus wrote:

Twice a day, at eleven and six, the old man takes the dog out for a walk. They haven’t changed their route in eight years. You can see them in the rue de Lyon, the dog pulling the man along until old Salamano stumbles. Then he beats the dog and swears at it. The dog cowers and trails behind. Then it’s the old man who pulls the dog. Once the dog has forgotten, it starts dragging its master along

again, and again gets beaten and sworn at. Then they both stand there on the sidewalk and stare at each other, the dog in terror, the man in hatred. It's the same thing every day. (27)

Routines are found throughout the novel. Meursault has consistently observed his neighbor while his neighbor has consistently followed the same routine day in and day out.

The final important character in the first part of the novel is Raymond Sintes. He is described as "a little on the short side, with broad shoulders and a nose like a boxer's. He always dresses very sharp. And once he said to me, talking about Salamano, 'If that isn't pitiful!'" (28). Raymond provides the source of conflict within part one of the novel when he asks Meursault to help him write a letter to a female friend. Raymond believes the woman is cheating on him and he wants to "punish her" (31) but he does not "think he could write the kind of letter it would take and that he'd thought of asking me to write it for him. Since I didn't say anything, he asked if I'd mind doing it right then and I said no" (32). The letter results in a follow-up visit from the woman, at which point "there were some terrifying thuds and the woman screamed, but in such a terrifying way that the landing immediately filled with people" (35-6). The police arrive and allow the woman to leave and warn Raymond to avoid this kind of behavior in the future. Following this event, Raymond invites Meursault and Marie to a friend's beach house on the upcoming Sunday.

When the day arrives to join Raymond's friends at the beach house, Meursault, Marie, and Raymond make their way to the beach. Before getting on the bus, the three notice a "group of Arabs leaning against the front" of a shop across the street (48). One

of this group is the brother of the woman who received the letter written by Meursault on Raymond's behalf. As a result of this letter she was beaten by Raymond and her brother "had it in for Raymond" (48). Upon arrival at the beach house, Meursault, Raymond, and the host, Masson, take a walk along the beach where there is another encounter with the man after Raymond. After this incident, and upon arriving back at the bungalow, Meursault states, "I didn't like having to explain to them, so I just shut up, smoked a cigarette, and looked at the sea" (54). Later in the afternoon, Raymond decides to walk along the beach again. When encountering the same group of Arabs for a third time, Raymond is carrying a gun in his hip pocket. Meursault convinces Raymond to hand him the gun and the two return to the beach house without any more encounters.

Meursault later found himself walking along the sea. Camus wrote:

I was thinking of the cool spring behind the rock [the scene of the encounters with the Arabs]. I wanted to hear the murmur of its water again, to escape the sun and the strain and the woman's tears, and to find shade and rest again at last. But as I got closer, I saw that Raymond's man had come back. (57)

But compelled by his need for relief, Meursault is not able to simply turn around and leave. As the sun causes his forehead to sweat, Meursault takes a step forward toward the Arab, who immediately draws a knife. Confusing the glimmer of the sea with the sun's reflection off the blade, "That's when everything began to reel...I squeezed my hand around the revolver. The trigger gave" (59). After firing once, "I fired four more times at the motionless body where the bullets lodged without leaving a trace" (59).

Meursault's murder of the Arab is the final event in part one of The Stranger.

Part two of the novel begins with Meursault in prison and provides a look at his questioning, the meeting with his lawyer, life in prison, the trial, and finally his sentencing for the murder. This portion of the novel moves at a much quicker pace and does not require as much detail as the first part. Meursault slowly comes to grips with his new life as a prisoner. It is a conversation with the head guard that makes Meursault aware of the reality of his situation, “‘But,’ he said, ‘that’s exactly why you’re in prison.’ ‘What do you mean that’s why?’ ‘Well, yes – freedom, that’s why. They’ve taken away your freedom.’ I’d never thought about it like that. I agreed. ‘It’s true,’ I said. ‘Otherwise, what would be the punishment?’” (78). The routine of prison life soon causes him to lose track of time, especially what day of the week it is. “They lost their names. Only the words ‘yesterday’ and ‘tomorrow’ still had any meaning for me” (80). Meursault reflects upon a round of questioning about the murder, the prosecutor wonders, “[W]hy was I armed and why did I return to precisely that spot? I said it just happened that way” (88). As the trial proceeds, “It was then I felt a stirring go through the room and for the first time I realized I was guilty” (90). The trial focuses upon the indifference Meursault experienced at the death of his mother, the new relationship with Marie, the lack of restraint in writing the letter on Raymond’s behalf, as opposed to simply addressing the murder at the beach. When questioned for “motives for my act...Fumbling a little with my words and realizing how ridiculous it sounded, I blurted out that it was because of the sun. People laughed” (103). Once the verdict is read, Meursault is told “in bizarre language that I am to have my head cut off in a public square in the name of the French people” (107). After an unhelpful encounter with the prison chaplain, Meursault accepts his fate and hopes, “For everything to be consummated,

for me to feel alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate” (123).

The Stranger allowed Camus to explore the absurdity of everyday living through an examination of routine and indifference against the backdrop of the decline of common sense. As a novelist Camus was attempting to provide a fictional example of how the central character’s various responses to his everyday life illustrate the absurdity of human existence. While Camus did not explicitly use the phrase *decline of common sense*, as a metaphor this concept connects The Stranger to the wider concerns of this project and will be addressed later in this chapter as a way in which this work of Camus can be situated within the overall dissertation.

Narrative Engagement

Within the preface to a 1956 version of The Stranger, Camus points towards his understanding of the absurd as a phenomenon to be engaged (or in Meursault’s case, a lack of engagement) when he addressed critics of the book. Camus believed that Meursault does not “play the game” of society by consistently being a person who “refuses to lie” (Lyrical 336). Camus further described his understanding of his protagonist, “A much more accurate idea of the character, or, at least, one much closer to the author’s intentions, will emerge if one asks just *how* Meursault refuses to lie” (Lyrical 336). How does Meursault refuse to lie? The book’s opening line indicates the indifference with which Meursault engages his life, “Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don’t know” (3). Social conventions would suggest that a person should be interested, or at least *act* interested on the day of a mother’s death. Meursault chooses not to act on emotions that he does not possess, in other words he does not lie about his

feelings. The central action of the second half of the novel revolves around the trial Meursault endures because of his shooting and subsequent death of an Arab. The court becomes interested in the motives for the killing. Camus writes, through the character of Meursault:

The judge...hadn't quite grasped the nature of my defense, and that before hearing from my lawyer he would be happy to have me state precisely the motives for my act. Fumbling a little with my words and realizing how ridiculous I sounded, I blurted out that it was because of the sun. (103)

Meursault stated the truth as best he could. The prosecutor in the case provides a summary of the social conventions violated by Meursault's actions, "Gentlemen of the jury, the day after his mother's death, this man was out swimming, starting up a dubious liaison, and going to the movies, a comedy, for laughs" (94). In his effort to make his initial defense, Meursault stated that "I explained to him, however, that my nature was such that my physical needs often got in the way of my feelings. The day I buried Maman, I was very tired and sleepy, so much so that I wasn't really aware of what was going on" (65). Camus writes, as a reflection on his central character, "The Stranger [is] a story of a man who, without any heroics, agrees to die for the truth" (Lyrical 337).

Within The Stranger, Camus illustrates an absurd world where one is condemned if one refuses to engage life on life's terms. Much like the central existential dilemma of The Plague, which will be explored in the next chapter, regardless of the response of the individual, the person is condemned to the absurdity of the human condition. This work also illustrates the lack of "common sense" among people in similar cultures. Social conventions are based upon the assumption that "everyone knows" what is appropriate in

a given situation. Meursault did not act according to these assumed understandings and he gave the impression throughout the novel that he did not even know what actions were appropriate in each situation. Camus provided a phenomenological description in a given historical moment of an existential crisis before the human community collected in one metaphor, absurd. While the absurd can be engaged in a common sense fashion, what happens when conventions and expectations for life are no more?

Within The Stranger everyday events make up the background of the novel: the death of one's mother, dating a former coworker, spending a relaxing day at the beach house of a friend, and a person put on trial for the shooting of another person. While these rather normal events make up the background, in the foreground is Meursault, a man who does not engage these events in the way that common sense may dictate. As the previous thoughts from Camus indicate, Meursault was not capable of "playing the game" dictated by societal conventions. Therefore, while a person who observes these conventions would make for a rather uninteresting main character in a novel, Meursault moves through routine everyday events in a very non-routine way, thus making him a *stranger* to his own situation.

The initial exchange between Meursault and the magistrate in The Stranger, in which the magistrate is attempting to persuade Meursault to pronounce a faith in God, illustrates Camus's point:

As always, whenever I want to get rid of someone I'm not listening to, I made it appear as if I agreed. To my surprise he acted triumphant. "You see, you see!" he said. "You do believe, don't you, and you're going to place your trust in Him, aren't you?" Obviously, I again said no. He fell back in his chair. (69)

Meursault faced the situation without appealing to something beyond everyday existence. He shared with Sisyphus an understanding that meaning does not come from a transcendent presence but from the everyday lived reality within which one is situated.

“Caligula”

Camus’s goal was to publish “The Myth of Sisyphus”, The Stranger, and “Caligula” in a single volume. Due to the budget limitations of his publisher he was unable to release the three simultaneously. The goal of providing these texts together was to “wrap up the absurdity question” (Lottman 262) and allow Camus to move onto the next phase of his work. Within “Caligula”, written in 1938 and first performed in 1945, Camus provided insights into the limitations of a single human’s ability to control the absurdity of human existence. It is a play in four acts that “opens a day or two after the death of Drusilla [Caligula’s sister] and this event makes Caligula really conscious of the absurd for the first time” (Cruickshank 195). The character of Caligula attempts to outwit his own circumstances and ultimately creates the circumstances for his own death.

Narrative

“Caligula” tells the fictionalized story of an actual ruler of the Roman Empire. After wandering about for several days, upon his return Caligula states why his life will no longer remain the same, “I suddenly felt a desire for the impossible” (Caligula 8). He continues by stating, “All that’s needed, I should say, is to be logical right through, at all costs” (8). He proceeds to hold those he encounters to their word and forces logical thinking to the very end. The only reason he states for this desire for the impossible as well as the emphasis on logical thinking is because “Men die; and they are not happy” (8). As he continues to fulfill his every desire, Caligula realizes that “my freedom has no

frontier” (14). The first act ends with Caligula standing beside his mistress Caesonia facing a mirror envisioning himself greater than the gods: “[W]hat is a god that I should wish to be his equal?” (16).

Three years have gone by as Act II opens. Cherea, the character that Isaac calls “the voice of reason and moderation” (50) recognizes the danger of Caligula’s actions and does not see him as one of the “mad emperors” of the Roman Empire (21). Cherea states, “[H]e knows what he wants....But what’s intolerable is to see one’s life being drained of meaning, to be told there’s no reason for existing....it’s a philosophy that’s logical from start to finish” (21). The act illustrates several ways in which Caligula exercises his unlimited power, including taking another man’s wife to be part of his concubine and executing a man accused (by Caligula) of drinking “an antidote” while it’s actually something for asthma.

Act III allows Caligula to make the bold admission that “Humility’s one emotion I may never feel” (43). He admits that power is driving his ambition and that “no ideal” is dictating his actions (43). As stated earlier, Caligula does not rely upon the gods to bring meaning to life. He also is distrustful of fate, “There’s no understanding fate; therefore I choose to play the part of fate. I wear the foolish, unintelligible face of a professional god. And that is what the men who were here with you have learned to adore” (44). After becoming aware of a plot to kill him, Caligula asks Cherea, “why [do] you wish to kill me?” (51). Cherea responds:

I’ve told you why; because I regard you as noxious, a constant menace. I like, and need, to feel secure. So do most men. They resent living in a world where the most preposterous fancy may at any moment become a reality, and the absurd

transfix their lives, like a dagger in the heart. I feel as they do; I refuse to live in a topsy-turvy world. I want to know where I stand, and to stand secure. (51)

Believing that the confession of his true feelings toward Caligula will result in death, Cherea is dumbfounded when Caligula releases him after burning the only piece of evidence demonstrating his connection to the assassination plot.

The final act (IV) ends with the murder of Caligula. Although Caligula killed Scipio's father, he has somehow gained a respect for Caligula. Scipio speaks with Cherea about the plot to murder Caligula. Scipio believes that Caligula "has taught me to expect everything in life" (56). Cherea disagrees, "No, he has taught you despair. And to have instilled despair into a young heart is fouler than the foulest of crimes he has committed up to now. I assure you, *that* alone would justify me in killing him out of hand" (56). Caligula's understanding of the world becomes clearer when he states, "There is no heaven" (69); "I exercise the rapturous power of a destroyer" (72); and most significantly, "Yet who can condemn me in this world where there is no judge, where nobody is innocent?" (72) After nearly strangling Caesonia to death, Caligula stares at his own reflection in a mirror and states, "I've come to hate you. I have chosen a wrong path, a path that leads to nothing. My freedom isn't the right one....Nothing, nothing yet. Oh, how oppressive is this darkness!" (73). The play ends with Caligula screaming, "To history, Caligula! Go down in history!" (73) His assassins enter the room and while chaos ensues, they each stab him with their daggers. Caligula's last words, and the final of the play, are "I'm still alive!" (74).

Within "Caligula" Camus addressed freedom, logic, power, and ambition. As a playwright Camus was attempting to build a work of fiction upon historical events and

characters that represented the *will to power*. Although Camus did not explicitly use the metaphor *will to power*, this concept connects the metaphors that emerge in this play and provides a point of connection between “Caligula” and this dissertation. *The will to power* will be addressed later in this chapter as a way in which this work of Camus can be situated within the overall dissertation.

Narrative Engagement

While The Stranger introduced Camus to a wider audience, Cruickshank writes the following about “Caligula”, “This time the attitude of the critics [in comparison to “The Misunderstanding”] was generally very favorable and Camus gained a position of some importance in the post-war French theater” (17). Camus wrote that Caligula’s “truth is to rebel against his fate, his error lies in negating what binds him to mankind. One cannot destroy everything without destroying oneself” (Author’s Preface vi). Since Camus did not believe that God existed, meaning for life could only be found within human relationships and interaction. When Caligula violated these connections through his irrational acts of power, he began the process of “destroying oneself.” What bound him to mankind was the responsibility that a leader should possess for those under his or her rule. Caligula acted without giving consideration to the potential consequences of his actions. In rejecting the norms of effective leadership, Caligula demonstrates what a nihilistic attitude of power can lead to – total destruction, or in Caligula’s own words, “nothing.” Bree writes, “In *Caligula*, Camus chose to project upon the stage the extreme consequences of nihilism with which he grappled in his first works” (Camus 168). By allowing his power to lead him to the (il)logical conclusion, Caligula is directly responsible for his own death.

Cruikshank refers to the character of Caligula as “a monster of vice and cruelty” (195). Although he was based upon a historical figure, Camus intended the play to speak to the concerns of the historical moment as well as further illustrate his understanding of the absurd. “*Caligula* belongs to the period in which he was most acutely aware of the absurd....The death and despair of human beings constitute his discovery of the absurd” (Cruikshank 195). This emergence of the absurd in “*Caligula*” is partly intended to illustrate the absurdity of the twentieth century totalitarian regimes that Camus spent much of his professional life combating. Isaac writes, “If a totalitarian system could speak, it would say what Caligula” says (64). Cruickshank wrote about the “similarities between the megalomania of Caligula and of Hitler, between Caligula’s attitude of mind and that revealed by some Nazi theorists, between Caligula’s actions and those of Hitler, between Caligula’s suicidal death and Hitler’s self-immolation in the Berlin bunker” (198-199).

In the play, Caligula states, “I have resolved to be logical, and I have the power to enforce my will” (13). This phrase connects a concept popularized by Nietzsche, the “will to power”, which can be thought of as “an overpowering of the weaker by the stronger” (Magnus and Higgins 311). Caligula repeatedly exploits his position as Emperor in order to have those under his command and control follow his instructions regardless of the outcome. This unlimited power allows him to see his vision of a logical world play out before his very eyes. Unfortunately, he recognizes too late that this particular vision will end with his own death. This play, along with The Stranger, focuses primarily upon the actions of one person. As Camus worked through his cycle on

absurdity he also provided a glimpse of the absurdity of attempting to maintain connections with others in the face of the inherent contradictions of existence.

“The Misunderstanding”

While The Stranger and “Caligula” focus primarily upon the absurdity of an individual’s existence, “The Misunderstanding” provides a glimpse into the absurdity of human relationships. All of human existence, both personal and interpersonal interaction, is lived against the backdrop of absurd circumstances. According to Camus no one escapes the reality of the absurd. This play, written in 1944, illustrates how several people attempt to outsmart the circumstances of their own lives. Again, tragedy strikes those trying to escape their absurd existence through hidden agendas and trickery.

Narrative

The basic plotline for “The Misunderstanding” first appeared as a minor moment within the novel The Stranger. While sitting in prison, Meursault discovers a newspaper article that reveals a story very similar to the story later developed within “The Misunderstanding.” The plot developed in the play by Camus involves a mother and daughter, The Mother and Martha respectively, who run a rural inn where they occasionally kill wealthy looking guests in an effort to raise enough money to escape to their dream location. Their son and brother, Jan, had left many years before. As the story unfolds Jan returns to be reunited with his family but first wants to stay an evening to discover the type of women they have become. In addition to Jan, The Mother, and Martha, the only other character of consequence is Jan’s wife, Maria.

In the opening sequence of Act I, when discussing “a stranger” that has visited their inn, Martha asks if her mother noticed “how he looked”; The Mother’s reply is “It’s

easier to kill what one doesn't know" (79). The scene transitions to a conversation taking place between Jan and Maria in which Maria suggests "A mother's bound to recognize her son; it's the least she can do" (82). But Jan, acknowledging the process that must take place for him to be welcomed back into his own family, admits "it takes time to change a stranger into a son" (83). Later in the scene, after Jan has returned to the inn, he attempts to initiate a conversation with Martha, his sister. Martha, uncomfortable with the questions Jan is asking, replies "As a guest at this inn you have the rights and privileges of a guest, but nothing more" (91). The Mother is a bit more receptive to Jan's inquiries. After speaking with Jan, The Mother tells Martha, that the innocence and trust of the traveler causes her to feel that "chance [has] sent us a victim who is so...so unsuitable" (98). Act I ends with Martha reaffirming the plans to kill Jan that very evening, going against her mother's request.

Act II opens with Jan speaking to himself while staying at the inn alone, against the protests of Maria, his wife. He foreshadows his own fate when he states, "It's in this room everything will be settled" (101). In an extended monologue, Jan says to himself about the current situation, "It's not enough in such cases to declare oneself: 'It's I'" (107). Jan recognizes the connection between his own return with that of the Prodigal Son when he states:

So the prodigal son's feast is continuing. First a glass of beer – but in exchange for my money; then a cup of tea – because it encourages the visitor to stay on.

But I'm to blame, too; I cannot strike the right note. When I'm confronted by that girl's [Martha's] almost brutal frankness, I search in vain for the words that would

put things right between us. Of course, her part is simpler; it's easier to find words for a rebuff than those which reconcile. (108)

Jan continues to struggle with what words to say as he restates that "I won't leave this house feeling like a stranger" (112). After drinking tea that has been poisoned, Jan falls into a deep sleep that allows the women to proceed with the plan. The Mother observes, "[H]e, at least, is free now of the burden of his life" (115). The second act concludes with Martha and The Mother disposing of Jan's body.

While sweeping under a table, early in Act III, the servant at the inn notices Jan's passport and hands it to Martha, who once realizing that her brother is the latest victim, calls "Mother!" (119). Slowly coming to grips with the consequences of their actions, the Mother acknowledges that "this world we live in doesn't make sense" (122). This same statement is echoed by Martha a few moments later. After The Mother's last appearance in the play, Martha wonders aloud, "What concern of mine was it to look after my brother" (124)? Soon, Maria arrives and exchanges words with Martha. Martha informs Maria, who is looking for Jan, that he is no longer at the inn. "[H]e is at the bottom of the river. My mother and I carried him to the river last night, after putting him to sleep. He didn't suffer, but he is dead sure enough, and it was we, his mother and I, who killed him" (127). Maria asks, "Had you learned he was your brother when you did it?" to which Martha replies "If you *must* know, there was a misunderstanding. And if you have any experience at all of the world, that won't surprise you" (129). Maria calls out for some help:

Oh God, I cannot live in this desert! It is on You that I must call and I shall find the words to say. [She sinks on her knees.] I place myself in your hands. Have

pity, turn toward me. Hear me and raise me from the dust, O Heavenly Father!

Have pity on those who love each other and are parted. (133)

At the sound of Maria's voice, the servant enters the room. Maria requests help from the servant, "Be kind and say that you will help me." The play ends with his one word answer, "No" (134).

Within "The Misunderstanding" Camus addressed the concepts of stranger, guest, and murder. This play represents Camus's effort to combat silence and promote dialogue. Although Camus did not explicitly use the metaphor of *dialogue*, this concept connects this play to the wider concerns of this project and will be addressed later in this chapter as a way in which this work of Camus can be situated within the overall dissertation.

Narrative Engagement

In reference to the play "The Misunderstanding" Camus wrote, "A son who expects to be recognized without having to declare his name and who is killed by his mother and his sister as a result of the misunderstanding – this is the subject of the play" ("Author's Preface," Caligula vii). A simple act of truth telling in which the son, Jan, reveals his name would have saved his life and reunited him with his mother and sister. Matherne writes, "Camus presents, not an acknowledgement of isolationist futility (as the absurdists would have it), but a need for 'dialogue' that is, the meeting of the minds, the understanding and compassion which should exist between man and man" (77). True dialogue, for Camus, is "the kind between people who remain what they are and speak their minds." He goes as far as saying that the "opposite of dialogue...is silence" (Resistance 70). Within "The Misunderstanding" Camus offers a bleak vision of the

world in which people remain silent. While The Stranger invites one to consider existential revolt, “The Misunderstanding” invites one to consider the results of a world where no action is taken at all.

Camus himself illustrated that this action very often contains “simple speech” (Notebooks V 125). He wrote in an entry from October 1945:

If the hero of *The Misunderstanding* had said: “Well, here I am and I am your son,” the dialogue would have been possible and not at cross-purposes as in the play. There would have been no tragedy because the height of all tragedies lies in the deafness of the protagonists....What balances the absurd is the community of men fighting against it. And if we choose to serve that community, we choose to serve the dialogue carried to the absurd against any policy of falsehood or of silence. That’s the way one is free with others. (125-126)

Issac supports the idea that dialogue is a central theme within this play. He writes:

[S]ilence is a form of contempt for others, who are denied their own voices and treated as objects to be commanded. Dialogue, on the other hand, requires the flourishing of many voices. Such dialogue is an overriding concern of Camus’s writings. Indeed, it is the major theme of one of his plays, *The Misunderstanding*. (123-124)

When viewing “The Misunderstanding” through the lens of these ideas, Jan shares the guilt for the fate of his family. By remaining silent, and eliminating the possibility of dialogue, he withholds his own voice from the ongoing conversation between a mother, sister, and their long-lost son.

The plot of “The Misunderstanding” reinforces the importance that Camus placed upon the impact of everyday events. According to Aronson, Jan’s concealing his own identity is “a human mistake, not the unfolding of fate” (61). In other words, Jan is not caught up in something beyond his control, he is fully capable of revealing his identity. Lottman suggests that this play represents for Camus an interest in “the minor ironies of life which might also be major tragedies” (89). That Jan remains silent, and ends the conversation before it can begin, ultimately results in his own death. Although this play was “not overenthusiastically acclaimed” by the critics (Bree, Camus 140), it does demonstrate Camus’s awareness of the subtlety of human existence.

The hero of the cycle of absurdity is Sisyphus, who despite his eternal punishment did not attempt to escape his circumstances but continually engaged the absurdity of his own existence. Although condemned by the gods, Sisyphus did not lose his life in his engagement with an absurd universe. Each of the protagonists of the other works ultimately faced their own death. Meursault was executed for his crime, Caligula was assassinated for his abuses of power, and Jan was murdered for not revealing his true identity. Within each of these works a primary metaphor emerges that connects Camus’s thought with the present postmodern moment. “The Myth of Sisyphus” lays the foundation for these works by suggesting that *meaning* will not be provided by some transcendent presence but must be created by an individual; in The Stranger Camus points toward the *decline of common sense*; “Caligula” provides a helpful reminder of *the will to power* within a given context and historical moment; and “The Misunderstanding” serves as a reminder of the importance of *dialogue* and open conversation between human beings.

Implications for Living in an Age of Absurdity

The metaphors in the preceding paragraph provide a bridge between the work of Camus and the present postmodern moment. They are not explicitly stated in Camus's work but serve as an opportunity for interpretive engagement between the two similar, yet fundamentally different, eras. Providing a clear description of each metaphor strengthens the case that Camus can serve as a philosopher of communication concerned with ethical communicative practice. Levinas suggested that it is important to provide faces and names in order to better understand historical circumstances when he wrote, "Perhaps the names of persons whose *saying* signifies a face – proper names, in the middle to these common names and commonplaces – can resist the dissolution of meaning and help us to speak" (Proper 4). It is not the names of people that are provided in this section, but names of ideas. The metaphors that emerge from the work of Camus assist in painting a picture of what ethical engagement in the midst of an age of absurdity may look like. These metaphors provide an entry point into further exploration of how to make ethical decisions in the midst of absurdity.

The metaphors that connect the work of Camus and the current postmodern moment are *meaning*, *decline of common sense*, *dialogue*, and *the will to power*. When working from the perspective of existential phenomenology, one recognizes that deeply philosophical ideas are embedded in everyday events and existence. Whether within fiction or nonfiction it is possible to make connections between Camus's writing and everyday events. The question of *meaning* becomes a central metaphor within a moment requiring dialogue which lacks common sense. Among the various concerns emerging when one navigates through a moment of narrative contention are "Which stories are

good and therefore worthy of my participation?"; "What action does this particular moment require of me?"; and "How can I avoid exploiting others and abusing my potential power?" In previous historical moments, meaning was given through involvement in the metanarrative. One need only look to the larger culture to decipher meaning in life. For example, as the United States expanded west past the Mississippi River, the sense of "Manifest Destiny" guided all actions within the emerging nation. Today, there is no longer a guiding public story that defines the actions of each member of American society. In many ways Camus prophesied the coming crisis of meaning that many struggle with today. While Camus raised the question of meaning within his work, he was still content to allow it to ultimately reside within a given individual. For example, he believed the Sisyphus was left to create his own story by relying upon his individual strength and will-power. Although Camus demonstrated his situatedness within the modern era by relying upon human individuality, he brought focus to questions that are extremely relevant in the postmodern moment – Where is meaning found? and How does one create meaning in an age of absurdity?

"Common sense" is typically understood as practical wisdom that is transferable from one context to another. This concept finds its roots within the work of Aristotle addressing the concept of "phronesis." Phronesis, or "practical wisdom" (Arnett, Dialogic Confession 7) points toward the idea that human experience itself becomes a teacher; thus making life-long learning a necessity for a postmodern moment. For example, when asking undergraduate students what is meant when someone says such and such is "common sense" the responses include "it's so obvious you shouldn't need to ask" and "something that everyone does without thinking about it." This emphasis upon

transferable and unreflective action creates a source of tension in the current historical moment. Within the contemporary postmodern moment of competing narratives and virtue structures, information is no longer transferable from one context to another. Very often common sense is a learned pattern of behavior in a given context; a pattern that may be developed within a family structure, a specific culture, or a particular professional field. As the United States becomes more and more diverse, transferring and implementing patterns of learned behavior from one context to another becomes more problematic. As the definition of a family becomes less and less agreed upon one cannot assume that what was appropriate in one family is acceptable in another. As professional fields become simultaneously more specialized and more global attempting to implement learned patterns from one place to another can be at least embarrassing and at most highly offensive and insulting to another human being. *The decline of common sense* serves as a powerful metaphorical reminder that the modern era's dependence upon implementation is no longer valid in a fast changing and global culture.

When confronted with differing versions of what is "common sense" in a given situation a variety of responses are available. One can attempt to implement a particular pattern of behavior regardless of the appropriateness. One can attempt to surrender any action in a given moment due to a lack of understanding in the situation. Or, one could make an effort to engage another in a conversation about what is appropriate in that given set of circumstances. This third option connects the metaphor of *the decline of common sense* with the metaphor of *dialogue*. *Dialogue* is "the idea that any utterance or act is always responding to and anticipating other utterances and acts" (Wood Dialogue xvi). In other words, one who approaches a situation with dialogic

sensitivity realizes that he or she is joining an ongoing conversation of ideas. This conversation is ever-changing as new ideas and new people enter into that particular conversation. This ongoing conversation cannot avoid the realities of everyday life or “the inevitability of walking in the mud of everyday life and human relationships” (Arnett, Dialogic Confession 63).

What very often limits one’s ability to engage in dialogue is an attempt to implement of form of communication that is inappropriate for the given moment. When one is more interested in the process of communication as opposed to the content of the exchange, much is lost. Within the horizon of Camus’s historical moment, he rejected a quick-fix or the trinity of modernity: efficiency, autonomy, and progress (Arnett, “Conversation” 62). Camus was committed to working out his philosophical ideals in a way that allowed him to be consistent in word and deed. This rejection of technique further demonstrates why he is an ethical model of a philosopher of communication for the current historical moment. In the postmodern age content should be privileged over process. In 1960 David Berlo focused upon the process of communication, de-emphasizing the content being communicated. While *how* one communicates is important, the more important question that should be answered is *what* is going to be communicated? This focus on process is situated within a modern context, and while it may make sense within that particular historical moment it no longer holds relevance for the contemporary context. Camus was committed to utilizing whatever means of communication were available including newspapers, novels, philosophical essays, interviews, and lectures. By consistently utilizing different forms of communication to

share his understanding of the absurd, his focus of attention remained upon content regardless of the various situations he engaged.

When working from an existential-phenomenological perspective, one is limited by the horizons of a given standpoint. Therefore, it is necessary to engage others in genuine dialogue in order to come to a new understanding of the current moment and what is an appropriate action in that moment. Within the modern historical era of “efficiency, autonomy, and progress” this dialogic approach could be viewed as cumbersome and not worthy of attention. But within the contemporary postmodern moment defined by metanarrative decline, resulting in narrative and virtue contention, one must be willing to engage both the ideas and personalities of others in order to understand what a suitable act is in a given context. The work of Jacques Ellul highlighted the dangers of attempting to implement a technique within dynamic human relationships. Implementation from one context to another poses a risk within a time where there is no agreed upon universals in the public realm.

The metaphor of the *will to power* demonstrates the risks inherent in human relationships within the postmodern era. As stated in chapter one, Camus was influenced by the work of Friedrich Nietzsche, who addressed the concept of “the will to power” in his own work. During a time of a dominant metanarrative, whether science, religion, or faith in reason and/or progress, the risks of exploiting power were typically held in balance. The events of World War I and World War II demonstrated on a global scale that a universal understanding of power was not present. Whether examining the exploits of the Russian Revolution or Nazi German, one is confronted with an overwhelming sense of the role that *the will to power* can play when there is no longer a metanarrative

guiding public action. Camus was writing both during and after the destruction of France in World War II. He saw first hand the devastation that power can bring over other human beings. One must make an intentional effort to be aware of the potential risks and abuses of power within competing narratives. All narratives are not good; one's task is to decipher the good stories from the bad and choose to join those in which one can make a productive contribution to society.

Communication Ethics: Camus's Understanding of Absurdity

Ethical living is a challenge in an age of absurdity. Within a postmodern moment, the *decline of common sense* illustrates that there is no longer a unifying metanarrative guiding public life. In this era of metanarrative decline, *dialogue* becomes essential to understand different ideas and insights into living a productive life. Through this interactive engagement, *meaning* is not something given to a person by a transcendent Being but emerges as a by-product of actively engaging the historical moment. But this approach to living has the potential for a dark side as well. The *will to power* is a temptation for anyone who is not held in check by those one encounters. Therefore, engaging in true *dialogue* is both a privilege and an existential ethical responsibility.

The guiding question of this chapter, "How did Camus's communicative meeting with the absurd assist in his ability to engage the historical moment of metanarrative decline from an existential ethical perspective?," invites an opportunity to summarize Camus' understanding and use of the metaphor of the absurd. Another way to phrase the guiding question is did Camus view the absurd as a lived reality or as a lens through which to view the world and help make sense of the chaotic circumstances? In many ways the absurd, for Camus, represents a philosophical reality within the everyday lived

experience; absurdity is a given. This understanding of the metaphor of absurd provides the theoretical background for the writing of Camus. Camus was more deeply committed to engaging the historical moment as it appeared before him than carrying on some pre-established line of research. He did not view his research and writing agenda as a plan to implement but as a flexible plan of action for engaging the ever-changing world. As the historical situation changed, Camus brought another major metaphor into the foreground, the metaphor of revolt. This metaphor should not be viewed as an abandoning of the metaphor of the absurd but as an effort to better understand and respond to the moment as it was rapidly changing.

Twentieth century Europe, specifically France, was the scene of a variety of major historical turning points. Two World Wars, the German occupation, and tensions between the capitalist society championed by the United States and the growing Socialist Russia all happened in and around the country of France. Camus was not only an eye witness to these events, he was also a participant. As Camus came to a fuller understanding of absurdity, his attention became focused upon the appropriate response in the midst of absurdity. He called this response revolt or rebellion. Within this world of absurdity, an opportunity for revolt can serve as a rhetorical interruption. Revolt serves as an invitation to those living within an absurd moment to find meaning as well as offering hope for acting in the midst of absurdity. Much like hermeneutics is dependent upon phenomenology, an understanding of Camus's essay The Rebel dependent upon his essay "The Myth of Sisyphus" and is best understood as a hermeneutic turn within his overall exploration of absurdity.

The poet Dylan Thomas (1914-1953) wrote:

Do not go gentle into that good night,
Old age should burn and rave at close of day;
Rage, rage against the dying of the light. (239)

This “rage” continues in response to the absurd. Revolt requires an intentional choice on the part of a person to act in spite of the meaninglessness of the moment. Pointing to a theme that he would develop further in his second cycle of work Camus wrote, “One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt” (“Myth” 54). Camus added, “Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom, and my passion” (64). Thomas provided a poetic understanding of Camus’s revolt; Camus refused to “go gentle into that good night” and engaged life on its own terms simultaneously being changed and changing the moment before him. Absurdity does not allow one to remain inactive; one must choose to act in spite of the absurd circumstances or be defeated by the very opportunities that absurdity provides.

Chapter Three

Meeting the Absurd: Responsiveness

“One writes in moments of despair. But what is despair?” (Notebook IV 91).

Absurdity, for Albert Camus, represented the inescapable circumstances of human existence which include an irresolvable tension between the human need for clarity and the fact that sometimes life does not make sense. Once caught in this absurd situation, one's only choice is to rebel against the circumstances and create one's own meaning for life. Camus's understanding of absurdity served as the philosophical background for his foreground discussion of existential revolt within his second cycle of work. The move from the metaphor of the absurd to the metaphor of revolt did not represent an abandoning of Camus's interest in absurdity but provided a different point of entry into his ongoing engagement of absurdity within his ever changing historical moment. The background theory of absurdity informed all of Camus's engagement with his historical moment; he was continually interested in how the metaphor of the absurd revealed itself in everyday life and what response was required in the midst of the absurd conditions. Through an ongoing commitment to ethically engage the changing historical moment, Albert Camus provided further evidence that he was working as a philosopher of communication. While his work was written during the latter days of the modern era one can connect Camus's meeting of his own historical moment with our present postmodern

moment; a moment that is also a moment of absurdity and invites one to revolt in the face of this absurdity. The absurd was a situated concern for Camus; as the historical moment continued to rapidly change, his understanding of the term was extended to include one's reaction in the midst of absurdity as well, propelling him into a conversation about revolt. Revolt, for Camus, was an act against the non-sense of his own time and represented an effort to impose order on a chaotic world.

Introduction

In the "Preface" to the first English edition of The Myth of Sisyphus, Camus connected revolt to the absurd when he stated, "For me 'The Myth of Sisyphus' marks the beginning of an idea which I was to pursue in The Rebel" (v). Within the "Myth of Sisyphus" Camus provided an introduction to revolt, a concept he would address in greater detail in his second cycle of work:

One of the only coherent philosophical positions is thus revolt. It is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity. It is an insistence upon an impossible transparency. It challenges the world anew every second. Just as danger provided man the unique opportunity of seizing awareness, so metaphysical revolt extends awareness to the whole of experience. It is that constant presence of man in his own eyes. ("Myth" 54)

This quote illustrates the phenomenological understanding that Camus held of the absurd, and the subsequent response of revolt that one must make to this human condition. For Camus, absurdity is a phenomenological reality and our response and engagement with that reality represents a hermeneutic turn. The absurd is not only something to be engaged but something that opens new understandings of human existence. When new

understandings and opportunities for living occur, one is confronted with the hermeneutic dimension of the metaphors of absurdity and revolt.

As stated in the previous chapter, Camus's The Stranger, the central piece of fiction of his cycle of the absurd, provided an illustration of the absurdity of everyday existence. Within the context of this absurd existence, one's only option is to respond to the absurd circumstances through existential revolt, therefore revealing that revolt itself can become an entrance to something else. As he attempted to work out the implications of the absurd for the changing historical moment, Camus began to work with a new metaphor, revolt. A notebook entry from June 17, 1947, stated, "Second series. Revolt: The Plague (and annexes) – The Rebel – Kaliayev" [a character from Camus's play 'The Just Assassins']" (Notebook V 158). These three projects, connected by Camus and considered by him to be his second cycle of work will be the primary focus of attention within this chapter, although in an effort to texture the understanding of the metaphor of revolt this project will go beyond these three works as necessary. The understanding of revolt provided by these three projects does not represent an abandoning of the absurd but rather texture for an understanding of absurdity within an ever-changing historical moment. While the background theory remained constant, the foreground events were ever changing; during the writing of "The Myth of Sisyphus" and The Stranger France was engaged in World War II and during the writing of The Rebel and The Plague a new Europe was emerging after the destruction of the war. Camus provided the foundational philosophy for rebellion in his book-length essay The Rebel. By overlapping the writing of "The Myth of Sisyphus", The Stranger, and "Caligula", Camus was able to texture the metaphor of the absurd through three distinct forms of written communication: a

philosophical essay, a novel, and a play. The same pattern was followed for the completion of the cycle of revolt.

In addition to The Rebel, Camus textures his understanding of revolt through the novel The Plague and the play “The Just Assassins.” These three works by Camus will be the focus of this chapter as the following question is explored: “How did Camus’s response to absurdity through the metaphor of revolt provide a hermeneutic turn within his description of the absurd?” The following items will be addressed as the guiding question for this chapter is answered. First, there is an exploration of revolt as outlined within The Rebel. This section provides an introduction to the metaphor of revolt as used by Camus, an exploration of how revolt allows one to avoid falling into a perpetual state of despair in the midst of absurdity, as well as how the emergence of revolt provides a hermeneutic turn within Camus’s wider discussions of the metaphor of the absurd. Next, an overview of the plotlines of each of the works of fiction including The Plague and “The Just Assassins” provides deeper insights into how Camus conceptualized the metaphor of revolt. This section is followed by an analysis of the works as they relate to the metaphor of revolt as outlined by Camus in The Rebel. Each section begins with a narrative summary of the main points and characters within the story and is followed by a narrative engagement of how the work textures an understanding of the metaphor of the absurd. The conclusion provides a metaphorical connection between the work of Camus and the contemporary postmodern moment. This final section provides summary comments and assists in transitioning to the next chapter.

The Rebel: An Essay of Man in Revolt

Responding to absurd circumstances by taking ethical action in the midst of absurdity was a central concern for Camus. In the “Introduction” to The Rebel, first published in 1951, Camus sorted out the existential ethical options available for a rebel when he wrote, “The purpose of this essay is once again to face the reality of the present, which is logical crime, and to examine meticulously the arguments by which it is justified; it is an attempt to understand the times in which we live” (3). The central issue for “The Myth of Sisyphus” was physical and philosophical suicide while the central concern of The Rebel was government supported murder, or “logical crime”. When describing absurdity, Camus was concerned with one taking his or her own life; when exploring an existential ethical response to absurdity, such as revolt, Camus became concerned with taking the life of another. Camus’s major concern was the murder of another that was state supported and justified in the name of revolution.

Narrative

The Rebel was divided into five parts: “The Rebel,” “Metaphysical Rebellion,” “Historical Rebellion,” “Rebellion and Art,” and “Thought at the Meridian.” A brief overview of the major arguments of the essay is provided next followed by an examination of how revolt represents a hermeneutic turn within Camus’s exploration of the metaphor of the absurd. Part one, “The Rebel,” began with the question, “What is a rebel?” (13). A rebel, according to Camus, “[A]ffirms that there are limits and also that he suspects – and wishes to preserve – the existence of certain things on this side of the borderline” (13). A rebel “has at least remained silent and has abandoned himself to the form of despair in which a condition is accepted even though it is considered unjust” (14). A call to rebellion requires a change in one’s focus of attention, “With rebellion,

awareness is born” (15). Camus viewed rebellion as essential for human existence, “In order to exist, man must rebel, but rebellion must respect the limit it discovers in itself – a limit where minds meet and, in meeting, begin to exist” (22). This theme of human choice within limits is pervasive throughout the essay.

Part two entitled “Metaphysical Rebellion” is divided into six additional sections: “The Sons of Cain,” “Absolute Negation,” “The Rejection of Salvation,” “Absolute Affirmation,” “The Poets’ Rebellion,” and “Nihilism in History.” Within the introduction to this part Camus emphasized that in one’s rebellion narrative clarity can be established “by his protest, the existence of the master against whom he rebelled” (24). One’s acts of rebellion allow one to build an understanding of everyday living in the midst of absurdity.

Within the section “The Sons of Cain” Camus cautioned against placing excessive trust in history itself, “In a world entirely dominated by history, which ours threatens to become, there are no longer any mistakes, but only crimes, of which the greatest is moderation” (28). This section’s title announces Camus’s simultaneous interest in and distance from the Christian Church, “And so we can say, without being paradoxical, that in the Western World the history of rebellion is inseparable from the history of Christianity” (28). Within the Christian faith “Christ came to solve two major problems, evil and death, which are precisely the problems that preoccupy the rebel” (32). Camus concluded this section by stating, “If everything without exception, in heaven and earth is doomed to pain and suffering, then a strange form of happiness is possible” (34). In order to fully rebel against the absurdity of human life, one must accept that neither

history itself nor the Christian Church will provide any assistance in the midst of a world of “evil and death.”

Within the second section, “Absolute Negation,” Camus explored how one’s limits are formed by the choices one makes and the organizations to which one belongs. It is impossible to have an unlimited existence, in fact, “to desire without limit is the equivalent of being desired without limit” (41). This theme of limits is continued in the following section entitled “The Rejection of Salvation.” When the abyss, or pit of despair, moves into the foreground, one also will become aware of the nihilistic attitude of the historical moment. Camus wrote, “Nihilism is not only despair and negation but, above all, the desire to despair and negate” (57-58). Standing in the face of nihilism and risking being overrun by history and powerful governments led Camus to ask the question “[C]an one live and stand one’s ground in a state of rebellion?” (58). As stated previously, Camus lived within a historical moment that lacked a unifying metanarrative which led to the contention of many different narratives for living. Within such a moment, being able to “stand one’s ground” is of the utmost importance. The response to absurdity discussed in The Rebel provides his most articulate explanation of what form that action should take.

The following section, “Absolute Affirmation,” provided an opportunity for Camus to connect the rise of nihilism with Nietzsche and suggest that:

Absurdity is the concept that Nietzsche meets face to face. In order to be able to dismiss it, he pushes it to extremes: morality is the ultimate aspect of God, which must be destroyed before reconstruction can begin. Then God no longer exists

and is no longer responsible for our existence; man must resolve to act, in order to exist. (Rebel 62)

Through these actions in the face of absurdity and despair a realistic hope emerges.

“Thus from absolute despair will spring infinite joy, from blind servitude, unbounded freedom” (72). Freedom, like absurdity, is a given within human existence. “The question ‘free of what?’ is thus replaced by ‘free for what?’” (72). Exercising freedom is an intentional choice and represents an existential ethical response to absurdity and an act of revolt in the midst of absurd circumstances.

For Camus, absurdity reveals itself in this ongoing struggle between history and rebellion and formed a key component within the section entitled “The Poets’ Rebellion.” Camus wrote about the appropriate existential ethical response when he stated, “We rebel against the injustice done to ourselves and to mankind” (83). The absurdity of the situation often prevents one from clearly identifying who or what creates the circumstances for rebellion, providing Camus an opportunity to emphasize that it is important to understand the person or institution against which a person is rebelling. The risks of being overrun by the forces of totalitarianism, often a difficult force to comprehend and identify, can lead one to conform to the institution of government and lose the ability to rebel. “Conformity is one of the nihilistic temptations of rebellion which dominate a large part of our intellectual history” (87). This part concludes with a section “Nihilism in History” which serves as a conclusion for an exploration of “Metaphysical Rebellion.” Camus wrote, “It is not the nobility of rebellion that illuminates the world today, but nihilism” (102). For Camus, rebellion still possessed an idealistic dimension, “In principle, the rebel only wanted to conquer his own existence

and to maintain it in the face of God” (102). This goal of metaphysical rebellion, which for Camus was the rebellion of writing without a potential for human sacrifice, was repeatedly violated through the abuses of historical rebellion.

Part three, “Historical Rebellion,” was divided into six further sections: “The Regicides,” “The Deicides,” “Individual Terrorism,” “State Terrorism and Irrational Terror,” “State Terrorism and Rational Terror,” “Rebellion and Revolution.” Within part three Camus reinforced that rebellion is not unlimited. In fact, “Rebellion is, by nature, limited in scope” (106). The risks of revolution are found when the rebel loses the ability to rebel because he or she has been swallowed by revolution, which is tied to a Marxist belief in history. Camus further clarified his position when he stated the purpose of The Rebel was an effort:

[N]ot to give, for the hundredth time, a description of the revolutionary phenomenon, nor once more to examine the historic or economic causes of great revolutions. Its [the book’s] purpose is to discover in certain revolutionary data the logical sequence, the explanations, and the invariable themes of metaphysical rebellion. (The Rebel 108)

Within part three Camus sought to address the question “[C]an totality claim to be unity?” (108). He began to provide an answer by exploring the role that the deliberate killing of a king or monarch played within historical rebellions. While Camus was supportive of the spirit that led to the French Revolution, he continued to reinforce his main point that formalized revolutions take priority over individual acts of rebellion and eventually the Revolution will impose its will upon the people.

This section, “The Regicides,” proclaimed that “1789 is the starting-point of modern times” (112). Camus explored the importance of Jean-Jacques Rousseau’s The Social Contract as it pertained to “the new religion whose god is reason, confused with nature, and whose representative on earth, in place of the king, is the people considered as an expression of the general will” (115). Camus believed that Rousseau understood the implications of his text; it was impossible for a king to govern over a population that attempted to live out the ideas in Rousseau’s work. In fact, with the publication of The Social Contract, “we are assisting at the birth of a new *mystique* – the will of the people being substituted for God himself” (115). This overthrow of the French King, Louis XVI, illustrated that “the condemnation of the King is at the crux of our contemporary history” (120). For Camus, the French Revolution of 1789 represented a turning point in Western society’s understanding and practice of revolution; this event was an intentional effort on the part of the French people to revolt against a belief that the king must be a direct servant of the Christian God.

The next section, “The Deicides,” continues with the theme Camus introduced in the previous section, the overthrow of God within a culture was something which Hegel came to see as part of the evolution of human history. These forces of “evolution” caused many to believe history was an irresistible force that would overtake any resistance, or rebellion, chosen by humans. This belief in the inevitability of progress was taken a step further by “German ideology” which confused the existence of “Truth, reason, and justice” with the German impulse for domination. “These values have ceased to be guides in order to become goals” (134). Whatever means were necessary to achieve this lofty goal were permitted, since “no pre-existent value can point the way” (134).

History itself became a force in which “Truth, reason, and justice were abruptly incarnated in the progress of the world” (134). This belief in progress has the potential to lead to “a terrible form of optimism” (146) in which “we can still observe at work today” (146). This form of optimism, based upon the philosophy of Hegel, most likely will lead to, “Cynicism, the deification of history and of matter, individual terror and State crime” (146). For Camus, cynicism emerged when people come to realize that this “terrible optimism” creates room for the unlimited power of government; the ends come to justify the means. While Camus does not address unmet optimism, he does address misplaced optimism. Further stressing the importance of individual choice and responsibility, Camus believed that optimism should be placed in the human being as a person capable of rebellion against the forces of history *not* in the institutions that claim to lead a rebellion but ultimately result in some form of totalitarianism.

The following section, “Individual Terrorism,” provided an opportunity for Camus to explore the tension between reason and experience. He wrote, “If everything is logical, then everything is justified....If one cannot accept the suffering of others, then something in the world cannot be justified, and history, at one point at least, no longer coincides with reason” (152). This pursuit of reason in the midst of absurdity was illustrated by Camus by the character of Kaliayev (a member of the Russian Socialist-Revolutionaries who assassinated the Grand Duke Sergei Romanov in 1905 and who served as the focus of Camus’s play “The Just Assassins”). In an effort to be logical in the midst of absurdity, the Russian revolutionaries “do not value any idea above human life, though they kill for the sake of ideas” (170). Camus’s philosophical effort to confront these crimes of logic further illustrate that he engaged his historical moment as it

actually existed before him and not as he hoped it would appear. This tension between reason and experience leads to a world in which “both victim and executioner are equally despairing” (176). The role reversal of victims and executioners is a very real risk in an age in which rebellion has no limits.

The title of the following section, “State Terrorism and Irrational Terror,” indicates that “the strange and terrifying growth of the modern State can be considered as the logical conclusion of inordinate technical and philosophical ambitions” (177). While Camus believed that there once was a unity about humanity, during the twentieth century, “There was no longer any standard of values, both common to and superior to all these men, in the name of which it would have been possible for them to judge one another” (179). In an age of absurdity, an age of narrative and virtue contention, despair presents itself as an option due to the inherent contradictions found within everyday life. The irrational fear that takes over during an absurd age can produce a culture of fear which leads to a culture of despair, “When the concept of innocence disappears from the mind of the innocent victim himself, the value of power establishes a definitive rule over a world in despair” (184). Camus concluded this section by reinforcing that content matters, and that ultimately Nazi Germany, with its nihilistic emphasis, was about nothing, “[T]hey [the Nazi leaders] did not know that the negation of everything in itself a form of servitude and that real freedom is an inner submission to a value which defies history and its successes” (186). For Camus, content driven metaphors mattered. His ultimate concern about the nihilism inspired Nazi Party was that it was devoid of any ideas that contributed to one’s meaning for life.

The section entitled “State Terrorism and Rational Terror” builds upon a similar theme as the preceding section. One of the forces against which a rebel must contend is the progress of history itself. Camus offered a variety of responses to the philosophy of Hegel and Marx. Camus wrote, “Progress, the future of science, the cult of technology and of production, are bourgeois myths, which in the nineteenth century became dogma” (193). He referenced Georges Sorel who claimed that:

[T]he philosophy of progress was exactly the philosophy to suit a society eager to enjoy the material prosperity derived from technological progress. When we are assured that tomorrow, in the natural order of events, will be better than today, we can enjoy ourselves in peace. Progress, paradoxically, can be used to justify conservatism. (194)

Camus wrote, “Reality [for Hegel and Marx] is a perpetual process of evolution, propelled by the fertile impact of antagonisms which are resolved each time a superior synthesis which, itself, creates its opposite and again causes history to advance” (198). This overt faith in history was a central concern of Camus’s as he attempted to make sense of an absurd age.

Camus also recognized one of the ironies of Nietzsche’s work when he stated:

To him [Nietzsche] we owe the idea which is the despair of our times – but here despair is worth more than hope – that when work is a degradation, it is not life, even though it occupies every moment of a life. Who, despite the pretensions of this society, can sleep in it in peace when they know that it derives its mediocre pleasures from the work of millions of dead souls? (209)

Camus added, “The principal fact is that technology, like science, has reached such a degree of complication that it is not possible for a single man to understand the totality of its principles and applications” (214). Therefore, the topic of despair emerges organically out of the interplay of Camus’s discussion of rebellion, technology, and progress.

This concern over the connection between rebellion and nihilism, what Camus referred to as “pure movement that aims at denying everything which is not itself” (224), illustrated a concern that Camus believed was central to an appropriate understanding of historical rebellion. There are many ways in which these hostile forms of government solicit the support of the public, most notably through “propaganda techniques” (237). Camus wrote, “Propaganda makes it possible to sign a pact with those who for years have been designated as the mortal enemy” (237). This cultural acceptance of propaganda also “allows the psychological effect thus obtained to be reversed and the people, once again, to be aligned against the same enemy” (237). Because Camus did not place a great amount of faith in “human nature” the possibilities for persuasion were “infinite” (237). In order to ethically revolt against the absurdity of one’s situation, one must have complete freedom to choose how to act. Camus’s concern about propaganda was that it could eliminate one’s ability to revolt because of the unethical persuasion that could take place. From a communication perspective it is important to note the differences between “propaganda” and what is commonly referred to as “persuasion”. Camus’s concern was with propaganda, or an intentional effort to distort the truth in an effort to gain supporters. Persuasion can be understood as an effort to ethically gather supporters in support of a particular idea or position.

Camus provided a brief retelling of a classic children's story to suggest one action that must be taken to combat the rise of totalitarianism. The simple act of truth telling, to honestly engage the world as it exists and not how one wants it to appear, was one of his major goals:

As in the fairy story, in which all the looms of an entire town wove the empty air to provide clothes for the king, thousands of men, whose strange profession it is, rewrite a presumptuous version of history, which is destroyed the same evening while waiting for the calm voice of a child to proclaim suddenly that the king is naked. This small voice, the voice of rebellion, will then be saying, what all the world can already see, that a revolution which, in order to last, is condemned to deny its universal vocation, or to renounce itself in order to be universal, is living by false principles. (237)

Despair, along with rebellion and progress, provide various entry points into understanding Camus's work in The Rebel. Much like the young child in the story of the emperor with no clothes, one must be willing to focus attention upon the details of living and call attention to those items that are most important for a given historical moment. The belief in the progress of history and the subsequent despair that emerges can lead one to the "brink of this abyss" (241). This "abyss" challenges the notion of everyday logic as well as the inherited understandings of guilt and innocence

Within the section titled "Rebellion and Revolution" Camus distinguished between rebellion (and "the rebel") and revolution (and revolt). Camus wrote, "Methods of thought which claim to give the lead to our world in the name of revolution have become, in reality, ideologies of consent and not of rebellion" (247). This section,

although over three-quarters of the way through The Rebel, provided a concise summary of the main points Camus was attempting to communicate through its publication.

Camus continued by stating that a rebel cannot become a formal member of a revolution since the action of a rebel “ends by taking sides against the revolution” (249). Rebellion is directly tied to one’s ability to find meaning in life. Camus repeats the phrase he used earlier in the text, “I rebel – therefore we exist” (22, 250). In order to have the ability to create meaning in the midst of absurdity, one must have the freedom to rebel. This particular chapter concludes with the statement, “[W]e have to live and let live in order to create what we are” (252). True freedom is exercised when all humans are given an opportunity to take action in the midst of absurdity. Revolutions are often products of history while true rebels are those persons who choose to revolt in the face of absurd circumstances.

The fourth part, “Rebellion and Art,” was divided into three sections: “Rebellion and the Novel,” “Rebellion and Style,” and “Creation and Revolution.” For Camus, “All rebel thought...is expressed either in rhetoric or in a closed universe” (255). The ideals of rebellion are communicated through both the spoken and written word as well as through the artist’s renderings of life. The novel, one form of rhetoric chosen by an artist, provides an opportunity for one’s focus of attention to be drawn toward ideas relating to rebellion.

Within the section “Rebellion and the Novel” Camus emphasized that despairing unreflectively was one of his main items of concern. Communicative engagement with despair lessens its impact upon daily life. Within a footnote Camus wrote, “To talk of despair is to conquer it” (263). There is also great risk to a person who is completely

consumed by the prevailing culture, “He is the symbol of the despairing world in which wretched automatons live in a machine-ridden universe” (266). While living in an absurd historical moment, with no universal common sense, one is more malleable to government influence. While rebellion is always an available response, the dominant belief in irresistible progress connected with powerful technologically driven propaganda, creates a potentially overwhelming force working against human freedom and the ability to rebel.

Camus’s interest remained focused on content within the next section “Rebellion and Style.” While form and style are important, ultimately rebellion is an action based upon one’s acknowledgement of the absurdity of life. In order to rebel, one must have an understanding of the ideas that are central to life. There must be a unity of form and content in order to heighten the efforts of the rebel, “A work in which the content overflows the form, or in which the form drowns the content, only bespeaks an unconvinced and unconvincing unity” (271). Taking action, or revolting, in the midst of absurdity is an act of creation which adds content to one’s life. Therefore, “There is no genius, contrary to what we are taught today, in negation and pure despair” (271). When style overshadows content totalitarianism is more likely to emerge as an oppressive force and inhibit both revolution and one’s personal ability to rebel.

Within the final section of part four, “Creation and Revolution,” Camus reinforced the primary function of rebellion, “Rebellion in itself is not an element of civilization. But it is a preliminary to all civilizations” (273). The artist must remain free to challenge the status quo within a culture and not succumb or be silenced by the conquering powers. If these powers prevail, not only will hope disappear but also any

sense of artistic achievement. “In this hell, the place of art will coincide with that of vanquished rebellion, a blind and empty hope in the pit of despair” (276). One of the many purposes of an artist is to assist in creating meaning within a given historical moment, “History may perhaps have an end; but our task is not to terminate it but to create it, in the image of what we henceforth know to be true” (276). Creation, for both an artist and any human being in an age of absurdity, should be a central concern. An act of creation is an act of rebellion through the introduction of content in the face of absurdity.

The final part of The Rebel, “Thought at the Meridian,” was broken into three sections: “Rebellion and Murder,” “Moderation and Excess,” and “Beyond Nihilism.” Within the first section, “Rebellion and Murder,” Camus emphasized the risk that always existed to allow rebellion to lead to a totalitarian regime, “Rebellion cut off from its origins and cynically travestied, oscillates, on all levels, between sacrifice and murder” (280). Within this section Camus was very blunt about his main concern, “Logically, one should reply that murder and rebellion are contradictory” (281). For Camus, “[R]ebellion, in principle, is a protest against death” (285). In the midst of this protest, the challenge Camus offered was to respond to the absurd world reflectively and through engagement, help create it. “[I]f the unity of the world cannot come from on high, man must construct it on his own level, in history” (286-287). The true spirit of ethical rebellion must be recaptured in order to preserve the future of society.

Within the section “Moderation and Excess” Camus again addressed the tensions found within an age of absurdity driven by faith in progress. While the progress of science and technology is overwhelming “it is useless to want to reverse the advance of

technology” (295). In the midst of pervasive technology, one’s main hope is found in embracing Camus’s attitude of “We are”; “[T]he ‘We are’ paradoxically defines a new form of individualism. ‘We are’ in terms of history, and history must reckon with this ‘We are,’ which must in its turn keep its place in history. I have need of others who have need of me and of each other” (297). Solidarity of purpose was central for Camus’s thought; in his age of metanarrative decline voices needed to rise in opposition to the way things appeared to be heading.

The final section of part five and the concluding section of the book, “Beyond Nihilism,” provided a glimpse of the realistic hope with which Camus engaged the world. Although “suffering exhausts hope and faith and then is left alone and unexplained” (303) Camus believed that “[r]eal generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present” (304). His concluding comments, while not providing a “how to” did provide a call to action, “[T]he only original rule of life today: to learn to live and to die, and, in order to be a man, to refuse to be a god...At this meridian of thought, the rebel rejects divinity in order to share in the struggles and destiny of all men” (306). Camus’s hope for Europe was found in this belief that others would respond to his call to action and rebel against the absurdity of human existence.

For Camus, there was an inherent contradiction between murder and a proper understanding of revolt. While contradiction is part of an absurd life, this commitment to state supported murder undermined the very ideas that revolt works to advance. This ongoing tension could draw one into a state of despair which hovers over the abyss of nihilism. In an age of unimpeded technological progress, this risk is even greater. Camus attempted to situate rebellion as a necessary occurrence for all cultures. He

believed that in order to be a true rebel one could not get absorbed into the system but be constantly able to stand outside of it and challenge the status quo. This understanding of revolt was part of Camus's ongoing commitment to work out the implications of an absurd life in an ever-changing historical moment.

Within The Rebel, Camus addressed metaphysical rebellion, historical rebellion, artistic creation, propaganda, technology, revolt, and content. As an artist, Camus was attempting to provide an impressionistic painting of the development and implications of the role of the rebel. While Camus did not use the metaphor of *lived philosophy*, it does provide a point of connection between The Rebel and this dissertation. *Lived philosophy* will be addressed later in this chapter as a way in which this work of Camus can be situated within the overall dissertation.

Narrative Engagement

Within the context of one's absurd existence, the only option is to respond to the circumstances through existential revolt, therefore revealing that revolt itself can become an entrance to something else. Each act of rebellion that one takes within an absurd moment opens new understandings of and possibilities for further actions, thus allowing the text to serve as a hermeneutic turn within Camus's own work exploring absurdity. Hermeneutics is "the art or theory of interpretation, as well as a type of philosophy that starts with questions of interpretation" (Bohman 377). The Rebel served as Camus's interpretation of historical and metaphysical rebellion and began with the question "What is a rebel?" (13). While his first cycle of work provided a recognition of the absurd through a phenomenological description of absurdity the second cycle, specifically The

Rebel, provided an opportunity to explore what response was necessary in the face of absurdity.

In his “Foreword” to The Rebel, Herbert Read wrote, “It would have been easy, on the facts marshaled in this book, to have retreated into despair or inaction” (ix). Albert Camus did not retreat into despair or inaction, but provided the content of the book as an encouragement to readers to continue to take intentional action in spite of the absurdity of the historical moment. Camus’s exploration of the metaphor of revolt provided a necessary and rhetorical reaction to the changing historical moment and served as an embodiment of the metaphor of the absurd. He believed that in order to provide for the future, one must do everything possible for the present, “Real generosity toward the future lies in giving to the present” (The Rebel 304). An ethical act of rebellion must meet the world on its own terms as opposed to trying to make the world fit within the confines of one’s preferences. Camus was deeply committed to engaging his historical moment from the limits of his situatedness, or embodied perspective, using the phrase to “stand one’s ground” to suggest that one views life from a situated perspective (The Rebel 58). This concern with embodiment and situatedness was also central to Hans Georg Gadamer’s approach to philosophical hermeneutics. In Truth and Method, Gadamer wrote, “The only way to grasp life is, rather, to become inwardly aware of it” (253). This inward awareness, or embodiment, of absurdity allows one to authentically respond to the circumstances through an act of existential revolt.

Although Camus never used the phrase “existential revolt” within his writings the concept is consistent with his understanding of rebellion in the face of absurdity. If one is situated within a given moment, that “experience has implicit horizons of before and

after, and finally fuses with the continuum of the experiences present in the before and after to form a unified flow of experience” (Gadamer 245). As one attempts to interpret the world from a given, or existential, perspective there must an effort made at “bracketing all positing of being and investigating the subjective modes of givenness” (Gadamer 244). While some may attempt to stand outside of history and make sweeping generalizations and judgments, Gadamer wrote in reference to the bias one brings to the task of interpretation, “What first seemed simply a barrier, according to the traditional concept of science and method, or a subjective condition of access to historical knowledge, now becomes the center of a fundamental inquiry” (262). The bias that Camus brought to his investigation of existential revolt was that the world was inescapably absurd; he could not view his work from any other perspective.

From the vantage point of one’s situatedness, he or she does not have a totally objective standpoint from which to judge the surrounding world. One can only act and engage the world from a particular position with a limited view of events. Gadamer wrote, “Thus there is no understanding or interpretation in which a totality of this existential structure does not function, even if the intention of the knower is simply to read ‘what is there’ and to discover from his sources ‘how it really was’” (262). From within this framework, hermeneutics is dependent upon phenomenology. Gadamer wrote, “Phenomenology should be ontologically based on...existence” (254). When one is situated within a given context, life is experienced and interpreted from that particular standpoint. The way in which Camus interpreted his existence was through the lens of the metaphor of the absurd. For Camus, the absurd was both part of his lived reality and

a means of interpreting life. Therefore, the first cycle of Camus's work exploring absurdity can be considered a necessary foundation for his hermeneutic turn of rebellion.

Hermeneutics addresses questions of interpretation and meaning. Camus wrote, "We cannot say that nothing has any meaning, because in doing so one affirms a value sanctified by an opinion; nor that everything has a meaning, because the word everything has no meaning for us" (The Rebel 296). Gadamer textures this statement written by Camus, "Hermeneutical reflection fulfills the function that is accomplished in all bringing of something to conscious awareness" (Philosophical Hermeneutics 38). In other words, hermeneutics opens possibilities by redirecting one's focus of attention. Arnett writes, "Focus of attention, the act of intentionality, frames the object claiming attention" (Dialogic Confession 55). If one accepts that the postmodern moment of metanarrative decline is one in which the "grand narrative has lost its credibility" (Lyotard 37), then one's focus of attention is misplaced in the search for a metanarrative or universal understanding of life. Moving from a modern world to a postmodern world invites a redirecting of one's focus of attention from seeking transcendent universals to engaging temporal specifics. Accepting Camus's recognition that human existence is absurd and filled with inherent contradictions eliminates the seeking of a metanarrative as a productive option. Camus does not simply stop at a phenomenological description of absurdity. In this second cycle of work he illustrates the necessary response to absurdity, existential rebellion.

Within everyday life, each new action one takes becomes an opportunity for a new understanding of life. One's meaning in life is created by taking action. Camus did not believe that meaning was provided by anyone or anything outside of everyday life.

Therefore taking action within a given moment in history provides both new opportunities for interpreting life as well as an opportunity to construct meaning within a given moment. Camus's exploration of revolt as an existential ethical response to absurdity is evident in both his fiction and nonfiction. A brief summary of the works of fiction which are a part of this cycle, The Plague and "The Just Assassins" will next be provided followed by an analysis of how that work nuances the metaphor of revolt. Each section begins with a narrative summary of the main points and characters within the story and is followed by a narrative engagement of how the work textures an understanding of the metaphor of revolt.

The Plague

Camus provides a very livable example of existential revolt in his novel The Plague, first published in 1947. By focusing upon the various responses that the characters have to a medical epidemic he captures both the actions and spirit necessary for one to be productive in the midst of absurdity. The absurd circumstances provide the background against which the action takes place. The focus is not upon the absurdity of the town, but upon the necessary responses of revolt that one must take in order to make a difference and create their own meaning in the midst of absurdity.

Narrative

Camus's novel The Plague, a work in five parts, is an exploration of the extraordinary events surrounding the outbreak of plague in the very ordinary town of Oran in "194-" (The Plague 3). A narrator (revealed at the end of the story to be Dr. Bernard Rieux) situated within the town provides the description and commentary about the events in the novel; the story is primarily written and told in the past tense as a

retrospective look at what occurred. A very ordinary town, Oran was a place where “everyone is bored, and devotes himself to cultivating habits” (4). These habits allow a person to “get through the days there without any trouble, once you form the habits. And since habits are precisely what our town encourages, all is for the best” (5). The novel focuses on the actions of a variety of characters, most notably Dr. Rieux, a medical doctor who cares for the citizens of Oran. As the novel opens, Dr. Rieux’s wife is ill and in need of medical treatment unavailable in Oran when she leaves the town in search of the appropriate medical intervention. As he goes about his normal business Dr. Rieux encounters Rambert, an out of town journalist, who is working on a story in Oran who becomes curious about the rats that have been appearing in town. Dr. Rieux is described as a man who “was sick and tired of the world he lived in – though he had much liking for his fellow men” (12). Dr. Rieux’s “liking for his fellow men” becomes more evident as the novel unfolds.

Dr. Rieux’s mother came to stay with him while his wife is out of town. “It was about this time that our townsfolk began to show signs of uneasiness” due to the amounts of “dead or dying rats” that were appearing in “factories and warehouses” (15). Rieux received a phone call from a former patient, Joseph Grand, who was concerned about a neighbor, Cottard, who had attempted to hang himself. These men take on added significance as the story unfolds. The concerns for solidarity are expressed by Grand, ““But I can very well stay with him [Cottard]. I can’t say I really know him, but one’s got to help a neighbor, hasn’t one?”” (20). After the death of the concierge of Rieux’s apartment building, people in Oran began to take notice that something horrible was beginning to happen in their town:

[T]heir views obviously called for revision. Still, if things had gone thus far and no farther, force of habit would doubtless have gained the day, as usual. But other members of our community, not all menials or poor people, were to follow the path down to which M. Michel had led the way. And it was then that fear, and with fear serious reflection, began. (23)

This realization that the fate of Michel could impact anyone, led to the realization that “Now we’re like everybody else” (28). The rats served as a great equalizer for every person who called Oran home and it “became evident to all observers of this strange malady that a real epidemic had set in” (35). Those in charge of medical issues of Oran became slowly aware that the “strange malady” could in fact be plague. When it is suggested to Dr. Rieux that plague vanished from the region centuries ago, he replies, “Vanished? What does that word really mean?” (36). A note by the narrator provides commentary on the topic, “There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise” (37). This plague, although perhaps common in European history, is something that catches the town of Oran completely by surprise as well.

As news of the plague spread, people became more aware of the freedom that could be taken from them if the town was quarantined. “They [the citizens of Oran] fancied themselves free, and no one will ever be free so long as there are pestilences” (37). In the face of the growing epidemic, Dr. Rieux continued to work as necessary. His belief was “The thing was to do your job as it should be done” (41). As Rieux follows up with Cottard after his failed suicide attempt, a sort of friendship emerges between Grand, Cottard, and Dr. Rieux. Upon reflection Rieux:

realized how absurd it was, but he simply couldn't believe that a pestilence on the great scale could befall a town where people like Grand were to be found, obscure functionaries cultivating harmless eccentricities...and he concluded that the chances were all against the plague's making any headway among our fellow citizens. (47)

When the authorities challenged Rieux's growing conviction that the epidemic was plague, he considered it of "small importance whether you call it plague or some kind of fever. The important thing is to prevent its killing off half the population of this town" (49). He continued by stating, "You're stating the problem wrongly. It's not a question of the term I use; it's a question of time" (50). As part one of the novel comes to a close, Rieux is burdened by his medical profession and never had he "known his profession to weigh on him so heavily" (59). An official telegram provides the closing words of the first part, "*Proclaim a state of plague stop close the town*" (63).

As part two opens, everyone in Oran realized that "plague was the concern of all of us" (67). After the gates of the town were closed, "the first thing that plague brought to our town was exile" (71). This feeling of exile and separation created many who "drifted through life rather than lived" (73). All the while the plague is taking over the town Dr. Rieux was doing his part to engage the epidemic as best he could. The strange benefit that the feeling of exile produced was that it caused many who were separated from their families to focus upon their despair as opposed to focusing upon the plague. "Their despair saved them from panic, thus their misfortune had a good side" (77). Rambert, the journalist stuck in the town as part of the quarantine, was exiled from his "wife in Paris....Well, she wasn't actually his wife, but it came to the same thing" (84).

His feelings for her caused him to begin searching for a way to escape from Oran and return to Paris. After attempting to get Dr. Rieux to supply a letter supporting his cause to leave the town, Rieux replies, ““That’s not a sufficient reason. Oh, I know it’s an absurd situation, but we’re all involved in it, and we’ve got to accept it as it is”” (86). Rambert accused him of “abstraction” and divorcing his actions from reality. Rieux did not back down from his position and did not assist Rambert in his effort to escape the exile imposed by the plague. Upon further reflection, Rieux admitted to himself that perhaps he was acting as an abstraction and perhaps “only one factor changed, and that was Rieux himself” (91).

As plague continued to dominate everyday life in Oran, everything, “even the least sound, had a heightened significance” (112). During a discussion with Tarrou about the fact that plague “has a good side; it opens men’s eyes and forces them to take thought” (125), Rieux responded, ““For the moment I know this; there are sick people and they need curing. Later on, perhaps, they’ll think things over; and so shall I. But what’s wanted now is to make them well. I defend them the best as I can, that’s all”” (127). In this pivotal exchange between Tarrou and Dr. Rieux, further illustration of Camus’s belief in absurdity is provided through Rieux who states, ““[S]ince the order of the world is shaped by death, mightn’t it be better for God if we refuse to believe in Him and struggle with all our might against death, without raising our eyes toward the heaven where He sits in silence?”” (128). When Tarrou asks the doctor who taught him his view that he just stated, his one word reply is ““Suffering”” (129).

In contrast to Dr. Rieux’s view, “Many fledgling moralists in those days were going about our town proclaiming there was nothing to be done about it and we should

bow to the inevitable...There was nothing admirable about this attitude; it was merely logical” (133). Rieux’s actions in the face of such opinions was not an effort to be heroic, in fact he stated in a conversation with Rambert, “[T]here’s no question of heroism in all this. It’s a matter of common decency” (163). Rambert discovers from Tarrou that Dr. Rieux’s wife is in a sanatorium outside of Oran. When he discovers that Rieux is doing his part in an effort to combat the faceless plague, his entire attitude about the situation changes. In part three Rambert abandons his plan to escape from Oran and instead volunteers to assist where needed. As part three continues, the folks in the town have given up the “furious revolt of the first weeks” and instead experience “vast despondency”. In this state, Rieux discovers “that the habit of despair is worse than despair itself” (181). Even when a new opportunity emerged for Rambert to escape, he continued working with Dr. Rieux, taking action as opposed to falling into despair.

As the plague dominated the town, “death had shown no favoritism” (214). After watching a child die, Rieux snapped at Father Paneloux, a priest in the Oran. Offering an apology, Rieux stated, “I’m sorry. But weariness is a kind of madness. And there are times when the only feeling I have is one of mad revolt” (218). Paneloux affirmed that although they did not share religious convictions that each was “working for man’s salvation” (219). During one of Father Paneloux’s sermons, he stated, “[W]e might try to explain the phenomenon of the plague, but, above all, should learn what it had to teach us” (223). Working from a religious framework, Paneloux came to share Rieux’s conviction that each person must take a stand against the inevitability of the plague. For Tarrou, the plague was not simply a medical epidemic, but something that “no one on earth is free from” (253). In fact, “[E]ach of us has the plague within him” (253). Tarrou

continued that what was of concern to him was how one can “be a saint without God” (255). “What interests me is being a man” (255) was the reply given by Dr. Rieux.

As part five opens, the plague has suffered several setbacks and the first signs of rats have appeared. Talk has now returned to the town of “the new order of life that would set in after the plague” (269). As the townspeople slowly gained confidence that the plague was defeated, “it seemed as if nothing had changed in the town” (271). Tarrou is the final death that receives focused attention in the novel. Putting his own beliefs into practice, he fights valiantly, with Dr. Rieux by his side, until his final breath. As the plague recedes, Dr. Rieux is confronted with the double impact of the death of his friend, Tarrou, and news of his wife’s death as well. Rieux, dealing with the loss, momentarily “wished to behave like all those others around him who believed, or made believe, that plague can come and go without changing anything in men’s hearts” (295). Rambert was reunited with his “wife” and “Cottard, Tarrou, the men and the woman Rieux had loved and lost – all alike dead and or guilty, were forgotten. Yes, the old fellow had been right; these people were ‘just the same as ever’” (308). Dr. Rieux reveals himself as the narrator and provides his dismay that the town has emerged unchanged by the events.

Within The Plague, Camus addressed exile, despair, and revolt. As a novelist Camus was attempting to provide a fictional example of how the central character’s various responses to the plague served as appropriate expressions of revolt. While Camus did not use the metaphor “*the unity of contraries*” within The Plague, this term from within the work of Martin Buber illustrates the fundamental contradictions found within human existence and provides a point of connection between The Plague and this

dissertation. “*The unity of contraries*” will be addressed later in this chapter as a way in which this work of Camus can be situated within the overall dissertation.

Narrative Engagement

The dialectical tension within The Plague demonstrates what Camus considered to be an ethical response of revolt in the midst of absurdity. Once the town of Oran is quarantined, the characters in the novel are caught between two options. First, they can choose to not get involved in helping those who have contracted the deadly disease. “There lay the real danger; for the energy they devoted to fighting the disease made them all the more liable to it” (194). Even by avoiding the disease head-on they still could contract the plague and die. The second option is to engage the plague directly, again risking one’s life to the deadly outbreak. Either way the characters risk death. There is no “final” resolution to the story. This is one point with Camus’s work where he provides a demonstration of the fundamental contradictions found in human existence. “The contradiction is this: man rejects the world as it is, without accepting the necessity of escaping it” (The Rebel 260). Unlike a Hegelian dialectic that allows for thesis-antithesis-synthesis, Camus allowed for this tension to exist unresolved. The plague is eventually controlled and the town returns to action as if the plague never happened at all. Only those who engaged the plague directly are changed – some in their death and others in their future responses to life. Camus focuses upon characters that rebel against the certain death of inactivity, thus demonstrating his commitment to action in the face of the inevitable (Arnett, Communication 138).

From a communicative perspective the epidemic of the plague can be considered a “rhetorical interruption” (Hyde 77). This plague, when viewed through the metaphor of

absurdity, serves as an invitation to the residents of Oran to rebel against absurdity and therefore offers and suggests hope. While Camus did not use the terminology of hermeneutics or existential phenomenology within his work, it is evident that he conceptualized the metaphor of the absurd in terms of both phenomenology and hermeneutics. Anyone who has experienced a rejuvenated community in context of crisis could say “Thank God for the absurd” due to finding meaning in the midst of paradigmatic uncertainty. In many ways the plague can be seen as an ontological intrusion or transgression within the novel.

John Krapp asserts the significance of the novel when he writes in a text published in 2002, “The last ten years have seen a resurgence in Camus scholarship and interpretation” but more importantly there have been several recent “studies even appearing on *The Plague*” (76). Solomon connected The Plague to “The Myth of Sisyphus” when he wrote “Rieux, like Sisyphus (and debatably like Sisyphus), may be ‘the absurd hero,’ fighting against the unbeatable foe, whether this is conceived to be death or the meaninglessness of the universe” (121). Fighting against plague, according to Camus, is best done in solidarity. It is through the united response to the plague that the main characters find or create their meaning for life. Rieux, in his interactions with Tarrou and Rambert, comes to the realization that the point of his effort is to do what he can because of his role, not because he possesses some interest in transcending the epidemic.

The Plague has been subject to many interpretations throughout the years since its publication. Solomon wrote, “An interpretation of *The Plague* largely depends on one’s attitude toward Camus, on his or her perspective, and on what ideological ax he or she

wants to grind” (114). The central question about the novel has to do with Camus’s description of plague and what he intended for it to mean. Camus was challenged by his own contemporaries, most notably Jean Paul Sartre and Roland Barthes, about the role that history plays within the novel. Subsequent interpretations (i.e. Cruickshank, Krapp, Solomon) explore the novel in light of the criticism of Sartre and Barthes but also allow the novel to speak on its own terms. The significance of the criticisms of Camus’s use of the metaphor of rebellion offered by his contemporaries provides helpful insights into his overall engagement with the metaphor of the absurd.

Following the publication of The Plague, Camus was criticized by philosopher Roland Barthes, in addition to Sartre, because he believed Camus lacked an understanding of historical engagement necessary to make an existential ethical difference in the modern world. Both Barthes and Sartre felt that because the plague was monolithic and treated everyone the same way that it was not an accurate description of the fascism and the destruction brought upon Europe by the Nazi regime. Barthes’s critique was that “Camus’s novel, by virtue of its naturalizing evil, signifies a refusal to depict human existence as part of an historical equation” (Krapp 78). Since Camus champions those who engage a disease as opposed to human faces, was he downplaying the role that human beings play in the good and evil that takes place everyday? This is the central concern raised by Barthes. Camus replied to Barthes directly:

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. (Lyrical 339)

Camus was an active participant in his historical moment through his work as a journalist, playwright, author, and member of the underground French Resistance movement. While the temptation may exist to stand above and outside of history to judge Camus's thought as inadequate for his historical moment this represents an unethical response to our own situatedness.

Both The Rebel and The Plague, in addition to being significant reasons Camus won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 1957, also led to his philosophical and personal split with Jean Paul Sartre. The Rebel is a challenge to "the pro-Communist orthodoxy of many on the left, including the influential group of intellectuals led by Jean Paul Sartre" (Spritzen and van den Hoven, 61). By this point in time Sartre had become one of many "apologists for Stalin" (Lottman 523) while Camus was growing more and more hostile towards Communism. "The author's [Camus's] unambiguous stand against Stalinism was bound to receive sympathy and approval from conservatives, from anti-Communists of all types" (Lottman 522). While either man could have compromised to save the relationship, each recognized that the conflicting narratives could not be resolved, so both chose to live consistently within his given position while living in tension with the other. While their debate was philosophically grounded, their concerns were communicated in a very public context. Camus's commitment to allowing philosophical ideas guide his communicative choices and actions, even when it required ending a close friendship, provides support of his functioning as a philosopher of communication. While one cannot "psychologize" (Arnett, Dialogic Confession 12) about how these personal experiences impacted Camus's philosophy and writing, what a person sees and hears rhetorically guides and influences the work one is able to accomplish.

“The Just Assassins”

Camus supplies the character of Kaliayev, the central character in “The Just Assassins,” first published in 1949, as an example of someone who “doubted to the end, but this doubt did not prevent him from acting” (The Rebel 173). This play explores the justifiable limits of revolt. Within an absurd moment, where there is not an overarching metanarrative guiding public action, one is faced with questioning the boundaries for ethical action. Using historical events and people as the basis of this play allows Camus to explore an actual event as opposed to an abstract idea disconnected from everyday life. This play, along with The Rebel and The Plague, were identified by Camus in his personal notebook as part of his cycle on revolt.

Narrative

In the opening act of this five act play, a group of revolutionaries are exploring who will throw the bomb to kill the Grand Duke. Stepan, the most vocal member in the opening sequence, attempts to reestablish himself as a sort of leader of the group after returning from three years in prison. As he reflects upon his own imprisonment he states, “Freedom can be a prison” (Caligula 236). The goal of the group, part of the “Revolutionary Socialist Party” is to execute “the Grand Duke Serge so as to bring nearer the day when the Russian people are set free” (237). The name of Ivan Kaliayev, the main character of the play, is mentioned, to which Stepan replies, “That’s no name for a terrorist” (237). As the plans have been made for the assassination, Kaliayev is the one who has been researching the correct moment to throw the bomb. The tension between Kaliayev and Stepan is intensified when Stepan reveals, after Kaliayev leaves the room “I want to throw the bomb” (241). After Stepan directly challenges Kaliayev’s

trustworthiness with this major task, Kaliayev responds to Stepan's accusation that he lacks experience with, "Experience? But you know quite well that one throws a bomb just once – and then...No one has ever had a second chance" (242). Kaliayev later provides further justification for the assassination when he states, "We consent to being criminals so that at last the innocent, and only they, will inherit the earth" (245). The final pages of the first act end with Kaliayev providing the theoretical background for the actions he is planning to take, "To die for an ideal – that's the only way of proving oneself worthy of it. It's our only justification" (246). The ideal for which Kaliayev is dying is provided when he states, "It's not he [the Grand Duke] I'm killing. I'm killing despotism...I shall kill him. With joy!" (248-249). Kaliayev believed that the Grand Duke violated his human role and therefore was deserving of death.

Act two opens on the day of the planned assassination of the Grand Duke. After realizing that the proper signals have not resulted in any actions, everyone panics until Kaliayev returns to the room. Although the Grand Duke was supposed to be alone Kaliayev's reason for not killing is, "There were children in the Grand Duke's carriage" (253). Stepan again challenges Kaliayev's commitment to the revolutionary cause when he states, "I don't suffer from a tender heart; that sort of nonsense cuts no ice with *me*....Not until the day comes when we stop sentimentalizing about children will the revolution triumph, and we be masters of the world" (256). Annenkov, another member of the group, challenges this thinking by Stepan when he states that "everything is *not* allowed" (257). The conversation continues around the idea of the limits of revolution. Dora, the former lover of Kaliayev, states that Kaliayev is:

Ready to kill the Grand Duke because his death may help bring nearer the time when Russian children will no longer die of hunger. That in itself is none too easy for him. But the death of the Grand Duke's niece and nephew won't prevent any child from dying of hunger. Even in destruction there's a right way and a wrong way – and there are limits. (258)

Stepan's simple reply is "There are no limits!" (258). This line of thinking is now challenged by Kaliayev who tells Stepan that "behind your words, I see the threat of another despotism which, if ever it comes into power, will make of me a murderer- and what I want to be is a doer of justice, not a man of blood" (259). Kaliayev further supports his claim that the murder of children "is a crime against man's honor" (260) when he states, "I have chosen death so as to prevent murder from triumphing in the world. I've chosen to be innocent" (261). Kaliayev understood the actions he was planning to take and the limits he worked within.

The day of the second attempt to take the life of the Grand Duke provides the background for act three. Stepan states as he is waiting for the events to transpire, "For people like me who don't believe in God, there is no alternative between total justice and utter despair" (273). Stepan and Dora continue talking when they hear the sound of a bomb exploding. Realizing that the plan has worked, Dora exclaims that Kaliayev "has brought it off! The people have triumphed!" (274). Kaliayev's actions are successful; now the focus turns toward his suffering for those actions.

Act four is set in Kaliayev's prison. Kaliayev does not believe he is a murderer or accused of a crime. He considers himself "a prisoner of war, no an accused person" (282). The Grand Duchess, wife of the late Grand Duke, visits Kaliayev in prison. She

makes an effort to appeal to his religious beliefs and asks him, “Won’t you join with me in prayer, and repent? Then we should be less lonely”. To which he replies, “Let me prepare myself to die. If I did not die – it’s then I’d be a murderer” (288). He continues by stating that it is the “injustice, sorrow, shame; by the evil that man do to others” that separates humans from each other. “Living is agony, because life separates” (290). She again attempts to appeal to a religious inclination when she states, “God reunites”. Kaliayev again rebukes the effort and responds, “[T]he only meetings that mean anything to me take place on earth” (290). Kaliayev is given an opportunity to receive a pardon on the condition that he repent of his crime. He refuses and prepares himself for his impending execution.

News of Kaliayev’s execution is reported to the group. Upon hearing the news, Dora asks for “the bomb to throw” (297). After returning from witnessing the hanging, Stepan admits that he is “jealous of” Kaliayev (300) for the way he faced his death. As the play ends, Dora again asks for the bomb so that she can be killed and be reunited with Kaliayev, “A cold night...and the same rope. Everything will be easier now” (302). Kaliayev’s death serves as a call to action to both those who doubted his ability and those who supported him throughout.

Within “The Just Assassins,” Camus addressed limits, revolution, freedom, and justice. As a playwright Camus was attempting to build a work of fiction upon historical events and characters that represented the limits of revolt. The metaphor of *limits* connects the remainder of the metaphors that emerge in this play and provides a point of connection between “The Just Assassins” and this dissertation. *Limits* will be addressed

later in this chapter as a way in which this work of Camus can be situated within the overall dissertation.

Narrative Engagement

The central focus of the “The Just Assassins” is the assassination of the Grand Duke of Russia. Kaliayev is the one assigned with the task of throwing the bomb and killing the Grand Duke. On the appointed day of the assassination, Kaliayev approaches the carriage carrying the Grand Duke and finds that his niece and nephew are in the carriage as well. Demonstrating that even revolutionaries have limits, Kaliayev is unable to throw the bomb and returns to the headquarters unsuccessful. Stepan, according to Isaac articulates “the worst sort of Marxist historicism” and “is motivated by a genuine sense of justice” (130). After further planning, Kaliayev does indeed kill the Grand Duke as planned, but only while he is alone. He represents the “authentic rebel” (Isaac 30). A long conversation takes place as to whether the rest of the revolutionaries would have been able to kill the children as well. While in prison for the killing, Kaliayev refuses to accept an offer from the Grand Duke’s wife because he denies that is in fact a “murderer” and not a revolutionary. The limits of the revolutionaries demonstrate the absurdity of the human condition. Bree suggests that Kaliayev and Dora, the play’s main characters are “voices, not human beings, to designate positions taken, parts recited” (Camus 161). While giving value to the life of children, the life of the Grand Duke was worth taking. While the children’s lives were worth preserving, Kaliayev’s own life was not worth saving by making a deal with the Grand Duchess. While Kaliayev never denied killing the Grand Duke, he did deny committing murder because he saw his action as justifiable.

The revolutionaries were setting their own criteria for what constitutes a justifiable assassination. If another group set different standards, chaos could ensue.

While Camus did not seek a universal standard for existence or appeal to something or Someone beyond everyday existence, he did recognize the absurdity of the human experience and the existential ethical response of revolt necessary to create meaning in the world. The diversity of viewpoints and of approaches to life required that other ways, beyond killing, must be found to navigate through one's historical moment. Kaliyev provides insight into the inner-conflict that can take place in the midst of absurdity. Killing is okay, but only a certain kind of killing. Revolution is okay, but even revolutionaries have boundaries that must not be crossed. Admitting that one took another's life can be justified, but only if it is considered within the context of a revolution and not simply as murder. "The Just Assassins" is a play that continues to be performed in various venues in Europe and North America. While Kaliyev's death does provide a resolution to the story itself, it does not resolve the tension between the "authentic rebel" found in the character of Kaliyev and the commitment to Marxist historicism found within the character of Stepan. While the contradictory ideas are left without answer, one is able to recognize the connection with the tensions that exist in the contemporary postmodern moment.

Absurdity is a lived reality for Camus. One cannot escape history and somehow view life from outside of the contradictions of existence. One's choice today, much like the ones faced by Sisyphus and Kaliyev, is to make a choice to engage life. While it may not be possible to justify the revolutionary actions of Kaliyev, it is unethical to suggest that anyone else would do anything different in that same situation. Just as

Camus was situated within a given moment, Kaliyev was also situated within a moment as well. It is impossible and unethical to stand outside of that moment and make sweeping judgments about the actions of others.

It is possible to begin to draw out several metaphors from within these three works within Camus's cycle of revolt. While there are multiple possible themes and interpretations within these pivotal works, for the purposes of this chapter one major metaphor from each work will provide the basis for further discussion. The Rebel provides an opportunity to consider the implications of a *lived philosophy* in which action is informed by one's theoretical presuppositions. Within The Plague, the concept of "*the unity of contraries*," a term from the work of Martin Buber, illustrates the fundamental contradictions found within human existence. "The Just Assassins" reminds one of the importance of the *limits* of one's actions, regardless of how justifiable they are, and the inherent contradictions often found within revolutionary activities. Whether within his fiction or nonfiction, connections can be made between everyday events and Camus's life and work.

Revolt: An Existential Ethical Response to Absurdity

Three previously mentioned metaphors help connect the work of Camus to the current postmodern moment. The metaphors are: *lived philosophy*, *the unity of contraries*, and *limits*. They are not all explicitly stated in Camus's work but serve as an opportunity for interpretive engagement between the two similar, yet fundamentally different, eras. Providing a clear description of each metaphor strengthens the case that Camus can serve as a philosopher of communication with a concern for ethical action. The naming of these metaphors provides a picture of revolt as explored by Camus and

provides an entry point into further exploration of how to ethically respond in the midst of absurdity. When considering how the metaphor of revolt represents a hermeneutic turn within Camus's understanding of absurdity, it is important to recognize the new ways of understanding human existence in light of the metaphorical connections.

Whether fiction or nonfiction it is possible to make connections between Camus's writing and everyday events. Walter Kaufman, who includes writings by Camus in his collection Existentialism from Dostoevsky to Sartre, wrote, "The existentialist has taken up the passionate concern with questions that arise from life, the moral pathos, and the firm belief that, to be serious, a philosophy has to be lived" (51). A *lived philosophy* is closely tied to the previous discussion on embodiment as well as the concept of praxis, or theory informed action. The goal of Camus's ideas, as well as the goal of an ethically sensitive philosopher of communication, is not to identify abstract forms that lack any functional purpose in everyday life. A *lived philosophy* suggests that one is equipped with the proper theoretical background to make decisions in an ever-changing historical moment. Within a postmodern moment of narrative and virtue contention, there is a risk of attempting to implement a technique from one context to another. In order to be productive in a variety of contexts, one must have a praxis orientation and possess the ability to be nimble when adjusting to new circumstances. When one comes to embody a particular philosophical framework he or she is capable of acting in an appropriate manner in different settings. A *lived philosophy* also suggests that action is required in order for a philosophical position to be truly worth assuming. When one comes to accept a position that is impossible to hold in everyday living, one is setting up others for moments of cynicism.

This metaphor of *lived philosophy* connects to the metaphor of *limits* as well. As demonstrated in “The Just Assassins”, while some positions can be held as abstractions, responsibility to other human beings places *limits* upon the positions we may accept as ethically appropriate. Often these *limits* force us to work in the context of two apparently contradictory concepts. When a person is working for an organization that is headed for financial ruin, one may still continue to do the job even though the company will not be in existence in a few months or years. This absurd situation forces the individual to hold two ideas in tension. Working for company headed for bankruptcy may seem pointless, and yet circumstances may require the person to continue to do his or her job to the best of one’s ability. The *limits* of life, such as family obligations, health concerns, or being tied to a specific geographic region, may create the circumstances that lead the person to stay at that particular company. Holding these two ideas in tension is creates a *unity of contraries* in which the person’s life as a whole is filled with contradiction.

Communication Ethics: Camus’s Understanding of Revolt

Responding ethically is a challenge in an age of absurdity. Within a postmodern moment, *lived philosophy* represents a commitment to live out the embodied ideals of a particular narrative as opposed to individualistic preferences. Taking ethical action is further challenged because one is living the tension of *the unity of contraries* in which multiple ideas and commitments are attempting to attract the focus of one’s attention. When taking action, one must recognize that *limits*, or boundaries, are demonstrated by each decision and subsequent action taken.

The guiding question of this chapter, “How did Camus’s response to absurdity through the metaphor of revolt provide a hermeneutic turn within his description of the

absurd?”, provides an opportunity to summarize Camus’ understanding and use of the metaphor of revolt. As stated earlier, Camus did not explicitly use the terminology of hermeneutics within his exploration of the absurd. This metaphor of revolt represents Camus’s commitment to and engagement with the ever changing historical moment. Because Camus was deeply committed to the working out his ideas in the context of his everyday life, it should not come as a surprise that not everyone agreed with the positions that he supported. Many scholars publicly disagreed with his stance in reference to revolt and rebellion, most notably his friend and French contemporary, Jean Paul Sartre.

A portion of the next chapter addresses the criticisms leveled at his work by his contemporaries, most notably Sartre. Although Camus viewed his work more as “art” and “poetry”, he was still understandably affected when he was derogatorily referred to as “a poet” while Jean Paul Sartre was respectfully addressed as “a critic” after their well-documented and public split (Lottman 533). Camus’s commitment to living out his ethical beliefs despite the absurdity of his historical moment, while contributing to his eventual split with Sartre, points toward his ongoing belief that his words and actions should be consistent with each another. Aronson writes, “In the end Camus and Sartre split not only because they took opposing sides but because each became his own side’s intellectual leader” (2). Perhaps in less turbulent times the two could have remained friends, but the politics of their everyday lives and the situation in post-war France made that option impossible. In our current moment many would simply “agree to disagree”; but within a moment possessing an “unabridged gulf between rationality and existence” (Cruickshank 49), this split further accentuates the absurdity of their time. The two disagreed with what specific action should be taken in the face of the absurd

circumstances in France following the devastation of World War II. Their inability to maintain an ongoing relationship in the face of absurdity represented a “fall” into “existential homelessness.” In the next chapter, Camus’s own work The Fall provides the fictional starting point for exploring the consequences for communicating in an age of absurdity.

Chapter Four

Meeting the Absurd: Acknowledgement of Consequences

“My Dear Camus: Our friendship was not easy, but I will miss it...” (Jean Paul Sartre in response to Camus, published in Modern Times).

One must recognize and accept the existence of the absurd before discovering an appropriate communicative existential ethical response; a response which should allow one to take action without falling into despair. Within the work of Albert Camus, this response revealed itself in his engagement with the metaphor of revolt. But even if one chooses not to take action, there are consequences when living in the midst of absurdity due to its pervasiveness and inescapability. The main characters in The Plague faced such a situation; avoiding the disease could still lead to catching the plague resulting in death while engaging the plague directly was also a risk to one's life. Unfortunately, the risk to act in the midst of absurdity is not simply found in the action itself but also in the consequences of the actions taken. As Camus continued to engage his contemporary moment with an eye toward the future he personally experienced the consequences of taking action in the face of absurd circumstances. Along with Camus, one major person interested in the political future of post-World War II France was Jean Paul Sartre, Camus's friend and co-member of the underground French Resistance Movement. While Camus and Sartre were relationally united in their efforts during the Resistance, once the

war ended their differences became too apparent to keep them together. Lacking a common background for conversation, it was not completely unexpected that the relationship between Camus and Sartre would come to an end.

Introduction

The differing positions of Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre were practically and philosophically based revealing that their social relationship could no longer withstand the lack of publicly agreed upon content, which from a communicative perspective lacked a “common center” (Buber, I and Thou 163). What seemed to be lacking in their existential moment, as well as in the current postmodern moment, was such a sense of a common center. Camus and Sartre could not even live in the same intellectual house with one another due to this lack of commonality and therefore serve as caricatures of the difficulty of engaging another person in a time of “existential homelessness” (Arnett “Existential” 229) in which the ground under one’s feet does not seem secure. The exchange between Sartre and Camus points toward communicative implications of what happens when conversational background is no longer in place. Both Camus and Sartre were responding to such a sense of existential homelessness with continual revolt in the midst of absurdity. Such a context makes it difficult to even have kinship with someone doing work like yours, but differently. Absurdity and revolt could not provide a common center because a common center offers temporal ground and absurdity indicates a lack of it; therefore this relational collapse was, in many ways, not unexpected. Recognizing the absurd and responding through revolt are foreground communicative actions while existential homelessness was the ongoing background that drove the work of Camus. Within this particular interpretation of Camus’s work, the fundamental issue is not

absurdity but existential homelessness; the fact that life is absurd creates the need for revolt in an effort to create meaning where none previously existed.

While Camus personally lived in the shadow of existential homelessness, he also provided a fictional character who exemplifies this very idea in the novel The Fall. This novel, written several years after the end of the dispute between Camus and Sartre, provides a fictional account of what happens when a common center, or background, is not present in the midst of absurdity. A notebook entry from June 17, 1947, stated, “Third Series. Judgment – The First Man” (Notebook V 158). Camus understood that when taking action in an age of absurdity that one would face consequences, or judgment, for those actions. While Camus never completed the book The First Man in his lifetime, he did write a novel that extensively explores the topic of judgment and the consequences that come about when living in such an age and therefore fits within the planned theme for his third series of work. This novel, The Fall, was the last novel Camus completed and published during his lifetime. This work provides the starting point for this chapter as the following question is explored: “How did Camus’s novel The Fall, as well as his disagreement with Jean Paul Sartre, represent an acknowledgement of the consequences of living in an absurd age?” The following items are addressed as the guiding question for this chapter is answered. First, an investigation of The Fall explores how the central character experiences the consequences of his actions in the midst of absurdity and reveals how this novel provides a fictional account of “existential homelessness”. Next, an examination of the conflict between Camus and Jean Paul Sartre provides a twentieth century example of the consequences of taking action in the midst of absurdity where a “common center” for public dialogue and debate is not present. The conclusion provides

an exploration of how the metaphor of *the fall* reveals itself through the interactions of Camus and Sartre, thus connecting his work of fiction, The Fall, to real life experiences. The following section begins with a narrative summary of the main points and characters within The Fall and is followed by a narrative engagement of how this work textures an understanding of the metaphor of the absurd.

The Fall

Camus's work The Fall was first published in 1956 and was the last novel completed and published while Camus was living. The novel, written in six unnumbered sections, is a story told as a monologue by the central character, Jean-Baptiste Clamence. Clamence considers himself a "judge-penitent" and invites his conversation partner (listener) and the reader to interact with his lengthy confession as he tells his story.

Narrative

In the first section Clamence begins his relationship with a visitor to a bar in Amsterdam by offering to serve as an interpreter. As the conversation continues Clamence states that "I am talkative, alas, and make friends easily. Although I know how to keep my distance, I seize any and every opportunity" (5). He has a rather bleak outlook on his contemporaries when he states, "A single sentence will suffice for modern man: he fornicated and read the papers. After that vigorous definition, the subject will be, if I may say so, exhausted" (6-7). For the first time he reveals a small portion about himself when he states, "If you want to know, I was a lawyer before coming here. Now I am a judge-penitent" (8). This brief description is followed by his introduction, "But allow me to introduce myself: Jean-Baptiste Clamence" (8). As the section ends Clamence foreshadows a topic of later conversation when he states:

I'll leave you near the bridge. I never cross a bridge at night. It's the result of a vow. Suppose, after all, that someone should jump in the water. One of two things – either you do likewise and fish him out and, in cold weather, you run a great risk. Or you forsake him there and suppressed dives sometimes leave one strangely aching. (15)

With that cryptic statement, Clamence leaves his new acquaintance until the next day.

The second section begins with the reoccurring question, “What is a judge-penitent?” (17). Clamence avoids answering the question and begins to tell his own story. He shares that he was a lawyer and that “I didn't tell you my real name” (17). As a lawyer he was always “on the right side” (18). He was motivated to practice law by the “feeling of the law, the satisfaction of being right, the joy of self esteem” (18). Not only was he a respected lawyer, but “I was considered generous...I gave a great deal in public and in private” (22). This generosity was an intentional effort to position himself higher than others he encountered. “Yes, I have never felt comfortable except in lofty places. Even in the details of daily life, I needed to feel *above*” (23). This feeling of being “above” the surroundings “cleansed me of all bitterness toward my neighbor, whom I always obligated without ever owing him anything. It set me above the judge whom I judged in turn, above the defendant whom I forced to gratitude...I lived with impunity” (25). Being above the punishment or judgment of others is only the beginning of his story. “To tell the truth, just from being so fully and simply a man, I looked upon myself as something of a superman” (28). Again foreshadowing an important element of his own story he begins, “I soared until the evening when...But no, that's another matter and

it must be forgotten” (29). This section ends with Clamence being summoned by another man who is in need of his companionship.

The third section again begins with Clamence avoiding answering questions about his story. As he continues to further share his interpretation about his own life he states, “I recognized no equals. I always considered myself more intelligent than everyone else, as I’ve told you, but also more sensitive and more skillful, a crack shot, an incomparable driver, a better lover” (48). He later continues his explanation of how he “always succeeded with women...I was considered to have charm. Fancy that! You know what charm is: a way of getting the answer yes without having asked any clear question” (56-57). While Clamence “had principles, to be sure, such as that the wife of a friend is sacred” (58) he conveniently ceased “a few days before, to feel any friendship for the husband” (59). While Clamence still has not confessed what he means by “judge-penitent” he invites his listener to “Search [his] memory and perhaps [he] will find some similar story that [he’ll] tell me later on” (65). As this conversation draws to a close Clamence recounts a story about a woman he witnessed while still in France. He saw her walking across a bridge and later heard the sound of “a body striking the water” (70). While he heard several cries, he did nothing to assist and simply kept on walking and “informed no one” (70). Abruptly he ends the conversation and simply says that he does not know what happened to that woman because over the next few days “I didn’t read the papers” (71).

As the fourth section opens, Clamence further confesses that “I have no more friends; I have nothing but accomplices” (73). These accomplices include...“the whole human race. And within the human race, you first of all. Whoever is at hand is always

first” (73). He arrived at this conclusion when he realized that no one would care if he committed suicide. But Clamence continues on in spite of the lack of friends because “I love life – that’s my real weakness” (76). Next, Clamence begins an extended monologue addressing the topic of judgment. He realized that after not attempting to help the woman who dove into the water, others could find “something to judge in me” (78). This alerted him that “there was in them an irresistible vocation for judgment” (78). Clamence continues to invite judgment upon himself when he states, “The idea, for instance, that I am the only one to know what everyone is looking for and that I have at home an object which kept the police of three countries on the run is sheer delight. But let’s not go into that” (90). While he still has not revealed his own interpretation of a “judge-penitent” he gives insight into his vocation when he states, “You see, it is not enough to accuse yourself in order to clear yourself; otherwise, I’d be as innocent as a lamb” (95). This section concludes with Clamence teasing his listener that he is close to giving his full description of a “judge-penitent” and will do so after a lesson about debauchery.

The fifth section explores Clamence’s opinion about his various relationships with women. “Despairing of love and chastity, I at last bethought myself of debauchery, a substitute for love, which quiets the laughter, restores silence, and above all confers immortality” (102). A lifestyle of debauchery is an opportunity to experience true freedom and “is liberating because it creates no obligations” (103). Apparently the conversation partner responds with something regarding the Last Judgment to which Clamence replies, “You were speaking of the Last Judgment. Allow me to laugh respectfully. I shall wait for it resolutely, for I have known what is worse, the judgment

of men” (110). Clamence makes further comments about impending judgment when he says “Don’t wait for the Last Judgment. It takes place every day” (111). Clamence considers himself a prophet such as “Elijah without a messiah” (117). This elevated position allows Clamence to pass judgment “without a law” (117). He is beyond the reproach of others and is “the end and the beginning; I announce the law. In short, I am a judge-penitent” (118). Clamence assures his partner that he will reveal “what this noble profession [of judge-penitent] consists of” (118) when they meet the following day.

The sixth, and final, section of The Fall begins with Clamence suggesting that “I have ceased to like anything but confessions, and authors of confessions write especially to avoid confessing, to tell nothing of what they know” (120). Clamence confesses to possessing a panel of the painting “The Just Judges” which was stolen and subsequently sold to the owner of a bar in Amsterdam. The owner was convinced by Clamence to store it in his home so that “in this way I dominate” (130). After telling the story of his stolen property, he states that he is practicing the profession of judge-penitent “at present” (130). He informs his partner that he has not just been talking to him for five days “for the fun of it” (131). He continues:

Now my words have a purpose. They have the purpose, obviously, of silencing the laughter, of avoiding judgment personally, thought there is apparently no escape. Is not the great thing that stands in the way of our escaping it the fact that we are the first to condemn ourselves? Therefore it is essential to begin extending the condemnation to all, without distinction, in order to thin it out at the start.

(131)

The practical steps of serving as a “judge penitent” begins with “in indulging in public confession as often as possible. I accuse myself up and down. It’s not hard...” (139). Over the days of conversation the “I” of Clamence’s confessions results in a collective “we”; “When I get to ‘This is what we are,’ the trick has been played and I can tell them off” (140). From the vantage point of Clamence, “The more I accuse myself, the more I have a right to judge you” (140). At this, Clamence invites his companion to begin his own confession, encouraging him to by stating that with “the intelligent ones it takes time” (141). At the end of the section the partner has responded to Clamence’s invitation to confess and begins telling his own story, fulfilling Clamence’s goal as a self appointed “judge-penitent.” While the novel addresses concerns of judgment and guilt, the central metaphor that connects it to the wider metaphor of the absurd as used by Camus is the metaphor of the fall.

Narrative Engagement

The title of this novel, The Fall, represents the cowardice of Jean Baptiste Clamence for not assisting the woman who fell into the river. Cruickshank wrote, “Overcome by a sense of moral bankruptcy he sought escape in various forms of debauchery...as its title suggests it questions that assumption of human innocence” (182-183). The name “Jean Baptiste” is a play on the name of the biblical character of John the Baptist who was the primary New Testament prophet who prepared the people for the coming of Jesus Christ. Jean Baptiste Clamence prepared people as well, but not for the coming of a Savior but for their own “fall”. Isaac calls Clamence a “nihilist” who “seeks to dominate” (172). He states further that “Only his [Clamence’s] perspective matters, and he employs subtle strategies of disarming and negating others so as to master them”

(172). While Clamence is in need of others to act as a judge-penitent, “he uses language only to dominate others...he exhibits no concern for the viewpoints of others except insofar as he can manipulate them” (Isaac 172). Clamence’s manipulation of others is driven by his desire to overcome his own sense of guilt.

Through his own confession of guilt, Clamence subtly invites others to reflect upon their guilt as well. Once they arrive at a point of vocalizing their concerns, he believes his own work is completed. Clamence believes that upon hearing the confessions of others he moves into a morally superior position which allows him to continue to live with himself in spite of his own inner anguish which can be viewed as a consequence of living in an age of absurdity. This absurdity of his own existence can be illustrated through the story that Clamence tells that led to his own fall. There was no reason why Clamence chose to cross one particular bridge at one particular time on the evening in which Clamence heard the woman fall into the water. The randomness of the circumstance illustrates that absurdity is not something one controls but is something one must choose to accept and act in spite of its existence. Clamence’s retreat into self-doubt and arguably self-pity reveals an intentional effort to avoid taking action in the midst of absurdity. While he could have chosen to rescue the woman, he did nothing. While he could have read the papers following the event to discover the fate of the woman, he did nothing. While he could have chosen to face his growing inner-guilt, he chose a self-imposed exile to a bar in Amsterdam. The lack of taking action, or rebelling against the circumstances, can lead to a similar “fall,” which for Clamence, was a fall into “existential homelessness.”

Clamence began to “rely increasingly on ‘the self,’ no longer supported by either a geographic or philosophical sense of home that offer[ed] meaning for existence” (Arnett, “Existential” 239). His move from Paris to Amsterdam is symbolic of his personal exile from the place that he had called his geographic home for many years. The consequences of the events that led Clamence to the bar in Amsterdam resulted in both his loss of a geographic home and led to a “psychological feeling of being ‘homeless’” (Arnett, “Existential” 230). This “existential homelessness” resulted in his obsession with his own guilt and subsequently a sense of narcissism which can be considered as “an effort to bolster the self as the core of meaning, in hopes of compensating for the loss of faith in other structures, institutions, and philosophies that had previously offered a sense of home” (Arnett, “Existential” 239). Although Clamence openly admitted that while he was a lawyer he enjoyed being recognized for his achievements, his actions still benefited others. But after his fall into existential homelessness, he was only concerned about himself and felt no responsibility for the well-being of anyone else.

While the shift from taking responsibility for others to a fixation on one’s own guilt may appear as a change in direction, it actually signifies a loss of direction on the part of Clamence. “Left with no common center or moral story to offer a beginning for conversation, a person can lose a sense of direction. A person no longer knows which way to turn and what option to pursue” (Arnett, “Existential” 233). In an age of narrative and virtue contention, “narrative remnants” often remain in place of a guiding metanarrative (Arnett and Arneson 89). Clamence was “still story-informed by the narrative remnant” (Arnett and Arneson 89) while he lived and worked as a judge-

penitent in the Amsterdam bar. In a time of competing narrative remnants, the notion of the absurd makes sense during a time in which one's actions are known not to be right but he or she is incapable of discerning the correct action. One of the things that allow narrative remnants to offer guilt is hope that narrative clarity will begin to emerge. For Clamence, there are enough narrative remnants passing by that he can sense an authentic or "existential guilt" (Buber, Knowledge 146). This sense of guilt is brought upon oneself through actions one commits; something has been done to earn it. Clamence's lack of action on behalf of the woman who jumped from the bridge burdened him with a sense of "authentic guilt" (Arnett and Arneson 246) that he was unable to relinquish.

Through the exploration of Clamence's struggle with his own guilt, the novel The Fall provides a vivid example of the consequences that occur when taking action in the face of absurdity. Within the first cycle of work addressing absurdity, Camus provided a phenomenological description through his recognition of absurdity. Within the second cycle of work Camus moved beyond description and provided some coordinates for how a person can enter the conversation and respond while living in an age of absurdity; thus presenting revolt as a hermeneutic turn within his description of absurdity. Within his third cycle of work Camus's goal, left unfinished, was to explore the consequences that come about when acting in the face of absurdity. Camus was situated within a modern moment; we are situated within a postmodern moment. While there are lessons to be learned from Camus for our present time, it is an unethical response to Camus's engagement of his moment to suggest that he only responded as someone situated within a modern moment would respond. To suggest that Camus should have responded to his moment in any other way than he did is moving beyond the limits of historicity in an

attempt to judge him from an objective standpoint outside of history – a feat that is both impossible and unethical.

Even when a clear common center is lacking, narrative remnants often remain. While the novel The Fall provides a fictional example of the consequences of living in the midst of absurdity, the real life events of the conflict between Camus and Jean Paul Sartre provide a twentieth century example of what happens when differences emerge in an age of narrative and virtue contention lacking a common center for public dialogue and debate. Many have interpreted The Fall as Camus’s effort to describe various events in his own life, most notably this public disagreement with Sartre over the direction of France following World War II. Aronson writes that “the conflict with Sartre was on every page” of The Fall (192). The conversation between these two men, even though it emerged over a different book, The Rebel, exemplifies the theoretical framework of The Fall. While the focus of the following section is upon The Rebel, the interactions between Sartre and Camus provide an example of the lived reality of what occurs when a common center is absent and two different approaches are taken in the midst of narrative fragmentation.

Camus & Sartre: An Existential Reality of The Fall

By the time The Rebel was published in 1951, Jean Paul Sartre was a leading apologist for Stalinism and opposed Camus’s suspicion of Stalin’s Soviet Union. Within The Rebel, Camus was seeking to impose order on a chaotic world through his exploration of revolt. But because Camus “was seeking order and duration” his critics dismissed this text and Camus’s “genuine commitment to revolt” (Lottman 523). The two men continued meeting with one another after the publication of The Rebel but

before the events of their public feud. In 1951, while the two were meeting with Simone de Beauvoir, Sartre told Camus that his book would be reviewed in Modern Times by Francis Jeanson. “Sartre warned Camus” that the review would not be a positive evaluation of the text or of the ideas it explored (Lottman 527). Camus was under the impression that his friends liked the book and “seemed disagreeably surprised” when he found out about the upcoming review (Lottman 527). The appearance of the review by Jeanson in May 1952 set off a chain of events that eventually resulted in the end of the interpersonal relationship between Camus and Sartre.

“Albert Camus, or the Soul of Revolt”

This initial review of this work was written by Francis Jeanson and was published in the spring of 1952. Jeanson was “(in his own words) a ‘disciple’ – though never a ‘parrot’ of Sartre” (Aronson 138). He was a “penetrating and original thinker” and was “probably the first writer to highlight the differences between early Sartre and Camus on absurdity” (Aronson 138). The following section begins with a narrative summary of the main points within each letter and is followed by a narrative engagement of how that piece of correspondence textures an understanding of the metaphor of the absurd.

Narrative

Jeanson’s review, entitled “Albert Camus, or the Soul of Revolt”, began by summarizing the positive reviews the book-length philosophical essay [The Rebel] received from “the most diverse thinkers” (79). He suggested that because all of these positive reviews came from a “right wing enthusiasm” for the book that “were I in Camus’ place, in spite of everything, I would be worried” (80). While admitting “that from a strictly literary point of view this book is an almost perfect success” these

concerns should still be voiced (81). Although the publication of The Rebel served as the main focus of Jeanson's review, he focused his first criticism upon Camus's novel The Plague which "recounts events as seen from on high, by a nonsituated subjectivity that didn't live those events itself but merely contemplated them" (82). Jeanson provides his own evidence from the novel when he stated, "Dr. Rieux hurls a challenge at the plague while trying to rescue the greatest possible number of human lives from it. But he can't be ignorant of the fact that the struggle is unequal and that he is beaten in advance" (84). Thus, the fate of Dr. Rieux is completely beyond his own control and at the "whim of the pestilence" (84). The idea that the plague is indifferent to the uniqueness of each human is of central concern to Jeanson.

An important issue for Jeanson was that if "there is a vice inherent in all revolutions, undoubtedly it would be preferable to show it, in the concrete structures of revolutionary action than the thought of philosophers" (88). But instead, Camus made the rise of modern rebellion the fault of the philosophy of Marx, which for Camus, "leads logically to the Stalinist regime" (88). Jeanson believes Camus makes a faulty leap from the theoretical idea of revolt to lived reality. While Jeanson was not attempting "to defend Hegel...from Camus' superficial criticisms" (89), he does take issue with his effort to make "all this...*Hegel's fault* – much more than it is *Marx's fault*" (90). Jeanson's concern are also that "everything [within The Rebel] takes place as if Camus were seeking a refuge for himself and trying to justify beforehand a possible 'disengagement,' a flight toward some definitive retreat where he can finally devote himself to the rebellious delights of an existence without history" (97). Jeanson was concerned that Camus's latest work would prove that he will "cease being a historically

situated consciousness” (100). Near the end of the review he suggests that while Camus may have his followers, if he continues to view the world in a similar fashion his commitment to rebellion “can no longer be of concern to anyone but Camus” (100). Perhaps his most stinging criticism was that The Rebel was “a great failed book” (101). He concluded by challenging Camus to return to the “personal voice” that made him “irreplaceable to us” (101).

Narrative Engagement

Francis Jeanson was assigned the task of reviewing The Rebel by Jean Paul Sartre, the editor of Modern Times. Aronson writes, “Before even touching on the book’s substance, Jeanson criticizes the man, his previous writing, the book’s reception, and its style” (139). Jeanson’s opening attack upon Camus illustrates that the immediate issue was not the quality of Camus’s ideas. It was readily apparent to Camus that the journal forum was not a “haven of trust” (Arnett, “Existential” 240) for content focused dialogue and debate. Only after these attacks does Jeanson begin to engage the ideas expressed in The Rebel. This review by Jeanson illustrates the difficulty of maintaining an ongoing relationship without common ground to stand upon. Although Camus was deeply affected by the negative evaluation of his work, he was willing to maintain the conversation by responding with a letter of his own. In an age of absurdity, in which the risk is often to turn to what Alasdair MacIntyre calls “emotivism,” (12) a willingness and commitment to engage the ideas as opposed to making personal attacks is necessary. MacIntyre writes, “Emotivism is the doctrine that all evaluative judgments and more specifically all moral judgments are *nothing* but expressions of preference” (12). After reflecting upon MacIntyre’s work, Arnett writes, “Differing dreams of diverse peoples

make uniform assumptions problematic” (“Interpersonal Praxis” 146). Jeanson’s initial review prior to publication was even more negative and “Sartre managed to get him to attenuate some of the more brutal remarks” (Lottman 527). In spite of the fact that Jeanson was responding to a text written by Camus, his review did not remain focused upon the content of that specific work. Camus wrote a reply to Jeanson’s review that appeared the following month, in June 1952.

“A Letter to the Editor of *Les Temps Modernes* [Modern Times]”

In an age of absurdity, lacking both common sense and a common center for conversation, one must be held accountable for what one says one will do. Camus was deeply concerned that The Rebel was a text that “sells but isn’t read” (Todd 306). In an effort to correct false readings of his work, Camus responded to this review with a letter of his own during the summer of 1952. Camus dismissed traditional protocol and addressed his response “Dear Editor” and ignored Jeanson’s name all together throughout the entire letter. He was aware that Sartre was the editor who requested the review and therefore it was to him that he was directing his comments. The following section begins with a narrative summary of the main points within this letter and is followed by a narrative engagement of how this piece of correspondence textures an understanding of the metaphor of the absurd.

Narrative

Camus began by offering no apologies for providing an opinion of revolt that was well accepted by those on the right, emphasizing his concern for truth over one’s political affiliation. “If, finally, the truth seemed to me to be on the Right, I would be there” (108). In direct response to Jeanson’s suggestion that Camus was disengaged from his

moment, Camus believed that by writing The Rebel he was engaging his own historical moment. “[M]y book placed itself directly in the midst of present history in order to raise a protest against it, and it was therefore, even if in a modest way, an act” (110). He next addressed the criticisms leveled against The Plague. “Any reader of *The Plague*, however, no matter how distracted, so long as he is willing to read the book to the end, knows that the narrator is Doctor Rieux, the book’s hero, and that he has paid rather dearly for the knowledge of which he speaks” (111). Camus attacks Jeanson, referring only to “your collaborator” and suggests that he:

[A]damantly refused to discuss the central theses to be found in this work [The Rebel]: the definition of a limit revealed by the very movement of rebellion; the criticism of post-Hegelian nihilism and Marxist prophecy; the analysis of the dialectical contradictions concerning the end of history; the criticism of the notion of objective guilt, etc. On the other hand, he has discussed in detail a thesis that is not to be found there. (112)

His belief was that Jeanson missed the point of his entire work.

Camus believed he should only be held accountable for what he said he would do and not for what he did not attempt to accomplish in the work. He stated very clearly that “With *The Rebel* I undertook a study of the ideological dimensions of revolutions” (112). He claims his work is “totally preoccupied with the political situation in Europe in 1950” and says that Jeanson’s review is the work that in fact “makes no reference to contemporary questions” (125). In perhaps his most scathing statement, and arguably his most personal one, he wrote:

I am beginning to become a little tired of seeing myself – and even more, of seeing former militants who have never refused the struggles of their time – receive endless lessons in effectiveness from critics who have never done anything more than turn their armchair in history’s direction. (126)

He concluded by stating that the initial review invited his response. “Had your article only been frivolous and its tone only unfriendly, I would have remained silent. If, on the contrary, it criticized me severely but fairly, I would have accepted it as I have always done” (127). While personal attacks were characteristic of the letters, Camus’s main focus remained upon the necessary action to take within an absurd moment.

Narrative Engagement

The major critique of Camus was aimed at his denial of Stalinism as part of the evolution of the “historical inevitability” (Marx and Engels 346) of history. According to Sartre, for Camus to deny that Marxism was appropriate was to deny the historical reality of their shared historical moment. However, Camus was not engaging a Marxian understanding of historical inevitability which is why Sartre and others critiqued him for the position he held. An understanding of Gadamer’s sense of “historicality” allows one to recognize that Camus was in fact engaging his moment through a different lens than the Marxism that guided Sartre. Camus was guided by a different set of assumptions than many of his contemporaries. After the debate ended, Camus’s silence perhaps reflected a recognition that a robust vocabulary for detailing his engagement was not yet present and that the dominant vocabulary, the privileged vocabulary, of Marxism and “historical inevitability” was winning the day. But ultimately other understandings of their moment

can be discovered through an interpretive framework of historicity as is now so philosophically prevalent in literature today, in particular in Gadamer and Ricoeur.

Francis Jeanson voiced concern that Camus only provided a metaphysical exploration of rebellion and criticized him for not embedding his exploration of revolt in historical events. Camus himself wrote that his purpose was to provide an analysis of the “ideological dimensions of revolt” and he delivered upon what he set out to provide. Within the contemporary postmodern moment, many people attempt to hold others accountable for items that the person never intended to provide. One must be allowed to set the criteria by which an organization, or in Camus’s case, a piece of literature, is to be evaluated. Attempting to hold someone to an unspecified standard often reveals more about the person complaining than about the person who is providing a particular service. One must be held accountable for what he or she says will be accomplished. Clear guidelines must be provided, Camus’s clarity about his purpose in writing The Rebel provides a helpful illustration of what clarity in writing may look like. While Camus provides a positive example for this item, his avoidance of Jeanson’s name only fanned the flame of the growing conflict between himself and Sartre. By addressing this letter “Dear Editor” Camus invited Sartre into the conversation as well. This attack on both Sartre philosophy and politics was too much for him to ignore, and his response to Camus appeared in August 1952.

“Reply to Albert Camus”

Two months after Camus’s letter was published, Sartre, as editor of the newspaper, replied in August 1952. This letter by Sartre ended the conversation as well as his friendship with Camus. The exchange between Camus, Sartre, and Jeanson

illustrates the consequences of taking action when a common center is not present and the subsequent fall that can occur when acting in the midst of absurdity. During a time of “existential homelessness” there must be more than mere relational connections to overcome the narrative and virtue contentiousness. The following section begins with a narrative summary of the main points within this letter and is followed by a narrative engagement of how this piece of correspondence textures an understanding of the metaphor of the absurd.

Narrative

In contrast with Camus’s cold opening, Sartre addressed his letter to “My Dear Camus.” He realized that this exchange of words in a public context most likely meant the end of their relationship; his opening words of the reply were “My Dear Camus: Our friendship was not easy, but I will miss it...” (131). Sartre continued, “Even friendship tends to become totalitarian; it requires either total agreement or it ends in a quarrel” (131). Sartre called Camus a “counterrevolutionary” and asked “Where is Meursault, Camus? Where is Sisyphus?” (132). These questions were intended to point out that Camus had changed and no longer supported revolt as he once had. Sartre attacks both the content of Camus’s letter as well as the style. “You used to denounce the use of violence everywhere, and now you subject us, in the name of morality, to virtuous acts of violence. You were the first servant of moralism, and now you are exploiting it” (136). Sartre struck at Camus’s confidence as a writer by stating “Suppose your book simply attested to your philosophical incompetence?” (139). While Camus considered himself as more of a poet than philosopher, this insult was hurtful nonetheless.

Sartre backed up his attack on Camus's philosophical incompetence when he wrote, "I have at least this in common with Hegel: you have not read either one of us" (145). Sartre drew the letter to a close, "It is not a question of knowing whether History has a meaning and whether we deign to participate in it, but to try, from the moment we are up to our noses in it, to *give* to it the meaning that seems best to us, while not refusing our support, however weak it may be to any concrete actions that may require it" (157-158). Thus ended the communication between Sartre and Camus; Sartre concluded his letter with "I will not reply to you any more....I refuse to fight you. I hope that our silence will cause this polemic to be forgotten" (158). Sartre's exit from the conversation, and Camus's subsequent silence, kept the focus on the central ideas of the debate.

Narrative Engagement

Camus did not have vocabulary to counter Sartre but had a literary heart in which he had more confidence in a philosophy yet to come, a philosophy yet unarticulated; he had more confidence in the not yet penned than he did in the lucidity of "historical inevitability" that was thrust before him as the only philosophical and practical option. Camus's literary heart perhaps lived with a word that historical inevitability no longer held in high esteem, that word was "hope." Camus's silence was a silence driven by the philosophical and pragmatic clarity centered on that one word. History would one day illuminate the way for others and offer clarity to a conversation that would continue long after the voices of those who uttered disagreement were no more. Ultimately it is hope tied to a narrative remnant that offers a counter to existential homelessness. Many times

that hope is best manifested in a silence that competes against an ongoing Tower of Babel.

While Camus may have lacked the vocabulary to counter Sartre's attacks, Cruickshank offers support for Camus's position, "He does not say that history should be ignored nor does he advocate withdrawal from all political action" (122). This public debate only further illustrated that Sartre was a defender of "the Marxist ideal" (Cruickshank 122) while Camus remained staunchly anti-Marxist and anti-Communist. While the exchange illustrated that ideas must be understood and discussed, at some point there is a limit to remaining a part of the conversation. Sartre's final words in his reply to Camus demonstrate that there are appropriate moments to end one's involvement in an ongoing conversation. After the final letter, they each withdrew from the conversation and focused upon other items of interest and concern and carried out their own agendas for action. This conversation "showed that their disagreement was not simply a question of different political policies but had to do with subtle moral and philosophical issues" (Cruickshank 120). The background philosophical differences were too great to serve as a foundation for an ongoing relationship. A given philosophy of communication can assist in providing insight into "how" a person lives life and engages a given moment. Camus's friendship-ending disagreement with Sartre was driven by a difference in philosophical beliefs that were more theoretical in nature, thus providing the background for their dispute. But it was also driven by a difference in political and ethical beliefs that played out in the everyday life and politics of post-World War II France, thus addressing the foreground issues as well. This lack of agreement in background and foreground concerns further demonstrates that a content-driven common center was absent from the

conversation. Working in the face of absurdity caused each to encounter the debate from a position of “existential homelessness” (Arnett “Existential” 219) which consequently led to the end, or fall, of their relationship. Their concern for ethics demonstrates how a study of philosophically driven communication ethics should not about process, but be deeply concerned for the content of communicative exchanges.

When communicating in an age of absurdity, limits exist when attempting to defend one’s own position or attempting to persuade another to assume a new position. Philip Clampitt makes the distinction between understanding and agreement when he writes that many business leaders “incorrectly assume that understanding always leads to agreement” (12). Very often within a communicative exchange one attempts to get the other person to agree, failing to realize that a primary goal of ethical communication is to be understood. Coming to an agreement with someone is based upon making a choice. One cannot control another person’s agreement. But a person is in control of presenting clear ideas in an effort to be understood. Perhaps a person today may “agree to disagree” but option was not available to Camus and Sartre in the volatile political climate of 1950s France.

This acceptance of limits is not intended to suggest that Camus’s (or Sartre’s) goal was not to persuade the other. But in a moment of absurdity one can only seek understanding and cannot force agreement. Therefore, one cannot make an assumption that another has a similar perspective and needs only to learn about the topic in order to be persuaded. Through The Rebel Camus sought to inform others of his perspective. Of course, when considering the persuasive nature of all human communication, information alone can become persuasive. But, one must hold a higher commitment to learning and

understanding as opposed to seeking agreement for a given position. Each communicative exchange is limited both by the perspective that one brings to the discussion as well as the distance one will go to find others who agree. Through a commitment to seek understanding one can often remain within the limits of one's position while impacting a given moment of absurdity.

While Camus and Sartre did not agree as to what action was appropriate in their particular moment, they did share a concern over how power was to be exerted over others. Solomon suggests that while many scholars have identified the differences between Camus and Sartre, the two men actually have more in common than most realize (7). Camus was staunchly anti-Communist in his belief and writing, but he was not a pro-Western supporter of capitalism either. He sought to find a "third way" that provided an alternative. Sartre initially attempted to do the same but eventually came to support Communism as much for its anti-capitalism position as its own merits. The conflict between Sartre and Camus demonstrates that while major differences may be present it is still possible to be in possession of some common values. Cruickshank wrote, "It is useful to remind ourselves in this way of the amount of common ground between Sartre and Camus. We are then better able to see that the quarrel between them had more to do with principles and that these differences sometimes depended on very fine shades of meaning" (121). Solomon wrote:

For all their differences, they now appear more in league with one another rather than opposed to one another. Despite their very different (and dramatically antagonistic) responses to the political questions of their day, they remain a

natural pairing, as unrestrained moralists and as intense philosophers of personal phenomenology. (7)

Both Cruickshank and Solomon consider the connections between Sartre and Camus significant enough to hold their ideas in tension with one another.

These two men were willing to engage in public dialogue about their ideas but ultimately understood that within the framework of dialogue one could not force another into acceptance of his own position. If one attempted to force or coerce the other voice into accepting a position against his own will he would be guilty of the totalitarianism that both sought to defeat. What was lacking for Camus and Sartre was the necessary communicative space within the public sphere that would have allowed them to engage one another's ideas without being forced to carry on an interpersonal relationship. Living in an age of "existential homelessness" that lacked a common center for this public debate did not allow this option to survive. Albert Camus's quest to discover or create meaning in life is an enduring concern for human communicators within different historical eras inviting different responses to that particular search. Within a modern moment driven by individualistic autonomy it was fitting that Camus sought to answer his search for meaning by turning inward to reliance upon the self. Within a postmodern moment meaning comes from being embedded within meaningful stories; these stories provide the background support for the foreground actions. Such moments of metanarrative decline and metanarrative non-existence invite questions about where meaning is found for the individual. In other words, moments lacking a metanarrative invite existential reflection. Camus's response in the midst of narrative and virtue contention and in the face of metanarrative decline was to turn inward and focus upon

existential reliance upon the self, demonstrated through his fiction in the character of Jean Baptiste Clamence in The Fall.

The historical moment of Albert Camus, as well as the current postmodern moment, provides illustrations of moments of narrative and virtue contention. The absurdity of the current postmodern era can be partially understood as one in which there is ongoing “metanarrative disruption” (Arnett and Arneson 54). Metanarrative disruption in this sense can be understood as a decline in “an implicitly and uniformly agreed-upon public virtue structure that functions as a universal standard” (Arnett and Arneson 7). In his writing, Camus identified the illusion of progress. Today, the realization that progress is a myth is more widely accepted; we live it and we find contentment in uncertainties and, because of this narrative contention, in voices that were never previously heard. There are many similarities between Camus’s age and our own era, but these two times are not identical. Camus and Sartre were living in the midst of metanarrative decline, while today there is even a decline in the conversation regarding metanarrative decline; the fact of competing narratives is today a given and no longer requires the same amount of reflection. While Camus and Sartre were living it, they were not writing about it. Today we can write about metanarrative decline because we are no longer living it – the decline happened; what we are left with is a multiplicity of competing virtues and narrative structures from which to choose. What was viewed as a metanarrative decline from the perspective of Camus can today be viewed as metanarrative non-existence.

Camus and Sartre did not simply want to believe something because it made intellectual sense; they each wanted to believe something because it was possible to live out within everyday life. Once their different viewpoints could no longer be held

together by their relational connections, their friendship ended and their work headed in different directions. Aronson writes, “In the end Camus and Sartre split not only because they took opposing sides but because each became his own side’s intellectual leader” (2). Each man embodied a particular position. The turbulence of the time did not allow them to maintain an ongoing conversation due to the fragility of the public square. Working within a modern moment led Camus and Sartre to attempt to find common ground and a common center that was built solely upon relational connections. While relational commonality may provide an adequate background for ongoing relationship within a moment that has an intact metanarrative, once the metanarrative background disappears the relationship no longer has anything providing support for its continuation.

A common center is not driven by relational commitment but a commitment of content-laden common ground. Absurdity, according to Camus, emerged during a moment of metanarrative decline and therefore revealed the absence of content as opposed to the presence of content for a conversation. The publication of The Rebel propelled public conversation between Camus and Sartre during the 1950s and started the exchange that eventually led to the end of any relationship between the two men. The two men were friends for almost ten years when the events of the debate took place. The collapse of an interpersonal relationship in a moment of narrative and virtue contention is one of many potential consequences of taking action in an age of absurdity. While not all interpersonal relationships would collapse under similar circumstances, because the friendship between Camus and Sartre was relationally based and not content based, the collapse was not unexpected due to the lack of a common center for discussion and debate.

The published exchanges between Albert Camus and Jean Paul Sartre indicate the lack of commonality that existed between the men and provide a vivid account of the consequences of taking action in the midst of absurdity. In an era of absurdity there is a lack of a common center which can be considered “an inherited, understood, and active philosophical and practical set of assumptions and actions that guide a people” (Arnett, “Existential” 231). The diversity of opinions illustrated the lack of common sense as far as how to respond to the European crisis following the events and devastation of World War II. When living in the shadow of existential homelessness, “The foundation has been pulled from beneath the feet of many. Such a historical moment suggests that no single metanarrative can be counted upon as a tacit glue to hold communicative partners together” (Arnett, “Interpersonal Praxis” 145-146). Lacking a common ground upon which to stand, Camus and Sartre eventually assumed positions in conflict with one another which led to the end of their relationship. “The perception of lost common centers and moral stories that provide a publicly known base from which conversation can begin contributes to uncertainty and mistrust” (Arnett, “Existential” 232). While Camus and Sartre shared an interest in the political future of France, each man held differing political commitments that could not be reconciled. Their interpersonal closeness was not enough to sustain their growing distance regarding the shape of their country’s future and represent a fall in their own relationship.

The Fall: A Consequence of Living in an Age of Absurdity

The metaphor of *the fall* assists in connecting the work of Camus to the contemporary historical moment and serves as an opportunity for interpretive engagement between the two similar, yet fundamentally different, eras. Providing a clear

description of this metaphor strengthens the case that Camus can serve as a philosopher of communication with a concern for ethical action. The naming of this metaphor provides a picture of the consequences of acting in an age of absurdity and provides an entry point into further exploration of how to ethically respond in the midst of an absurd age. The metaphor of *the fall* serves as a reminder that one must not rely solely upon oneself but be situated within and work from the perspective of meaningful stories. An existential *fall* occurs when one pushes to extreme limits the modern era's reliance upon individualism and technology and is no longer capable of maintaining a livable philosophy for life in the midst of absurdity. This *fall* creates an existential crisis in which one searches for meaning within a given historical moment. A *fall* into "existential homelessness" could lead some to seek an escape from an absurd existence while others may *fall* into a perpetual state of despair. An existential call to responsibility in the face of absurdity leads one to be outward focused as opposed to attempting to make all decisions with only one's own self-interest in mind.

Within a moment of absurdity, meaning will not be handed down from someone or something outside of everyday existence. Camus represents one who was willing to find meaning by engaging life on its own terms in spite of the absurdity of the given moment. Through a commitment to ethical action and revolt Camus sought meaning for his everyday life and has thus brought meaning to the lives of many others as well. In a modern age driven by agency, the primary concern was very often placed upon oneself as opposed to the story in which one works. The conflict between Camus and Sartre provides a twentieth century case study of what narrative fragmentation and contention looks like and the potential consequences that arise by taking action in the face of

absurdity. By failing to have a background common center that served as a foundation for their conflict, this twentieth century event represents a *fall* which is an existential reality within an age of absurdity. While Camus and Sartre continued on in their own respective directions, they were no longer united relationally, politically, or philosophically. As with Clamence in The Fall, who continually focused upon his lack of action when the woman dove from the bridge, this one event for Camus and Sartre represented a very specific moment that came to clarify Camus's own beliefs and actions.

Communication Ethics: Camus's Situated Concerns in the Midst of Absurdity

Existential ethical engagement within a historical moment of absurdity invites "conversations about ideas and between persons" (Arnett, Dialogic Education) gathered common centers of public dialogue and debate. Although the conversation between Camus and Sartre provided a twentieth century case study of a conversation gathered around the metaphors of absurdity and the metaphor of revolt, these two topics were incapable of sustaining a long-term conversation because they represent a lack of content as opposed to providing content. The guiding question for this chapter is "How did Camus's novel The Fall, as well as his disagreement with Jean Paul Sartre, represent an acknowledgement of the consequences of living in an absurd age?" The chapter began with an exploration of the novel The Fall and explored how it points toward an understanding of existential homelessness. A summary and evaluation of each of the letters central to the debate between Camus and Sartre was followed by a narrative engagement of the ideas expressed in their public feud. Finally, this final section has further revealed how *the fall* represents an apt metaphor through which one can interpret the engagement of Camus and Sartre.

The entire conflict erupted over a review of Camus's The Rebel published by Francis Jeanson in May 1952. While the circumstances have dramatically changed over the past 50 years, there are still many connections that can be made between the historical moment of the debate and the contemporary postmodern moment. Albert Camus understood an era of absurdity as an age of metanarrative decline, contradiction, and one in which there is no universal common sense. In such a moment, there is no unifying source or symbol of public conversation. The ideas central to their mutual engagement did not provide a foundation upon which an ongoing relationship could be built. Much like an organization that loses its way whenever a common concern unites, Arnett writes, "Lack of direction in an organization is born as a common center for conversation ceases" ("Existential" 234). Camus and Sartre were at odds in their debate because they lacked the necessary ingredients which could serve as a foundation for their continued relationship. This very public breakdown of the relationship represents a *fall* for Camus and invites a conversation about how one can identify to whom and to what one is responsible. The next chapter explores Camus's own turn toward responsibility and what that turn may mean for the study of communication ethics in an era of narrative fragmentation.

Chapter Five

The Communication Ethics Turn toward Responsibility

“Albert Camus permits me to investigate anew the importance of existentialism in times of narrative fragmentation” (Arnett, “Conversation” 55).

Once a person has *recognized* the absurdity of human existence, has chosen an appropriate *response*, and has experienced the *consequences* for the actions taken, he or she still has to address the lingering questions of who takes long term responsibility for that particular situation. While Clamence, in The Fall, was concerned about inviting others into a new conversation, he was not concerned about taking responsibility for the person once that new understanding emerged. Within The Fall, Clamence represented a person who was situated within a particular context, pointing toward existential phenomenology; a “judge-penitent” who issued an invitation for conversation, pointing toward hermeneutics; and an awareness that new understandings about the world and oneself are arrived at through interaction, pointing toward dialogue. Although Albert Camus did not overtly explore the terms or concepts of existential phenomenology, hermeneutics, or dialogue, his work illustrated a commitment to each. The interplay of each of these concepts assists us in making a connection between the historical moment of Camus and the present postmodern moment. This concern for responsibility is most evident in two works that were published posthumously after the crash that killed Camus

in 1960. Within the study of communication ethics, the question of whom holds responsibility for whom is a topic that must be addressed within a changing historical moment. These two works, one written prior to The Stranger (A Happy Death) and the other left unfinished (The First Man), represent Camus's changing awareness of the issue of responsibility in the face of absurdity.

Introduction

Albert Camus published three novels during his lifetime: The Stranger, The Plague, and The Fall. At the time of his death he had the completed manuscript for one novel, A Happy Death, and had partially completed the manuscript for an additional novel, The First Man. These novels, representing bookends to Camus's career, provide insight into his ongoing interpretation of a changing historical moment. The "Preface" of Communication Ethics in an Age of Diversity states that "ethical communication theory, practice, and pedagogy do not occur in a vacuum" (Makau and Arnett vii). This dissertation illustrates that Albert Camus did not desire to work within a vacuum either. "Communication is a process guided by persons, texts, and the historical moment. The communication process does not take place in isolation" (Arnett and Arneson 31). Camus did not write in isolation of the events surrounding him and held a deep commitment to engage the moment as it actually existed before him which represented his concern with ethical communicative practice. Within an age of absurdity one can be certain that he or she will encounter a variety of diverse people and opinions. Communication ethics in this age of absurdity and diversity "requires the will and ability to listen carefully, to pursue and practice mutual respect, invite reciprocity and inclusiveness, and to live openly and responsibly with the dialectical tensions inherent in

commonality and difference” (Makau and Arnett x). In an effort “to live openly and responsibly” one must entertain the question of who holds responsibility for various actions taken and people encountered. This chapter seeks to address this question of responsibility in the context of an age of absurdity through the lens of the work of Albert Camus.

A Happy Death and The First Man represent Camus’s unfinished effort to navigate through the narrative remnants of an age of metanarrative decline and fragmentation. As the world was rapidly changing around him, his understanding of a concept such as responsibility was changing as well. These two works provide insight into the development and maturity of his understanding of a central concept within the study of communication ethics, responsibility. A summary and response to A Happy Death and The First Man serve as the starting point for the chapter. This section is followed by an interaction between the two works as they address the question of responsibility. Due to the nature of the publication of these books, this chapter is not going to provide a thorough exploration of the critical literature but rather demonstrate how each book fits within the wider work of Camus. This is followed by an exploration of how A Happy Death demonstrates an inward turn, or a turn away from responsibility, and The First Man serves as an example of a communicative turn toward responsibility for another human being within Camus’s work. Next, a summary of the major metaphors identified within the work of Camus in the previous chapters is situated within this larger project or dissertation. A final section provides concluding comments and assists in connecting this chapter to the entire project. Each of these steps are taken in an effort to answer the guiding question of this chapter, “How can the work of Albert Camus serve as

a lens through which one can better understand a communication ethics turn toward responsibility in an age of absurdity?"

A Happy Death

A Happy Death, written between 1936 and 1938 but not published until 1972, was the first novel penned by Camus. Because it was not published until after his death there are multiple editorial changes that remain uncorrected. In this novel the main character, Patrice Mersault, has many characteristics similar to the Mersault who appears in The Stranger. This narrative summary is followed by an analysis of the text under the heading "Narrative Engagement."

Narrative

The first part, "Natural Death" is broken down into five sections. In the opening section, the main character, Patrice Mersault, kills a man by the name of Roland Zagreus, a man who uses a wheelchair because he no longer has any legs. A note that has been handwritten by Zagreus is left by Mersault to give the appearance of a suicide. The revolver used to kill the man is left at the villa as the only evidence of the "suicide." Upon leaving the home with a significant amount of money previously owned by Zagreus, Mersault is overcome with the moment. "In this flowering of air, this fertility of heavens, it seemed as if a man's one duty was to live and be happy" (7). Before returning home, Mersault shivers and sneezes thus foreshadowing the illness that will eventually claim his life.

The second section is a flash-back to Mersault's ordinary life leading up to the murder. Mersault, who works in an office near the sea, leaves work with a friend and spends much of the remainder of the section eating lunch at a restaurant. Camus wrote

about Mersault's routine, "Things that in other circumstances would have excited him left him unmoved now, for they were simply part of his life, until the moment he was back in his room using all his strength and care to smother the flame of life that burned within him" (13). The routine of his life was evident as Camus recounted the relationship between Mersault and his sick mother, "[Her] suffering had lasted so long that those around her grew accustomed to her disease and forgot that she was deathly ill, that she would die" (14). After she died, he continued to live alone in the same house that he once shared with his mother and realized that "poverty in solitude was misery. And when Mersault thought sadly of the dead woman, his pity was actually for himself" (15). The remainder of the time while Mersault is home he watches the world pass by from his balcony.

The third section continues to recount Mersault's life, specifically his relationship with Marthe, prior to the murder of Roland Zagreus. While they were out at a movie Mersault "exaggerated his ceremonious manner, stepped back to let the usher pass, lowered Marthe's seat for her. And he did all this less from conceit, from ostentation, than because of the gratitude that made his heart suddenly swell, filling with love for all these people around him" (22). But Mersault's triumph is short lived. When Marthe recognizes a man a few seats behind, Mersault becomes jealous and wants to know the nature of their relationship. After asking Marthe if this man was a former lover, he compels her to provide the names of all of her former lovers. Recognizing all but one name, he asks, "And that Zagreus – who's he? He's the only one I don't know" (31). This exchange begins Mersault's curiosity about Zagreus. Marthe maintains a non-physical friendship with Zagreus and invites Mersault to come along and meet him.

Although at first he is uncomfortable around Zagreus, the “boyish laugh of Zagreus’, which at first annoyed him caught Mersault’s attention and interest” (34). The relationship continues to grow as Mersault makes occasional visits to the home of Zagreus.

The fourth section explores the growing relationship between Mersault and Zagreus. In the midst of conversation, Zagreus states, “I don’t like talking seriously. Because then there’s only one thing to talk about – the justification that you can give your life. And I don’t see how I can justify my amputated legs” (37). Zagreus continues by telling Mersault what is to become a major theme of the book, “[W]ith a body like yours, your one duty is to live and be happy” (38). Zagreus, building Mersault’s hope that pursuing happiness is a worthwhile goal, says, “We don’t have time to be ourselves. We only have time to be happy” (39). Zagreus’s belief is that “you can’t be happy without money...in almost every case, we use up our lives making money, when we should be using our money to gain time...To be or become rich is to have time to be happy” (43). Zagreus then informs Mersault how he has made two million dollars in his life and provides the evidence by showing Mersault the safe with his revolver sitting on top of the money.

The fifth, and final, section of the first part begins with Mersault’s trip home from Zagreus’s house. He encounters his neighbor, Cardona, where Mersault spends a good part of the evening. After a mundane experience with Cardona, Camus wrote, “And in the great distress that washed over him, Mersault realized that his rebellion was the only authentic thing in him, and that everything else was misery and submission” (53). Following this experience of rebellion, “The next morning, Mersault killed Zagreus ,

came home, and slept all afternoon” (54). Taking the money that Zagreus had showed him now allows Mersault to pursue happiness without worrying about financing his adventures.

The second part, “Conscious Death”, is broken into five sections. The first section begins with Mersault checking into a room in Prague. Once in his room:

He was flooded by a dreadful pleasure at the prospect of so much desolation and solitude. To be so far away from everything, even his fever, to suffer so distinctly here what was absurd and miserable even the tidiest lives showed him the shameful and secret countenance of a kind of freedom born of the suspect, the shady. (59)

As he aimlessly explored the city, he wanders into a restaurant where he “must have looked peculiar, for the musician played more softly, the conversations stopped, and all the diners looked in his direction” (63). Since he has no real plan for his stay in Prague, the days move slowly. Awaking one morning, “He sat at the table in his pajamas and worked out a systematic schedule which would occupy each of his days for a week” (65). The schedule includes visiting all the major landmarks and tourist attractions. His various visits to these locations “made Mersault bitterly conscious of his desolation” (68). After only four days in the city, his isolation begins to take its toll. “Every day he thought of leaving and every day, sinking a little deeper into desolation, his longing for happiness had a little less hold over him” (69). After passing a crowd gathered around a dead man lying in a pool of his own blood, Mersault rushes back to his hotel room. “Something sharp was throbbing in his temples. His heart empty, his belly tight, Mersault’s rebellion exploded. Images of his life rushed before his eyes” (70). As he lay

on his bed, on his last day in Prague, “Tears burst from his eyes [and] inside him widened a great lake of solitude and silence above which ran the sad song of his deliverance” (71). Continuing on his quest for happiness, Mersault leaves Prague to seek happiness elsewhere.

The second section begins with Mersault on a train which would “draw him out of a life the very memory of which he wanted to erase and lead him to a threshold of a new world where desire would be king. Not for a single moment was Mersault bored” (73). This continued isolation issues an existential call to Mersault to reflect upon his life:

He closed his eyes. It takes time to live. Like any work of art, life needs to be thought about. Mersault thought about his life and exercised his bewildered consciousness and his longing for happiness in a train compartment which was like one of those cells where a man learns to know what he is by what is more than himself. (74)

While in Vienna, Austria, he writes a letter to his friends Rose and Claire. “It was the overflow of silence that he put down on paper” (76). Upon writing the letter, Mersault “decided to return to Algiers” (79). He was “poisoned by solitude and alienation, needed to withdraw into friendship and confidence, to enjoy an apparent security before choosing his life” (79). As he travels to his friends he again reflects upon his life. Before the murder of Zerkow “he had pursued singlemindedly a happiness which in his heart he believed was impossible. In this he was no different from everyone else. He had played at wanting to be happy. Never had he sought happiness with a conscious and deliberate desire. Never until the day...” (81). Upon the murder of Roland Zerkow, which was a “single act of lucidity” the life of Patrice Mersault “had changed and happiness seemed

possible” (81). The opportunity that came about through the murder of Zagreus culminated in Mersault’s new awareness that “it was his own will to happiness which must make the next move” (82). Arriving back in Algiers to spend time with his friends he came to the realization that “he was made for happiness” (84).

The third section begins with Mersault sitting talking with his friends Rose, Claire, and Catherine. While their home was known as the “House of the Three Students” to the neighbors, they preferred to call it “The House above the World [which] was not a house of pleasure, it was a house of happiness” (89). While friends are visiting “The House above the World” a conversation about love takes place. After joking that one of the guests is only after Rose’s love, she states, “I’m merely trying to be happy – as happy as possible” (97). While the friends are still at the home, Mersault begins thinking about a woman he sees frequently around the area, Lucienne Raynal. Mersault has “decided she was probably not very intelligent, and that pleased him” (99). Mersault’s focus of attention is brought back to the present moment when the friends prepare to leave. While the four are alone, Mersault, Rose, Claire, and Catherine, their minds return to the evening’s conversation. “If this night was in some sense the figure of their fate, they marveled that it should be at once so carnal and so secret, that upon its countenance mingled both tears and sun. And with pain and joy, their hearts learned to hear that double lesson which leads to a happy death” (102). This section ends with the sense of solitude lifting and “restoring them to the world” (103).

The fourth section begins with Mersault coming to the realization that “wandering seemed no more than the happiness of an anxious man” and declared his intentions to leave the “House above the World”, travel for awhile longer, and “then

settle down somewhere around Algiers” (105). In an effort to give the appearance of respectability, and because the “world is always satisfied, it turns out, with a countenance it can understand” (106), Mersault makes a large financial investment in German pharmaceuticals. After getting his financial affairs in order, Mersault tells Lucienne, “If you want, I can marry you. But I don’t see the point” (106). A week later they were married and Mersault abruptly left and told her that he would send for her when he was ready. Upon telling Catherine, one of the friends from “The House above the World” that he is marrying Lucienne, he encourages Catherine to find “happiness in yourself” and not “just wait for a man to come along” (108). After driving two hours, Mersault arrives at his new home in Chenoua. While in the solitude of his new home he came to an awareness that “he was disconcerted by the variance between the gesture which had brought him to this life and this life itself” (112). After sending for Lucienne, they talk about their relationship in which she says “‘You don’t love me.’ Mersault looked up. Her eyes were full of tears. He relented: ‘But I never said I did, my child’” (113). As their conversation continued she states that Mersault is “not happy” (114). “‘I will be,’ Mersault said violently. ‘I have to be’” (114). Lucienne left the next day and Mersault returned to his old neighborhood where he lived at the time of the murder of Zgreus. Upon entering the diner where he always ate, Celeste, the owner, told him, “[Y]ou haven’t changed. Still the same!” (115). This causes Mersault to marvel “at the strange blindness by which men, though they are so alert to what changes in themselves, impose on their friends an image chosen for them once and for all. He was being judged by what he had been” (115). While in the area he runs into Marthe, his former lover and the person who introduced him to Roland Zgreus. After returning to his new home in

Chenoua, he again sends for Lucienne. Traveling from his former home to his new home allows Mersault to reflect upon his current circumstances. “By making the gesture of a fresh start, by becoming aware of his past, he had defined what he wanted and what he did not want to be” (118). What he is becoming is a person with a daily routine.

“Mersault steeped himself in this humiliating yet priceless truth: the conditions of the singular happiness he sought were getting up early every morning [and] taking a regular swim” (118). This daily activity, or “first action controlled the rest of his day” (119).

“Day after day, Mersault let himself sink into his life as if he were sliding into water” (122). This daily routine was briefly interrupted with a visit by Catherine, Claire, and Rose. While talking with Catherine, Mersault tells her that, “You make the mistake of thinking you have to choose, that you have to do what you want, that there are conditions for happiness. What matters – all that matters, really – is the will to happiness” (128).

While they were still guests in his house, “Mersault fainted for the first time” (130). The friends sent for the doctor, Bernard. After checking Mersault’s health he begins to speak about his observations of Mersault’s life:

“You’re the only man besides myself around here who lives alone. I don’t mean your wife and your friends downstairs. I know those are episodes. Still, even so, you seem to love life more than I do...Because for me, loving life is not going for a swim. It’s living in intoxication, intensity. Women, adventures, other countries...It’s action, making something happen. A burning, marvelous life. What I mean is – I want you to understand me...I love life too much to be satisfied with nature.” (133)

When moved to the point of confessing everything in his life, Mersault asks Bernard, “Are you capable of feeling contempt for a man?” (134). Upon reflection, Bernard answers, “I think so...It’s quite simple, I think. In cases when he was motivated by expediency or a desire for money” (134). After the doctor leaves, Mersault again reflects upon his own actions. “He had become aware of the essential and immoral truth that money is one of the surest and swiftest means of acquiring one’s dignity” (134). Sitting alone during a fall evening, Mersault realized that his quest for happiness has been successful. “So many evenings had promised him happiness that to experience this one as happiness itself made him realize how far he had come, from hope to conquest” (136). For the first time since killing Zagreus, Mersault is overcome by his innocence of desire and passion.

The final section begins with Mersault gaining an awareness of “no other reality in himself than that of a passion for adventure, a desire for power, a warm and intelligent instinct for a relationship with the world – without anger, without hatred, without regret” (139). But these feelings of ecstasy are short-lived as “he suddenly realized he was sick, and anguish overwhelmed him at the thought that he might die in this unconsciousness” (141). When Bernard visited him again, he told Mersault that “Your heart’s failing” (145). Mersault forces himself to face his own death. “Conscious, he must be conscious, he must be conscious without deception, without cowardice – alone, face to face – at grips with his body – eyes open upon death” (150). With Lucienne at his side one last time, “Slowly, as though it came from his stomach, there rose inside him a stone which approached his throat...’In a minute, in a second,’ he thought. The ascent stopped. And stone among stones, he returned in the joy of his heart to the truth of the motionless

worlds” (151). And with these final words and experiences, Mersault faces his own death.

Narrative Engagement

Several characteristics of Mersault’s engagement with life are consistent with the ethos of the wider work of Camus. Mersault demonstrates a willingness to engage life on its own terms. He was willing to engage the moment as it actually existed as opposed to the way in which he wished it would appear. While his actions against Zagreus represent nothing more than a premeditated murder, they also represent awareness that one must take action in order to overcome obstacles. Mersault did not wait for the money to appear from nowhere but made an intentional effort when the opportunity presented itself. With this action he represents another character by Camus who takes responsibility for his own life and attempts to create meaning for himself.

A second way in which A Happy Death fits within the wider work of Camus is by telling a story about a man who maintained realistic hope, or a hope within limits. Limits are inherent in an age of absurdity. Life is not always “fair” in the way the term is often used. Life does not always make sense. These are limits that one must navigate through in order to maintain any level of hope. But this hope is found in the “mud of everyday life” (Arnett, Dialogic Confession 63) as opposed to some form of idealistic optimism disengaged from everyday living. Thinking “outside of the box” becomes a somewhat unrealistic goal. Perhaps a better suggestion would be to think “within the limits of the box.” Mersault was not attempting to be original in his life or actions but was attempting to make the best of the situation that he was living.

While Mersault was occasionally sidetracked from his quest for happiness, eventually he was able to continue to take action without falling into despair. Falling into a state of despair becomes a very real temptation when accepting the absurdity of a given moment. When one comes to see that all things are *not* actually possible a state of discouragement has the great potential to set in. But, in Mersault's case, he recognized his opportunity to overcome his obstacle and believed that "money is one of the surest and swiftest means of acquiring one's dignity" (134). Although Mersault was the very type of man who could cause feelings of contempt in Dr. Bernard, Mersault was willing to take whatever action was necessary in order to overcome his obstacle to happiness. As stated earlier, Camus's interest was seeking a way to engage life in spite of absurdity, *not* create a justification for a planned escape.

A fourth way that this book represents a characteristic of Mersault's engagement with life which is consistent with the ethos of the wider work of Camus is through an emphasis on the importance of an intentional choice. While the fate of Sisyphus was determined by someone else, it was his own choice to triumph in the face of adversity. While Mersault was born into circumstances that he did not appreciate and sought to overcome, he made an intentional choice and take action to change his life and situation. He was not simply driven by a remote philosophy of life but was able to situate his desires in such a way that his beliefs could impact his decisions. This emphasis upon a lived philosophy, a major concern of those addressing existential concerns, provides further reason why Camus should be given consideration as a philosopher of communication – Camus attempted to engage life from an ethical perspective with a consistency between word and deed, giving respect to his historical moment. Patrice

Mersault, in A Happy Death, provides a vivid example of Camus's commitment to taking action in the face of absurdity.

The First Man

This novel was found in Camus's briefcase at the scene of the tragic car accident that killed him in 1960. It was not published until 1995 and represents Camus's most autobiographical work. The action in the novel explores two moments in time: the childhood of the main character, Jacques Cormery, and also his interactions as an adult. There are a variety of editorial changes, such as inconsistent names of characters, that would have been corrected if Camus had lived to complete the novel. The following summary is of the novel as it is published with a few editorial comments where appropriate.

Narrative

The novel, as it exists, is published in two parts. The first part, "Search for a Father," is divided into nine sections, although some of them have chapter designations while others do not. The first section of part one has no title and recounts the birth of Jacques Cormery. The father, Henri Cormery, is "a Frenchman about thirty" (4) and the father of one son already who is four years old. This episode of Jacques' birth takes place in "a night in the fall of 1913" (7). Upon arriving at their destination and new home, Henri seeks out assistance for his pregnant wife. As he is seeking the doctor, he introduces himself to a woman in the village by saying, "I'm the new manager of the Saint-Apotre property. My wife's giving birth. I need help" (12). The child is born without complication with the assistance of the village doctor.

The second part, titled “Saint Briec,” takes place “[f]orty years later” (20) and shifts the focus to the character of Jacques Cormery. Cormery is seeking out the cemetery where his father is buried. As he talks with the caretaker of the cemetery he informs him that he is looking “for the location of those who died in the war of 1914” (23). The caretaker responds, “‘Cormery, Henri,’ he said, ‘fatally wounded at the Battle of Marne, died at Saint-Briec October 11, 1914’” (23). As he reflected on this visit:

He thought that this visit made no sense, first of all for himself, who had never known his father, who knew next to nothing of what he had been, and who loathed conventional gestures and behavior; and then for his mother, who never spoke of the dead man and could picture nothing of what he was going to see.
(24)

Cormery considered his father a “dead stranger” (24) and never gave much thought to the man he was before his death. But one specific moment in time changed Cormery’s opinion about his father, “At that moment he read on the tomb the date of his father’s birth, which he now discovered he had not known” (25). The dates that appeared were “1885-1914” and “suddenly he was struck by an idea that shook his very being. He [Jacques] was forty years old. The man buried under that slab, who had been his father, was younger than he” (25). While he never gave much thought to his father, he realized that he “believed he was living, he alone had created himself” (26). His newfound interest in his father was from awareness that “all his energy is not enough to create himself” (28). This realization led him to a moment in which “he father was alive again” (28) and set him on a journey that transforms his life.

The third section, "Saint-Brieuc and Malan" begins with a conversation between Jacques and his old friend Victor Malan. Victor encourages him, "Since you're going to see your mother, try to find out something about your father" (30). Jacques replies, "[N]ow that my curiosity is aroused I might as well try to pick up some more information" (30). Cormery acknowledges the debt he owes to Malan when he says, "[Y]ou opened for me the door to everything I love in the world... even the most gifted person needs someone to initiate him" (33). Although Malan earlier encouraged Cormery to find out about his father he now states, "I do approve [of asking about your father]. I was just afraid you'd be disappointed" (34). In his final comment to Cormery before parting, Malan says, "Go find out. You no longer need a father. You brought yourself up alone" (36). With these words the two friends part.

The fourth section, "The Child's Game," finds Cormery reflecting upon his relationship with his grandmother, an overbearing woman very similar to Camus's own grandmother. This section serves as a transition to the fifth section which reveals Cormery's reunion with his mother. Upon arriving at his mother's home, "his mother [Catherine Cormery] opened the door and threw herself in his arms. And there, as she did every time they were reunited, she kissed him two or three times, holding him against her with all her strength" (55). As he looked at her, "[A]s plainly as she might be dressed, Jacques did not remember ever seeing her wear anything ugly. Even now, the grays and blacks in which she dressed were well chosen" (57). As they catch up with one another, Cormery turns the conversation to his father. But his mother's memory is not filled with much information about herself or his dead father. "What year was he born?" "I don't know. I was four years older." "And you, what year were you born?" "I don't

know. Look in the family book” (61). His mother’s life had been filled with work and little time for anything else. “For poverty is not a choice one makes” (66). He invites his mother to move from her home in Algeria to France, “‘Come with me to France,’ he said to her, but she shook her head with resolute sorrow: ‘Oh no, it’s cold over there. I’m too old now. I want to stay home’” (77). While he asks many questions, his quest for information about his father is at a dead-end when speaking with his mother.

The sixth section, “The Family,” continues with Jacques Cormery quizzing his mother about what she knows of his father. Camus provides background information about why she may not be able to answer his questions, “To begin with, poor people’s memory is less nourished than that of the rich; it has fewer landmarks in space because they seldom leave the place where they live, and fewer reference points in time throughout lives that are gray and featureless” (80). He goes on to write, “Remembrance of things past is just for the rich. For the poor it only marks the faint traces on the path to death” (80). And with this discouraging response, “he had to give up on learning anything from her” (81). As this section moves to discussing Jacques family, the reader learns that his grandmother “more than anyone else had dominated Jacques’s childhood” (83). She was the source of much of his shame and embarrassment as he grew up. But “these brief episodes of shame were quickly forgotten in the classroom, where Jacques regained the upper hand, and on the playground, where soccer was his kingdom” (85). Much of what Jacques learned was from observation and self-teaching. “No one had actually taught the child what was right and what was wrong” (88). While he was deeply devoted to his mother, much of the man he was to become was by his own creation.

The seventh section, and titled “Etienne,” describes Jacques’s uncle, referred to as both “Ernest” and “Etienne” within the novel. As a member of a very poor family, Ernest believed that “it is always easier to be extravagant when you have nothing” (117). It was this carefree attitude that endeared Jacques to his uncle. Jacques “never stopped loving them, them above all, and he cherished them all the more for his ability to love them when he had failed to love so many who deserved it” (129). While his purpose on this particular trip was to seek out information about his father:

Never would he learn from them who his father had been, and even though by their presence alone they had reopened springs within him reaching back to his poor and happy childhood, he could not be sure whether these very rich memories gushing out of him were really faithful to the child he had been. (133)

He soon left his home to visit the one person, next to his mother, who had the most impact upon the man he was to become.

The eighth section, marked 6A, “School”, provides the exchange between Cormery and his favorite teacher, M. Bernard. This teacher “had at a given moment used all his weight as a man to change the destiny of this child in his charge, and he had in fact changed it” (136). In addition to his teacher, one of the reasons Jacques loved school was “that [he] was not at home, where want and ignorance made life harder and more bleak, as if closed in on itself” (145). The importance of M. Bernard cannot be overstated for Cormery, for it was in his class where he and his close friend, Pierre, “felt for the first time that they existed and that they were the objects of the highest regard; they were judged worthy to discover the world” (146). While visiting with his teacher many years after he was no longer in his classroom, he was given a book that, when read by M.

Bernard in the classroom, had moved him to tears. For fifteen years, since he was 25 years old, Jacques has been stopping in to see his teacher anytime he visited with his mother. It was through this particular teacher's encouragement that Jacques excelled academically. M. Bernard successfully worked with Jacques's grandmother and mother in an effort to have him sent to a lycee, a French secondary public school reserved for the academically gifted students. The teacher "had launched Jacques in the world, taking on himself alone the responsibility for uprooting him so that he could go on to still greater discoveries" (159). Once Jacques passed the qualifying exams for the lycee, M. Bernard told him, "You don't need me anymore...you'll have teachers who know more. But you know where I am, come see me if you need me to help you" (175). This sense of responsibility for Jacques propelled him through his academic life. And in turn, Jacques felt responsible for maintaining a relationship with his teacher many years after he was no longer his student.

The ninth section, marked 7 and titled "Mondovi: The Settlement and the Father," sees Jacques return to his birthplace in search of any information about his father. This trip is also unproductive in his search for information, "Later, on the plane taking him back to Algiers, Jacques was trying to sort out the information he had collected. Actually he had only gotten a little, and nothing that directly concerned his father" (184). This lack of information about his father gives him the feeling of being one "with no past" (193). Many, like Jacques, had lost their fathers during the First World War. Like the others he was:

wandering through the night of the years in the land of oblivion where each one is the first man, where he had to bring himself up, without a father, having never

known those moments when a father could call his son, after waiting for him to reach the age of listening, to tell him the family's secret, or sorrow of long ago, or the experiences of his life...he had to learn by himself, to grow alone...to learn to live without roots. (195)

The first part ends with Jacques's focus of attention on the fact that he "had tried to escape from anonymity" (196) but was unsuccessful.

The second part, "The Son or The First Man," is divided into four sections. The first section marked 1 and titled "Lycee", recounts the experiences that Jacques had as a student at the lycee. One of the immediate things that Jacques noticed was that "it was impossible for him to connect his family to traditional values and stereotypes" (203). His mother was mostly deaf and was the only member of the house who could barely sign her name; both his grandmother and uncle were illiterate and unable to sign their own names. His mother cleaned other people's homes and did their laundry, a profession that was highly uncommon among the other students at the lycee. "A child is nothing by himself; it is his parents who represent him. It is through them that he defines himself, that he is defined in the eyes of the world" (204). Because of his "family situation" Jacques had received a scholarship to attend the lycee "that included half-board" (220). The solid education they received from M. Bernard at the neighborhood school had "from the first year, put them in the top group of the class" (223). Jacques was also able to stand out on the soccer field where he "made himself respected and liked" (224). But once he returned home each evening "there was no mention of the lycee" (227). Jacques continued to live this dual life, excelling in school while living in the poverty of his home.

The second section, "The Chicken Coop and Cutting the Hen's Throat," recounts the humorous story of Jacques demonstrating himself more brave than his brother in his willingness to catch a family chicken and assist his grandmother in slitting its throat. This section is short, and while providing very little to the overall story, does provide insight into the day to day life in which Jacques took part at home. The third section, "Thursdays and Vacations," recounts Jacques life on Thursdays, when there was no classes at the lycee, and during holidays from school. Those who lived in poverty had no time for vacations, and Jacques was left listening to those who had the finances to travel during the vacations. He found his escape through a weekly trip to the library where he "had always devoured any books that came to hand, and he consumed them with the same appetite he felt for living, playing, or dreaming" (244). Because he "knew nothing and wanted to know everything" Jacques devoured any and all types of books he could find to read (248). This escape through reading was unavailable to his mother and grandmother so he found that his "existence was divided unequally into two lives between which he was unable to make any connection" (250). Not only were his interests different, "[N]o friend, no teacher [from the lycee] ever came to his home during all the years before he received his baccalaureate" (251). The only life known by his mother and grandmother was one of labor, "Work in this neighborhood was not a virtue but a necessity" (257). This conflict between the two worlds led his grandmother to force Jacques to get a job during the summer between classes. It was during this time at work that he realized that something "obscure was stirring in him, something irrational, something in his blood and in his nature" (269). Through his reading, his work experience, and the learning that was taking place at the lycee, Jacques was experiencing

“many things [that] were beginning to pull him away from the child he had been” (275). At the age of 13, Jacques was gaining many experiences that would propel him towards the man he was to become.

The fourth, and final, section of the book as it is published is marked 2 and titled “A Mystery to Himself.” This brief section sees Jacques, at 40 years old, reflecting back upon his childhood in which he had “the longing, yes, to live, to live still more, to immerse himself in the greatest warmth this earth could give him” (282). This “longing to live” characterizes Jacques Cormery as a child and also as an adult.

Narrative Engagement

Like the novel A Happy Death several characteristics of Jacques Cormery’s engagement with life are consistent with the ethos of the wider work of Camus. First, Cormery accepted the absurdity of his situation. In a notebook entry from September 7, 1938, Camus wrote,

If it is true that the absurd has been fulfilled (or, rather, revealed) then it follows that no experience has any value in itself, and that all our actions are equally instructive. The will is nothing. Acceptance everything. On one condition: that, faced with the humblest or the most heart-rending experience, man should always be “present”; and that he should endure this experience without flinching, with complete lucidity (Notebook III 143).

The acceptance of absurdity is a necessary first step in order to appropriately engage the present postmodern moment. Upon reflection, Jacques recognized that he lived in poverty as a child and yet he was able to think of it as a “happy childhood” (16). He accepted the absurdity of his situation, a situation much like Camus’s own: a dead father,

an overbearing grandmother, a silent and deaf mother, and a home life steeped in poverty. Instead of living in despair of the fact that he did not have every opportunity that everyone else had, Jacques found what he was best at, school and soccer, and did what he could to recognize the absurdity and overcome the circumstances into which he was born. Nowhere in the novel does he seek to cast blame. Instead of being angry at his mother, he has a deep love and fondness for her. Instead of attempting to turn his back on his former teacher, he makes it part of his routine to visit him yearly. Jacques Cormery provides a fictional demonstration, greatly patterned after Camus's own life, of someone who accepted the absurdity of the world as it actually existed before him.

A second way in which this novel fits within the wider work of Camus is through its demonstration of allowing the communicative space for the emergence of new metaphors and a new understanding of life. Instead of neglecting the memory of his father he sets out on a quest to come to a new understanding of who the man was. He did not want to simply accept the fact that he did not know anything about his father and was willing to track down those who could provide further information about his life. This new understanding that Jacques was seeking assisted him in his continual engagement with the historical moment. In a similar way, it is a violation of the work of Camus to assume that the metaphor of the absurd can serve as an appropriate metaphor for every situation and do so indefinitely. One must allow the communicative space for the emergence of new metaphors that will bring content to future historical moments. Consistency with the thought of Camus will not be found in attempting to view all of life through the lens of the metaphor of the absurd but in viewing life through an appropriate metaphor for the circumstances of that moment.

The Communication Ethics Turn toward Responsibility

These two works by Albert Camus provide a vivid contrast in the way each explores a central problem in human communication, the concern over one's appropriate level of responsibility for another human being. At the end of his life Camus was beginning to point toward what it means to engage absurdity with an element of responsibility for another. Within A Happy Death Mersault is only concerned with his own well-being and does not assume any responsibility for those around him. The First Man provides a stark comparison concerning the act of taking responsibility. In this novel, Cormery assumes responsibility for finding out about his father, he seeks out his mother, and he continues to visit with his teacher from years past. This responsibility is reciprocal; the people Cormery encounters including his mother, grandmother, and teacher, all assume responsibility for his well-being as well. This shift in focus provides a communicative turn towards another that is lacking in the earlier works of Camus.

A brief exploration of the topic of responsibility as revealed in the work of Emmanuel Levinas, whose own work is explored in the context of the philosophy of communication in an essay by Bettina Bergo, is helpful in better understanding the significance of Camus's turn toward responsibility. The interpretation of responsibility held by Levinas was worked out in the context of the metanarrative disappearance of the twentieth century. Arnett writes, "Each time one thinks one 'has' Levinas, he moves to interpret otherwise than conventional wisdom, inviting a corrective conversation to the modern project of metanarrative and self-assurance, questioning metanarrative agreement that makes agent autonomy seemingly possible" ("Dialogic" 80). According to Levinas, through a call to responsibility for another "I am summoned as someone irreplaceable. I

exist through the other and for the other, but without this being alienation: I am inspired” (Levinas, Otherwise 114). Within the context of human communication, Levinas’s work serves as a reminder of “a call of responsibility that embraces burdens in responsible action in an unfinished world” (Arnett, “Dialogic” 83). The “Translator’s Introduction” to Levinas’s Otherwise Than Being or Beyond Essence highlights four components of responsibility as evidenced in the work of Levinas: responsibility is a fact, responsibility is a bond, responsibility is a “form of recognition,” and responsibility is an act (Lingis xix). One of Camus’s publications in the underground newspaper Combat written on November 25, 1948, illustrates his own consistency with these thoughts of Levinas. The article, called “Why Spain?: Response to Gabriel Marcel,” was written after Marcel publicly challenged why the events of Camus’s play “State of Siege” were set in Spain. Camus accepted responsibility as a fact through this entry as he revealed his commitment to the act of responsibility, the bond of responsibility, and the recognition that comes when one acts in a responsible manner.

When addressing the murder of Luis Companys, who was handed over to by the French Vichy to be assassinated by Spanish leaders in 1940, Camus wrote, “[W]e must admit that we shot Companys, that we are responsible for what followed” (“Spain” 300). Camus’s work, in connection with Levinas, suggests that responsibility is an act; in this case Camus believed that the French people did not act in an ethically responsible manner by failing to take action on the behalf of Luis Companys. Camus also believed that responsibility served as a bond with those who are united together for a common cause when he wrote, “The world I live in disgusts me, but I feel myself in solidarity with the suffering people in it” (“Spain 301). Although he was disgusted by the world in which he

lived, he continually engaged life on its own terms and not the way in which he wished it to appear. The bonds of humanity served as a call to responsibility to take action on behalf of those who were suffering. Finally, Camus understood that a call to responsibility was a form of recognition for those people who were suffering or who existed on the fringes of society. “To my way of thinking, though, there is one ambition that all writers ought to possess: the ambition to bear witness and to cry out whenever possible, to the extent that our talent permits, on behalf of those who share our servitude” (“Spain” 301). Levinas went as far as stating that “I am a hostage” to another once I experience a call to responsibility (Otherwise 128). While Camus did not use such graphic language to explain his sense of responsibility to another, with the publication of The First Man Camus’s work demonstrated a much stronger turn toward responsibility than his previous writings. Like Levinas, Camus’s later work explored the existential call to responsibility in the midst of absurdity. Through a brief summary of the preceding chapters of this dissertation, this discussion of responsibility will be situated within the wider concerns of this project and the study of communication ethics.

The opening chapter provides an introduction to Camus’s own meeting of the absurd. Many of the absurd elements of Camus’s own life are present in the novel The First Man such as the death of a father, living with an illiterate mother and grandmother, and overcoming the obstacles of poverty to succeed in school. Chapter one of this dissertation continues by providing points of connection between Camus’s own historical moment of metanarrative decline and the contemporary postmodern moment of narrative and virtue contention. During a time of narrative and virtue contention many voices on the fringe of society are no longer listened to due to the decline of a metanarrative. While

some people may be pushed aside, a time of narrative and virtue contention invites an engagement with others different from us which leads to new understandings about life. For Camus, his engagement with his historical moment resulted in the emergence of the metaphor of the absurd. Our own engagement with the historical moment can result in other metaphors that meet the needs of the present time. We are responsible for meeting the historical moment as it actually exists before us and not how we want it to appear.

Chapter two explores Camus's own *recognition* of the absurdity of his historical moment. He acknowledged the existence of the absurd through his writing of "The Myth of Sisyphus," The Stranger, "The Misunderstanding," and "Caligula." These books explore stories about characters unwilling to take responsibility for anything beyond themselves. Sisyphus focused his attention on the rock that was before him. Mersault was concerned with his own well-being in the face of routine everyday events. The central characters of "The Misunderstanding" experienced what occurs when one is unwilling or unable to engage another in productive conversation. And Caligula was obsessed with his own will to power at the expense of those he governed. This lack of responsibility towards others is consistent with Camus's central character in A Happy Death and represents the modernistic reliance upon the self that has been used to characterize the work of Camus and link him to wider existentialist concerns.

Chapter three explores revolt as the necessary existential ethical *response* in the face of absurdity. Camus explored this theme through The Rebel, The Plague, and "The Just Assassins." This series of books explored various ways that revolt manifests itself in the face of absurdity. Camus's provided The Rebel as a call to action in the face of absurdity and as an alternative to falling into despair. The Plague provided an example of

human beings who felt responsible to themselves to act in the face of absurdity. While their actions benefited many, there is no evidence from their conversations that they felt an obligation to humanity, their only obligation was to themselves. “The Just Assassins” provide a glimpse of the responsibility that Camus would later explore in The First Man. There was awareness on the part of the central characters that their actions would benefit others. But the play concluded with a general sense that one’s obligation was to oneself and others would only benefit as a by-product of personal and individualistic revolt.

Chapter four explores the *consequences* that occur when acting in the midst of absurdity. Within The Fall Camus provides a character so consumed by his own guilt that he is unable to see other people as anything other than a means to feel vindicated for his failure to act in a given moment of crisis. While the novel provides a fictional example of what happens when acting in the face of absurdity, an event in the life of Camus himself provided a real life example of a similar struggle. The break-down of the relationship between Camus and Jean Paul Sartre serves as a twentieth century case study of what happens when action is taken amidst absurdity. The title of the novel The Fall serves as a metaphor of what happens when one is unable to carry on a productive conversation in the midst of metanarrative decline. This fall is into existential homelessness and represents an inability to engage the ground of others. This fall, in the work of Camus, comes after one recognizes the existence of absurdity and responds through revolt. Within the first two cycles of work Camus reveals characters that rely solely upon themselves. The fall into existential homelessness occurs after one comes to the realization that reliance upon the self is a dead end founded upon a modern reliance on efficiency, autonomy, and progress (Arnett, “Conversation” 62). To avoid falling into

despair, as Clamence does in The Fall, one must find a more constructive response to the moment.

This chapter explores the communicative turn toward responsibility necessary to act in an ethical manner in the midst of absurdity. The progression of the *recognition* of absurdity, the *response* to absurdity, and the *consequences* of taking action in the midst of absurdity functions as an existential call, which is a form of responsibility for other human beings. Without the publication of A Happy Death and The First Man one would have to accept some logical leaps and gaps in order to accept this project's interpretation within all of Camus's work. But the stark contrast between the self-reliance of Patrice Mersault and the responsibility of Jacques Cormery justifies such an interpretation. Camus was making a communicative turn towards responsibility within his work. It is "within the face of the Other [that] one finds a call to responsibility" (Arnett, Dialogic Confession 118). Cormery sensed an internal, or existential, call to responsibility for his mother, his teacher, and to seek out information about his dead father. This existential call to responsibility did not result in an inward turning but in an outward turning to engagement with others. These two works by Camus, although left uncompleted, represent a significant transition within his own writing and serve as a powerful reminder of one's responsibility to others in the midst of absurdity. This chapter has explored the question "How can the work of Albert Camus serve as a lens through which one can better understand a communication ethics turn toward responsibility in an age of absurdity?" An exploration of Camus's own turn toward responsibility has been explored through an analysis of and comparison between A Happy Death and The First Man. A summary of each chapter of the dissertation provides various points of connection

between the guiding question of this chapter and the overall project. A metaphorical map is next provided to connect the emergent metaphors to a communicative turn toward responsibility within an age of absurdity.

Communication Ethics in an Age of Absurdity

Existential ethical engagement with the historical moment must allow space for the emergence of appropriate metaphors that meet the needs of that particular moment. While Camus never explored absurdity as a metaphor he did understand the symbolic nature of human communication. In “The Myth of Sisyphus” he wrote, “A symbol always transcends the one who makes use of it and makes him say in reality more than he is aware of expressing” (124). Camus’s own exploration of the metaphor of the absurd transcends the way he understood and used the term. While Camus’s goal was to engage his present moment, he understood that existential ethical engagement has implications for the future. As he wrote in The Rebel, “Real generosity toward the future lies in giving all to the present” (304). The emergence of organic metaphors in the midst of exploring Camus’s work is very consistent with his approach to living.

The following list of metaphors can serve as a framework for the “web of metaphorical significance” (Arnett and Arneson 301) that provides Albert Camus’s contribution to the theory of communication ethics. This list represents how Camus named the historical moment of narrative fragmentation that he found before him. The current postmodern moment is also a moment of narrative and virtue contention and therefore Camus’s theoretical insights can provide guidance for action in the midst of absurdity during our contemporary historical moment as well. Camus’s work provides one with a sense of what it means to be situated within an absurd moment in history. For

Camus, absurdity was an existential reality. The age of metanarratives was gone with only narrative remnants and fragments remaining. The following metaphors are organized according to the thematic structure of this dissertation which provides a picture of how Camus assists in the recognition, response, and acknowledgement of consequences in an age of absurdity. Each of these metaphors can be found in previous chapters of this dissertation where they emerge from specific works of Camus.

Recognition

A person who recognizes the absurdity of a given moment or situation is not interested in being different for the sake of being different. Once a person recognizes the division between his or her longing for clarity and the absurd reality of the world, one's focus of attention is placed upon this difference, thus leading to the following central metaphor Camus provides for a person caught in this tension within an absurd moment.

- Stranger
 - Recognizing the absurd circumstances of a given historical moment calls absurdity to one's attention thus creating the sense that one is a *stranger* to one's own existence. Active reflection upon this new-found awareness assists in the realization that different assumptions guide one's actions when compared to those of another; in other words one recognizes that the ground upon which one stands is different from another, reinforcing the narrative fragmentation of the age.

Response

Camus believed that each individual possessed the freedom to respond to the recognition of the absurd in his or her own unique way. While any option was available,

some options are more ethical, and therefore represent better choices, than others. The following six metaphors explore the various ways in which one can impose order on a chaotic and absurd existence. The first three, according to Camus, are unacceptable responses while the latter three represent existential ethical responses in the midst of absurdity.

Unacceptable Responses

- Physical Suicide
 - When responding to absurdity through an act of *physical suicide*, the choice is being made to eliminate one's existence. This means of escape, while ending the confusion found in navigating through absurdity, is an unacceptable option because it seeks to physically flee from absurdity as opposed to living life to the fullest extent possible.
- Philosophical Suicide
 - When responding to absurdity through an act of *philosophical suicide*, an effort is being made to build a philosophical system of escape from absurdity while maintaining one's existence. This means of escape, which Camus believes is often religious in nature, is an unacceptable option because it avoids direct engagement with absurdity and seeks to explain away the contradictions inherent in everyday living.
- Murder
 - When responding to absurdity through an act of *murder*, an effort is being made to eliminate another person or multiple people in an effort to impose order on an absurd existence. This is an indirect effort at escaping

absurdity by eliminating those who one believes contributes to one's own absurd existence.

Acceptable Responses

- **Metaphysical Rebellion**
 - When responding to absurdity through *metaphysical rebellion*, one makes an intentional choice to carry on in spite of the recognized absurdity in a given historical moment or situation. One must make an intentional choice to act in the face of absurd circumstances and not succumb to despair in the midst of confusion and chaos.
- **Hope**
 - When responding to absurdity by maintaining a sense of *hope*, one must accept the limits of human existence and continually engage life on its own terms. Within this framework, *hope* is not a passive emotion but an active engagement with absurdity. *Hope* emerges as a by-product of an active response to one's recognition of absurdity.
- **Ambition**
 - When responding to absurdity through acts of personal *ambition*, one accepts that meaning is created through action and is not handed down or provided by someone or something outside of everyday life. This understanding of *ambition* is not self-serving but is an acceptable existential ethical response to absurdity when it propels one to act in the midst of the contradictions of human existence.

Acknowledgement of Consequences

Absurdity, for Camus, was inescapable. There are consequences when living in the midst of absurdity due to its pervasiveness and inescapability whether or not one chooses to take action or even recognize its very existence. The following two metaphors explore the consequences of taking action in the midst of absurdity. The first one suggests a negative consequence while the second one provides a positive consequence of recognizing and responding to an absurd moment.

Negative Consequence

- The Fall
 - When one fails to recognize absurdity or when one recognizes its existence yet chooses not to engage it directly, an experience of *the fall* into despair can take place. This *fall* is only overcome through confrontation and engagement with absurdity which begins with one recognizing its existence and choosing an existential ethical response.

Positive Consequence

- Artistic Creation
 - When one recognizes absurdity and responds in an existential ethical manner, a new understanding of human experience emerges. This new understanding represents an *artistic creation* that produces content in opposition to the nothingness or nihilism that often leads one to despair. These acts of *artistic creation* are building blocks upon which others can construct and create meaning for themselves as well and serves as a positive consequence of acting in the midst of absurdity.

Albert Camus functioned as a philosopher of communication who was deeply concerned about ethical issues of his time. This work demonstrates an effort to constructively respond to the unique communicative challenges of the contemporary postmodern moment. Albert Camus's work provides an opportunity to extend philosophical and ethical considerations of the implications of the work of Hans-Georg Gadamer and Paul Ricoeur, specifically addressing metaphorical engagement, within the human communication. The works of Walter Fisher, Michael Hyde, and Ronald C. Arnett, situate these considerations within the wider scholarship of the discipline of communication.

This project seeks to respond to the guiding question, "How can Albert Camus's use of the metaphor of the absurd assist a human communicator in engaging the historical moment from an existential ethical perspective in a time of narrative and virtue contention?" Through his implicit work as a philosopher of communication Camus provided an example of a person with deep ethical commitments who navigated through the chaos of a moment of metanarrative decline. In our own moment of narrative and virtue contention, Camus's voice should again be heard as we seek to take communicative responsibility in an age of absurdity. Camus was on a moral mission as a human being; not as a moralist, but with sense of "I can not give up." Nor can we. The price of being human is acknowledging the absurd; that is what it is to call ourselves human. Camus knew that there was something in the human heart that would not stop; this is how he continued to look for hope when there was not any seeming before him. For Camus, and for us, there is hope when there is no hope, that is the absurd and what

defines us as human beings. The greatest existential reality for a human being is that there is hope when there should be no hope.

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