DPhil Thesis Abstract
Jill Beer ~ Lady Margaret Hall ~ Michaelmas 2003

Re-reading Camus's Ethics

This study problematizes the dominance of the *Temps modernes* polemic in critical readings of Camus's political and ethical thought, and offers a more nuanced reading of his contribution to both contemporary and modern ethical discourses. An exploration of critical readings of Camus's theoretical work reveals a retrospection and return on the part of critics who perpetually revisit the same issues which caused so much contention in the 1950s - political engagement, historical absolutism, Marxism, the use of violence, ideological extremism – in order to defend or simply reassert Camus's position in relation, or rather in opposition, to that of Sartre. Whilst this hermeneutic framework might, in some senses, still be pertinent, it neither allows for a breadth of perspective which the distance afforded by time offers, nor permits a consideration of Camus's thought in the light of the theoretical shifts which have taken place in the intervening period. Engaging in this hermeneutic dialogue, the purpose of this thesis is to disrupt the binarism of the Camus/Sartre paradigm through a comparative study of Camus's theory of revolt and Simone de Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity in the light of Maurice Blanchot's critical perspective, in order firstly to offer a radically new reading of Camus's position in relation to that of his contemporaries, and secondly to open up an alternative perspective on Camus's thought in terms of the ethical concerns which have come to underpin more modern critical paradigms such as postcolonialism, feminism, poststructuralism and ethical criticism.

DPhil Thesis Abstract
Jill Beer ~ Lady Margaret Hall ~ Michaelmas 2003 [i.e. 2004]

Re-reading Camus's Ethics

A canonical yet controversial figure, Albert Camus has attracted much critical attention since his rise to prominence in the early 1940s. Best known for his literary work, Camus is one of the most popular and widely-read modern French authors. In contrast, his contribution to twentieth-century thought has proved far more contentious. A turning point in French literary history, the quarrel which erupted between Camus and Sartre following the publication of *L'Homme révolté* in 1951 called into question Camus's credibility as a political commentator and hastened his retreat from French intellectual life in the postwar years. It is clear from an exploration of critical response to Camus's theory of revolt since the *Temps modernes* debacle that the terms of this debate have come to dominate hermeneutic discourse in this area. Critical readings of *L'Homme révolté* tend to schematize Camus's position in relation to that of Sartre, so over-simplifying the differences which exist between them. As recently as the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *L'Homme révolté*, which saw a resurgence of interest in Camus and his political ideas, critics chose to return to the battleground of the 1950s, rather than engage with Camus's theory of revolt in the light of theoretical developments which have taken place in the intervening period, such as postcolonialism, feminism, postmodernism and ethical criticism.

The dominance of this critical paradigm is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, in adopting the binarism of the Camus/Sartre debate as a hermeneutic framework, this approach perpetuates a reading of Camusian revolt and Sartrian Existentialism as fundamentally opposed. Critical discourse is thereby reduced to either defending or

attacking long-established positions rather than exploring new and alternative perspectives which might offer less limited and less limiting readings of Camus's work. Consequently, the similarities which exist between Camus's thought and some aspects of Existentialism, in particular the existentialist ethics developed by Simone de Beauvoir, have been neglected. Secondly, such a return to the agenda of the 1950s prevents any possibility of engaging with Camus's theory of revolt in terms of the theoretical discourses which have emerged since the mid-twentieth century. In an attempt to problematize the dominance of this debate as a critical paradigm and to consider the relevance of Camus's ethical thought in the light of more recent theoretical perspectives, this study both draws into proximity Camus's theory of revolt and Simone de Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity, and adopts Maurice Blanchot's ethical optic as a critical framework, in order to offer a more nuanced reading of Camus's contribution to both contemporary and modern discourses on ethics.

Whilst Sartre intended to write a sequel to *L'Être et le néant* which would address the ethical implications of the ontology he had elaborated in his landmark text, notes for which can be found in his posthumously published work *Cahiers pour une morale*, it was Beauvoir who took Sartrian Existentialism beyond the bounds of the transcendental ego and into the ethical domain. Faced with the moral dilemmas of war and the need for some criteria on which to base action in complex social situations, Beauvoir set out to develop an ethics, based on Existentialism, which would address the question of the individual's responsibility towards the Other. Like Camus, Beauvoir perceived the excesses of contemporary history to result from the metaphysical desire for full self-presence, and advocated an ethical approach which would respect the ambiguity of the human

condition. However, despite the similarities in purpose and approach which clearly do exist between Beauvoir's and Camus's ethical perspectives, Beauvoir's contribution to ethical discourse is all but absent from critical studies of Camus's work, which persist in privileging Sartre as a counterweight and contrast to Camus. Yet Beauvoir is ideally placed to inform and illuminate the relationship between Camusian revolt and Sartrian Existentialism, situated as she is in a unique position in relation to, but distinct from, Sartre. In an effort to disrupt the binarism of the Camus/Sartre paradigm and to open up a new and alternative way of evaluating Camus's position in relation to that of his contemporaries, this thesis engages in a comparative study of Camus's and Beauvoir's ethical thought.

At the same time as offering a re-reading of Camus's work in terms of contemporary debate, I have also endeavoured to evaluate his approach to ethics in the light of modern ethical criticism. Whilst some critics have offered readings of Camus's fiction in terms of literary and theoretical discourses such as postcolonialism, feminism and theories of alterity, critical debate surrounding his non-fictional writing has remained entrenched in the polemics of the postwar era. Somewhat surprisingly, given Blanchot's reputation as a literary theorist and critic, the series of articles he wrote for *La Nouvelle Revue française* in 1954, which address the status of the Other in Camus's theoretical work, does not feature in critical studies of Camus's ethics. Yet Blanchot's approach to ethics has been highly influential in shaping modern critical discourses, and his reading of Camus's theory of revolt sheds a radically new light on Camus's ethical position, in a way that the vast majority of Camus criticism has failed to do. In adopting Blanchot's perspective as a methodological optic, this study aims to offer a re-reading of Camus's

thought in terms of subsequent theoretical shifts which have shaped modern theory and criticism. As such, this approach is extremely productive in allowing aspects of Camus's ethical thought to emerge, and in evaluating the extent to which Camus can be seen to foreshadow the concerns of future generations of literary theorists and critics. The conceptual approaches of Beauvoir and Blanchot thus form a non-standard binocular through which I explore three key areas of debate: the creation of values, Self-Other relations, and the problem of violence.

Before exploring these issues, I begin by tracing the development of Camus's thinking from the early years of his career to the emergence of his concept of revolt in the latter years of the Second World War. Whilst some critics have explored aspects of this period of Camus's life, very few of the major studies of his ethics consider the significance of this time in shaping his conceptual framework. Yet many of the issues Camus went on to address in his postwar writing, such as the question of whether or not the end justifies the means, the problem of absolutism, and the use of violence, were areas of concern for Camus prior to the war and can be traced in his private notebooks, correspondence and journalistic articles. Through a study of a wide variety of sources relating to this time, Chapters 2 and 3 chart the genesis and development of Camus's ethical thinking from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s. Focusing on Camus's political engagement and journalistic work prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, Chapter 2 explores his conception of the interrelationship between politics and ethics, history and action, and traces the long process of self-examination that the outbreak of war triggered in him, as he questioned the conceptual framework on which his approach to the problem of ethical action had been based. In Chapter 3, I examine the relationship between the

intellectual crisis Camus experienced at this time and his essay on the Absurd. Many critics have focused on the philosophical content of this text. In contrast, this chapter offers a reading of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as both a reformulation of an earlier emotional experience and as a textualization of the context in which it was written; a means by which Camus could address and work through the ethical problems posed by war.

Having traced the development of Camus's ethical thinking from the mid-1930s to his decision to engage in political action, I turn in Chapter 4 to an analysis of the transition Camus makes from his absurdist reasoning to his theory of revolt. Engaging in the hermeneutic dialogue surrounding the relationship between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté*, which pivots on the question of ethical values and whether they pre-exist or are founded by the individual consciousness, this chapter sets out to disrupt the binarism of this debate by engaging with Maurice Blanchot's critical reading of the relationship between Camus's two major essays. Blanchot's optic is effective in drawing into proximity Camus and his existentialist counterparts because, rather than relying on a restrictive Sartre/Camus dichotomy, it highlights the similarities in their responses to contemporary nihilism and shifts the focus of debate from the nature of ethical values to the creation of values, so establishing a different critical agenda from that which has dominated and continues to dominate discourse in this area. Chapters 5, 6 and 7 then offer a comparative study of Camus's theory of revolt and Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity, in the light of Blanchot's ethical perspective, through an exploration of the three key areas of discussion which I outlined above. Each chapter takes up one of the polemical issues central to the *Temps modernes* debate, in order firstly to show the limitations of this critical paradigm, secondly to provide a more nuanced reading of Camus's ethical

position in relation to his contemporaries, and thirdly to offer an assessment of Camus's work in the light of Blanchot's ethical perspective.

Chapter 5 intervenes in the critical debate surrounding Camus's recourse to given values and challenges the consensus amongst critics that Camus and Beauvoir are fundamentally opposed on this question. Whilst Camus and his existentialist counterparts appear to be divided on the issue of values, it is clear from an exploration of his concept of human nature and Beauvoir's principle of freedom that they both seek an ethical approach which is at once universally applicable and faithful to the belief that there is no organizing unity beyond human existence. Conceiving of human nature as a value which is both relative and absolute, Camus situates his ethics between universalist and relativist discourses. Likewise, Beauvoir's notion of freedom as an absolute value freely chosen by the individual consciousness sets out to bridge the gap which has traditionally separated individualistic and holistic methodologies in the field of metaethics. This similarity in Camus's and Beauvoir's purpose and approach draws them into proximity and so collapses the polarity of critical discourse on this issue. Moreover, when Camus's approach in relation to that of his contemporaries is considered in the light of Blanchot's reading of *L'Homme révolté*, the issues which highlighted their dissimilarity no longer operate as critical criteria. Instead, the question of the movement of affirmation underpinning their respective responses to the problem of nihilism comes to the fore, so problematizing the extent to which either Camus's or Beauvoir's position can be described as ethical.

Chapter 6 sets out to consider Camus's treatment of alterity, both in relation to his contemporaries and in terms of modern ethical discourse, through an exploration of his

vision of Self-Other relations and Beauvoir's concept of intersubjectivity. This non-oppositional reading nuances the relationship between Camus's ethical position and that of Beauvoir and calls into question the way in which critics have sought to establish the moral high ground for Camus over Sartre and other existentialists since the *Temps modernes* polemic. Both Camus and Beauvoir advocate a mode of ethical action which seeks to balance the ambiguity of the human condition and to hold in tension the competing interests of individual freedoms. However, the differences in their conceptions of ethical values can be seen to influence the way in which they understand human relationships and respond to the Other. Whereas Camusian revolt both reveals the individual's value and binds him or her in solidarity with all other human beings who share a common identity, the ontology on which Beauvoir bases her ethics does not easily allow her to escape the Sartrian economy of subject and object. In contrast, when Camus's approach to human relations is read in the light of Blanchot's ethical perspective, his theory of revolt is found wanting. Since the rebel must simultaneously negate all that is not him- or herself in order to affirm his or her human worth, Camusian revolt, for Blanchot, dissimulates nihilism and, in privileging the Self over the Other, prevents the possibility of ethical encounter. Building on Blanchot's evaluation of Camus's position, this chapter concludes with an exploration of Camus's short story 'La Femme adultère' which, I argue, both illustrates and counteracts Blanchot's reading of Camus's ethics, by showing that the space of encounter which Blanchot envisages can also be discerned in Camus's fictional work.

The final chapter offers a re-reading of Camus's treatment of the problem of violence or, in Beauvoir's terms, of ethical failure. Caricatured as non-violent at all costs,

Camus's approach to the question of ethical failure was largely dismissed during the 1950s, with the result that the response of subsequent generations of critics to his position on the use of violence has been far more positive in tone as they have attempted to re-establish him as a serious thinker and political commentator. This chapter seeks to intervene in this history of interpretation and to problematize the dominance of this critical paradigm by exploring the close proximity between Camus's treatment of violence and that of Beauvoir. When the implications of Camus's vision of Self-Other relations for his treatment of violence are considered in conjunction with Beauvoir's more pragmatic approach, it is evident that, whilst he and Beauvoir share much common ground in their views on absolutism and the relationship between means and ends, his concept of human nature as given privileges the absolute term of his 'relatif absolu' and so lends a rigidity to his position on violence. However, when Camus's response to the problem of violence is read in an alternative light, that of Blanchot's theoretical perspective, the question that then arises is not whether Camus's ethics are sufficiently flexible, but whether he is sufficiently ethical. In Blanchot's view, the conceptual basis on which Camus founds his moral position prevents him from encountering the Other as radically other. Turning again to Camus's short fiction, I respond to Blanchot's reading by arguing that an exploration of Camus's narrative 'L'Hôte' would indicate that he drew far closer to Blanchot's vision of encounter than Blanchot suggests, and in this way Camus can be seen to foreshadow the ethical concerns of subsequent generations.

Re-reading Camus's Ethics

BODLEIAN LIBRARY OXFORD
DEPOSITED
THESIS

Contents

List of Abbreviations 3

Acknowledgements 4

1 Reading Camus's Ethics: The Legacy of the *Temps modernes* Polemic 5

2 Genesis: The Early Years 33

3 The Absurd and the Problem of Praxis 78

4 From the Absurd to Revolt 115

5 The Foundation of Ethical Values 135

6 Mastery or Slavery: Beyond the Dialectic? 158

7 Violence and the Problem of Ethical Failure 186

Conclusion 222

Bibliography 229

List of Abbreviations

E	Albert Camus, *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965)
PM	Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* suivi de *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947; *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* first published 1944).

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank Colin Davis and Toby Garfitt for their expertise, help and advice throughout this project. I would also like to thank Alison Fell for her willingness to engage patiently with my thesis, and Ruth Cruickshank for her friendship and unstinting support. I am indebted to the Arts and Humanities Research Board for the award of a Postgraduate Studentship which has enabled me to complete this project. I am also grateful for the financial assistance I have received from the Faculty of Modern and Medieval Languages, Oxford University. I would especially like to acknowledge the support of my family, and of Martyn Beer, whose constant encouragement has been invaluable. I would like to dedicate this thesis to Amelia Capstick.

1

Re-Reading Camus's Ethics: The Legacy of the *Temps modernes* Polemic

Albert Camus's *L'Homme révolté* has not ceased to generate critical debate and controversy since its publication in 1951. The culmination of philosophical and ethical concerns which had preoccupied him throughout the 1940s, Camus's theory of revolt rejects what he perceives to be the violence of contemporary nihilism and advocates an alternative response to the absurdity of the human condition.[1] Whilst Camus's notion of revolt was conceived during the war, the theory he went on to elaborate was largely forged through the turmoil of the post-Liberation years. The moral complexities and political extremism of this period led Camus to rethink and formalize the ethical approach[2] he had begun to adopt towards the end of the war and which had underpinned

---

[1] Mark Orme underlines the sense in which *L'Homme révolté* represents the culmination of Camus's philosophical and ethical concerns and comments: 'Un simple regard sur les écrits contemporains de Camus nous montre qu'il s'interroge sur les questions fondamentales de *L'Homme révolté* bien avant la publication du livre en octobre 1951', '*L'Homme révolté* vers une justification éthique de la justice', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 19 (2001), 91-119 (p.91). Roger Quilliot in his commentary on *L'Homme révolté* in the Pléiade edition also argues that the seeds of Camus's theory of revolt were present in Camus's consciousness from the earliest years and that a spirit of revolt can be traced throughout his life: 'À côté de l'absurde, la révolte est partout présente. Révolte, l'adhésion au parti communiste, le Théâtre du Travail, la Maison de la Culture; révolte encore, le refus d'un poste à Sidi-Bel-Abbès; révolte toujours, les compte rendus de tribunaux', 'Commentaires', *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.1609-1630 (p.1609).

[2] Any evaluation of a writer's ethics is intrinsically problematic unless the underlying concepts which the critic brings to bear on a text or texts are clearly defined. There is by no means a consensus amongst moral philosophers as to the precise terminology to be used. The word 'ethical' is most widely used to describe questions about the meaning of moral words and the concepts to which they refer, rather than questions which seek to establish what 'ought' to be, what is 'good', 'bad', 'wrong' and so on, which are generally perceived to belong to the moral domain. On the whole, commentators tend to agree that there are at least two layers to ethical enquiry. However, any of the following terms could be used to describe these two categories: for first order principles, morals, ethics or normative ethics; for second order principles, the logic of ethics, metaethics, philosophical ethics or moral philosophy. See for example Simon Blackburn, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994); R. M. Hare, *Essays On The Moral Concepts* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1972); J. L. Mackie, *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1990; first published by Pelican Books, 1977) and Alasdair MacIntyre, *A Short History of Ethics*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1998; first edition 1967). Throughout this study, I use the terms 'ethical' or 'ethics' to refer to ideas, enquiry and discourse which are concerned with second order principles. In discussions of specific ethical perspectives, for example that of Simone de Beauvoir, Emmanuel Levinas or Maurice Blanchot, the particular meaning given to the term 'ethical' by that theorist is made clear.

his decision to engage in resistance activity.[3] The central and most controversial issue for Camus at this time was the use of violence, whether it is justified and, if so, for what ends and under what circumstances.[4] Although this question had been a practical and a theoretical concern for Camus since the late 1930s, it became an increasingly difficult issue for him as he faced the ethical challenges firstly of the *épuration* and, towards the end of the decade, of the political controversy over the Stalinist gulags. The summary justice that came to characterize the trials of alleged collaborators, the cruelty and humiliation with which those suspected of collaboration were treated as France sought to purify itself from the ravages and duplicity of war, tested both the values on which Camus had based his ethics and the relativistic approach he had adopted.[5] At first intransigent on the need to pursue justice, as his well-known riposte to François Mauriac in *Combat* in January 1945 outlines,[6] Camus's position gradually evolved and in August of that year he retracted his initial support for the *épuration* in a much-cited editorial, describing it as both odious and futile.[7]

---

[3] Some critics perceive this period to be one of transformation for Camus who in their view shifted from the political activism of the Resistance to abstentionism, which they perceive both *L'Homme révolté* and Camus's response to the Algerian crisis through the 1950s to represent. Claude Bourdet in his obituary to Camus identifies the time between 1945 and 1951 as pivotal in this respect, 'Camus ou les mains propres', *France Observateur*, 7 January 1960. More recently, Tony Judt attempted to account for Camus's move from engagement to distance in *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1998).

[4] The use and justification of violence was present in the literary work of numerous French thinkers at this time. See for example Jean-Paul Sartre, *Les Mains sales* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948); Simone de Beauvoir, *L'Invitée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943), *Le Sang des autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

[5] For an account of the impact of the *épuration* on Camus's role as a public figure and intellectual see Judt, pp. 87-112. Mark Orme also explores the relationship between the *épuration* and *L'Homme révolté*, and offers a reading of Camus's essay as 'un traité général qui cherche à diagnostiquer une réponse éthique aux poursuites judiciaires', arguing that in this sense 'la délibération théorique précède l'utilité pratique', Orme, p.92.

[6] See Albert Camus, *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), p.285.

[7] Camus writes: 'On nous excusera de commencer aujourd'hui par une vérité première: il est certain désormais que l'épuration en France est non seulement manquée, mais encore déconsidérée. Le mot d'épuration était déjà assez pénible en lui-même. La chose est devenue odieuse', *Essais*, p.289. Although Camus never quite shared Mauriac's views, by 1945 he was certainly moving in that direction. The most notable indication of this was his willingness to sign the petition to De Gaulle for clemency in the case of

As his hopes for a new France, free from the politics of the Third Republic and the complicity of the Occupation, began to fade through the course of 1945, Camus began to drift away from the centre of political and intellectual life.[8] Moreover, the profound disquiet he had felt during the mid to late 1930s at the ideological extremism of the pre-war years resurged again as the polemics of the Cold War era began to emerge and rumours of Stalinist Gulags circulated.[9] Whilst there is some controversy over the stage at which certain intellectuals knew of the Soviet camps, it is clear from accounts of the context in which *L'Homme révolté* was written, such as that by Bernard Gros, that news of the camps in the USSR had begun to filter through to the West shortly after the defeat of Germany. Gros writes: 'Dépassées les journées de liesse populaire qui suivirent

---

Robert Brasillach, which, along with his expressions of sympathy for other cases, attracted much derision from the communist left who criticized him for taking a soft line on collaborators. However, Tony Judt notes that Camus only agreed to sign the petition after some deliberation and cites an unpublished letter from Camus to Marcel Aymé where he explains that his reason for signing was his objection to the death penalty and not his support for Brasillach, see *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944-1956* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: California University Press, 1992). It is worth noting that other prominent intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir refused to support Brasillach's cause. See Sartre, 'Qu'est-ce que la littérature?', in *Situations*, 10 vols (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1947-76), II (1948), pp.55-330; 'Présentation', *Les Temps modernes*, 1 (1945-6), pp.1-21. See also Beauvoir, 'Œil pour œil', *Les Temps modernes*, 1 (1945-6), 813-830 and *La Force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963), pp.31-3.

[8] As early as December 1944, Camus wrote in his *Carnets*: 'La réputation. Elle vous est donnée par des médiocres et vous la partagez avec des médiocres ou des gredins', *Carnets II: janvier 1942-mars 1951* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964), p.129. Writing in his *Carnets* at this time, Camus reveals his profound sense of solitude and his disillusionment with the times: 'Tentation de fuir et d'accepter la décadence de son époque. La solitude me rend heureux. Mais sentiment aussi que la décadence commence à partir du moment où l'on accepte. Et on reste – pour que l'homme reste à la hauteur qui est la sienne. Exactement, pour ne pas contribuer à ce qu'il en descende. Mais dégoût, dégoût nauséeux de cet éparpillement dans les autres', p.135. An increasing concern, this is echoed again towards the end of 1945: 'À trente ans, presque du jour au lendemain, j'ai connu la renommée. Je ne le regrette pas. J'aurais pu en faire plus tard de mauvais rêves. Maintenant, je sais ce que c'est. C'est peu de chose. [...] La renommée! Dans le meilleur des cas, un malentendu. [...] Ce malentendu, pour qui sait le prendre, est une libération. Mon ambition, si j'en ai une, est d'un autre ordre', pp.151-2.

[9] In September 1945, Camus wrote in his *Carnets*: 'Le seul problème contemporain: Peut-on transformer le monde sans croire au pouvoir absolu de la raison?', *Carnets II*, p.141. See also pp. 155-7. Citing 'Ni victimes ni bourreaux', Lionel Dubois remarks that Camus condemned the Stalinist camps well before the subject was in the media, see Dubois, 'Le Combat d'Albert Camus contre les totalitarismes', in *Les Trois Guerres d'Albert Camus: actes du colloque international de Poitiers 4-5-6 mai 1995* (Poitiers: Éditions du Pont-Neuf, 1995), pp.123-137 (p.133). Tony Judt also suggests that it was around 1948 that Camus's attention began to shift from the *épuration* to the problem of communism and justice, Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility*, p.114.

l'écroulement de l'Allemagne nazie, le monde occidental apprit avec stupeur que la grande alliée, l'U.R.S.S., celait dans ses déserts d'authentiques camps de concentration'.[10] From 1945 onwards, a number of publications which testified to the existence of the camps entered the public domain,[11] exploding the belief held by some French intellectuals that the USSR offered a model of the perfect communist state.[12] It is against this backdrop and in response to these issues that Camus formalized his thinking on revolt and developed a staunchly anti-absolutist position in response to the extremism of contemporary politics. Camus confirms this in his 'Défense de *L'Homme révolté*' where he writes: 'Pour ma part, je n'aurais pas écrit *L'Homme révolté* si, dans les années 40, je ne m'étais trouvé en face d'hommes dont je ne pouvais m'expliquer le système et dont je ne comprenais pas les actes' (*E*, 1702). This period was therefore one of exploration and self-reflection for Camus and the development of his thought can be traced through the journalistic and theoretical work he published during this time, much of which addressed issues which later became the central themes of *L'Homme révolté*. In particular, Camus's early essay 'Remarque sur la révolte', written during the latter stages of the war and

---

[10] Bernard Gros, *Camus: 'L'Homme révolté'* (Paris: Hatier, 1977), p.7.

[11] The most notable and controversial of these were Arthur Koestler's *Le Zéro et l'infini* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1945), *Le Yogi et le commissaire*, trad. by Dominique Aury and Jeanne Terracini (Paris: Charlot, 1946), and Victor Kravchenko's testimony *J'ai choisi la liberté! La vie publique et privée d'un haut fonctionnaire soviétique*, trad. by Jean de Kerdéland (Paris: Éditions Self, 1947). As the tension between East and West mounted, more writers voiced their concerns about the terror and apparent moral impunity of the Soviet regime. In 1948, Grenier published *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948) and Raymond Aron his *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948). On 12 November 1949, David Rousset published his controversial article 'Appel aux déportés des camps nazis. Au secours des déportés dans les camps soviétiques' in *Le Figaro littéraire*.

[12] Gros argues that the wilful forgetfulness on the part of French society of the Moscow trials during the 1930s and the lack of interest in solitary voices like that of Jean Grenier, who spoke out against political extremism before the war, along with the influential lectures given by Alexandre Kojève, whose interpretation of the Hegelian master/slave dialectic as a means of bringing about the perfect state through revolution was immensely popular amongst intellectuals at the time, combined to create an intellectual climate which was extremely supportive of the USSR. Although Gros notes that Kojève did not explicitly equate the USSR with the notion of the perfect state, he cites R. P. Fessard who attended the lectures and who suggested that there was no doubt about the association in Kojève's mind, Gros, p.8. For a transcription of Kojève's lectures see Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. by Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

published in 1945 in *L'Existence*, a volume edited by Jean Grenier, explores the relationship between the Absurd and revolt and serves as a template for the first chapter of *L'Homme révolté*. The series of articles he wrote under the title 'Ni victimes ni bourreaux' in 1946 question the use of violence and the means used to achieve ethical ends.[13] Highly controversial, these articles resulted in a heated exchange between Camus and Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie.[14] Camus also wrote 'Prométhée aux enfers' in 1946 which was later published as part of the collection *L'Été* in 1959 and in which he rejects absolutism as a mode of metaphysical revolt, so foreshadowing the central concern of his theory of revolt.[15] A move from the praxis of resistance to the theorization of revolt, *L'Homme révolté* must be understood, at least in part, as Camus's response to contemporary history and the ethical dilemmas it posed.

In this landmark text, Camus interprets history as the site of metaphysical struggle and historical action as the means by which human beings battle for totality and significance. Profoundly disillusioned by what he regards as the apocalyptic consequences of doctrines which promote historical action as a mode of revolt, Camus proposes an ethics based on the principle that human life is implicitly valuable and advocates a relativistic approach which seeks to maintain the tension between affirmation and negation. For Camus, the act of revolt sets a limit which must not be infringed: 'C'est en cela que l'esclave révolté dit à la fois oui et non. Il affirme, en même temps que la frontière, tout ce qu'il soupçonne et veut préserver en deçà de la frontière' (*E*, 423). In

---

[13] See Camus, 'Ni victimes ni bourreaux', *Essais*, pp.331-352.
[14] See Emmanuel d'Astier de la Vigerie, 'Arrachez la victime aux bourreaux. Réponse à Albert Camus', *Caliban*, April 1948, 12-17; 'La Grande Tribune politique d'action: Ponce-Pilate chez les bourreaux. Réponse à Albert Camus', *Action*, 14-20 July 1948. Camus's two responses to d'Astier de la Vigerie can be found in *Essais*, pp.355-368.
[15] Camus, *Essais*, pp.841-844.

this moment, the rebel both discovers and expresses his or her human dignity and is willing to fight to the death to defend it. Camus argues, somewhat controversially, that this willingness to die in the name of human freedom brings with it the realization that the value of human nature exists above and beyond individual existence: 'Il agit donc au nom d'une valeur, encore confuse, mais dont il a le sentiment, au moins, qu'elle lui est commune avec tous les hommes' (*E*, 425). In Camus's view, the universality of human worth therefore demands that rather than a solitary, solipsistic, act of self-assertion, authentic revolt is an expression of human solidarity. Action which does not maintain the tension between Self and Other, between the affirmation of human life and the negation of that which threatens it, consequently pursues one or other of these terms as an absolute goal and, in so doing, sacrifices human life and freedom.

Unsurprisingly, given the polemical climate in which it was written, Camus's essay met with a wide diversity of critical opinion, the most damaging and enduring of which were the views expressed by Francis Jeanson and Jean-Paul Sartre in *Les Temps modernes*.[16] The bitter debate which erupted in May 1952 between Sartre and Camus exposed and highlighted the differences in their philosophical perspectives.[17] In his 'Réponse à Albert Camus', Sartre challenges the position Camus takes on the creation of values, the question of historical action and the issue of violence. Although at times

---

[16] See Jeanson, 'Albert Camus ou l'âme révoltée', *Les Temps modernes*, 7 (1952), 2070-2090 and Sartre, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', *Les Temps modernes*, 8 (1952), 334-353.

[17] It is not within the scope of this introductory chapter to explore the debate between Camus and Sartre in any great detail. However, for a more detailed discussion of their quarrel see Germaine Brée, *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974); Claudie et Jacques Broyelle, *Les Illusions retrouvées: Sartre a toujours raison contre Camus* (Paris: Grasset, 1982); Peter Royle, *The Sartre-Camus Controversy: A Literary and Philosophical Critique* (Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 1982); Jonathan H. King, 'Sartre-Camus: The Quarrel as Biography', *French Cultural Studies*, 13 (1994), 39-56; Olivier Todd, 'Camus and Sartre', in *Camus's 'L'Etranger': Fifty Years On*, ed. by Adèle King (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.244-51; John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959), pp.120-127; A. Blanchet, 'La Querelle Sartre-Camus', in *La Littérature et le spirituel: la mêlée littéraire*, ed. by A. Blanchet, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959-61), I (1959), pp.267-279.

obscured by personal wrangling, the terms of the debate centre on the nature of ethical values and how these values are to be pursued. For Sartre, values are determined and defined by the individual consciousness through action. Since values do not pre-exist but are created and founded through historical action and collective political endeavour, ethical failure is inevitable and must be accepted as fundamental to the human condition.[18] In contrast, Camus's notion of the given value of human nature led him to an understanding of the ethical as independent of action and history. Consequently, the extent to which his conceptual framework can justify and therefore accommodate the use of violence is far more limited. The public nature of the debate, the profile of those involved[19] and the embittered tone of the discussion sealed the end of Camus and Sartre's friendship and established a critical agenda which has dominated readings of *L'Homme révolté* ever since. Despite Sartre's acknowledgement that they in fact shared much common ground[20] and despite his hope that '[leur] silence fera oublier cette polémique',[21] it is clear from critical responses to Camus's theory of revolt since 1952

---

[18] The notion of ethical failure to which I am referring is not that of moral failure, the result of human actions or decisions, but the concept which Beauvoir notably developed of the ethical as impossibility. For Beauvoir, the impossibility of full self-presence means that human action is implicitly limited, resulting in an inability to work towards all ethical ends all of the time. The failure which ensues from this is, in Beauvoir's view, both inevitable and integral to human action. See Simone de Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* and *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*. For a discussion of Beauvoir's notion of failure see Colin Davis' chapter 'Didacticism and the Ethics of Failure: Beauvoir', in his book *Ethical Issues in Twentieth-Century French Fiction: Killing the Other* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000), pp.86-107.

[19] Judt suggests that Sartre's popularity was a significant factor in Camus's ostrecization from the inner sanctum of French intellectual life, arguing that Sartre's authority carried great weight at this time and that it became fashionable to dismiss Camus, *The Burden of Responsibility*, p.100.

[20] Sartre opens his response to Camus as follows: 'Notre amitié n'était pas facile mais je la regretterai. Si vous la rompez aujourd'hui, c'est sans doute qu'elle devait se rompre. Beaucoup de choses nous rapprochaient, peu nous séparaient. Mais ce peu était encore trop: l'amitié, elle aussi, tend à devenir totalitaire', 'Réponse à Albert Camus', p.334.

[21] Ibid., p.353. It is worth noting that Sartre was acutely aware of the provisional nature of their debate and that it was proper to a particular historical and political time and context. Sartre writes: 'Ce qu'il adviendra de nous je ne sais: peut-être nous retrouverons-nous dans le même camp, peut-être pas. Les temps sont durs et mêlés', p.353. As I will outline in the following pages, it is a peculiarity of much of the criticism concerning Camus's theory of ethical revolt and the polemic which ensued that critics have not similarly acknowledged the limitations of this interpretive framework.

that this controversy has had an enduring effect on the way in which we interpret both Camus's ethical position and his contribution to twentieth-century discourses on ethics.

This phenomenon was noted by Michel Maillard in a discussion focusing on Camus and the Second World War at the international conference held in Poitiers in 1995. Remarking on the tendency of some critics to over-simplify Camus's and Sartre's perspectives in a desire to defend *L'Homme révolté*, Maillard comments: 'Les Camusiens auraient tendance à penser - et c'est vrai que j'ai tendance à le penser aussi - que Camus a eu raison contre Sartre, etc. et que, maintenant, il y a peu de choses qui peuvent sauver l'agrégé de philo, mais j'ai l'impression, quand même, que Sartre avait - car il avait une certaine intelligence - , Sartre avait un rapport beaucoup plus complexe aux choses'.[22] Maillard's remarks are of interest because they point to the polemical nature of critical response to Camus's philosophical and theoretical writing. Indeed, an exploration of critical studies of *L'Homme révolté* across the last five decades offers multiple examples of the way the quarrel between Camus and Sartre has created a critical paradigm which, to a large extent, has patterned and defined readings of Camus's work ever since, with the result that the existentialist agenda voiced by Jeanson and Sartre still dominates critical discourse in this field. Critics tend to revisit the same issues which caused so much contention in the 1950s - political engagement, historical absolutism, Marxism, the use of violence, ideological extremism – in order to defend or simply reassert Camus's position in relation, or rather in opposition, to that of Sartre.

As early as 1963, the polemicization of critical opinion following the *Temps modernes* debate can be seen to emerge. Lucien Guissard in an article in *La Croix*

---

[22] Michel Maillard, 'Camus et la guerre 1939-45', in *Les Trois Guerres d'Albert Camus: actes du colloque international de Poitiers 4-5-6 mai 1995* (Poitiers: Éditions du Pont-Neuf, 1995), pp.68-100 (p.90).

criticizes Morvan Lebesque for what he perceives to be a highly defensive reading of Camus's theory of revolt, which, he writes, takes up the 'ancienne opposition entre la "philosophie" de Camus et l'existentialisme sartrien'.[23] Although more objective in tone than Lebesque, Marcel Domerc's article 'Camus est-il dépassé?' in 1966 similarly questions the criticisms Sartre made of Camus's essay.[24] At a time when there had been significant shifts in literary theory, criticism of *L'Homme révolté* in the late 1970s preferred on the whole to revisit the battlegrounds of the 1950s, perpetuating the hermeneutic paradigm which had shaped critical response to Camus's work two decades earlier, rather than offering new readings of his essay in the light of emerging theoretical paradigms such as postcolonialism, poststructuralism and feminism, as some critics had begun to do with Camus's literary texts.[25] Bernard Gros's monographic study of *L'Homme révolté*, published in 1977, offers an example of this preoccupation on the part of critics with settling old scores. In the opening paragraph, Gros sets out his critical agenda: 'Il fallait être aveuglé par la passion politique, comme Sartre, pour ne pas voir, en 1951, que ce livre mettait en lumière l'un des grands problèmes du siècle'.[26] Rebutting Sartre's critical view of the stance Camus takes on ideological absolutism in 'Prométhée

---

[23] Lucien Guissard, 'Albert Camus: moraliste "bourgeois"?', *La Croix*, 3 June 1963. See Morvan Lebesque, *Albert Camus par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1963).
[24] Marcel Domerc, 'Camus est-il dépassé?', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 9-15 February 1966.
[25] See for example Michel Grimaud, 'Humanism and the "White Man's Burden": Camus, Daru, Meursault and the Arabs', in *Camus's 'L'Étranger': Fifty Years On*, ed. by Adèle King (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.170-82; Edward Hughes, *Writing Marginality in Modern French Literature from Loti to Genet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001), pp.102-134; Colin Davis, 'Altericide: Camus, Encounters, Reading', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 33 (1997), 129-141; Shoshana Felman and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis, and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992); Jean Sarrochi, 'L'Autre et les autres', in *Albert Camus's 'L'Exil et le royaume': The Third Decade*, ed. by Anthony Rizzuto (Toronto: Les Éditions Paratexte, 1988), pp. 95-104; Elizabeth Hart, 'Face à face: l'éthique lévinasienne dans "L'Hôte"', in *Les Trois Guerres d'Albert Camus*, ed. by Lionel Dubois (Poitiers: Les Éditions du Pont-Neuf, 1995), pp.172-177; Vicki Mistacco, 'Nomadic Meanings: The Woman Effect in "La Femme adultère"', in *Albert Camus's 'L'Exil et le royaume': The Third Decade*, ed. by Anthony Rizzuto (Toronto: Les Éditions Paratexte, 1988), pp.71-84.
[26] Gros, p.5.

aux enfers', Gros describes Sartre as 'ce valet des dieux de la Violence et du Totalitarisme'.[27] Locked into the Sartre/Camus polemic, Gros concludes what is effectively his own *défense* of *L'Homme révolté* by stating: 'Au risque de "décourager Billancourt", il faut dire et redire que c'est Camus qui avait raison'.[28] More subdued in tone, René-Jean Dupuy's article on Camus as a political moralist is also dominated by the Camus/Sartre opposition. Pursuing a distinctly existentialist critical agenda, Dupuy focuses on the issues which fundamentally separate Camus and Sartre, so reaffirming the critical consensus, not only on this brief period of French intellectual history, but also on Camus's contribution to contemporary political and ethical thought.[29]

Whilst some critics moved away from the hermeneutics of the *Temps modernes* debate during the 1980s, focusing instead on the more creative and regenerative aspects of Camus's writing,[30] the 1990s have seen a resurgence of critical interest in Camus's political and theoretical work and a return to the binarism of the Camus/Sartre debate. An exploration of criticism since 1990 reveals the extent to which critical analysis of Camus's ethical position remains fixed within the parameters of what I would argue is now a restrictive critical paradigm, since it only looks at Camus's thought through the optic of Sartrian Existentialism. Although this hermeneutic framework might, in some senses, still be pertinent, it neither allows for a breadth of perspective which the distance afforded by time offers, nor permits a consideration of Camus's thought in the light of

---

[27] Ibid., p.22.
[28] Ibid., p.62.
[29] René-Jean Dupuy, 'Camus, moraliste politique', *Annales de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Nice*, 38 (1979), 237-249.
[30] See for example Raymond Gay-Crosier, 'La Révolte génératrice et régénératrice', in *Albert Camus: œuvre fermée, œuvre ouverte?*, ed. by Raymond Gay-Crosier and Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), pp.113-134; 'Révolte, souveraineté et jeu chez Bataille et Camus: étude conceptuelle', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 12 (1985), 7-34. See also Édouard Morot-Sir, '*L'Homme révolté*: entre oui et non', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 12 (1985), 35-64.

the theoretical shifts which have taken place in the intervening period.[31] Despite Michel Maillard's comments, to which I alluded earlier, the debate on *L'Homme révolté* which took place during the international conference in Poitiers in 1995 is representative of this critical approach to Camus's political writing which continues to dominate the way in which Camus's theoretical work is read. This debate, detailed in the conference proceedings, rapidly descended into a discussion of the Camus/Sartre feud, reaffirming this paradigm as the dominant optic through which to read and assess Camus's ethical position.[32] The dominance of this critical agenda was again evident in a number of journal articles published in celebration of the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of *L'Homme révolté* in 2001. The edition of the *Lettres modernes* Albert Camus series published in 2001 was entitled *'L'Homme révolté' cinquante ans après*. Despite the title, a number of the contributors seem to have been set on returning to the critical agenda of the 1950s, determined to re-settle old scores. In particular, Denis Charbit, in his article '*L'Homme révolté*: grandeur et servitude de la fonction intellectuelle', offers a defence of

---

[31] For example, critical readings of Camus's political and ethical writing have tended not to take account of the theories of alterity which have continued to emerge since the 1960s and whose central concern is the status of the Other. Yet the work of such writers as Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida and Alain Finkielkraut resonate with Camus's writing as is confirmed by the handful of critics who have drawn out this aspect of his literary work. See for example Sarrochi, pp. 95-104, Davis, 'Altericide: Camus, Encounters, Reading', pp.129-141; and Elizabeth Hart, 'Levinasian Ethics and the Works of Albert Camus' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York, 1997), 'Face à face: l'éthique lévinasienne dans "L'Hôte"', pp.172-177; Jill Beer, '*Le Regard*: Face to Face in Albert Camus's "L'Hôte"', *French Studies*, 56 (2002), 179-192. For a reading of *La Chute* and *La Peste* as testimonial narratives which bear witness to the silenced-Other, see the following chapters in Felman and Laub, 'Camus's *The Plague*, or A Monument to Witnessing', pp.93-119 and 'Camus's *The Fall*, or the Betrayal of the Witness', pp.165-203.

[32] Abdelkader Djemai, 'Camus journaliste', in *Les Trois Guerres d'Albert Camus: actes du colloque international de Poitiers 4-5-6 mai 1995*, ed. by Lionel Dubois (Poitiers: Éditions du Pont-Neuf, 1995), pp.41-57 (pp.49-53). This binary optic can also be seen in Jeanyves Guérin's article 'Camus, philosophe pour classes terminales?' where he writes of Sartre: 'Le philosophe de la praxis, lui, voit son prestige monter au zénith, quand il fait l'apologie de la violence et de la fraternité-terreur. [...] Les intellectuels français du demi-siècle sont portés sur l'absolu et la totalité. Ils préfère être systématiques que cohérents. On comprend dans ces conditions qu'ils n'aient pas longtemps accepté un Camus dans leurs rangs', Jeanyves Guérin, 'Camus, philosophe pour classes terminales?', in *Albert Camus et la philosophie*, ed. by Anne-Marie Amiot and Jean-François Mattéi (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp.85-99 (pp.90-91).

Camus's essay which systematically addresses the now familiar criticisms made by Jeanson and Sartre, albeit in an effort to prove the modern relevance of Camus's thinking. One such rebuttal of many throughout Charbit's article concerns the accusation that Camus's analyses of different literary, political and philosophical figures in *L'Homme révolté* are summary and second-hand. Charbit contests this bitterly: 'Camus se trouvait obligé de schématiser, de réduire, de sélectionner tel ou tel aspect et de négliger tel autre. [...] il fut aussitôt taxé de dilettantisme et d'incompétence pour avoir osé s'aventurer sur une chasse bien gardée par des commandeurs vigilants soucieux de protéger la supériorité de leur érudition ou de préserver la pureté de leur idole'.[33] Similarly, Françoise Trageser-Rebetez, in her study of the cyclical paradigm in Camus's philosophy of history, posits the purpose and relevance of her paper in terms of the Camus/Sartre polemic.[34] Indeed, even her reading of recent history seems to be mediated through this optic: 'La présente contribution a pour objet de dégager l'aspect cyclique de la philosophie camusienne de l'Histoire tel qu'il apparaît dans *L'Homme révolté*. Cette thématique n'a certes pas perdu de son intérêt, depuis que la postériorité a donné raison à Camus contre Sartre, depuis que fut attestée, en 1987, une actualité à sa "philosophie politique" [...] enfin, depuis la chute du mur de Berlin en 1989'.[35]

One of the very few people to have questioned the binarism of this critical framework is François Noudelmann. Writing for an edited collection on Camus and

---

[33] Denis Charbit, '*L'Homme révolté*: grandeur et servitude de la fonction intellectuelle', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 19 (2001), 11-53 (p.40).
[34] Françoise Trageser-Rebetez, 'Paradigme cyclique dans la philosophie camusienne de l'histoire: la symbolique de *L'Homme révolté*', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 19 (2001), 55-89. For further examples of recent articles on Camus's political and ethical thought which subscribe to and perpetuate this critical perspective see Lawrence D. Kritzman, 'Camus's Curious Humanism or the Intellectual in Exile', *Modern Language Notes*, 112 (1997), 550-575 and Simone Debout, 'Sartre et Camus, témoins de la liberté', *Modern Language Notes*, 112 (1997), 600-607.
[35] Trageser-Rebetez, p.55.

philosophy in 1997, Noudelmann argues that the polarity of the *Temps modernes* debate has obscured the proximity between Camus's philosophical thought and that of Sartre: 'La trop fameuse querelle de 1952, à propos de *L'homme révolté*, a occulté le dialogue de deux itinéraires philosophiques entrecroisés'.[36] In his article, Noudelmann sets out to illustrate the similarities between Camus's and Sartre's approaches to literature, the body, human nature and history. Concluding that '[l']opposition ne semble pas si nette entre les deux penseurs',[37] Noudelmann closes his article with a call for a more nuanced reading of Camus and Sartre's relationship which 'permettrait de sortir du strict conflit partisan et de ne pas rester à l'épisode des *Temps modernes*'.[38] However, whilst Noudelmann points to the restrictiveness of this critical paradigm and the need for a re-reading of Camus's work, his enquiry remains within the confines of the Camus/Sartre relationship and does not relate their thought to the work of other postwar intellectuals, such as Simone de Beauvoir. Nor does he explore Camus's theory of revolt in the light of subsequent shifts in literary theory and criticism which, in my view, is necessary if we are to move beyond the terms of the *Temps modernes* debate. Six years on from Noudelmann's contribution, the binarism of this polemic continues to dominate Camus criticism in this area which has hitherto failed to respond to Noudelmann's tentative suggestion that 'le temps est peut-être venu de ne plus jouer un camp contre un autre, de ne plus répéter les anathèmes, simples enjeux du pouvoir de ceux qui prennent les auteurs pour des étendards'.[39]

---

[36] François Noudelmann, 'Camus et Sartre: le corps et la loi', in *Albert Camus et la philosophie*, ed. by Anne-Marie Amiot and Jean-François Mattéi (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp.133-155 (p.134).
[37] Ibid., p.152.
[38] Ibid., p.154.
[39] Ibid., p.133.

The purpose of tracing this critical discourse from the 1960s to the present day is not to discredit or diminish the significance either of individual studies or of the event which shaped their critical approach. It is unquestionable that Camus's rupture with Sartre marks a pivotal moment both in postwar French intellectual life and Camus's own career as a political commentator, public figure and respected writer. However, it is also clear from this exploration that, with some notable exceptions, the critical agenda of Jeanson and Sartre has come to dominate readings of Camus's work.[40] Engaging with Noudelmann's article, I would argue that the dominance of this critical framework is problematic for two principal reasons. Firstly, the binarism of this debate has tended to polarize critics into two opposing camps, thus not taking other postwar thinkers such as Beauvoir fully into account. Critical discourse is reduced to either defending or attacking long-established positions rather than exploring new and alternative perspectives which might offer more nuanced readings of Camus's work. Consequently, the similarities which exist between Camus's thought and some aspects of Existentialism, in particular the existentialist ethics developed by Beauvoir, have not surfaced. Secondly, this critical approach is limited because it does not, nor can it, take account of later theoretical shifts which have taken place since the Camus/Sartre polemic. Criticism of Camus's ethics is therefore restricted to the theoretical and philosophical parameters of the immediate postwar years and has not engaged with Camus's non-fictional work in the light of more recent theories of alterity. In particular, theorists such as Maurice Blanchot, Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov and Marc Augé have been influential in

---

[40] I would add moreover that the assumptions we make, the questions we ask, the issues we seek to address, all of these activities are necessarily inflected by our critical, theoretical and intellectual background. Thus, by seeking to problematize the dominance of this critical paradigm, this study both responds to and is itself shaped by the history of interpretation I have outlined.

challenging the precepts of Western ontology about the Self and the status of the Other. Given these limitations and the modern critical climate, where issues of otherness are at the forefront of ethical, feminist and postcolonial thinking, the purpose of this study is firstly to disrupt the binarism of this critical paradigm by adopting an alternative approach, which draws into proximity the work of Camus with that of Simone de Beauvoir, secondly to offer a more nuanced reading of Camus's contribution to contemporary discourses on ethics, and thirdly to open up an alternative perspective on his proposal through a study of his work in the light of Maurice Blanchot's radically different ethical optic.

Like Camus and many other intellectuals at the time, Beauvoir's shock at the outbreak of the Second World War radically altered her literary and philosophical concerns.[41] Terry Keefe comments that from 1941 onwards Beauvoir became increasingly aware of the need to recognize the consciousness of others and describes *Le Sang des autres* as an attempt to address the problem of alterity and the question of our relationship with *autrui* within the context of a complex social situation.[42] The war and the ethical challenges that it posed brought a new social and political dimension to Beauvoir's fiction and her two theoretical works, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* and *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, lay the philosophical ground for the narratives which constituted her

---

[41] Kate and Edward Fullbrook describe Beauvoir's ethical writing as a response to the need to learn the lessons of the war 'by constructing an ethics that would address the need for action in specific material circumstances'. They make the further comment that Beauvoir emerged from the war with a 'deep sense of the impact of history on the individual', Fullbrook and Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993), p.141. The impact the declaration of war had on Beauvoir is clear in her memoirs of this time: 'Jusqu'alors je ne m'étais souciée que d'enrichir ma vie personnelle et d'apprendre à la traduire en mots [...]. Soudain, l'Histoire fondit sur moi, j'éclatai: je me retrouvai éparpillée aux quatre coins de la terre, liée par toutes mes fibres à chacun et à tous. Idées, valeurs, tout fut bousculé; le bonheur même perdit son importance', *La Force de l'âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), pp.381-2.

[42] Terry Keefe, *Simone de Beauvoir* (Basingstoke and London: MacMillan Press, 1998), pp.59-60.

'période morale'.[43] Yet Beauvoir's contribution to contemporary ethical discourse is absent from critical studies on Camus's ethics which tend to privilege Sartre as a counterweight and contrast to Camus. In reference to the conclusion of Sartre's *L'Être et le néant* where he announces a sequel to this work which would address the ethical implications of Existentialism, Olivier Todd writes: 'Camus et Sartre affrontent l'éternel problème des bases d'une morale si l'on ne croit pas en Dieu'.[44] Although Sartre did indeed intend to write a sequel to *L'Être et le néant*, notes for which can be found in his *Cahiers pour une morale*,[45] it was Beauvoir who took Sartrian Existentialism beyond the bounds of the transcendental ego and into the ethical domain.[46] Despite their preoccupation with existentialist discourse, Camus critics rarely broaden their perspective to encompass the work of Beauvoir, whose writing on ethics became highly influential in the postwar years, particularly following the publication of *Le Deuxième Sexe* in 1949 in which there has been a recent resurgence of interest in the 1990s.[47] One exception to this is Aliette Armel's short piece in *Magazine littéraire*, in which she refers to Beauvoir's

---

[43] Beauvoir writes: 'À partir de 1939, tout changea; le monde devint un chaos, et je cessai de rien bâtir [...]. Ainsi entrai-je dans ce que je pourrais appeler la "période morale" de ma vie littéraire qui se prolongea pendant quelques années', *La Force de l'âge* , p.561. For an account of this period, see Elizabeth Fallaize, *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988), pp.9-13.

[44] Olivier Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996), p.311.

[45] Although written in 1947 and 1948, *Cahiers pour une morale* was only published posthumously in 1983. Before he died, Sartre apparently stipulated that he did not want any of his unfinished philosophical texts to be published until after his death. See *Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

[46] It is worth noting that Camus was instrumental in persuading Beauvoir to undertake the project of constructing an existentialist ethics based on Sartre's *L'Être et le néant*. See Kate Fullbrook and Edward Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.160.

[47] See for example Sonia Kruks, *Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990); Michèle Le Doeuff, *L'Étude et le rouet* (Paris: Seuil, 1989); Eva Lundgren-Gothlin, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex'* (London: Athlone, 1996) and Catriona Mackenzie, 'A Certain Lack of Symmetry: Beauvoir on Autonomous Agency and Women's Embodiment', in *Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex': New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Ruth Evans (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp.122-159. For a detailed account of critical reception to *Le Deuxième Sexe* since its publication in 1949 see Elizabeth Fallaize, 'Introduction', in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth Fallaize (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.1-16 (pp.9-11) and also Alison S. Fell, *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003), pp.78-85.

article 'Faut-il brûler Sade?' and remarks on the similarity between her conclusions and those of Camus in his essay on revolt. But otherwise this article offers a reading of *L'Homme révolté* from the perspective of the Camus/Sartre polemic.[48] On the rare occasions when Beauvoir is mentioned in critical discussions of the relation between Camus's work and that of his contemporaries, such as that cited above, she is invariably and often unquestioningly placed in the Sartrian camp without any reference to or consideration of her own ethical position.[49] Yet, as this study will show, there are strong similarities between Camus's and Beauvoir's interpretation of contemporary history and the ethical approaches they develop to the problem of contemporary nihilism. In her unique position in relation to, but distinct from, Sartre, Beauvoir is well-placed to inform and illuminate the relationship between Camus's thought and Sartrian Existentialism.

Based on the ontology Sartre outlines in *L'Être et le néant*, Beauvoir's ethics are founded on the notion of failure and the principle of individual freedom. The failure implicit to the human consciousness, the need to assume what I am not in order to define my being, is both the source and the foundation of Beauvoir's ethics.[50] Firstly it is the source of ethics because out of our failure to achieve full significance and the consequent

---

[48] Aliette Armel, '*L'Homme révolté* aujourd'hui', *Magazine littéraire*, 276 (1990), 46-47 (p.46). See also Simone de Beauvoir, 'Faut-il brûler Sade?', *Les Temps modernes*, 7 (1951), 1002-1033; 'Faut-il brûler Sade? (fin)', *Les Temps modernes*, 7 (1952), 1197-1230. It is important to note that Armel is largely alone in identifying the parallels between Camus's approach and Beauvoir's ethics.

[49] Recent work on Beauvoir has striven to critique this assumption that Beauvoir's position mirrors and is dependent upon Sartre's. For example, Sonia Kruks writes: 'Beauvoir begins from within Sartre's framework, but ends by offering us an analysis which bursts out of the confines of Sartreanism', 'Beauvoir: The Weight of Situation', in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth Fallaize (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.43-71 (p.58). See also Margaret Atack, 'Writing from the Centre: Ironies of Otherness and Marginality', in *Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex': New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Ruth Evans (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp.31-59, and Margaret Simons, 'Beauvoir and Sartre: The Philosophical Relationship', *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 165-79.

[50] Discussing Beauvoir's notion of ethical failure, Davis writes: 'If Sartre failed to establish an existentialist ethics, Beauvoir radicalizes his non-completion of the *Cahiers pour une morale* by making failure itself the unsurpassable horizon of moral action', *Ethical Issues in Twentieth-Century French Fiction*, p.94.

need to assert ourselves in the world, comes the need for ethics: 'sans échec, pas de morale; pour un être qui serait d'emblée exacte coïncidence avec soi-même, parfaite plénitude, la notion de devoir-être n'aurait pas de sens. [...] C'est dire qu'il ne saurait y avoir de devoir-être que pour un être qui, selon la définition existentialiste, se met en question dans son être, un être qui est à distance de soi-même et qui a à être son être' (*PM*, 15-16). Distinct from other philosophical paradigms which admit a pre-existing nature to humanity and posit as a final goal the perfection of human nature, the existentialist ethics Beauvoir develops does not allow for the hope of overcoming human failure through the perfection of the human spirit. The corollary of this position is that the enduring and insurmountable ambiguity of the human condition will always generate a need for ethics. Secondly, failure is the foundation of ethics because in order to be we need the existence of others, without whom it would be impossible to define what we are by what we are not. This upsurge of freedom, which Sartre explores in detail in *L'Être et le néant*, requires that there are other consciousnesses across whose freedom my own liberty is projected in order for me to be my own nothingness. The preservation and assertion of my own liberty is therefore dependent on that of *autrui* and it is this necessity to respect the freedom of others which becomes the foundation of Beauvoir's ethics and permeates both her fictional and non-fictional writings: 'Ce n'est qu'en tant qu'étranger, interdit, en tant que libre, que l'autre se dévoile comme autre; et l'aimer authentiquement, c'est l'aimer dans son altérité et dans cette liberté par laquelle il s'échappe. L'amour est alors renoncement à toute possession, à toute confusion; on renonce à être afin qu'il y ait cet être qu'on n'est pas' (*PM*, 85). Therefore, in Beauvoir's

view, by freely choosing failure, the individual enters into a responsibility for the freedom of the Other.

Whereas Beauvoir's ethical paradigm provides a new and productive way of evaluating Camus's thought in relation to his contemporaries, Blanchot's theoretical optic opens up an alternative perspective which allows us to assess Camus's theory of revolt in terms of modern critical discourses such as feminism, postcolonialism and ethical criticism, all of which are informed to a certain extent by the theoretical approaches developed by Blanchot, Levinas, and others. In 1954, Blanchot wrote a series of three articles for the *Nouvelle Revue française*, examining the transition between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté* from an ethical perspective which is very different from that of Sartrian Existentialism.[51] A close friend of Emmanuel Levinas, whose work addresses the radical alterity of the Other,[52] Blanchot explored in his critical and literary work the ethical implications of otherness for the act of writing. Challenging the traditional, logocentric, paradigms of literary criticism, Blanchot's unique approach disrupts established literary genres and calls into question the nature of language itself. John Gregg writes: 'If, in Blanchot's writing, these traditionally distinct activities have

---

[51] Maurice Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur l'enfer', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 3 (1954), 677-686; 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 3 (1954), 850-859; 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 3 (1954), 1059-1069.

[52] Based on the Cartesian notion that ideas of things more perfect than ourselves cannot originate from us, Levinas's *idée de l'infini* describes otherness as the expression of an absent presence; the presence of that which surpasses us and constantly eludes our understanding. For Levinas, the Other is '*l'inadéquation* par excellence': intangible, elusive and distant. The encounter he proposes is one in which the Self welcomes and respects the Other as altogether other, rather than seeking to annihilate otherness in the impossible search for full self-presence. Levinas's ethical approach therefore renounces conflict and proposes peace, hospitality and generosity through encounter. See Emmanuel Levinas, *Totalité et Infini: essai sur l'extériorité* (Paris: Le Livre de poche; original edition Martinus Nijhoff, 1971), p.12. For a very clear account of Levinasian thought see also Colin Davis, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996). For a discussion of Blanchot's friendship with Levinas see Leslie Hill, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997). For a study of the relation between Blanchot's thought and that of Levinas see Gary D. Mole, *Levinas, Blanchot, Jabès: Figures of Estrangement* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 1997).

encroached on each other's territory, it is because their concerns are essentially the same: whether in the guise of novelist or critic, he seeks to plumb the depths of the mysteries of the origin of literature'.[53] Perceiving the act of writing as a space of encounter, Blanchot probes the relationship between literature and philosophy: 'Blanchot in his writing has renewed the critical debate concerning the ontological – or non-ontological – status of literature and art in general, and profoundly transformed the manner in which it is necessary to think the question of the ethical demand to which writing is a response'.[54] His 'language of otherness',[55] or 'éthique de l'écriture'[56] as one critic describes it, offers a radically new approach to literary criticism which seeks to encounter the text as Other and to probe its treatment of alterity. Adopting Blanchot's optic, the purpose of this study is not only to offer a more nuanced reading of Camus's ethical position in relation to his contemporaries, but also to reflect on Camus's thought in terms of subsequent theoretical shifts which have shaped modern theory and criticism. In Chapter 4, I explore Blanchot's reading of Camus's theory of revolt and establish his alternative perspective as a second methodological optic through which to engage with Camus's theory of revolt. The conceptual approaches of Beauvoir and Blanchot thus form a non-standard binocular through which I will explore three key areas of debate: the creation of values, Self-Other relations, and the problem of violence.

Finally, before I examine further Camus's theory of revolt in the light of Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity and in relation to Blanchot's ethics, it is vital to chart the

---

[53] John Gregg, *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p.4.
[54] Hill, p.2.
[55] Ibid., p.3.
[56] Anne-Lise Schulte Nordholt, *Maurice Blanchot: l'écriture comme expérience du dehors* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1995), p.10.

development of Camus's thinking from the early years of his career to the emergence of his concept of revolt in the latter years of the Second World War. Whilst some critics have explored aspects of this period of Camus's life,[57] very few of the major studies on his ethics consider the significance of this time in shaping his conceptual framework. Despite pledging to '[trace] the origin of Camus's ideas back to his initial symbols in order to elucidate both ideas and symbols by comparison and to show his development from experience to ethics',[58] Lev Braun offers little analysis of the impact Camus's involvement in the *Parti communiste français* had on his understanding of the relationship between politics and ethics, nor does he discuss the significance of his pre-war journalism for the development of Camus's ethical values.[59] Similarly, Bernard East offers no account of the historical and political context in which Camus's ethical thought took shape.[60] More recently, Stephen Eric Bronner set out to offer a portrait of Camus as a moralist, and whilst he refers to Camus's membership of the PCF he does not elaborate on this period of Camus's politicization. He also mentions Camus's writing for *Alger Républicain* but does not discuss the extent to which his journalistic work inflected his response to the outbreak of war and the ethical problems it posed.[61] Therefore, before pursuing in detail the question of Camus's contribution to twentieth-century discourse on

---

[57] See for example *Fragments d'un combat1938-1940*, ed. by Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi and André Abbou (Paris: Gallimard, 1978); Jean-Louis Planche, 'Une jeunesse algéroise. Camus 1914-1940', *Europe*, 77 (1999), 17-39; Paul Viallaneix, *Le Premier Camus suivi de Écrits de jeunesse d'Albert Camus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973); Roger Quilliot, 'Camus et le socialisme', in *Camus et la politique: actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp.31-38; Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi, 'L'Entrée de Camus en politique', in *Camus et la politique: actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp.137-151; Roger Grenier, *Albert Camus: soleil et ombre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991), pp.13-27.

[58] Lev Braun, *Witness of Decline: Camus, Moralist of the Absurd* (Rutherford N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974), p.14.

[59] Ibid., pp.30-9.

[60] Bernard East, *Camus ou l'homme à la recherche d'une morale* (Paris: Cerf/Bellarmin, 1984).

[61] Stephen Eric Bronner, *Camus, Portrait of a Moralist* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1999), pp.21-30.

ethics I intend in Chapters 2 and 3 to trace the genesis and development of Camus's ethical thinking from the mid-1930s to the early 1940s, and will focus on two key phases: Camus's political engagement and journalistic work prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, and the initial years of the war during which he wrote *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.

Camus's decision to join the Communist Party marks his entry into politics, and an exploration of his *Carnets* and correspondence during this period offers an insight into his ethical values at this time. The experience of extreme poverty during Camus's working-class childhood led to the development of an acute social conscience and a profound sense of the value of human life which remained with him throughout his life. His commitment to his working-class roots and the growing political extremism of the 1930s prompted Camus to consider engaging in political action as a means of achieving social and economic change. Faced with the question of how best to achieve ethical goals, Camus pursued the idea of ideological adherence further and in 1935 applied for membership of the Communist Party. A formative period in Camus's intellectual life, his involvement with the PCF constitutes an attempt to fuse the political and the ethical. The purpose of Chapter 2 is to explore the significance of this time of political activism in terms of the development of Camus's ethical approach and to consider the formation of Camus's thought in the years succeeding his departure from the Communist Party through an exploration of his journalistic writing for *Alger Républicain*. This period allowed Camus to develop his thinking free from the ideological demands of party politics. As I outlined earlier, few critics have explored the significance of the articles Camus wrote during this time for the development of his ethical thought. Yet many of the issues Camus went on to address in his postwar writing, such as the question of whether or not the end

justifies the means, the problem of absolutism and the use of violence, were clearly areas of concern for Camus prior to the war. In the second part of Chapter 2, I therefore engage with Camus's early journalism in order to show firstly the way in which his ethical approach developed during this period, and secondly to explore the intellectual crisis which the outbreak of war provoked in Camus and which can be discerned in his *Carnets*.

War, for Camus, triggered a long process of self-examination as he questioned the conceptual framework on which his approach to the problem of ethical action had been based. For Camus, the absurdity of war radically called into question the possibility of meaning. Thus, in an attempt to establish whether or not he was justified in engaging in political action, he turned to the philosophical paradigm which had dominated his early literary work: the Absurd. *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, written during this time, served as the foundation of his theory of revolt and its significance in the development of Camus's thought is critical to an understanding of his ethical position. In Chapter 3, I examine the relationship between the intellectual crisis Camus experienced at the outbreak of war and his essay on the Absurd. Although many critics focus on the philosophical content of this text, I would like to offer a reading of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as a textualization of the context in which it was written; a means by which Camus could address and work through the ethical problems posed by war. Central to his enquiry was the question of signification and whether any intellectually coherent justification for human action can be found. He returned to the Absurd in search of a 'rule' or code of action which would provide a basis for making ethical choices. His exploration of human existence in the face of absurdity led him to the conclusion that since the Absurd arises from the co-presence of human beings and the world, action must affirm human existence if it is to remain

faithful to the truth of the human condition. The corollary of this is that, in Camus's view, the act of suicide is philosophically unjustifiable. Camus's interpretation of the Sisyphus myth offers him a paradigm for the creation of ethical values. However, this conceptual framework proves to be profoundly problematic and Camus's reasoning on the Absurd ultimately fails to resolve the ethical dilemma he faces with regard to the question of his own political engagement in the War. Whilst the Absurd appears to support the affirmation of human existence, it simultaneously negates the value of human life. Consequently, the Absurd for Camus justifies action without providing any basis on which to determine what constitutes ethical action, of distinguishing 'good' from 'bad'. However, it is evident from Camus's *Carnets* and correspondence that he was profoundly aware of the ethical impasse to which his interpretation of the Absurd had led him. Chapter 3 concludes with an exploration of Camus's thought in the period after the publication of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as he tried to resolve on a philosophically coherent course of action.

It is out of this intellectually and morally challenging time that Camus's notion of revolt emerged. Having traced the development of Camus's ethical thinking from the mid-1930s to his decision to engage in political action, I turn in Chapter 4 to an analysis of the transition Camus makes from his absurdist reasoning to his theory of revolt. Although Camus's essay on the Absurd was well received by his contemporaries, the reception of *La Peste* proved less unanimous. Some critics, amongst them Francis Jeanson, questioned the coherence of Camus's move from a position of absurdity to that of revolt, arguing that the values implicit in Camus's concept of revolt are incompatible with a belief in the absurdity of life. This debate centred on the question of the creation of

values and whether they pre-exist or are founded by the individual consciousness. Fundamental to the existentialist critical agenda, this issue became a key point of controversy between Camus and Sartre in the *Temps modernes* debate. Somewhat unsurprisingly, Camus critics have since been keen to emphasize the coherence of the move Camus makes from the Absurd to revolt, so counteracting the damaging criticisms Sartre and others made about the philosophical foundations on which Camus based his theory of revolt. Chapter 4 aims to disrupt the binarism of this hermeneutic dialogue by engaging with Maurice Blanchot's critical reading of the relationship between Camus's two major essays. Blanchot's optic is effective in drawing into proximity Camus and his existentialist counterparts because, rather than relying on a limited and limiting Sartre/Camus dichotomy, it highlights the similarities in their responses to contemporary nihilism and shifts the focus of debate from the nature of ethical values to the creation of values, so establishing a different critical agenda from that which has dominated and continues to dominate discourse in this area.

As I indicated above, the purpose of Chapters 5, 6 and 7 is to probe this proximity further through an exploration of three key areas of discussion: the creation of values, Self-Other relations, and the use of violence. Each chapter takes up one of the polemical issues central to the *Temps modernes* debate, in order firstly to show the limitations of this critical paradigm, secondly to provide a more nuanced reading of Camus's ethical position in relation to his contemporaries and thirdly to offer an assessment of Camus's work in the light of Blanchot's ethical perspective. To this end, Chapter 5 intervenes in the hermeneutic debate surrounding Camus's recourse to given values and challenges the consensus amongst critics that Camus and Beauvoir are fundamentally opposed on this

question. It does this through an exploration of the similarities and differences between Camus's movement of revolt and Beauvoir's upsurge of freedom, both of which found ethical values in response to the nihilism of the human condition. Chapter 6 moves on to consider the implications of Camus's notion of values for his treatment of alterity and addresses the contentiousness that has surrounded the question of Camus's ethical approach. Regarded as morally aloof in the 1950s, praised as profoundly humanistic in the 1980s, and dismissed as ethically inadequate in the 1990s, Camus's position has provoked a wide-range of critical views as theoretical perspectives have shifted and changed. The purpose of Chapter 6 is therefore to re-examine the relevance of Camus's thought, both in relation to his contemporaries and in terms of modern ethical discourse through an exploration of Camus's vision of Self-Other relations in contrast to that of Beauvoir. Central to this chapter will be a discussion of the extent to which Camus looks beyond the master/slave dialectic to an alternative mode of ethical encounter in a way that Beauvoir's existentialist ethic, founded as it is on the principle of the dialectic, struggles to do.

The final chapter offers a re-reading of Camus's treatment of the problem of violence or, in Beauvoir's terms, of ethical failure. Criticism of this aspect of Camus's theory of revolt has, perhaps more than any other issue, tended to reflect the polemics of the Camus/Sartre debate. Camus's retreat into silence during the Algerian War did little to silence his critics who perceived this withdrawal from public debate as political ineptitude, quietism and abstentionism. Caricatured as non-violent at all costs, Camus's approach to the question of ethical failure was largely dismissed during the 1950s, with the result that the response of subsequent generations of Camus critics to his position on

the use of violence has been far more positive in tone as they have attempted to re-establish Camus as a serious thinker and political commentator. This chapter seeks to intervene in this history of interpretation and to problematize the dominance of this critical paradigm by exploring the close proximity between Camus's treatment of violence and that of Beauvoir. The aim of this comparative reading is firstly to assess the degree to which Camus's conceptual framework allows him to accommodate the problem of failure in contrast to Beauvoir's distinctly more pragmatic approach. Secondly, it will consider Camus's position on this issue in the light of Blanchot's critical perspective, in order to appreciate Camus's contribution to twentieth-century thought, not only in relation to his contemporaries, but also and importantly in terms of modern ethical discourses.

My methodology, combining as it does both Beauvoir's and Blanchot's perspective, is effective in disrupting the binarism of the Camus/Sartre critical paradigm and allowing hermeneutic debate to go beyond the terms in which discussions of Camus's *L'Homme révolté* have hitherto been framed, thus offering a far more nuanced reading of the relationship between Camusian revolt and Sartrian Existentialism. Moreover, informed by a critical climate where issues of otherness constitute the mainstay of literary theory and criticism, this study reveals aspects of Camus's theory of revolt which, due to the dominance of the *Temps modernes* polemic, have not been fully explored. Radically different, this interpretive approach also sheds a fresh light on the relationship between Camus's literary and theoretical writing, and reveals the way in which *L'Homme révolté* and his creative work can be mutually illuminating. As I will discuss in later chapters, Camus's short story collection, *L'Exil et le royaume*, fictionally gestures towards a more

vulnerable encounter than is to be found in his essay on revolt and in this way can be seen both to illustrate and nuance Blanchot's reading of Camus's ethical position.

2
Genesis: The Early Years

Before I begin to trace the development of Camus's ethical thought through the early years of his life, I would like to consider the definition of the term 'ethical' as distinct from 'political' or indeed 'philosophical'. Part of the ambiguity of the field of ethics is that it is integrally related to and dependent on other contiguous (and equally ill-defined) areas like politics, metaphysics, ontology and sociology. As J. L. Mackie comments in a discussion of the frontier between ethics and politics:

> If politics is the general theory of how human communities function and can flourish, then (as Aristotle saw) ethics is a part of politics. Equally, if ethics is the general theory of right and wrong in choices and actions, and of what is good or bad in dispositions and interpersonal relations and ways of living, then political activities and aims and decisions come within its scope. In any case, the two cannot be kept apart.[1]

Regarded as a branch of philosophy because of the metaphysical nature of the questions with which it is concerned, the field of ethics, as I indicated in the introduction, is concerned with questions relating to the meaning of moral words and the concepts to which they refer. However, as Mackie suggests, the ethical and the political are closely intertwined. Moreover, this interrelatedness has constantly shifted and changed through different periods of history. In the increasingly politicized climate of the 1930s, ethical issues became inextricable from questions of political engagement and it is within this context that Camus's ethical, philosophical and political ideas evolved. As I will show, these divergent but interlocking strands of Camus's thought developed in complex and multidirectional ways, sometimes concordant, sometimes clashing. The purpose of

---

[1] Mackie, p.235.

Chapters 2 and 3 is therefore to trace the evolution of his ethical perspective through a study of a wide variety of sources relating to this time, including his *Carnets*, correspondence and journalistic articles.[2]

Key to the development of Camus's ethical thought during these early years was his membership of the *Parti communiste français*[3] and his journalistic work for *Alger Républicain*. Although the political agenda of the Communist Party resonated with Camus's concerns for the working-class and the Arab community, its revolutionary ideology ran counter to Camus's increasingly anti-historicist and anti-absolutist approach to the question of human existence. As the political ferment of the 1930s intensified and ideological allegiance demanded ethical compromise, Camus's relationship with the PCF became fraught with suspicion, distrust and disillusionment. In this hothouse of ethical choices and political loyalties, the values which had first motivated Camus to join the party in 1935 and which had sustained his ambivalence with regard to communist orthodoxy, strengthened and solidified. When, in 1937, Camus was given the choice of

---

[2] In Chapters 2 and 3 I draw on a range of different types of evidence, including remembered conversations, letters, personal notebooks and more crafted texts such as essays and newspaper articles, each of which provides a different insight into the development of Camus's thought to varying degrees of reliability. It is worth noting that sources such as letters, notebooks and recounted conversations, need to be treated with some circumspection, either because of their subjective nature, as is often the case with private correspondence, or because of the cryptic style in which they are written. For example, eliptical and partial statements, citations and reflections can be found in Camus's *Carnets* and are often lacking in fuller elaboration which would lend clarity to their significance. Finally, there are editorial issues to consider, particularly in the case of private letters and notebooks. Dates and places are occasionally missing in the original manuscripts, making them difficult to situate. Moreover, manuscripts often contain passages which are difficult to decipher, thus adding a further layer of interpretation which must be taken into account when using them as evidence. In this way, these sources differ significantly in status from the published articles and essays with which I will also engage, written as they were for a public audience. In Chapters 2 and 3 I draw these very different types of evidence together in order to trace the development of Camus's ethical thought during the early phase of his life.

[3] Although Camus states in a letter to Grenier written on 21 August 1935 that he would join the Communist Party on his return from the Baleares, there is some controversy over when precisely Camus joined the PCF. Olivier Todd cites a letter from Camus to Claude de Fréminville which states: 'je pars aujourd'hui pour les Baléares. Quinze jours... Je me suis inscrit au parti communiste. Je travaille loyalement', Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.89. Planche, on the contrary, states that Camus made his *demande d'adhésion* before leaving for the Baleares and that on his return he was admitted to the party, p.28.

supporting the anti-fascist cause and denouncing anti-colonialist supporters of the newly-formed *Parti populaire algérien* or being expelled from the party, he was faced for the first time with an ethical dilemma which would become an abiding theme in his fictional and non-fictional work: the problem of ethical failure. Within a matter of months after his departure from the Communist Party, Camus was addressing the same issue, albeit in the broader context of international affairs and the politics of war, in the pages of *Alger Républicain*. Sources relating to this critical period in the development of Camus's ethics offer an insight into the values he held at this early stage and his conception of the interrelationship between politics and ethics, history and action. Divided into two main sections, this chapter will trace the formation of Camus's ethical thought through an exploration firstly of his involvement with the PCF and secondly of his journalistic work. The first half of this chapter explores the influence of key figures in Camus's life on his approach to political adherence, in particular, Camus's friend Claude de Fréminville and his tutor Jean Grenier, his possible motives for joining the PCF, his involvement with the party and his growing disillusionment with institutionalized politics. In this section, I argue that Camus's rejection of Communism can be read as a refusal to accept the use of unethical means in the pursuit of just ends and therefore as a formative moment in Camus's intellectual and political life, which laid the ground for critical choices he would face in subsequent years.

The second half of this chapter focuses on the period immediately following Camus's departure from the Communist Party, and will outline the importance of Pascal Pia in providing an intellectual context in which Camus could define his political and ethical views, and also the way in which journalism offered Camus the opportunity to

engage in social issues and Algerian affairs. This will lead into an exploration of his response to the historical and political context in which he was writing through a reading of a number of his journalistic articles which address the ethical issues posed by war. Vital to an understanding of the development of Camus's ethical perspective, these articles offer an insight into his conceptual approach to the moral dilemmas involved in ethical endeavour. The final part of this chapter will therefore explore the impact of war on his thinking and will probe the ethical crisis which conflict provoked in Camus through a reading of his *Carnets*. It is evident from his notebooks that the horror of war renewed Camus's preoccupation with the Absurd. Incongruent with the ethical concepts on which he had based his ethico-political ideas, his growing sense of absurdity can be seen to undermine and disrupt the ethical position he had taken up in the pages of *Alger Républicain* and *Soir Républicain* in response to the War. The final part of this chapter will explore this collision in Camus's thinking between two conflicting conceptual approaches and the ethical crisis which it precipitated.

Communism, Orthodoxy and Ethics

During the early 1930s, the internal politics of the PCF in Algiers were dominated by the question of how to respond to colonialism. Reluctant to interpret the social and economic problems of Algeria and other North African colonies in any other terms but class, the PCF was unsure whether or not to lend its support to progressive Islamic groups, like Messali Hadj's *L'Étoile nord-africaine*, in their campaign for national independence.[4] By 1934, the international threat of Fascism had become a major concern for all left-wing parties in France, and in response to the call of Amsterdam-Pleyel in

---

[4] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.45.

July 1935,[5] around ten organisations, including the Communists, joined forces under the umbrella *Front populaire*.[6] The aim was to put up a united front against the tide of right-wing extremism that was sweeping across Europe. Mirroring the political concerns of the PCF in Paris, the Algerian wing of the party turned its attention to the growing rise of Fascism and the threat of war. However, the more the party turned its attention to the fight against Fascism, the more pronounced the underlying tensions became over the question of Algerian independence. Despite the party's internal politics, the PCF's membership in Algiers rose dramatically as extremism on both sides of the political spectrum increased, doubling in size between 1934 and 1935.[7] Unsurprisingly, in the poorer *quartiers* of Algiers, and particularly in Belcourt where Camus grew up, there was a strong tradition of support for the PCF due in part to the presiding fear of unemployment amongst the working class population, a fear which the widespread economic crisis of the 1920s and early 1930s had only intensified. In fact, Jean-Louis Planche in his article on Camus's Algerian background describes the trade-unionists and party activists in Belcourt as 'les seuls émissaires bienveillants'.[8] By the time Camus came to join the PCF in 1935, the party headquarters were situated not two hundred metres from his home in rue de Lyon.[9] Given his own social and economic background, and the political context at the time, it is not surprising that Camus was drawn towards some form of ideological adherence. However, integral to Camus's relationship with politics was an ambivalence which hinged on the nature of ethical values and how they

---

[5] Note that Camus joined Amsterdam-Pleyel in Spring 1935. The main objective of the organisation, led by Charles Escoute, was to fight against Fascism and to defend peace and liberty. See Planche, p.28.
[6] For a detailed study of this period see Julian Jackson, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).
[7] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.88.
[8] Planche, p.19.
[9] Ibid., p.28.

can be pursued without negating these same values in the process. The intellectual and academic environment in which Camus was living and working leading up to his decision to join the party in 1935 was highly influential in shaping his ethical perspective. In particular, his friend Claude de Fréminville and his tutor Jean Grenier played key roles in encouraging Camus to engage in political action and to join the Communist Party. Therefore, before exploring his decision to become a member of the party further, I will discuss the formative influence of both Fréminville and Grenier on Camus.

Influences: Fréminville and Grenier

The *Faculté des lettres* in Algiers, where Camus had begun a course in philosophy and literature in 1933,[10] regarded itself as one of the most demanding in France. Attracting newly-qualified staff from the *Ecole Normale Supérieure*,[11] it was a popular first post for academics at the start of their university careers.[12] It was also traditionally left-wing,[13] and a number of staff and some students around Camus were liberal in outlook and sympathetic to the Algerian cause.[14] The friends Camus gathered around himself were distinctive by their non-conformity and creativity.[15] Among them were Max-Pol Fouchet, Jean de Maisonseul, Claude de Fréminville, Sauveur Galliero, André Belamich and Louis Bénisti. According to Olivier Todd, out of this group of social activists, writers, students and sculptors, Camus confided most in Fréminville. One of the most politically active and engaged of Camus's peers, Fréminville had a profound

---

[10] Ibid., p.26.
[11] Ibid., p.27.
[12] Conversation with M. Holzer, archivist at the *Ministère de l'Education Nationale*, Paris, 26th September 2002.
[13] Planche, p.27.
[14] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.50.
[15] Planche remarks: 'Il [Camus] choisit alors ses amis pour leur culture et leur non-conformisme', p.25.

influence on Camus's decision to join the PCF. Deeply concerned about the implications of Hitler's rise to power for European and World politics, Fréminville joined the party in the spring of 1934 and encouraged Belamich and Camus to do likewise.[16] However, Camus was more reticent in his approach to ideological adherence, and in an unpublished letter he wrote to Fréminville, who between February and June 1934 was living in Paris, he expressed his views about the dangers of political orthodoxy and his reservations about joining the Communist Party: 'Prends garde surtout de ne point t'attacher à un "credo" de jeunesse parce que c'est un credo [...]. Si j'allais au communisme, et ce serait possible, j'y mettrais dedans [*sic*] ma vitalité, mes moyens, mon intelligence, j'y mettrais tous mes talents, toute mon âme peut-être, pas tout mon cœur. Quelque chose de moi n'y serait pas. Et cela je ne le veux pas'.[17] In response to Fréminville's continued insistence, Camus explains: '*Adhérer*, ce serait me forcer, me cacher ce qu'il y a d'autre en moi [...]. Je n'y peux rien si tout me pousse au silence et à la vie humaine, si tout m'éloigne de ce qui est social. Agir? Mais j'agis tous les jours [...]. Moi *j'oublie* d'adhérer. Si j'ai tort à tes yeux peut-être qu'au fond, va, tout est *équivalent*'.[18] When pressured, Camus reacted by rejecting the intellectual straitjacket which he believed Communism to be, in favour of the freedom to live and act in ways which expressed the whole of himself, including his sense of absurdity and his profound attachment to human life. However, by Spring 1935, Camus's position on Communism had shifted significantly enough for him to warm to the idea of becoming involved in the party. Todd suggests that it was Fréminville who finally persuaded Camus to join the PCF, whereas other critics emphasize the significance of Grenier and key political events which took place that

---

[16] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.68.
[17] Cited by Todd, ibid., p.68.
[18] Ibid., pp.68-9.

year.[19] However, Fréminville clearly challenged Camus to think about the question of political activity and advocated Communism as a means by which to engage in action at a time when the momentum of political events was also pushing intellectuals towards political adherence. Yet, as his correspondence and differing interpretations of his motives by critics suggest, Camus's motives for joining the PCF were extremely mixed and offer an insight into his ambivalence of approach which, I will argue, defined his response to the ethical dilemmas which arose during his time as a party member. In order to explore further his motivation for engaging in political action, I will now explore the influence of Grenier's thought on Camus's approach to political engagement.

Despite Olivier Todd's view that Grenier was too obsessed with questions of contingency and transcendence to engage with the political problems which were brewing in Algeria and beyond in the early to mid-1930s,[20] Grenier's collection of articles *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie* suggests not only that he was fully aware of the political climate at the time but that he had considered the implications of this both for the intellectual and for society as a whole.[21] Critical of the nature of orthodoxies and those who choose to adhere to them, Grenier advocates an approach to political issues which prizes intellectual integrity through maintaining personal liberty and independence of mind. In his preface to the collection, Grenier explicitly situates his essays in the contemporary political context, and his response to the upsurge in political adherence is

---

[19] Todd writes: 'Fréminville, étincelant, ardent, a enfin convaincu Camus d'adhérer au parti communiste' and notes this date as Spring 1935, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.88. In contrast, Planche points to contemporary political events as the catalyst for Camus's decision to join the Communist Party, p.28. Roger Quilliot, on the other hand, emphasizes the influence of Jean Grenier as key to an understanding of Camus's political engagement at this time in his article 'Camus et le socialisme', p.31.

[20] Todd writes: 'Dans ses cours, Jean Grenier n'évoque pas les problèmes algériens. Obsédé par la contingence, il cherche une sérénité métaphysique. Il joue avec la transcendance, le vide, raconte ses voyages aux élèves qui lui rendent visite dans sa villa d'Hydra', *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.50.

[21] Jean Grenier, *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

pertinent, insightful and thought-provoking, particularly in view of the time at which he was writing.[22] Sketching the shifts in cultural, artistic and political thought from the end of the First World War onwards, Grenier traces the teleology from the despair and disillusionment of the immediate postwar period, through the anxiety of the 1920s, to the faith and hope inspired by the political idealism of the 1930s: 'l'âge des hérésies est passé comme était passé l'âge des négations; nous en sommes maintenant à l'âge des orthodoxies'.[23] Deeply concerned about the trend of political adherence by intellectuals, Grenier embarks on a critique of orthodoxy, outlining the implications of political action for intellectual integrity: 'Le socialisme au lieu d'être un rétrécissement de l'esprit devrait en être un élargissement. [...] c'est une entreprise d'abaissement intellectuel que l'on travaille aujourd'hui, sous prétexte de répandre une nouvelle culture, qui serait le véritable'.[24] Critical of the way in which Marxism had, in his view, become a totalitarian doctrine which assimilated all other fields of intellectual enquiry in the pursuit of a totality of knowledge, Grenier argues that Communism, based as it is on Marxism, sacrifices the freedom of those it seeks to liberate in order to secure its domination as a political system.[25] Most significantly, Grenier questions the ethical implications of dialectical materialism which reduces all human life and history to movement; a process of becoming from which the perfect communist state will one day emerge. Grenier argues that this approach to history justifies all means used to bring about the end goal:

---

[22] Grenier's preface begins: 'Ces essais ont eu pour occasion l'actualité', ibid., p.11.
[23] Ibid., p.28.
[24] Ibid., pp.30-31.
[25] Grenier writes: 'je me permets de plaider en faveur de l'ouvrier qui n'a pu acquérir d'instruction ou seulement une demi-instruction, en faveur du paysan, en faveur du pauvre et de vous dire: si vous libérez, libérez-le complètement. Ne lui enlevez pas ces contraintes matérielles qui l'étouffent pour imposer à son intelligence un autre fardeau. Ne combattez pas l'obscurantisme bourgeois pour lui substituer un obscurantisme prolétarien. Soyez généreux pour ces pauvres gens dont vous vous déclarez les soutiens', ibid., p.30.

'Nous sommes en plein messianisme, un messianisme qui justifie d'avance tous les massacres, car qu'est-ce que la vie de quelques milliers ou millions d'hommes à côté d'un paradis terrestre dont on est sûr?'[26]

Grenier also addresses the relationship between ethics and politics and the dilemmas it poses in the final essay in the collection, 'Lettre à André Malraux', which offers a critical response to Malraux's novel *L'Espoir*.[27] Written in January 1938, this article identifies the problem of ethical failure as the central question of that time and dismantles it in the following way: 'Ce problème est: qu'a-t-on le devoir de faire? Jusqu'où a-t-on le droit d'aller quand on veut faire triompher ses idées? Plus précisément: à quelle action violente peut nous engager un idéal pacifique? Et quel rôle peut jouer l'intellectuel là-dedans? Le rôle de témoin? De protestataire? Celui de combattant?'[28] Although central concerns of many thinkers during this period, the issues Grenier raises in this letter are strikingly reminiscent of those Camus addresses in *L'Homme révolté*, providing evidence to support the case for a sustained philosophical influence of Grenier on Camus.[29] In his article, Grenier's position on intellectual

---

[26] Ibid., p.34. Interestingly Grenier's anti-historicist reading of Marxist doctrine in the 1930s as messianic and responsible in no small part for the atrocities committed in its name is an interpretation of Marxism which emerges strongly in Camus's reading of the philosophical work of the forefathers of dialectical materialism in *L'Homme révolté*.

[27] André Malraux, *L'Espoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937).

[28] Grenier, *Essai sur l'esprit*, p.169.

[29] For example, commenting on the way in which ethical action often negates itself, Grenier refers to the victim and the executioner opposition, which haunts Camus's writing on the question of resistance and revolt: 'Vaut-il mieux être un enfant ou un bourreau? [...] un assassin ne fait pas de Morale; et un justicier agit au nom de la Morale – et ceci est beaucoup plus grave', *Essai sur l'esprit*, p.172. The Camusian problem of balancing ends and means is also central to Grenier's article. Referring to Malraux's notion of 'fatalités de l'action', Grenier writes: 'Vos fatalités de l'action [...] c'est la fin qui justifie les moyens, c'est convertir les peuples et assurer leur salut – au besoin malgré eux', p.177. Finally, Grenier's suggestion that a more ethical form of socialism can be found in trade unionist models that work from the ground roots up recalls Camus's short section on Scandinavian forms of socialism in *L'Homme révolté*, see *Essais*, p.701: 'Les réalisations socialistes nonétatistes, nondictatoriales, nontyranniques sont d'ailleurs innombrables. Nous avons vu dans bien des pays le socialisme s'édifier à partir des syndicats et des coopératives (en partant de l'individu) et non à partir de l'État', *Essai sur l'esprit*, p.183. It is also worth noting that in

engagement, the new vogue amongst the literary elite, is unequivocal: 'La situation d'un intellectuel (je veux dire simplement d'un homme qui attache du prix aux idées) à l'intérieur d'un parti est tragique. Il y a des choses qui sont inadmissibles pour lui en tant qu'intellectuel et qu'il se croit obligé d'accepter en tant que partisan. Mais ne nions pas le *déchirement*: il existe'.[30] The reason for the incompatibility Grenier perceives between the intellectual and the political is essentially a question of ethics. Whilst Grenier reluctantly admits that some degree of ethical failure is unavoidable if certain values such as liberty and justice are to be pursued, he regards this as a compromise of intellectual integrity and therefore unacceptable for the intellectual: 'Il se peut que tout groupe humain en vienne là, qu'il faille admettre un certain nombre de choses pour se mettre d'accord en vue d'une action. [...] Mais je ne vois pas du tout pourquoi quelqu'un qui croit à la valeur de la pensée entrerait dans ce jeu-là'.[31] Extraordinary in that they are contemporaneous with Camus's rupture and consequent exit from the Communist Party, Grenier's observations on the problem of ethical failure and the question of political adherence give a very clear idea of the contours of Grenier's thinking during the mid-thirties.

Given Grenier's perspective, it is quite mysterious why, in 1935, he encouraged Camus and others to join the Communist Party. Relaying one of a number of conversations he had with Louis Bénisti between 1991 and 1992 regarding this period, Olivier Todd describes how '[a]u-dessus des mêlées, Grenier, le dimanche, reçoit quelques disciples et des collègues. Un après-midi, il a parlé du communisme. À l'âge de

---

L'Homme révolté Camus describes Grenier's essay in a footnote to his chapter on 'La Révolte historique' as 'un livre d'actualité', *Essais*, p.626.

[30] Grenier, *Essai sur l'esprit*, p.175.

[31] Ibid., p.177.

Camus, on doit s'engager en politique, explique le professeur, et tenter une expérience, quitte à se retirer'.[32] The precise date of the particular meeting to which Todd refers is unclear, as is the timing of Grenier's advice to Camus to join the PCF, as only Camus's reply to Grenier on 21 August 1935 has survived.[33] The question of why Grenier advised Camus in this way, when it was so clearly discordant with his own views on orthodoxy, views which had already begun to take shape by this stage,[34] has generated much speculation. Roger Quilliot comments that Grenier's letter is a 'lettre curieuse dans la mesure où elle est contemporaine de l'*Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie* and questions whether Grenier regarded membership of the PCF as some form of political initiation which he could not himself have undertaken, or whether, in fact, Grenier hoped to liberate Camus from this temptation.[35] Less convincingly given the views Grenier expresses in *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie*, Todd speculates that Grenier had envisaged a political career for Camus for which time in the PCF would have provided a good grounding.[36] Grenier himself comes no closer to clarifying the reasons why he gave Camus the advice he did in a letter he wrote to Camus in 1947:

> Le divorce entre le conseil donné à un autre et l'attitude personnelle est flagrant et devait vous paraître scandaleux. Je me mettais trop – je croyais me mettre trop à la place des autres – il y avait là-dedans un désir de rendre service, de s'effacer, le

---

[32] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, pp.88-89.
[33] Albert Camus and Jean Grenier, *Correspondance 1932-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981), pp.22-3.
[34] The earliest of the articles contained in *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie*, 'L'Intellectuel dans la société', is dated 1935, with the rest spreading through 1936 and 1937 with the final 'Lettre à André Malraux' being written in 1938.
[35] See also Quilliot, 'Camus et le socialisme', p.32.
[36] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.89.

sentiment aigu de ma solitude, l'impossibilité d'arriver à une croyance pleine et agissante, je veux dire de faire l'unité en moi, bref un peu de tout.[37]

Whatever the reasons, it is clear from Camus and Grenier's correspondence that Grenier's opinion mattered to his student and that in joining the PCF Camus felt he was acting in accordance with Grenier's views. Camus concludes his letter to Grenier on the 21 August 1935: 'Dans tous les cas je vous promets de rester clairvoyant et de ne jamais céder aveuglément. C'est un peu votre pensée et votre exemple qui m'aideront'.[38]

Given Camus's deep respect and admiration for Grenier, it is not unsurprising that Camus read his tutor's encouragement to join the Communist Party as an endorsement of political adherence. However, the degree to which Grenier's as yet privately-held views on orthodoxy filtered down into the many conversations he had with Camus at this time and influenced Camus's thinking is more ambiguous. Camus's promise to Grenier to remain clear-sighted and not to follow party policies blindly would suggest that Camus was aware, at least to some degree, of Grenier's reservations with regard to political orthodoxies. Furthermore, Camus's reticence towards political adherence expressed in his letter to Grenier of 21 August 1935 and elsewhere, echoes Grenier's thoughts to such an extent that it is hard to believe this is not coincidental.[39] Yet, the shame and confusion Camus felt on reading *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie* in

---

[37] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.133. See also Jean Grenier, *Albert Camus, Souvenirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968), pp.37-54.

[38] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.23. It is worth noting that as early as May 1932 Camus's high regard and esteem for Grenier was already well-established. In a letter to Grenier, Camus writes: 'Votre avis me permettrait de conserver ou d'abandonner le but que je me suis fixé et à la poursuite duquel je tâcherai d'oublier ce que je suis', ibid., p.11.

[39] Ibid., pp.22-23. See also Camus's letter to Claude de Fréminville cited by Todd where he remarks that he could not adhere completely to Communism because it would be to deny something of himself, Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.68.

1938,[40] and to which he later refers in a letter to Grenier in 1951 on receiving a manuscript copy of *Albert Camus, Souvenirs*, seems to imply that he knew little of Grenier's views when deciding whether to join the PCF: 'A une seule époque, et vous avez raison de le souligner, j'ai refusé de vous approuver. Je ne comprenais pas que vous ayez pu me conseiller de devenir communiste et que vous preniez ensuite position contre le communisme'.[41] It therefore seems clear that despite Camus's claim not to have known about Grenier's personal views, Grenier's commitment to intellectual integrity, his preference for solitude rather than adherence, his ethical reservations with regard to doctrines of political action, had inflected Camus's thinking and nuanced his approach to the question of political adherence.

Motives and Values

I would now like to pursue further Camus's decision to join the PCF and the ambivalence of his motives through an exploration of his correspondence, private impressions of that time and other relevant critical material, in order to gain an insight into the underlying ethical values which shaped his thinking at this time. In his article entitled 'Camus et le socialisme', Roger Quilliot states that it is impossible to understand Camus's relationship with politics without referring to the letter he wrote to Grenier where he outlines his reservations and reasons for becoming a Communist Party member.[42] The reason for this is that the principles which would later define Camus's response to political situations are already present in his approach to Communism. In this letter, which begins by confirming that Grenier was right to have advised him to join the

---

[40] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.31.
[41] Ibid., pp.179-180.
[42] Quilliot, 'Camus et le socialisme', p.31.

party and that he would do so on his return from the Baleares,[43] Camus voices his concerns about the purely rationalistic basis of communist ideology, explaining that '[c]'est la prétention qu'on trouve chez les marxistes d'édifier une morale dont l'homme se suffise' with which he struggles.[44] He then goes on to outline his desire to engage in political action, but in a spirit very reminiscent of Grenier's thinking, indicates that there is a limit to the lengths he is willing to go in order to achieve political ends: 'En somme une volonté de se dérober aux pseudo-idéalismes, aux optimismes de commande, pour établir un état de choses où l'homme puisse retrouver le sens de son éternité. Je ne dis pas que ceci est orthodoxe. Mais précisément dans l'expérience (loyale) que je tenterai, je me refuserai toujours à mettre entre la vie et l'homme un volume de *Capital*'.[45] Finally, Camus reveals to Grenier the instinctive values which form the essence of his approach to politics and which draw him to Communism: 'Cela est suffisant pour que je souscrive sincèrement à des idées qui me ramènent à mes origines, à mes camarades d'enfance, à tout ce qui fait ma sensibilité'.[46] The impulse driving Camus's decision to go into politics is summed up in his parting comment to Grenier: 'J'ai un si fort désir de voir diminuer la somme de malheur et d'amertume qui empoisonne les hommes'.[47] Rooted in both political and ethical concerns, Camus's motivations for engaging in political action were implicitly dual.

Indeed, critics have largely read Camus's desire to join the PCF as morally rather than politically inspired; a metaphysical quest for an instinctive morality and an outlet for

---

[43] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.22.
[44] Ibid., p.22.
[45] Ibid., p.22.
[46] Ibid., p.22.
[47] Ibid., p.23.

his deeply ingrained pacifism.[48] Drawn by a 'sens de l'humanité',[49] Camus entered politics as a means of achieving social justice and liberty for all. However, he clearly recognized, even at this early stage in his somewhat turbulent political career, that without some form of limitation such ethical action always risks resulting in failure. Although Camus's attempt to explain his motivations remains non-intellectualized, tentative and exploratory at this stage, the 'antinomies de l'action' (*PM*, 120) which Beauvoir later elucidated in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* are already discernible in Camus's approach.[50] Given the nature of Camus's nascent ethical position and the rigour with which the PCF demanded and maintained party loyalty, it is both strange that Camus chose this particular route out of all those which the *Front populaire* coalition offered at the time, and entirely unsurprising that his stay with the party was so brief.[51] Describing Camus as a 'curieux communiste', Quilliot goes on to write: 'Voilà un communiste dont on peut prévoir qu'il ne fera pas une longue carrière au Parti'.[52] As I will show, the ambivalence underpinning Camus's approach to political adherence laid the ground for the ethical dilemma Camus would face over his support for the PPA and the consequent rupture with the party. Never entirely 'on board', Camus spent his time in

---

[48] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, pp.90-91. Todd writes: 'Camus ne se prétend pas marxiste. Longue tentation, précipitée par les événements, lancé dans une quête de l'absolu, il fait une *expérience* communiste', p.90. In the following chapter he goes on to write: 'Camus cherche une mystique au-delà de la justice sociale et d'un combat contre les inégalités. Son communisme a le cœur aussi métaphysique qu'économique et moral', p.91. Commenting on the moral tone of Camus's explanation, Quilliot writes: 'Le choix de Camus est un choix moral, existentiel fait par fidélité à l'univers des pauvres dont il sort', Quilliot, 'Camus et le socialisme', p.32.

[49] Jean Négroni, 'Albert Camus et le Théâtre de l'Équipe', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 12 (1960), 343-349 (p.343). This article is reproduced in part in 'Révolte dans les Asturies/ L'État de siège', *L'Avant-Scène: numéro spécial sur Albert Camus*, 1–15 November 1968.

[50] Reflecting on Camus's relationship with politics in this pre-war period of the PCF, *Alger Républicain* and Pascal Pia, Quilliot points to the sense of revolt which is already apparent in Camus: 'Camus est l'homme qui refuse toutes les injustices, qui garde son entière liberté d'esprit et dont les protestations ne sont pas dépourvues de ce sens des limites qui le caractérise', 'Camus et le socialisme', p.33.

[51] Quilliot remarks that out of all the routes available to Camus within the *Front Populaire* alliance, he chooses the most difficult one for him given his own doubts, misgivings and questions, ibid., p.32.

[52] Ibid., p.32.

the party skirting militancy and dedicating himself to activities which coincided with his sympathy for the anti-colonialist cause and also to his commitment to militant theatre which he perceived as a means of promoting solidarity and human dignity.

Militant Theatre and Marginality

The role Camus played as a party member and the increasing disillusionment which crept into his relationship with the PCF as political tensions mounted, both in Algiers and abroad, are key to an understanding of how Camus's ethical thought developed over this time. Throughout 1935, support for the far-right party, the *Croix-de-Feu*, increased rapidly in the Algerian capital, which became the party's next stronghold after Paris.[53] In May 1935, Augustin Rozis, a member of the *Croix-de-Feu*, was elected mayor.[54] However, between 1935 and 1936 support for the *Front populaire* also rose dramatically and in April 1936 the coalition won a landslide victory in the legislative elections, reducing right-wing representation to one minister out of ten.[55] Fearing civil unrest in reaction to the strength of the extreme left, the Algerian authorities put the armed forces on alert and banned all public meetings.[56] Internally, the threat of Fascism increased, so too did the tensions in the PCF between those who regarded the anti-fascist fight as the main priority of the party and those who were principally committed to the anti-colonialist cause. Pressure was exerted on the Algerian movement from the higher echelons of the party to remain faithful to the anti-fascist agenda of the PCF as dictated

---

[53] Planche, p.28.
[54] Ibid., p.28.
[55] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.106. For a discussion of the political and historical context at the time of Camus's membership of the PCF see Roger Quilliot, 'Politique et culture méditerranéennes' in *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.1314-1320.
[56] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.96.

by the party headquarters in Paris.[57] The old anti-colonialist agenda of the 1920s was rapidly being pushed aside in the drive towards a united front, irrespective of nationality, against Fascism and Nazism.[58] On entering the party, Camus became immediately embroiled in the tense relations between the pro-France and anti-France factions. Amar Ouzegane and Ben Ali Boukhort, both Algerian Communists, were responsible for generating support for an Algerian Communist Party to be established which would be separate and distinct from the PCF. The fundamental problem in persuading Muslims to join the Communist Party was the question of religion, which was totally incompatible with communist doctrine.[59] Émile Padula, the secretary for the communist section based at Belcourt, delegated the task of recruiting militant Muslims to join the *Étoile nord-africaine* to Camus.[60] Regarded as an 'activité fractionnelle' by some party members who were shocked to find a young and relatively unknown French militant entrusted with such a politically sensitive task, Camus's recruitment campaign brought him into close contact with the Arab community and other Algerian Communists.[61] Impressed by Ouzegane and other militant Algerians, Camus became increasingly sympathetic towards the anti-colonialist agenda and although the status of the Arab is at best ambiguous in his literary work,[62] it is clear from both his political activity and his journalistic work that he

---

[57] Marcel Gitton is sent as a representative from the PCF in Paris to speak to Algerian members on the 17th and 18th October 1936. Here he states that the Communist Party's fight is not primarily on the anti-colonialist front but on the fascist front, ibid., p.94.
[58] Ibid., p.143.
[59] Ibid., p.144.
[60] Planche, p.29. See also Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.180. Camus writes: 'on m'avait chargé de recruter des militants arabes et de les faire rentrer dans une organisation nationaliste (L'Étoile nord-africaine, qui devait devenir le P.P.A)'.
[61] Planche, p.29.
[62] In particular see *L'Étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942) and *L'Exil et le royaume* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957). For a study of the ambivalent status of the Arab-Other in 'L'Hôte' see my article, '*Le Regard*: Face to Face in Albert Camus's "L'Hôte"', pp.179-192.

was deeply committed to the Algerian cause.[63] Concerned about the ethical issues of inequality, poverty, discrimination and marginalization which colonialism engenders, Camus found himself increasingly at odds with party policy, despite these concerns forming the backbone of communist ideology.

Throughout the course of 1935, Camus's role within the party became more and more focused on cultural matters and he threw himself into militant theatre as a means of expressing his sense of metaphysical and political revolt. In the Autumn of that year, he established the *Théâtre du Travail* under the auspices of the PCF and the *Front populaire*. The group comprised of generally militant young people: university students, artists, painters, sculptors, architects, workers and *petits bourgeois*. Citing a flyer advertising the *Théâtre du Travail*'s first performance, Jean Négroni describes the aim of the theatre company as follows: 'prendre conscience de la valeur artistique propre à toute littérature de masse et démontrer que l'art peut parfois gagner à sortir de sa tour d'ivoire. Le sens de la beauté étant inséparable d'un certain sens de l'humanité'.[64] Jeanne Sicard in a letter she wrote to Francine Camus illuminates further the significance of Camus's involvement in the theatre at this time. Writing with particular reference to the controversial play *Révolte dans les Asturies*, Sicard reflects: 'Dans mon souvenir, *Révolte dans les Asturies* demeure comme l'expression de ce moment où Camus, qui ne cessa de s'interroger sur les manières de lutter contre la misère humaine, cherchait une formule d'art collectiviste et populaire en accord avec sa doctrine politique qu'il croyait être le

---

[63] The series of articles Camus wrote for *Alger Républicain* between 5-15 June 1939 under the title *Misère de la Kabylie*, which chronicles the famine in this region and the suffering of its inhabitants, is indicative of the compassion and concern with which Camus engaged with the plight of the Algerian people, see *Essais*, pp.905-38. His support of the Blum-Violette project is a similar expression of his commitment to greater parliamentary participation for the Algerian population. See the 'Manifeste des intellectuels d'Algérie en faveur du projet Viollette' which was published in *Jeune Méditerranée*, the monthly bulletin of the *Maison de la culture* and which Camus helped to draft, *Essais*, pp.1328-9.

[64] Négroni, p.343.

communisme'.[65] It is interesting to note that Camus's search for an artistic mode of metaphysical revolt is presented here as his raison d'être, with his political allegiance as somewhat peripheral. A letter Camus later wrote to Grenier would seem to confirm this: 'Les affiches et la vente du journal, croyez-le, n'y étaient pour rien. Pour un jeune sportif, c'était même plutôt drôle et du reste je le faisais, de mon propre gré, pour le théâtre et la maison de la culture, jamais pour le parti qui soignait ses intellectuels'.[66] To what extent this accurately reflects Camus's relationship with and commitment to the party is difficult to say. However, at the very least, it is clear that the *Théâtre du Travail* offered Camus an ideal space for political activity where the creative and the political could fuse and where he could remain on the edges of mainstream party activism.

In January 1936, the *Théâtre du Travail* opened for the first time at Bab el-Oued with a performance of Malraux's *Le Temps du mépris*.[67] Set against the backdrop of the sea at the baths of Padovani, the play was a huge success attracting around two thousand spectators. However, the second play the group attempted to perform proved far more controversial, both publicly and privately. *Révolte dans les Asturies*, co-written by Camus, Jeanne Sicard, Yves Bourgeois and Alfred Poignant,[68] dramatizes an event which took place in Spain in September 1934 when the extreme right-wing government violently repressed an insurrection by miners. In the tense political climate of 1936, the

---

[65] Ibid., p.345.
[66] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.180.
[67] For an account of Camus's involvement with the *Théâtre du Travail* see Roger Grenier, pp.29-46.
[68] Todd comments that although others were involved with writing the script for *Révolte dans les Asturies*, it was largely written by Camus and can be seen as Camus's manifesto for the fusion of art and politics, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.124. This is confirmed by Jeanne Sicard who, in a letter to Francine Camus, writes: '*Révolte dans les Asturies* devait, au début, se présenter [...] comme un canevas sur lequel les acteurs étaient invités à broder. Mais la pièce fut finalement rédigée par quatre d'entre nous: Camus, deux jeunes agrégés du lycée d'Alger, un d'anglais: Bourgeois, un d'allemand: Poignant et moi-même. Le sujet , l'action, la mise en scène furent établis par ces quatre au cours de plusieurs séances de travail qui eurent presque toutes lieu à la maison Fichu [...] Ai-je besoin d'ajouter que Camus était dès ce moment notre animateur incontesté? Que nous reconnaissions toute sa valeur? Que la participation des trois autres co-auteurs n'a existé que dans son sillage?', cited by Négroni, p.345.

subject of this play was deeply polemical and Augustin Rozis, the right-wing mayor of Algiers, banned the troupe from using the auditorium, which successfully prevented the performance from going ahead.[69] Rozis's decision was challenged by neither the Communist Party nor the *Front populaire*. The failure of his party and the left-wing coalition to take a stand against the ban did nothing to stem Camus's growing disillusionment with the political process, which had been brewing for some time. In his *Carnets* in March 1936, Camus wrote: 'Grenier à propos du communisme: "Toute la question est celle-ci: pour un idéal de justice, faut-il souscrire à des sottises?" On peut répondre oui: c'est beau. Non: c'est honnête. [...] Mais, d'autre part, comment concilier communisme et dégoût? Si je tente les formes extrêmes, dans la mesure où elles atteignent l'absurde et l'inutile – je nie le communisme. Et ce souci religieux...'.[70] His party's acceptance of Rozis's suppression of the *Théâtre du Travail* as a battle not worth fighting given the party's immediate political agenda was a blow for Camus. Planche comments that 'l'interdiction conforte Albert Camus dans sa piètre opinion du monde politique' and goes on to comment that Camus's scepticism 'n'est ébranlé ni par la victoire du Front populaire, en France et à Alger, en mai 1936, ni par le triomphe du Congrès musulman en juin'.[71] Increasingly sceptical about the integrity of politicians and their parties, Camus threw himself into the work of the *Maison de la culture* which was committed to developing links with the Algerian population. However, from January 1937 onwards political events began to spiral in Algiers and relations between the Communist Party and supporters of Messali Hadj disintegrated into mutual distrust and suspicion. Faced with the choice of reneging his support for those involved in the

---

[69] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.125.
[70] Albert Camus, *Carnets I: mai 1935-février 1942* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962), p.29.
[71] Planche, p.32.

Algerian campaign for independence or betraying the PCF's policy on privileging the anti-fascist struggle, Camus was caught in an ethical dilemma which, I would argue, would define his relationship with politics. I will now explore how the implications of this political crisis and the ethical choices it posed shaped his approach to the problem of ethical action.

Rupture and Disillusionment

In January 1937 Léon Blum's government dissolved Messali Hadj's *Étoile nord-africaine* to the delight of the PCF whose anti-fascist campaign was weakened by the anti-colonialist agenda of Messali and his supporters. In response, Messali immediately set up the *Parti populaire algérien* and continued to whip up popular support for Algerian independence. Concurrently, the publication of André Gide's *Retour de l'URSS* (1936) met with widespread disapproval amongst Communists. Although the *Maison de la culture* ran a debate on the issues Gide raised, it was poorly attended and no Communist was present.[72] Camus's absence is particularly surprising given his admiration for Gide as a writer and, more importantly, his position as secretary of the *Maison de la culture*. In March there were widespread strikes throughout Algeria and in July Messali led a massive demonstration in Algiers where he was arrested and then deported.[73] A crackdown on Messalists followed and many of his supporters were sought out and arrested.[74] The conflicting views which had caused tensions within the PCF now polarized, creating an irreparable split between the anti-fascist and the anti-colonialist factions. When Communists began to denounce Messalists, Camus's position in relation to both the party and his contacts in the PPA became extremely difficult. He made his

---

[72] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.145.
[73] Ibid., p.146.
[74] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.180.

objections known to Ouzegane and Padula, but despite Ouzegane's attempts to persuade Camus that the party's policy was fully justified, Camus remained unconvinced. Indeed, Camus's *Carnets* reflect his ongoing disillusionment vis à vis political parties and proponents of them. In August 1937, he wrote: 'Chaque fois que j'entends un discours politique ou que je lis ceux qui nous dirigent, je suis effrayé depuis des années de n'entendre rien qui rende un son humain. Ce sont toujours les mêmes mots qui disent les mêmes mensonges'.[75] Early that Autumn, Padula and Ouzegane issued Camus with an official warning that he was on the verge of deviating from party policy. Between October and December, Camus came under increasing pressure to step into line whilst the communist press continued to portray Messalists as pseudo-fascists.[76] Recounting the sequence of events which led to his departure from the PCF in a letter to Grenier in 1951, Camus describes the sense of outrage he felt at the intolerable position his membership of the PCF placed him in and his shame before his Arab friends who appealed to him to act:

> Mais, on m'avait chargé de recruter des militants arabes et de les faire rentrer dans une organisation nationaliste (L'Étoile nord-africaine, qui devait devenir le P.P.A.). Je l'ai fait et ces militants arabes sont devenus mes camarades dont j'admirais la tenue et la loyauté. Le tournant de 36 est venu. Ces militants ont été poursuivis et emprisonés, leur organisation dissoute, au nom d'une politique approuvée et encouragée par le P.C. Quelques-uns, qui avaient échappé aux recherches, sont venus me demander si je laisserais faire cette infamie sans rien dire. Cet après-midi est resté gravé en moi; je

---

[75] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.64.
[76] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.148.

me souviens encore que je tremblais alors qu'on me parlait; j'avais honte; j'ai fait ensuite ce qu'il fallait.[77]

Accused by the party leadership of disloyalty, Camus refused to deny it and the process of exclusion began. Todd recounts that 'Camus, sans jamais évoquer l'indépendance, insistant sur les droits civiques et sociaux, ne cède pas sur le soutien dû aux "indigènes", ce qui, souligne-t-il, fut la ligne juste du Parti'.[78] Although Ouzegane respected Camus's honesty and understood his concern for the Muslim working-class, he could not agree with Camus's assessment of the political situation. Ouzegane's conception of revolutionary action was one of political realism which recognized the need for compromise between present necessities and future goals. In a letter to Charles Poncet some forty years later Ouzegane wrote: 'un révolutionnaire sérieux sait ne demander à chaque époque que ce qu'elle peut donner et apprend à fixer le possible dans l'immédiat sans cesser de préparer le but final'.[79] Relating Ouzegane's remarks to his disagreement with Camus over the party's policy on the PPA, Todd comments: 'ce que Camus prend, selon Ouzegane, pour une inacceptable erreur stratégique et morale n'est qu'un changement tactique'.[80] It is therefore evident that central to Camus's rupture with the Communist Party is the question of ethical failure; whether it is justifiable and what measure is acceptable.

When faced for what appears to be the first time in his political life with the choice between ends and means, Camus displayed a profound unwillingness to accept what was perceived by a political party to be the necessary cost involved in pursuing a

---

[77] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.180.
[78] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.148.
[79] Cited by Todd, ibid., p.150.
[80] Ibid., p.150.

just cause. However, it would be a mistake to read into Camus's response to this ethical dilemma a refusal of all failure. It is clear from his letter to Grenier that the lengths the PCF was willing to go to in order to achieve a political end were intolerable to Camus, but it is uncertain to what extent this lack of measure, as Camus perceived it, determined the stance he took. Unformulated at this stage, Camus's response to the inevitability of failure is uncompromising. Yet his confrontation with the PCF confirmed his long-held concerns about the ethical implications of political realism and triggered a process of intellectual enquiry which would only reach culmination in the publication of *L'Homme révolté* in 1951. Disillusioned with politics and in search of a means of metaphysical and political revolt, Camus turned towards the intellectual and the aesthetic. In December 1937 he wrote in his *Carnets*: 'La politique et le sort des hommes sont formés par des hommes sans idéal et sans grandeur. Ceux qui ont une grandeur en eux ne font pas de politique. Ainsi de tout. Mais il s'agit maintenant de créer en soi un nouvel homme. Il s'agit que les hommes d'action soient aussi des hommes d'idéal et les poètes industriels'.[81] Indeed, although Todd remarks on the apparent duality of Camus's life in 1936, it is clear that by 1938 Camus was moving towards the need for some level of coherence between his intellectual and political lives, between his sense of absurdity and his desire to engage in political action.

His notebooks at the end of 1937 and the beginning of 1938 reveal Camus's effort to understand and make sense of his political experience in metaphysical terms. In December 1937, he cites exerpts from Oswald Spengler's *Déclin de l'Occident*[82] which

---

[81] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.99.

[82] Oswald Spengler, *Der untergang des Abendlandes: Umrisse einer Morphologie der Weltgeschichte*, 2 vols (München: Beck, 1922-3). A highly influential work, Spengler's book was translated into French in

contrast the cyclical notion of history associated with the ancient Greeks and the linearity of the Western European concept of history, a distinction which would later underpin the theory of revolt he outlines in the first section of *L'Homme révolté*.[83] Less than two months later, Camus describes revolutionary ideology as a means of rebelling against the absurdity of the human condition: 'L'esprit révolutionnaire est tout entier dans une protestation de l'homme contre la condition de l'homme'.[84] Moreover, Communism is reduced by Camus to an exercise in metaphysical rebellion, for which dictators and class domination form but pretexts: 'Une révolution s'accomplit toujours contre les Dieux – à commencer par celle de Prométhée. C'est une revendication de l'homme contre son destin dont tyrans et guignols bourgeois ne sont que des prétextes'.[85] Recognizing the temptation of historical action as a means of fighting against the human condition, Camus remarks: 'il faut toute l'émotion de Malraux pour ne pas céder alors à la volonté de prouver'.[86] If Communism, and other doctrines of political action, are merely pretexts for metaphysical revolt, then the nature of ethical values, how these are created and how they are acted upon, are critical questions. This search for philosophical coherence with regard to the question of political action was facilitated by the opportunity Jean-Pierre Faure offered Camus to work as a journalist for *Alger Républicain* in September 1938. Free from political affiliations, *Alger Républicain* afforded Camus the space to establish his political views, and the like-mindedness and moral support of Pascal Pia provided an invaluable source of encouragement and affirmation.

---

the early 1930s. See *Le Déclin de l'Occident: esquisse d'une morphologie de l'histoire universelle*, trad. by Mohand Tazerout, 2 vols (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1931-3).

[83] Camus, *Carnets I*, pp.99-101.

[84] Ibid., p.105.

[85] Ibid., p.106.

[86] Ibid., p.106.

In September 1938, Camus met Pascal Pia for the first time and was persuaded to join him on the editorial team of the newly-established *Alger Républicain*.[87] Their friendship provided a context in which Camus could discover a political and intellectual identity, not only during the intensity of the pre-war years but also through the turbulent aftermath of the Liberation, when the moral voice Camus had first discovered as a journalist for *Alger Républicain* took on greater resonance as the editor of *Combat*.

Staunchly and unfashionably pacifist, Camus's ethical stance on the impending war, elaborated in the pages of *Alger Républicain* and its sister publication *Soir Républicain*,[88] was defined more by his personal and political experiences than by a coherent intellectual approach to the question of ethical action. However, the outbreak of war in September 1939 had a profound impact on him, triggering a process of intense introspection and self-examination. Fundamental to his thinking were two questions: why should one act? and how should one act? These questions and the myriad of issues bound up in them constitute the bedrock of Camus's œuvre from the late 1930s to the publication of *L'Homme révolté* in 1951. The purpose of the second half of this chapter is to explore this crucial, but neglected, period of Camus's life more closely in order to

---

[87] In the summer of 1938, Jean-Pierre Faure, who had first met Pascal Pia when he was working for *Ce Soir* in Paris, approached him to set up *Alger Républicain*, Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.173. According to Quilliot, Pia informed him that the idea for *Alger Républicain* was hatched just prior to the Munich Agreement in August-September 1938, Roger Quilliot, 'Vie et mort d' "Alger Républicain" et du "Soir Républicain"', in *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.1366-7 (p.1366). Modelled on the political situation in Oran where the left had established *Oran Républicain* to counter the right-wing media monopoly, *Alger Républicain* was designed to create a forum for the non-communist left in Algiers, Ajchenbaum, 'Préface', in Albert Camus and Pascal Pia, *Correspondance 1939-1947* (Paris: Fayard/Gallimard, 2000), pp.VII-XXV (p.X).

[88] *Soir Républicain* was launched in September 1939 in an attempt to compensate for the losses made by *Alger Républicain*. From 15th September to 28th October the two newspapers co-existed with Camus as editor in chief of *Soir Républicain*. See Quilliot, 'Vie et mort', *Essais*, p.1367. See also Emmanuel Roblès's account of this period in the special edition of the *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 1st March, 1960 entitled 'Hommage à Camus', 'Jeunesse d'Albert Camus', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 87 (1960), 410-421.

trace the way in which Camus's ethical thought developed and changed during these turbulent pre-war years.

The Influence of Pascal Pia on Camus

Although from very different backgrounds, Camus found in Pia a role model, an older brother, a soul-mate and, in political terms, a kindred spirit.[89] Three important factors contributed to this: their approach to journalism, their mutual dislike of politics, and the loss of their fathers during the First World War. Neither Pia nor Camus were particularly taken with journalism as a career, maintaining a critical distance from it as a profession that is often driven more by financial gain and political interest than by the search for truth.[90] Although this libertarian approach clashed with the Algerian authorities in 1938-9, in the months following the Liberation Pia and Camus's particular brand of journalism, which practised and campaigned for moral integrity in public life, resonated profoundly with the mood of the times. Moreover, both men were deeply sceptical about politics, preferring to remain on the sidelines of ideological adherence, although not necessarily of political life.[91] Todd comments: 'Pia et Camus sont

---

[89] Pia's mother was relatively well-off, well-educated, highly literate and worked as an accountant until Pia was born, after which she worked as a rail network administrator. Camus's mother was extremely poor, illiterate, partially dumb and worked as a cleaner for most of her life. Pia shrank away from the literary glitz of Paris. Having written both prose and poetry, he abandoned his creative work, burnt his poems and refused to allow the *Nouvelle Revue française* to publish his novel. Camus, on the other hand, desperately wanted to establish himself as a writer and sought to be part of the literary world of Paris: 'À priori, tout sépare donc Pia et Camus: l'un est déjà blasé et refuse de se considérer comme un écrivain; l'autre a une ambition littéraire, lutte contre la maladie et oscille entre énergie et découragement', Ajchenbaum, p.XIII. For a full discussion of Camus's and Pia's backgrounds, see Ajchenbaum, pp.XII-XIII.

[90] Ajchenbaum comments that Camus and Pia felt they brought a certain liberty of thought and movement to journalism as a profession. Note however that Todd seems to suggest that Pia was more convinced than Camus about the potential of journalism to have and display integrity, and that it was in fact Pia's example that persuaded Camus to regard it as anything other than a means of financially supporting his literary ambitions, Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.179.

[91] Roger Grenier cites Pia as having said of Camus: 'Autant que j'aie pu en juger, ses sympathies allaient désormais aux libertaires, aux objecteurs de conscience, aux syndicalistes à la Pelloutier, bref à tous les réfractaires', p.300.

allergiques aux hommes politiques. Un politique dissimule la vérité'.[92] Finally and perhaps most significantly, both men lost their fathers during the First World War, and their shared experience of absence and loss convinced both of the futility of war.[93] The impact of this bereavement on Camus's ethical outlook is not to be underestimated. His posthumous work, *Le Premier Homme*, reveals the extent to which he was haunted by the absent presence of his father, the tragic cost of war and the brutality of conflict.[94]

Ajchenbaum persuasively suggests that Camus's pacifist approach to war is closely connected to his father's death: 'L'ombre des pères n'a-t-elle pas flotté tout au long de ces mois de lutte pacifiste?'[95] Indeed, the pacifist line *Alger Républicain* took on the rapidly escalating political situation is unsurprising given the desire for truth, the distrust of political orthodoxies and the horror of war that Pia and Camus shared.

It was in the unconventional and slightly anarchic context of this friendship that Camus developed his ethical ideas. As tensions increased between the editorial team and the administrative board of the paper, Camus and Pia's growing sense of solidarity strengthened. Todd comments: 'Camus est aussi isolé que Pia. Une solitude à deux renforce une amitié'.[96] Although they moved in extremely different worlds in the years that followed their brief spell working for *Alger Républicain*, the fraternal loyalty which was first forged during their time in Algeria defined their friendship and laid the foundations for their renewed alliance on the editorial board of the clandestine newspaper

---

[92] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.177.
[93] Ajchenbaum, p.XII.
[94] Albert Camus, *Le Premier Homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994). See Camus's second chapter which fictionalizes a visit he made in August 1947 to the grave of his father who died in the Battle of the Marne in 1914, pp.25-32. See also the passages where Camus recalls and recounts his impressions of the brutality of war which had clearly scarred his memory as a child and which had remained with him into adulthood, pp.65-67 and pp.139-141.
[95] Ajchenbaum, p.XV.
[96] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.217.

Combat towards the end of the war.[97] Indeed, it is clear from Camus and Pia's correspondence that Pia's involvement in Camus's life and intellectual career during the war and the immediate postwar years was significant. This is evident in the sustained efforts Pia made to find Camus work in France following their departure from *Alger Républicain* and to promote his work in the intellectual circles of Paris. Always self-effacing, Pia worked tirelessly to introduce influential figures such as Jean Paulhan, Roger Martin du Gard and Gaston Gallimard to Camus's work. Writing in May 1942 in response to Camus's wish to dedicate *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* to him as a mark of gratitude, Pia writes: 'J'ai été très touché de vous voir m'offrir la dédicace de ce livre. Et également très confus. Le peu que j'ai pu faire pour vous ne méritait pas une telle récompense, et d'ailleurs, en maintes circonstances, vous aviez déjà largement payé de retour les quelques services que j'ai pu vous rendre'.[98] Moreover, when Pia needed to complete his editorial team for *Combat*, he turned naturally to Camus whom he later described to his wife as 'mon *alter ego*'.[99] Indeed, in a letter to his wife in August 1944, Pia comments: 'Je suis content que Camus soit rentré, il me manquait et j'aime mieux travailler avec lui qu'avec d'autres'.[100] Although there is little material evidence, for obvious reasons, from the period Camus and Pia worked together in Algeria, it is clear from their later correspondence that they identified profoundly with each other's political, moral and journalistic position. Furthermore, the solidarity, loyalty and mutual respect expressed in their correspondence testify to the importance of this time working side by side on *Alger*

---

[97] On the fraternity that this period of war and occupation engendered in people, see a remark Camus makes in his *Carnets* in June 1938: 'La seule fraternité maintenant possible, la seule qu'on nous offre et qu'on nous permette, c'est la sordide et gluante fraternité devant la mort militaire', *Carnets I*, p.115.
[98] Camus and Pia, *Correspondance*, p.94. See also Pia's letter to Camus dated 4 November 1942 where he writes: 'Je vous remercie vivement de la dédicace, qui m'a touché. À la vérité, je n'ai nullement le sentiment d'en être digne, et il va falloir maintenant que je m'efforce de la mériter', p.108.
[99] Ajchenbaum cites a letter from Pascal Pia to Suzanne Pia, dated September 1944, p.XXI.
[100] Ajchenbaum cites a letter from Pascal Pia to Suzanne Pia, dated 13 August 1944, , p.XXI.

Républicain in the tempestuous months preceding and following the onset of war. Camus's relationship with Pascal Pia was therefore crucial, not only to his response to war, but also to his decision to engage in resistance activity which I will discuss further in the following chapter. Before exploring Camus's approach to the ethical issues posed by war, I would like to outline briefly the way in which his work for *Alger Républicain* allowed him to discover a moral voice and provided an outlet for him to express his deeply-rooted concerns for social equality and justice.

Journalism and Social Activism

It is clear from the articles Camus wrote during this time that he thrived on the opportunity journalism offered him to engage in social and political issues. The main themes of his early work for the paper were the Spanish civil war, Algerian poverty and both individual and collective injustice. Particularly memorable is his collection of articles entitled *Misère de la Kabylie* published between 5th and 15th June 1939 which report on the widespread poverty of the Arab community in the Kabyle region of Algeria.[101] He also used the paper as a podium from which to speak out in support of those he regarded as victims of injustice. For example, he followed the Hodent affair which ran from January to March 1939 in which M. Hodent, an employee of the *Société indigène de prévoyance à Trézel*, was, in his view, unfairly accused of corruption.[102] Similarly, he campaigned in June 1939 for the innocence of Sheik El Okbi who was

---

[101] These articles are reproduced in *Essais*, pp.903-938. It is worth noting that Todd regards Camus's report on the Kabyle as the key transition phase in his development from an essayist to a good journalist and regards this series of articles as an attempt on Camus's part to unite the Arab and European communities, Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, pp.192-195.

[102] Roger Quilliot, 'La Politique d'"Alger Républicain"', *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.1367-1372 (p.1368).

accused of the assassination of Kahoul, the Muphti of Algiers,[103] arguing that El Okbi was being used as a scapegoat for a political murder that others had perpetrated.[104] Inextricably linked to defending the poor, Camus's fight against injustice also led him to support the arsonists of Auribeau in late July 1939. Accused of starting a fire during an agricultural strike in September 1937, ten workers were given sentences of between five and seven years hard labour. Camus questioned whether the punishment fitted the crime and called for the cessation of the court case and the acquittal of the accused.[105] It is therefore clear that despite Camus's lack of political affiliation, he was still actively involved in political and social affairs during this period. Quilliot writes: 'On le sent préoccupé par le chômage, les problèmes humains et sociaux du machinisme industriel, attiré par une combinaison de l'économie de marché et de l'économie dirigée, sensible au reproche adressé au Front populaire d'avoir fait passer les revendications avant les réformes de structure'.[106] Underlying Camus's social activism is therefore a keen sense of moral responsibility, and journalism provided him with a unique opportunity to vocalize and explore his ethical concerns.

The Ethics of War

In addition to focusing on local issues, *Alger Républicain* addressed international affairs and it is in this arena that Camus's conceptualization of the problem of ethical action is most discernible. No longer ideologically bound by the Communist Party, or indeed any other political party, Camus was free to redefine his political identity and

---

[103] Muphti or mufti (*moufti*) is Turkish-Arabic for 'judge' and refers to someone who theorizes and interprets Islamic law, so performing in the one role religious, judicial and civil functions, *Le Petit Robert* (Paris: Dictionnaires Le Robert, 1991), p.1242.
[104] Quilliot, 'La Politique', *Essais*, p.1369.
[105] Ibid., p.1370.
[106] Ibid., p.1371.

shape his own ethical perspective. An exploration of the articles Camus wrote, firstly for *Alger Républicain* and then, from September 1939 to January 1940, for *Soir Républicain*, offers an insight into Camus's ethical approach to the absolutism of contemporary politics and the attendant ethical issues of the use of violence and the balance between ends and means. Through a consideration of a selection of articles, I will explore Camus's approach to the ethical challenges posed by war before going on to consider the impact war had on Camus's conceptual framework. In a satirical article he wrote for *Alger Républicain* entitled 'Petit portrait dans le goût du temps', published on 18 December 1938, Camus criticizes the politically orthodox and patriotic approach taken by the French government towards the rapidly escalating international crisis: 'La boulangerie lui paraît même si singulière, si fermée, si noble et si hautaine qu'il en fait un monde à part et impitoyablement l'oppose aux autres univers' (*E*, 1375). Commenting on the response of France to the threat of Fascism, Camus questions the morality of an absolutist approach to achieving ethical objectives: 'Mais le fils de boulanger a un autre amour, et c'est la démocratie. Seulement, cet amour, qui se nourrit des ardeurs d'un tempérament à ce point brutal, le porte souvent aux pires excès. Je veux dire qu'il aime la démocratie jusqu'à l'étrangler. Mais le fils de boulanger affirme volontiers que c'est quand même l'amour' (*E*, 1375). The ethical dilemma Camus is alluding to here is the question of means and ends. In his view, absolutism often involves the negation of those values that are being pursued. Camus's snapshot of the times captures the enduring problem of this era, a problem which not only preoccupied Camus, but other prominent intellectuals too.[107] For Camus, the thirties' concoction of orthodoxy and moral fervour

---

[107] Writing in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, for example, Beauvoir situates the danger of absolutism in the metaphysical context of the human desire for full self-presence, as Camus would later do in *L'Homme*

would lead only to violence and war: 'Du coup, c'est le jeu mêlé de ses deux amours qui le porte au désespoir, je veux dire aux conseils de guerre, aux gaz inoffensifs et à la garde mobile. [...] Meurtrier par amour, qui ne l'acquitterait?' (*E*, 1376) This pre-war piece is highly significant because of the way in which it foreshadows the concerns Camus expresses in *Lettres à un ami allemand* where he traces the long intellectual *détour* he took to come to terms with the reason for and the need to engage in war.

With the introduction of censorship in September 1939, Pia and Camus's editorial line on France's political approach became more and more critical. Regarding the position taken by the Daladier government as dangerously simplistic, Camus began a page in *Soir Républicain* entitled 'Sous les éclairages de la guerre', with the express aim firstly of addressing some of the complex political, historical and ethical issues which the conflict with Germany raised and secondly of identifying an intellectually coherent course of action.[108] Quilliot comments: 'Il lui [*Soir Républicain*] semble que le conflit a des racines profondes qu'il convient de découvrir pour aboutir à une solution'.[109] Fundamental to Pia and Camus's position is their view that the means used to achieve political and ethical ends must reflect the goal pursued. The approach they advocated therefore sought to hold in tension these competing terms. I would now like to trace their campaign for a more measured policy towards the fight against Fascism in a sequence of articles which address the absolutism, as Camus perceived it, of the French government's position both on the question of intellectual liberty and that of conflict resolution.[110]

---

révolté: 'Ils se reconnaissent pour la fin suprême à laquelle doit se subordonner toute action: mais les exigences de l'action les acculent à se traiter les uns les autres comme des instruments ou des obstacles', *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p.13.

[108] For a detailed account of *Soir Républicain* and the outbreak of war see Roger Quilliot's article '"Le Soir Républicain" et la guerre' in *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.1373-1374.

[109] Quilliot, '"Le Soir Républicain" et la guerre', p.1373.

[110] See 'Notre position', *Essais*, pp.1378-1380.

One of the issues on which Camus and Pia perceived the French government to be taking an absolutist line was that of censorship, and they campaigned vociferously against this in the months following the declaration of war. In their view, censorship represented a violation of their intellectual liberty and therefore constituted an unjustifiable means of pursuing the greater goal of freedom which attempts to control the press were designed to facilitate. An editorial on 22nd October 1939 defines the paper's position: 'Nous n'admettons pas la censure sur les esprits... Nous haïssons le national-socialisme, le bellicisme, la dictature surtout sur la pensée'.[111] Determined to uphold intellectual liberty, *Soir Républicain* published the status of all the information passed on, whether this be from official, unofficial, unconfirmed or British sources.[112] In his article 'Notre position', the question of censorship is unravelled further and the ethical issues underlying this policy explored. Primarily, Camus argues against the idea that in order to achieve justice, liberty must be restricted: 'On ne saurait trop réfuter ce sophisme que le maintien du moral d'une nation nécessite la disparition de ses libertés' (*E*, 1378). The problem of absolutism and the ethical failure which that inevitably entails was clearly a growing concern for Camus and a theme which would become central to his thinking throughout the postwar period. Impressed by what he perceived as a more enlightened, more measured, response to this question, Camus cites Britain as exemplary in her position not only over the liberty of information but also on the question of conscientious objection: 'On ne saurait trop insister sur l'exemple que nous donne à cet égard l'Angleterre. [...] Ceci donne la mesure du climat de la liberté britannique. Et c'est l'honneur et la force d'une démocratie que de pouvoir équilibrer des libertés si

---

[111] Cited by Quilliot, '"Le Soir Républicain" et la guerre', p.1373.
[112] Ibid., p.1373.

essentielles'.[113] Although Camus's view of England's treatment of conscientious objection may not be entirely accurate, particularly as war progressed, his reference to it serves to illustrate his search for an alternative, more balanced, way of achieving ethical ends.

Camus's notion of measure is defined further in his article 'Lettre à un jeune anglais', published on 23rd of December 1939. This is a satirical piece which prefigures *Lettres à un ami allemand* and arguably *La Chute* in its evocation and use of an interlocutor. Here Camus's understanding of absolutism appears to be more developed in that he perceives in this approach to history and human action an illusory desire for a perfect order, so foreshadowing the grounds for his rejection of absolutism in his later writing on revolt: 'Je suis sûr qu'elle [la doctrine française] aura son bonheur qui est celui du royaume des cieux où sera accueillie la presque totalité de notre génération. Sur cet état d'esprit, il faut que vous sachiez ceci: de l'esprit, à la vérité, nous n'en avons guère. Mais nous sommes favorisés de son contraire, qui est l'État' (*E*, 1381-2).[114] Recognizing the difficulty in maintaining both liberty and justice, Camus writes: 'Le problème était pourtant délicat puisqu'il s'agissait de concilier une théorie selon laquelle nous défendons notre liberté dans cette guerre et des réalités qui exigent une adaptation de cette liberté aux nécessités d'une guerre' (*E*, 1382). The effort to balance two competing terms to which Camus refers here, prefigures his relativistic proposal, the *pensée de midi*, and recalls the influence of Greek thought on his philosophical outlook.

---

[113] Ibid., p.1378.

[114] It is worth noting the resonance between Camus's response to absolutism and that of Beauvoir. In *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, Beauvoir writes: 'c'est le fanatisme politique qui vide la politique de tout contenu humain et impose l'État non pour les individus mais contre eux', pp.64-5.

This idea of measure is central to Camus's approach to the problem of ethical action and is further evident in his criticism of France's decision to engage in war.

In Camus's opinion, France's recourse to war against Germany was simplistic and short-sighted because, in adopting that policy, France was failing to learn the lessons of the past. For Camus, the Versailles Treaty provided an example of the way in which the pursuit of absolute justice spawns injustice if the means used do not reflect the desired end. Refusing the dialectics of conflict, Camus and Pia in their article 'Notre position' condemned the injustice of both Hitler and the victorious nations whose postwar policies were in part responsible for creating him:

> Nous avons été les premiers à répudier un régime où la dignité humaine était comptée pour rien et où la liberté devenait une dérision. Mais, en même temps, nous ne cessions de dire que cet excès dans la bestialité trouvait sa source dans le désespoir de tout un peuple. Les nations ici sont comme les individus. C'est dans leur plus grande misère qu'elles forgent leur volonté de puissance.(*E*, 1380)[115]

Furthermore, their proposed approach to the conflict with Germany sought to balance both the desire for peace and the imperative of achieving it: 'nous demandons sans fièvre, en pleine conscience de nos responsabilités, qu'au sein même de la guerre, la paix soit envisagée et plus précisément les moyens de conclure une paix durable. Et nous demandons que cette paix définie, plébiscitée par le peuple français, soit proposée sans trêve, au milieu même des combats, tous les jours s'il le faut' (*E*, 1379).[116] The notion of

---

[115] Remarking on Camus and Pia's position on political action which is based on dialectical principles and the use of violence as a means of achieving certain ends, Ajchenbaum writes: 'Ils refusent un monde construit autour des notions de vainqueur et de vaincu, et annoncent la guerre prochaine comme un échec de l'homme', p.XIV.

[116] It is worth noting that only a few days previously on 28th October 1939, Pia and Camus had written: 'Ce monde nouveau dont parlait le dernier éditorial d'*Alger républicain*, ce n'est pas seulement après la guerre qu'il faudra l'édifier. Mais c'est au cœur même de la tragédie européenne qu'il faut jeter ses bases et

using peaceful means to bring about peace, even in a state of war, sounds good in theory, but invites the question: what does this mean in practice? In 'Notre position' Camus states: 'Ne pas humilier, s'efforcer de comprendre, ôter à Hitler les raisons profondes de son prestige, accorder tout ce qui est juste en refusant ce qui est injuste, réviser Versailles en réclamant la Tchécoslovaquie et la Pologne, [...] fonder la solidarité humaine et européenne, rajuster la politique des nations à une économie devenue internationale: ce sont là nos positions' (*E*, 1380). Camus's solution to the immediate problem of war with Germany was radical and from our twenty-first century perspective somewhat naïve given what is now known about Hitler and Nazism. Yet, even in late 1939 much was already known about Hitler's politics and in the light of this Camus's perspective seems to border on the utopian. Shortly after the publication of 'Notre position' in *Soir Républicain*, Camus and Pia were virtually accused of treachery in an article published in *L'Émancipation nationale* which asked: 'Est-ce défendre notre peuple, notre pays, la paix, que de parler de créer après la victoire une Europe nouvelle basée sur l'idée utopique de République universelle et d'internationalisme?'.[117] Despite the militaristic agenda of *L'Émanciption nationale*, the question of whether Camus and Pia managed to strike a balance between means and ends is an important one and one that is key to the persuasiveness of the ethical position Camus went on to develop in the postwar years.

As *Soir Républicain* came under increasing pressure from both the censors and its administrative board for the political line taken by its editors, Pia and Camus's ethical position hardened. In the credo that was intended for publication but suppressed by

---

annoncer son rayonnement. C'est cette tâche que nous nous sommes assignée. Nous la poursuivrons malgré tous les obstacles', Quilliot, '"Le Soir Républicain" et la guerre', p.1373.

[117] Cited in Camus and Pia's response to this charge, 'Profession de foi', *Essais*, pp.1384-1387. This text was suppressed by censors and remained unpublished until 1965.

censors in January 1940, Pia and Camus emphatically state their case: 'Nous ne craignons pas de le dire: Nous pensons que cette Europe peut être acquise à moins de frais qu'elle ne l'est en ce moment. Nous nous refusons à suivre les entraînements de la haine ou à aider, par notre silence, à pousser l'Europe et ses nations dans l'abîme' ('Profession de Foi', *E*, 1386). The question of the cost of war is paramount. Confirming their position, they reiterate: 'Nous sommes profondément pacifistes' (*E*, 1386). Finally, they pledge to continue to stand for the ethical values in which they believe: 'Quoi qu'il en soit, et ceci s'adresse à nos lecteurs, nous continuerons à défendre et à maintenir ce que nous croyons vrai. Aujourd'hui, où tous les partis ont trahi, où la politique a tout dégradé, il ne reste à l'homme que la conscience de sa solitude et sa foi dans les valeurs humaines et individuelles' (*E*, 1387).[118] This uncompromising rhetoric does not fit easily with Camus's call for measure and brings into question the extent to which Camus had in fact come to terms with the inevitable element of failure which measure implies. Rather than consider the implications of a relativistic approach to ethical action, Camus seems to retreat into a mystical aspiration towards a world that is founded on a notion of given values: 'Nous réclamons le droit de défendre la vérité humaine, celle qui recule devant la souffrance et aspire à la joie' ('Notre position', *E*, 1380). In fact, a number of the articles which engage with the ethical issues war presents culminate not in a coherent position on the problem of ethical failure, but in a lyrical displacement or postponement of it.

Although the absurdity of human existence is frequently evoked in these passages, rather than clarify Camus's response to war, this only serves to confuse it further. In 'Profession

---

[118] This profound sense of solitude and betrayal is also expressed a few months previously in Camus's *Carnets*: 'Tous ont trahi, ceux qui poussaient à la résistance et ceux qui parlaient de la paix. Ils sont là, aussi dociles et plus coupables que les autres. Et jamais l'individu n'a été plus seul devant la machine à fabriquer le mensonge', *Carnets I*, pp.167-8.

de foi', Camus and Pia write: 'Notre espoir est que ce monde peut être sauvé de lui-même et que chacun alors retrouvera ce qui fait le prix de la vie, le bonheur précaire de chaque jour, le destin solitaire que chaque homme poursuit en silence' (*E*, 1386). It is therefore clear from Camus's journalism that at this initial stage of war, his position on the question of how to engage in ethical action lacks definition. As I will now discuss, this is further problematized by the competing discourse of absurdity which runs through Camus's *Carnets* at this time and which betrays a more profound ethical crisis than has yet been acknowledged by Camus critics. It is a crisis, however, which is critical in defining Camus's ethical approach and shaping his theory of revolt.

Ethical Crisis

In the months preceding September 1939 there is a surprising absence of comment in Camus's notebooks with regard to the wider political situation. Rather, his anxiety about the threat of war appears to be filtered through his imagination and the human cost is sketched with evocative simplicity in his *Carnets*: 'Mobilisation. Le fils aîné s'en va. Il est assis devant sa mère et il dit: "Ça ne sera rien." La mère ne dit rien. Elle a pris un journal qui traînait sur la table. Elle le plie en deux, puis en quatre, puis en huit'.[119] Despite Camus's awareness of the gathering pace of world events, which he had now been following in his capacity as a journalist for some time, the declaration of war seemed to catch him off guard. His fragmented description of public response to the news betrays an element of disbelief and an effort to take in the full implications which, being visually absent, elude him: 'La guerre a éclaté. Où est la guerre? En dehors des

---

[119] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.151. Camus goes on to write: 'A la gare, la foule qui accompagne. Les hommes empilés dans les wagons. Une femme pleure. "Mais jamais je n'aurais cru qu'il serait comme ça, aussi mal." Une autre: "C'est drôle qu'on coure comme ça pour mourir." Une fille pleure contre son fiancé, lui est grave. Il ne dit rien. Fumées, cris, cahots. Le train s'en va', pp. 151-2.

nouvelles qu'il faut croire et des affiches qu'il faut lire, où trouver les signes de l'absurde événement? [...] On veut y croire. On cherche son visage et elle se refuse à nous'.[120] Todd remarks on Camus's horror at Germany's invasion of Poland, suggesting that his disbelief can be explained by his conviction that the war could have been avoided.[121] Jean-Pierre Rioux puts forward similar reasons and raises the question of how Camus, a journalist, former Communist, proud libertarian and supporter of Spanish republicans, could have failed to see the direction in which events were moving. [122] Rioux suggests two reasons why this may have been the case. Firstly, he suggests that as a child of the Third Republic, Camus's history of political disenchantment left him disengaged from the workings of world politics.[123] Yet, it could also be argued that such a degree of disillusionment might on the contrary have deepened his scepticism with regard to the ability of politicians to resolve the current crisis and therefore sharpened his awareness of the inevitability of war. Secondly, Rioux argues that war coincided with an intensely creative period for Camus in literary terms, having recently completed his first major work *L'Envers et l'endroit*.[124] However, more interesting than Camus's initial response to the outbreak of war, which caught others similarly off guard, is the impact it had on Camus's conceptual framework.

---

[120] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.165.
[121] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.209.
[122] Jean-Pierre Rioux, 'Camus et la seconde guerre mondiale ou "rentrons dans l'histoire avec le mépris qui convient"', in *Camus et la politique: actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp.97-106. It is worth noting that Camus was not alone in his feeling of surprise and disbelief at the outbreak of war. Beauvoir writes that even as late as the summer of 1939 she held out the belief that war would be avoided: 'Au début de l'été 1939, je n'avais pas encore tout à fait renoncé à espérer. Une voix obstinée continuait à susurrer en moi: "Ça ne m'arrivera pas; pas la guerre, pas à moi"', *La Force de l'âge* , p.381.
[123] Rioux, p.98.
[124] Rioux, p.98.

As I outlined above, preceding the outbreak of war there is in Camus's work a preoccupation with the question of ethical action, the problem of achieving certain goals without negating these goals in the process. This intellectual debate, which we see satirized in 'Petit portrait dans le goût du temps' and which continues throughout his journalistic writing post-September 1939, is predicated on a belief that ethical values are possible. Justice, liberty, integrity, truth, humanity, are all terms which consistently figure in Camus's ethical vocabulary and are concepts which define his response to the world around him. Rooted in his childhood poverty, his working-class background and his belief in the value of human nature,[125] Camus's core beliefs are curiously discordant with the absurdism that had come to define his philosophical perspective. It is important not to forget that at a time when his journalistic work was highly charged with moral and ethical imperatives, Camus was also writing his trilogy of the Absurd, having already completed *L'Envers et l'endroit* in 1936.[126] Until the outbreak of war, Camus seems to sustain this dualism in his intellectual life without these two conflicting discourses threatening to undermine each other. However, it is evident from his *Carnets* that, with the outbreak of war, life and thought, experience and philosophy collided for Camus and this convergence profoundly challenged his understanding of human existence and action.

---

[125] Camus, *Carnets I*: 'J'ai besoin parfois d'écrire des choses qui m'échappent en partie, mais qui précisément font la preuve de ce qui en moi est plus fort que moi', p.60.

[126] Albert Camus, *L'Envers et l'endroit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937). Published in 1937, *L'Envers et l'endroit* was written in 1935-36. Although not published until 1944, *Caligula* was written in 1938 and the first indication of this work in Camus's *Carnets* appears in January 1937, *Carnets I*, p.43. *L'Étranger* was completed in May 1940 and published in 1942. The themes of this *récit* are discernible in Camus's *Carnets I* as early as May 1935, p.15. But it is not until June 1937 that a fragment of the text appears, see pp.49-50. However, Camus himself identifies August 1937 as the point at which he first began to formulate consciously the theme for *L'Étranger*, p.61. Unlike the other texts in Camus's trilogy of the absurd, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* came to maturity slightly later, not being completed until February 1941, *Carnets I*, p.224. Although the theme of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is present in Camus's *Carnets* as early as May 1936 (pp.38-39) it is not until August 1938 that we find a fragment for Camus's essay on the Absurd (pp.118-119) and from December 1938 onwards, reflections on the absurd become increasingly frequent.

The notebook entries for September 1939 reveal the extent to which the absurdity of war shattered Camus's intellectual world and dismantled the conceptual paradigm on which his ethical notions had been based. Reflecting on the first few days of hostilities, Camus writes:

> D'autre part, tout prend une valeur nouvelle. [...] L'absurdité essentielle de cette catastrophe ne change rien à ce qu'elle est. Elle généralise l'absurdité un peu plus essentielle de la vie. Elle la rend plus immédiate et plus pertinente. Si cette guerre peut avoir un effet sur l'homme, c'est de le fortifier dans l'idée qu'il se fait de son existence et dans le jugement qu'il porte sur elle. Dès l'instant où cette guerre "est", tout jugement qui ne peut l'intégrer est faux. Un homme qui réfléchit passe généralement son temps à adapter l'idée qu'il a formée des choses aux faits nouveaux qui la démentent. C'est dans cette inclinaison, dans cette gauchissure de la pensée, dans cette correction consciente, que réside la vérité, c'est-à-dire l'enseignement d'une vie.[127]

It is evident from this passage that war both amplified the sense of absurdity Camus already felt and radically challenged the Absurd as a coherent philosophical position in the face of the dilemmas that war posed. Moreover, war reinforced Camus's belief in the 'indifférence profonde'[128] of human life and at the same time confronted him with a moral dilemma. Attempting to define war shortly after it had been declared, Camus writes: 'On se demandait où était la guerre – ce qui, en elle, était ignoble. Et on s'aperçoit qu'on sait où elle est, qu'on l'a en soi – qu'elle est, pour la plupart, cette gêne, cette

---

[127] Camus, *Carnets I*, pp.166-167.
[128] Ibid., p.168.

obligation de choisir'.[129] The choice before Camus was stark. No longer a decision between pacifism and violence, action and contemplation,[130] Camus's choice was between conflict or collaboration: 'On ne peut dire "Je l'ignore". On collabore ou on la combat. Rien n'est moins excusable que la guerre et l'appel aux haines nationales. Mais une fois la guerre survenue, il est vain et lâche de vouloir s'en écarter sous le prétexte qu'on n'en est pas responsable. Les tours d'ivoire sont tombées'.[131] Faced with the challenge of engaging in action, which would inevitably involve violence, Camus returned to his philosophical roots in an effort to reconcile his absurdist convictions and the values underpinning his conflicting desires both to support the cause of war and to keep his hands clean. In a letter Camus wrote to Francine Faure at this time, he discusses the absurdity of war and shares his need to explore this further through a book that he is writing, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, which he describes as 'un travail où l'intelligence a la plus grande part – la morale vient après'.[132] As I will argue in the following chapter, *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* can be read as a response to Camus's need to find an intellectually coherent approach to the problem of ethical action. Given that behind the problem of how to act

---

[129] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.170.

[130] Although Camus clearly felt the pull of a purely anti-historicist and contemplative approach which he saw in Grenier, it is clear from their correspondence that by May 1940 Camus found this to be an untenable position in the face of unfolding political and historical events: 'Et c'est très dur d'essayer de se tenir en dehors, avec une âme égale. J'ai pensé à ce que vous me dites sur l'indépendance. "A condition d'être exigeant envers soi-même." Oui, bien sûr, et je ne l'ai jamais mieux senti qu'ici et en ce moment', Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.40. In fact, it is worth noting that from the moment war is declared, Camus finds it impossible to remain 'indifferent', in Grenier's terms, to the tide of history: 'si ignoble que soit cette guerre, il n'est pas permis d'être en dehors', *Carnets I*, p.167. Camus elaborates on this shortly afterwards when he writes: 'Juger un événement est impossible et immoral si c'est du dehors. C'est au sein de cet absurde malheur qu'on conserve le droit de le mépriser', p.172.

[131] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.172. Note that this is written shortly after 7th September 1939 and therefore Camus's reference to collaboration must be read in the broader sense of support for the opposing side and not in the historically specific sense of collaboration with the German occupying force post-June 1940 when this term took on a greater resonance.

[132] Cited in Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.215. Although the exact date of this letter is unclear, Todd notes that the citations he makes come from letters sent to Francine Faure the 24th and 26th November, and 3rd December 1939.

lies the question of whether one should act at all, Camus's investigation of the possibility of meaning forms a significant part of his journey towards an ethical position. The purpose of Chapter 3 is to assess the significance of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in the development of his ethical thought and to consider the way in which this text can be read as a textualization of the ethical crisis which the outbreak of war triggered in Camus through an exploration of his essay on the Absurd, his *Carnets* and his correspondence.

3
The Absurd and the Problem of Praxis

Building on the established view that the outbreak of war triggered in Camus a prolonged period of self-examination, I will argue that this *détour*, as Camus himself describes it in *Lettres à un ami allemand*,[1] marks a critical point in the development of his ethics. Whilst critics have largely accepted Camus's own reading of this time,[2] as I will discuss in a moment, the ethical crisis precipitated by the onset of war and the radical revision of ethical values that this provoked in Camus has received little attention. Furthermore, although commentators often point to the significance of *Lettres à un ami allemand* in the genesis of Camus's theory of revolt,[3] the importance of the period leading up to this work, from the outbreak of war in 1939 to Camus's decision to join the editorial team of *Combat* in 1943, has been neglected. As outlined in the previous chapter, it is clear from Camus's journalistic writing and his *Carnets* that war and the violence it would entail had begun to challenge the foundations of his intellectual understanding of why and how human beings should act, colliding his philosophical convictions and his ethical values. It is also evident that in order to find some justification for engaging in political action Camus turned to his philosophical roots: the Absurd. The purpose of this chapter is therefore to explore the significance of *Le Mythe*

---

[1] In his first letter, Camus writes: 'Il nous a fallu un long détour, nous avons beaucoup de retard. C'est le détour que le scrupule de vérité fait faire à l'intelligence, le scrupule d'amitié au cœur. C'est le détour qui a sauvegardé la justice, mis la vérité du côté de ceux qui s'interrogeaient. Et sans doute, nous l'avons payé très cher', *Essais*, p.223.

[2] In reference to *Lettres à un ami allemand*, Dubois remarks: 'C'est donc sous le signe de l'homme que Camus s'engage dans le long combat de la Résistance', 'Le Combat d'Albert Camus', p.124. See also Jean-Pierre Rioux, who remarks that the chronology, or narrative, of this period which Camus offers in the *Lettres* is the only one he regards as reliable: 'le détour, le sursaut et le défi de la dignité collective; l'acharnement du choix individuel au fil des mois [...]. Les nazis, eux, n'attendaient pas et ne s'embarrassaient pas de cette chronologie qui épouse très intimement l'évolution personnelle de Camus et qui repousse l'heure du choix quelque part en 1943', p.101.

[3] See for example Bronner, pp.60-1; Cruickshank, p.91 and Rioux, pp.99-101.

de Sisyphe as a response both to the ethical dilemma posed by war and the intellectual crisis to which it gave rise.

Central to this discussion is the role played by *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in enabling Camus to work through some of the metaphysical issues underlying his search for an ethical position. Whilst many critics have focused exclusively on the philosophical content of this text, I would like to offer a reading of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as a textualization of the historical and political context in which it was written; a means by which Camus could address and work over the ethical problems posed by war.[4] Furthermore, I will argue that a consideration of the relation between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and its context is critical to an understanding not only of the development of Camus's ethics but also of his ethical position, since Camus's reasoning on the Absurd serves as the foundation for the theory of revolt he later developed. The question of the relation between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté* is contentious not least because the philosophical coherence of Camus's essay on revolt was dismissed by Jeanson and Sartre following its publication in 1951.[5] Perhaps as a consequence, Camus critics have tended to emphasize the coherence between Camus's reasoning on the Absurd and his theory of revolt and to present the transition between the two as seamless and unproblematic.[6] Before intervening in this hermeneutic dialogue, I would like to

---

[4] My focus in this chapter is specifically on the historical and political factors which influenced both the development of Camus's ethical thought and the composition of his essay on the Absurd at this time. For a detailed discussion of the intellectual influences on Camus during this period see Louis Faucon, 'Commentaires', *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965), pp.1410-1416. In particular, Faucon draws our attention to the influence of Malraux's work, Rachel Bespaloff's *Cheminements et Carrefours*, Dostoevsky's *Les Possédés* and *Les Frères Karamazov*, and Franz Kafka whose work forms the focus of Camus's belatedly published study 'L'Espoir et l'absurde dans l'œuvre de Franz Kafka'.

[5] See Jeanson, 'Albert Camus ou l'âme révoltée', p.2073 and Sartre, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', p.334.

[6] Roger Mehl, 'De la révolte à la valeur', *Foi et Vie*, 6 (1952), 516-532. Whilst Mehl acknowledges that the Absurd results in an ethical impasse, he nevertheless roots Camus's notion of revolt unquestioningly in the Absurd. See also René-Marill Albérès, *Les Hommes traqués* (Paris: La Nouvelle Édition, 1953), pp.187-

explore the significance of Camus's essay on the Absurd in the development of his ethical thought in order to appreciate the extent to which *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* resolves the questions which drove Camus's search for an intellectually coherent approach to political action. As such, this chapter is vital firstly to an understanding of the relationship between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté* and secondly, to a more nuanced reading of Camus's contribution to twentieth-century ethical discourses.

Divided into four sections, this chapter will offer a reading of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as a textual response to the ethical crisis the outbreak of war provoked in Camus and a return to the site of an earlier emotional experience of the Absurd, so counteracting critical opinion which underplays or simply ignores the importance of the context in which it was written. The second part of this chapter will then outline the absurdist reasoning Camus elaborates in his essay and discuss his interpretation of the Absurd as an affirmation of human life. Thirdly, I will address the problem of praxis and chart Camus's quest to derive a 'rule' or code of action from his analysis of the Absurd. This discussion will focus on the second section of Camus's essay, 'L'Homme absurde', where he outlines his 'éthique de la quantité' (*E*, 154) and attempts to apply this to human action in a number of different social contexts: love, art and politics. This shift from theory to practice proves far from easy for Camus and it becomes evident that, whilst it might be argued that the Absurd justifies an affirmation of human existence, it is unable to provide a basis for ethical values and consequently for human action.

Profoundly problematic, the Absurd appears to resolve the question of whether and how to engage in historical action only in part and an exploration of its limitations as an

---

220; R. P. Holstein, '*L'Homme révolté*', *Facultés catholiques de l'ouest*, 2 (1953), 27-30; Braun, p.120; East, p.59; François Ewald, 'L'Absurde et la révolte', *Magazine littéraire*, 276 (1990), 43-45; Kritzman, p.552.

ethical paradigm are crucial to an understanding of Camus's ethics. Finally, through an exploration of his *Carnets* and correspondence, I will trace the development of Camus's thought from the completion of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in 1941 to his decision to engage in political action in 1943. Although the shift from the Absurd to revolt is discernible in the pages of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, it took a number of years for Camus to develop fully his notion of revolt and the final part of this chapter sets out to explore this intellectual journey.

Context, Text and Textualization

Along with *L'Étranger*, the publication of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in 1942 launched Camus into the intellectual limelight. Yet despite the amount of critical attention it has received, few critics situate the composition of this essay in its historical and political context. Nor do they relate it to other sources, such as Camus's *Carnets*, correspondence and journalism, all of which offer an insight into his purpose in pursuing the implications of absurdity further at this time. The vast majority of critical accounts of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* focus exclusively on Camus's exploration of absurdism, whilst either ignoring the context in which it was written or assuming that this bears no relation to the philosophical concerns Camus outlines. This is particularly evident in shorter articles where *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* forms part of a broader thematic or comparative study. For example, Édouard Morot-Sir in a comparison of three essays by Camus, Sartre and Bataille remarks that *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* does not address contemporary events and, more importantly, that it is written as if the war had no effect on Camus.[7] Lionel Dubois

---

[7] Édouard Morot-Sir, '1942-1943. L'Homme à la recherche de l'impossible', *L'Esprit créateur*, 33 (1993), 5-15, p.8. See also, Lucien Guissard, 'Camus. À la recherche d'une légitimité', in *Écrits en notre temps: Saint-Exupéry, Simone Weil, Ramuz, Paul Claudel, Jules Roy, Aragon, André Malraux, Albert Camus,*

ventures further describing *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as 'une œuvre de guerre',[8] but limits his analysis of the relation between the text and its context to a simplistically historicist interpretation of the Sisyphus myth as an allegorical message of hope for a beleaguered and subjugated French people in the blackest year of the war. The fact that the conceptual and compositional roots of Camus's essay date back to the mid-1930s, thereby rendering such an interpretation problematic, is not raised.[9]

The conspicuous absence of attempts to contextualize *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is perhaps understandable in critical works where the need for brevity imposes limitations on the extent to which broader issues can be discussed. However, this lack of interest in the political and historical background to *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is also evident in monographic studies which focus specifically on the development of Camus's ethical thought. In *Witness of Decline: Camus Moralist of the Absurd*, Lev Braun sets out to 'follow the development of Camus's ethics',[10] and although he identifies the period between 1940-43 as a time 'when Camus's ethics underwent a major change',[11] he offers no explanation as to why he holds this view or why this might be the case. A decade later, Bernard East similarly sets out to trace '[l]a problématique au sein de laquelle évolue la lente et difficile recherche de Camus' perceiving it to be 'celle d'un penseur

---

François Mauriac, ed. by Lucien Guissard (Paris: A. Fayard, 1961), pp.267-283; Dupuy, pp.237-249 and Ewald, p.44.

[8] Lionel Dubois, 'Le Combat d'Albert Camus', p.126.

[9] A reference to the central theme of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* appears in Camus's *Carnets* as early as March 1936, *Carnets I*, p.34. From May of that year, ideas and passages for Camus's essay on the Absurd figure with increasing frequency in his notebooks, pp.38-9 and following.

[10] Braun, p.13.

[11] Ibid., p.74. It is worth noting that in a discussion of Camus's notion of absurdity between *Révolte dans les Asturies* in 1934 and *Caligula* in 1938, Braun makes oblique references to an ethical crisis in Camus but neither accounts for this crisis nor develops this further: 'Camus is questioning his own beliefs in his radical attempt to understand Caligula not only intellectually but emotionally as well. [...] *Caligula* is a radical application of the *tabula rasa* method, by which Camus starts his attempt to reconstruct his shattered ethics', p.44.

religieux et moral'.[12] The first chapter, which is promisingly entitled 'L'Infrastructure de la morale d'Albert Camus', consists of an exposition of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as the foundations of *L'Homme révolté*. Yet we are offered neither a contextualization of Camus's essay on the Absurd, nor a substantial account of or for the ethical dilemma underlying Camus's notion of revolt.[13] In contrast, Louis Faucon in his commentary on *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* emphasizes the significance of the contemporary context for Camus when writing this text,[14] and his view is echoed by Olivier Todd who regards Camus's essay as a means of deciding how to respond to the political situation, arguing that it is clear from both *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and Camus's *Carnets* that he feels compelled to resolve on some course of action.[15] In response to these readings, I would like to argue firstly that there is a relationship between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and the historical context in which it was written, and secondly that this relation is critical to an understanding of the development of Camus's ethical thought.

First of all, it is important to acknowledge that the interests and concerns Camus explores in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* did not arise in response to the outbreak of war. As the

---

[12] East, p.16.

[13] East, pp.29-65. More recently, Bronner contributed another portrayal of Camus's ethical thought. Yet, the account of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* offered in *Camus, portrait of a moralist* is noticeably lacking in probity and depth of analysis. Bronner describes Camus's essay as a text with philosophical limitations yet provides no analysis of them and, in a comment which is confusingly anachronistic, claims that *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* reflects a historical reality in that 'Sisyphus [...] illuminates the indomitable will of those who survived the concentration camps in Germany and the Soviet Union', p.47. Again, this reading fails to take into account the fact that by September 1940, only a few months after the beginning of the occupation, the first part of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* had already been written, see Camus's *Carnets I*, p.216.

[14] Faucon, 'Commentaires', pp.1410-1416. Faucon remarks that 'Le déclenchement des hostilités et la "drôle de guerre" donnent à ce débat métaphysique un enjeu charnel', p.1412. It is worth noting that Faucon also raises the importance of Camus's personal context in shaping his thought at this time. Suggesting that Camus himself may have faced the question of suicide, he writes: '*Le Mythe de Sisyphe* n'aurait cependant pas été conçu, si Camus n'avait pas alors à se mesurer lui-même avec l'absurde. En 1936 et 1937, écarté par la maladie des objectifs qu'il avait choisis, voué à la routine des besognes alimentaires, déçu dans ses adhésions politiques, meurtri par son échec conjugal, Camus a pu être frôlé par la tentation du suicide', p.1412.

[15] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.294.

last phase of a cycle of writing on the Absurd, Camus's essay continues the themes that he had already explored, albeit in different forms, in *L'Étranger* and *Caligula*.[16] Although *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* was largely written between 1938 and February 1941 when it was completed, it had been in the planning stage since the mid-1930s. As early as 1936, the question at the centre of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* occurs and recurs in Camus's *Carnets*: 'Dès l'instant où l'on ne se tue pas, il faut se taire sur la vie';[17] and later that year: 'Si on est bien persuadé de son désespoir, il faut agir comme si on espérait – ou se tuer. La souffrance ne donne pas de droits'.[18] In October 1937, the metaphysical source of the ethical problem posed by the Absurd, that of the possibility of meaning, is formulated more explicitly: 'Avoir ou n'avoir pas de valeur. Créer ou ne pas créer. Dans le premier cas, tout est justifié. Tout, sans exception. Dans le second cas, c'est l'Absurdité complète. Il reste à choisir le suicide le plus esthétique: mariage + 40 heures ou revolver'.[19] Indeed, absurdity and its implications were an established part of Camus's cognitive framework during the 1930s and became increasingly so in the years preceding the war. Indications that the Absurd might prove problematic as a basis for action and signs of Camus's need to pursue this further begin to appear in his notebooks in 1938. In reference to Karamazov's ethic 'Tout est permis', to which he later returns in *Le Mythe*

---

[16] The Absurd is also a persistent theme in Camus's early collection of essays *L'Envers et l'endroit* and his work *La Mort heureuse* which although written in 1936-8 was only published much later in the first of the *Cahiers Albert Camus* series, see Albert Camus, *La Mort heureuse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

[17] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.34.

[18] Ibid., p.41. It is worth commenting that there is a discrepancy between the published edition of Camus's first *Carnets* and the original manuscript. Reproduced in Raymond Gay-Crosier's recent study of *L'Étranger* is the original page of Camus's notebooks from which this citation is taken and it clearly should read: 'Comme si la souffrance leur donnait des droits'. In this instance it does not significantly alter the meaning. However, it is an indication that the *Carnets* should be read with a measure of circumspection. See Raymond Gay-Crosier, *The Stranger* (New York: The Gale Group, 2002), p.56.

[19] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.89.

de Sisyphe,[20] Camus writes: 'Mais il faut aller au fond de la formule'.[21] It is therefore evident that, although Camus's interest in the Absurd took on a new urgency and purpose following the declaration of war, it was already present as an intellectual concern in Camus's work preceding events of September 1939 and to a large degree defined his approach to questions of existence and meaning.

As I suggested in the previous chapter, Camus regarded *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as a mode of investigating the philosophical perspective which had so far defined his intellectual approach but which conflicted with his underlying ethical convictions. Grappling with the dilemma of whether or not he was justified in engaging in political action, Camus turned to the Absurd. A reading of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in terms of the intellectual crisis Camus faced illuminates the way in which it textualizes the metaphysical issues implicit to the question of ethical action. Camus's essay is replete with references to the need for some form of 'rule' or 'discipline' based on the Absurd and this search for an intellectually coherent course of action is the context in which Camus addresses the problem of absurdity. From the beginning of his essay, Camus insists, almost excessively, on the importance of there being a coherence between thought and action: 'On peut poser en principe que pour un homme qui ne triche pas, ce qu'il croit vrai doit régler son action. La croyance dans l'absurdité de l'existence doit donc commander sa conduite' (*E*, 101).[22] The purpose of his essay is therefore to 'tirer du geste lui-même les conséquences qu'il suppose' (*E*, 100) and this objective is

---

[20] Camus, 'Le Mythe de Sisyphe', *Essais*, p.149.
[21] Camus, *Carnets I*, pp.118-9. References to the Absurd appear more and more in Camus's notebooks towards the end of 1938, see *Carnets I*, pp.134-141.
[22] Grenier remarks on Camus's insistence on the need for clarity and truth in a letter he wrote to Camus during Easter in 1943 following his reading of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: 'Dans votre œuvre - beaucoup plus que dans votre vie - je sens un violent désir de n'être pas *dupe*, une grande peur de se laisser leurrer; vous êtes toujours en garde', Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.92.

reiterated throughout *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*.[23] I would like to argue that this insistence on Camus's part is significant because it betrays the urgent need he felt to interrelate thought and action, philosophy and life, and so draw into relationship both text and context.[24] Camus's stress on the need to follow the Absurd through to its logical conclusion is in part a reaction to existentialist philosophers who, he believed, had evaded the implications of absurdity by making an unjustified jump in their thinking, resulting in what Camus refers to as philosophical suicide.[25] Yet it is clear from the reasons Camus gives for pursuing the question of whether 'y a-t-il une logique jusqu'à la mort' (*E*, 103) that this dissatisfaction with the conclusions of others was fuelled by the need to justify human action in the face of the nihilistic violence which had come to dominate twentieth-century history: 'L'horreur vient en réalité du côté mathématique de l'événement. Si le temps nous effraie, c'est qu'il fait la démonstration, la solution vient derrière. [...] Aucune morale ni aucun effort ne sont *a priori* justifiables devant les sanglantes mathématiques qui ordonnent notre condition' (*E*, 108-9).

---

[23] For an example of the way in which Camus constantly reiterates and returns to this point see 'Le Mythe de Sisyphe', *Essais*: 'Ce qui m'intéresse, je veux encore le répéter, ce ne sont pas tant les découvertes absurdes. Ce sont leurs conséquences', p.109; 'Ce sont là encore des évidences. Je répéterai à nouveau qu'elles ne sont pas intéressantes en elles-mêmes, mais dans les conséquences qu'on peut en tirer', p.110; 'Une seule certitude suffit à celui qui cherche. Il s'agit seulement d'en tirer toutes les conséquences', p.120; 'Mais que signifie la vie dans un tel univers? Rien d'autre pour le moment que l'indifférence à l'avenir et la passion d'épuiser tout ce qui est donné', p.142.

[24] Morot-Sir picks up on the importance Camus places on the need to identify the consequences of the Absurd for human action but does not develop this further: 'Paradoxalement se tendre vers les extrêmes de la connaissance, c'est raisonner, ce que Camus appelle plus d'une fois: "tirer les conséquences"', '1942-1943. L'Homme à la recherche de l'impossible', pp.8-10.

[25] See Camus, 'Le Mythe de Sisyphe', *Essais*, pp.102-4. Camus's use of the term 'logique' is highly specific and differs from the meaning of logic in the traditional, philosophical, sense. John Cruickshank describes Camus's definition of logic as the following: 'a rigorous measure of consistency between thought and action', p.47. For examples of Camus's use of this term see *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, 'Il y faut seulement une pensée injuste, c'est-à-dire logique', *Essais*, p.103; 'La réflexion sur le suicide me donne alors l'occasion de poser le seul problème qui m'intéresse: y a-t-il une logique jusqu'à la mort?', *Essais*, p.103; 'Et poussant jusqu'à son terme cette logique absurde, je dois reconnaître que cette lutte suppose l'absence totale d'espoir', *Essais*, p.121.

Perceiving post-Nietzschean nihilism to be responsible for the contemporary climate of atrocity and murder, conflating metaphysics with history as he would later do more explicitly in *L'Homme révolté*, Camus turned to the Absurd in order to probe the relationship between absurdity and human action. Camus writes: 'Cette nostalgie d'unité, cet appétit d'absolu illustre le mouvement essentiel du drame humain' (*E*, 110).[26] He goes on to comment that '[s]'il fallait écrire la seule histoire significative de la pensée humaine, il faudrait faire celle de ses repentirs successifs et de ses impuissances' (*E*, 111). Faced with the violence of contemporary history, Camus sought an ethical approach to the absurdity of the human condition and sets out in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* to probe the philosophical grounds for the two modes of response to the Absurd which had so far dominated his intellectual outlook: action and contemplation. Evoking once again the choice between Malraux and Grenier, Camus writes: 'On sent bien qu'il y a un climat commun aux esprits que l'on vient de rappeler. Dire que ce climat est meurtrier, c'est à peine jouer sur les mots. Vivre sous ce ciel étouffant commande qu'on en sorte ou qu'on y reste. Il s'agit de savoir comment on en sort dans le premier cas et pourquoi on y reste dans le second' (*E*, 119). The outbreak of war had clearly thrown into doubt the extent to which the paradigm of the Absurd, which had shaped his intellectual life so far, could accommodate the reality of human experience, a doubt which he expresses in his *Carnets* in September 1941: 'On règle tout: C'est simple et évident. Mais la souffrance humaine intervient, qui change tous les plans'.[27] Faced with the horror of violence, Camus works back from the ethical question of how to act to a consideration of the values which define

---

[26] This nascent concept of the relationship between human metaphysics and history is reformulated and developed further in *Lettres à un ami allemand* and encapsulated in Camus's reference to humanity's experience of the Absurd through history as 'la tragédie de l'intelligence', *Essais*, p.242.
[27] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.236.

human action and ultimately to an exploration of the philosophical justification for why human beings should engage in action at all: 'L'esprit arrivé aux confins doit porter un jugement et choisir ses conclusions. Là se placent le suicide et la réponse. Mais je veux inverser l'ordre de la recherche et partir de l'aventure intelligente pour revenir aux gestes quotidiens' (*E*, 117).[28] It is therefore within the context of this broader ethical enquiry that Camus revisits the question of absurdity in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. As a textualization of the context in which it was written, this essay both reflects and embodies the convergence of life and thought that war triggered in Camus and other intellectuals at this time. A remark Camus makes towards the end of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* reveals the extent to which he was aware of this complex interplay between text and context: 'Une pensée profonde est en continuel devenir, épouse l'expérience d'une vie et s'y façonne' (*E*, 190). *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* clearly constituted for Camus a means by which he could address the disjunction between life and philosophy, metaphysics and ethics, and as such provided him with a way of coming to terms with and working through the ethical crisis triggered by the outbreak of war.

The Absurd and the 'Étrange Oui' of Sisyphus[29]

In his landmark study, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt*, John Cruickshank writes that the Absurd 'translates something of that sense of crisis which seems to characterize contemporary European metaphysics',[30] and defines it as follows:

---

[28] In outlining the purpose and approach of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus makes this return to the Absurd more explicit: 'Jusqu'ici, c'est par l'extérieur que nous avons pu circonscrire l'absurde. On peut se demander cependant ce que cette notion contient de clair et tenter de retrouver par l'analyse directe sa signification d'une part et, de l'autre, les conséquences qu'elle entraîne', *Essais*, p.119.

[29] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', p.855. My exploration of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* has been influenced by the series of articles Blanchot wrote for *La Nouvelle Revue française* on the transition Camus makes from the Absurd to revolt to which I referred in Chapter 1 and I engage fully with Blanchot's reading of Camus's ethics in the next chapter.

[30] Cruickshank, p.50.

'The absurd is the conclusion arrived at by those who had assumed the possibility of a total explanation of existence by the mind but who discover instead an unbridgeable gulf between rationality and experience'.[31] As we have discussed, Camus arrived at this conclusion at an early stage in his intellectual career and he reaffirms this belief in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: 'ces deux certitudes, mon appétit d'absolu et d'unité et l'irréductibilité de ce monde à un principe rationnel et raisonnable, je sais encore que je ne puis les concilier. Quelle autre vérité puis-je reconnaître sans faire intervenir un espoir que je n'ai pas et qui ne signifie rien dans les limites de ma condition?' (*E*, 136) This conviction that life is fundamentally absurd has important implications for the development of Camus's ethical thought and I turn now to examine Camus's understanding of the Absurd, in order to tease out the more problematic and ambiguous aspects of his thinking on the creation of ethical values.[32] The central question Camus set out to answer in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* is whether or not suicide is the logical consequence of the Absurd. Integral to this for Camus is the question of whether human life is worth living, or, formulated differently, whether any values can be derived from the Absurd: 'Juger que la vie vaut ou ne vaut pas la peine d'être vécue, c'est répondre à la question fondamentale de la philosophie' (*E*, 99).[33] In search of an answer, Camus probed the intensely individualistic, metaphysical

---

[31] Ibid., p.49.

[32] It is not my intention to give a full and detailed account of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, since there are innumerable critical studies which have already performed this task, but rather to explore *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as the initial phase of Camus's quest for a coherent ethical position. For a detailed study of Camus's notion of the Absurd see Cruickshank, pp.41-64; for a more general treatment of Camus's work and thought see Germaine Brée, *Camus* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959); for more recent readings of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* see for example André Comte-Sponville, 'L'Absurde dans *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*', in Anne-Marie Amiot and Jean-François Mattéi, *Albert Camus et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp.159-171 and Maurice Weyembergh, *Albert Camus ou la mémoire des origines* (Paris and Brussels: De Boeck & Larcier, 1998), pp. 51-62.

[33] Camus's formulation of the question central to his essay betrays one of the weaknesses of his approach and exposes his tendency to base his philosophical enquiry on certain assumptions. Unlike Beauvoir, for whom the question of whether human life is worth living is nonsensical since existence does not exist as a given entity outside of the individual consciousness, Camus's use of terms such as 'life' or 'being' leaves it

experience, which he had lyrically portrayed in his earlier works *L'Envers et l'endroit* (1937) and *Noces* (1938).[34]

Absurdity, for Camus, is an overwhelming sense of strangeness. It is the impossibility of ever fully understanding or fully knowing either oneself or the world in which we live. Camus writes: 'Car si j'essaie de saisir ce moi dont je m'assure, si j'essaie de le définir et de le résumer, il n'est plus qu'une eau qui coule entre mes doigts. [...] Entre la certitude que j'ai de mon existence et le contenu que j'essaie de donner à cette assurance, le fossé ne sera jamais comblé. Pour toujours, je serai étranger à moi-même' (*E*, 111).[35] We therefore experience ourselves as strangers whose significance is reduced to nothing when confronted with the mystery and inhumanity, as Camus describes it, of the world: 'Un degré plus bas et voici l'étrangeté: s'apercevoir que le monde est "épais", entrevoir à quel point une pierre est étrangère, nous est irréductible, avec quelle intensité la nature, un paysage peut nous nier' (*E*, 107).[36] This acute sense of negation, nakedness and fragility is encapsulated for Camus in the myth of Sisyphus. In Greek mythology, Sisyphus is exiled to hell by the Gods and condemned to the perpetual toil of heaving a boulder to the top of a mountain only to see it roll down to the bottom from where he must begin again. Describing Sisyphus as 'le héros absurde' (*E*, 196), Camus writes: 'Il

---

unclear as to whether he is referring to individual existence or life as a universal entity. Referring to this looseness in Camus's philosophical discourse, Maillard comments: 'C'est un peu le problème de l'écriture de Camus, dans son classicisme, c'est qu'il y a des notions comme ça qui sont un peu "passe-partout", comme l'être. Mais il n'y a jamais de définition sur laquelle on peut s'appuyer pour dire: voilà ce qu'il entendait par là', 'Camus et la guerre 1939-45', p.97. This lack of clarity raises questions about the assumptions Camus brings to bear, inadvertantly or otherwise, on his exploration of the Absurd.

[34] See Camus, *L'Envers et l'endroit* and Albert Camus, *Noces suivi de L'Été* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

[35] Camus acknowledges the parallels between his notion of absurdism and the absurdity which forms the basis of Sartre's nascent Existentialism early on in his essay when he makes reference to '[c]e malaise devant l'inhumanité de l'homme même, cette incalculable chute devant l'image de ce que nous sommes, cette "nausée" comme l'appelle un auteur de nos jours, c'est aussi l'absurde', *Essais*, p.108.

[36] Camus describes the otherness of the world as 'inhumain' and goes on to write: 'Au fond de toute beauté gît quelque chose d'inhumain et ces collines, la douceur du ciel, ces dessins d'arbres, voici qu'à la minute même, ils perdent le sens illusoire dont nous les revêtions, désormais plus lointains qu'un paradis perdu', *Essais*, pp.107-8.

l'est autant par ses passions que par son tourment. Son mépris des dieux, sa haine de la mort et sa passion pour la vie, lui ont valu ce supplice indicible où tout l'être s'emploie à ne rien achever' (*E*, 196). Sisyphus occupies a space of extreme human suffering, 'le point zéro' as Camus would later term it in his *Carnets*,[37] it is an abject existence, a space of tedious, soul-destroying work. Relating this state of being to the plight of the modern worker, Camus comments: 'L'ouvrier d'aujourd'hui travaille, tous les jours de sa vie, aux mêmes tâches et ce destin n'est pas moins absurde. [...] Sisyphe, prolétaire des dieux, impuissant et révolté, connaît toute l'étendue de sa misérable condition' (*E*, 196). Believing there to be 'un lien direct entre ce sentiment et l'aspiration vers le néant' (*E*, 101), which in his view drives the nihilistic excesses of contemporary history, Camus probes the Absurd further in order to establish whether or not suicide is the logical consequence of absurdity or whether, on the contrary, it is possible to derive any meaning from the Absurd as a philosophical paradigm.[38]

For Camus, the Absurd arises from the co-presence of human beings and the world: 'L'absurde naît de cette confrontation entre l'appel humain et le silence déraisonnable du monde. C'est cela qu'il ne faut pas oublier. C'est à cela qu'il faut se cramponner parce que toute la conséquence d'une vie peut en naître' (*E*, 117-8). Present in neither the world nor the individual, absurdity is born out of their juxtaposition: 'L'absurde est essentiellement un divorce. Il n'est ni dans l'un ni dans l'autre des éléments comparés. Il naît de leur confrontation. [...] je puis donc dire que l'absurde n'est pas dans l'homme [...], ni dans le monde, mais dans leur présence commune' (*E*, 120).

---

[37] Camus, *Carnets II*, p.31.

[38] Camus writes: 'Jusqu'ici, c'est par l'extérieur que nous avons pu circonscrire l'absurde. On peut se demander cependant ce que cette notion contient de clair et tenter de retrouver par l'analyse directe sa signification d'une part et, de l'autre, les conséquences qu'elle entraîne', *Essais*, p.119.

Camus concludes from this that all the elements which give rise to the Absurd must be conserved if human existence is to be lived with any lucidity or authenticity. By eliminating one term of the equation and collapsing the tension between our desire for meaning and the impossibility of signification, we consent to the absurdity of our condition. Camus deduces from this that in order to live the truth of our existence, we must choose to preserve human life: 'Nier l'un des termes de l'opposition dont il [l'absurdité] vit, c'est lui échapper. Abolir la révolte consciente, c'est éluder le problème. Le thème de la révolution permanente se transporte ainsi dans l'expérience individuelle. Vivre, c'est faire vivre l'absurde. Le faire vivre, c'est avant tout le regarder' (*E*, 138). In these terms, the act of committing suicide, constitutes a negation of human existence because it consents to the Absurd: 'On peut croire que le suicide suit la révolte. Mais à tort. Car il ne figure pas son aboutissement logique. Il est exactement son contraire, par le consentement qu'il suppose' (*E*, 138).

Reading in the myth of Sisyphus a rejection of suicide, Camus concludes that integral to the Absurd is an affirmation of the value of human life. For Camus, the 'oui' of Sisyphus constitutes a cry of revolt, a willingness to confront the absurdity of human existence and a conscious choice to occupy this intensely human space of nakedness, fragility and alienation:

> L'homme absurde dit oui et son effort n'aura plus de cesse. [...] À cet instant subtil où l'homme se retourne sur sa vie, Sisyphe, revenant vers son rocher, contemple cette suite d'actions sans lien qui devient son destin, créé par lui, [...] persuadé de l'origine tout humaine de tout ce qui est humain, aveugle qui désire voir et qui sait que la nuit n'a pas de fin, il est toujours en marche. Le rocher roule encore.(*E*, 197-8)

Interpreting Sisyphus's labour as a positive affirmation of human life, Camus asserts his view that the Absurd constitutes a source of value and that in fighting against the absurdity of life, this value is revealed and founded. In this way, his analysis of the Absurd can clearly be seen to foreshadow the theory of revolt which he went on to develop. Camus writes: 'Cette révolte donne son prix à la vie. Étendue sur toute la longueur d'une existence, elle lui restitue sa grandeur' (*E*, 139).[39] Therefore, for Camus, the Absurd simultaneously both affirms and negates life, so creating a tension between the individual and the world which must be lived and maintained: 'L'homme absurde ne peut que tout épuiser, et s'épuiser. L'absurde est sa tension la plus extrême, celle qu'il maintient constamment d'un effort solitaire, car il sait que dans cette conscience et dans cette révolte au jour le jour, il témoigne de sa seule vérité qui est le défi' (*E*, 139). This concept of the underlying tension Camus believes the Absurd to generate becomes central both to his theory of revolt and to his ethical approach. Having established in theoretical terms that suicide is not the logical consequence of the Absurd and having concluded that the Absurd affirms the value of human life, Camus turns to consider the practical implications of the tension he perceives absurdity to create.

The Problem of Praxis

Translating theory into practice was both an urgent concern and an arduous task for Camus. A response to the contemporary political context in which he found himself in the late 1930s and early 1940s, Camus's intellectual investigation into the Absurd was driven by the desire for a rule by which to govern human action. Rejecting the

---

[39] Camus goes on to elaborate his understanding of the value of human life which he perceives to be implicit in the Absurd and the way in which metaphysical revolt upholds this value: 'Cette discipline que l'esprit se dicte à lui-même, cette volonté forgée de toutes pièces, ce face-à-face, ont quelque chose de puissant et de singulier. Appauvrir cette réalité dont l'inhumanité fait la grandeur de l'homme, c'est du même coup l'appauvrir lui-même', *Essais*, p.139.

conclusions other philosophers have drawn, Camus writes: 'Je demande la règle de vie de cet état et ce qu'on me propose en néglige le fondement, nie l'un des termes de l'opposition douloureuse, me commande une démission' (*E*, 128). Central to Camus's enquiry is therefore the question of praxis: how to live the tension implicit in the human condition: 'Mais savoir si l'on peut vivre avec ses passions, savoir si l'on peut accepter leur loi profonde qui est de brûler le cœur que dans le même temps elles exaltent, voilà toute la question' (*E*, 113). This is the subject of the second section of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, entitled 'L'Homme absurde', which aims to look at the consequences of Camus's *raisonnement absurde* for human action. Shifting his attention from theory to practice, Camus writes: 'Ce qui précède définit seulement une façon de penser. Maintenant, il s'agit de vivre' (*E*, 146). The fundamental problem Camus faces in attempting to derive a code of action from the Absurd is that, according to his reasoning, the Absurd both affirms and negates human existence. More specifically, it justifies the value of human life but provides no values by which to shape and govern action. The 'éthique de la quantité' (*E*, 154) Camus proposes reflects this apparent contradiction at the heart of the Absurd and reveals some of the problems inherent in his conceptualization of absurdity as a source of values. The purpose of the penultimate part of this chapter is to explore the difficulties Camus encounters in translating theory into practice and to consider the limitations of Camus's absurdist reasoning as a foundation for an ethics.

Camus constructs his ethic of quantity on the grounds that the Absurd involves a negation of value and that it is therefore not possible to derive meaning from it: 'La croyance au sens de la vie suppose toujours une échelle de valeurs, un choix, nos

préférences. La croyance à l'absurde, selon nos définitions, enseigne le contraire' (*E*, 142-3). Since the Absurd offers no basis for ethical values and renders all actions equivalent, Camus concludes at this point in his essay that it is not the quality of actions which matters but the quantity: 'Or, en face de ce souci particulier, la croyance à l'absurde revient à remplacer la qualité des expériences par la quantité. [...] je dois dire que ce qui compte n'est pas de vivre le mieux mais de vivre le plus. [...] Une fois pour toutes, les jugements de valeur sont écartés ici au profit des jugements de fait' (*E*, 143). As with the philosophical realm, in the arena of human action Camus warns of the danger of making illegitimate 'jumps' which threaten the lucidity with which we live out our existence: 'Comment alors ne point faire comme tant de ces hommes dont je parlais plus haut, choisir la forme de vie qui nous apporte le plus possible de cette matière humaine, introduire par là une échelle de valeurs que d'un autre côté on prétend rejeter?' (*E*, 144). He goes on to conclude: 'Là où la lucidité règne, l'échelle des valeurs devient inutile' (*E*, 144). Camus therefore concludes that: 'La morale d'un homme, son échelle de valeurs n'ont de sens que par la quantité et la variété d'expériences qu'il lui a été donné d'accumuler' (*E*, 143). Having laid a foundation for his ethics which is predicated on the value of human existence, Camus is caught in the position of affirming human action whilst having no justifiable grounds for defining how human beings should act. The ethic of quantity he consequently formulates reflects the impossibility of this position. Devoid of any moral quality, Camus's ethic seeks an intensity of life and action whilst offering no principles, whether individual or universal, by which to choose one course of action over another.[40] Indeed, Camus goes as far as separating his discussion of his ethic of

[40] Interestingly, it was precisely this need to devise some method for establishing 'an order of precedence' in various ethical situations, so that the freedom of ethical choice would not be squandered in a vacuum,

quantity from questions of morality claiming: 'Il ne peut être question de disserter sur la morale' (*E*, 149). Moreover, in reference to the illustrations of absurdist revolt he then goes on to offer, he comments: 'Ils ne cherchent pas à être meilleurs, ils tentent d'être conséquents' (*E*, 169).

The problematic nature of this conceptual approach is discernible in Camus's discussion of Ivan Karamazov's moral and metaphysical outlook, which he sums up in the formula: 'Tout est permis' ('Le Mythe de Sisyphe', *E*, 149).[41] Camus's use of ethically loaded terms compromises his alignment with Dostoievsky's evocation of a reality where human existence is unsupported or constrained by given values. Describing the freedom of the Absurd as 'le pouvoir impuni de mal faire', Camus goes on to discuss the relationship between absurdity and morality:

> L'absurde ne délivre pas, il lie. Il n'autorise pas tous les actes. Tout est permis ne signifie pas que rien n'est défendu. L'absurde rend seulement leur équivalence aux conséquences de ses actes. Il ne recommande pas le crime, ce serait puéril, mais il restitue au remords son inutilité. De même, si toutes les expériences sont indifférentes, celle du devoir est aussi légitime qu'une autre. On peut être vertueux par caprice.(E, 149-50)

---

which drove Beauvoir to construct an existentialist ethics, Fullbrook and Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre*, p.142.

[41] The 'logique' which Camus discerns in Dostoevsky's protagonist Ivan Karamazov, and which he describes in *L'Homme révolté* as the 'mouvement de [la] révolte à l'insurrection métaphysique' (*E*, 428), can be traced in the statement Ivan makes in the monastery in the early stages of the novel where he states: 'Ivan Fiodorovitch ajouta entre parenthèses que c'est là toute la loi naturelle, de sorte que si vous détruisez dans l'homme la foi en son immortalité, non seulement l'amour tarira en lui, mais aussi la force de continuer la vie dans le monde. Bien plus, il n'y aura alors rien d'immoral; tout sera autorisé, même l'anthropophagie', *Les Frères Karamazov*, trad. by Henri Mongault and Marc Laval, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1923), I, pp.108-9. For a detailed study of the relationship between Dostoevsky's thought and work and that of Camus see Ray Davison, *Camus: The Challenge of Dostoevsky* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997).

On the one hand Camus argues for an equivalence of acts and yet in employing words like 'inutilité' and 'vertueux', he couches his argument in terms which imply a notion of ethical values. This slippage in Camus's philosophical approach becomes more explicit when he addresses the question of human guilt and innocence: 'Toutes les morales sont fondées sur l'idée qu'un acte a des conséquences qui le légitiment ou l'oblitèrent. Un esprit pénétré d'absurde juge seulement que ces suites doivent être considérées avec sérénité. Il est prêt à payer. Autrement dit, si, pour lui, il peut y avoir des responsables, il n'y a pas de coupables' (*E*, 150). Again, Camus makes recourse to ethical notions of rightness and wrongness in his remark that the absurdist is ready to 'pay' for his or her actions, which would suggest that Camus believes that human behaviour can be evaluated and that certain actions do carry a price or punishment. It is therefore clear that in relating his philosophy to political and social action, Camus encounters significant difficulties. These are particularly evident in the third illustration Camus offers of absurdist revolt, that of the conqueror, where he works through the implications of the conclusions he has drawn from the Absurd for the question of political engagement.[42]

The chapter entitled 'La Conquête' is particularly interesting because of the way it foreshadows the pattern and progression of Camus's thinking on ethics in his resistance work *Lettres à un ami allemand*. In fact, in many ways, this section of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* can be read as a precursor to the *Lettres* in its preoccupation with the question of the relationship between thought and action, metaphysics and history. The conqueror's apostrophe opens with the statement: 'Non, dit le conquérant, ne croyez pas que pour

---

[42] Although Todd seems to play down the significance of Camus's sketch of the conqueror, I would argue that when read as a textualization of the context in which it was written, this chapter is highly illuminating in terms of Camus's quest for a response to the contemporary political situation. Todd writes: 'À travers Don Juan, hédoniste, avec l'acteur au travail éphémère, moins avec le conquérant, beaucoup avec l'artiste, Camus situe sa morale personnelle comme écrivain et en tant qu'homme', *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.298.

aimer l'action, il m'ait fallu désapprendre à penser' (*E*, 164). The central concern of this chapter is the question of whether to engage in political action and why one might do so. Tracing the trajectory of human response to the turmoil of history, Camus identifies what he perceives as a shift in the way people in the past responded to the atrocity of war: 'J'ai vu de bons esprits s'émerveiller des chefs-d'œuvre des peintres hollandais nés au cœur des sanglantes guerres de Flandre, s'émouvoir aux oraisons des mystiques silésiens élevées au sein de l'affreuse guerre de Trente Ans. Les valeurs éternelles surnagent à leurs yeux étonnés au-dessus des tumultes séculiers' (*E*, 164-5). Whereas in previous centuries war was underpinned by a belief in absolute values, Camus argues that in the climate of contemporary nihilism, the horror of violence has undermined and corroded religious belief: 'Mais le temps depuis a marché. Les peintres d'aujourd'hui sont privés de cette sérénité. Même s'ils ont au fond le cœur qu'il faut au créateur, je veux dire un cœur sec, il n'est d'aucun emploi [...]. Voilà peut-être ce que j'ai senti le plus profondément. À chaque forme avortée dans les tranchées, à chaque trait, métaphore ou prière, broyé sous le fer, l'éternel perd une partie' (*E*, 165). As I have discussed, in this post-Nietzschean context, the choice of many writers and intellectuals lay between action and contemplation and Camus was no different. The stylization of absurdist revolt which he offers in his chapter on conquest dramatizes this choice and the underlying issue of how to act ethically in an absurd world.[43]

Indeed, Camus's effort to tease out the consequences of his definition of the Absurd for historical action is revelatory of his inner search for an intellectually coherent

---

[43] Discussing this choice further in his essay on revolt, Camus writes: 'La calomnie de ce monde ramène au nihilisme que Nietzsche a défini. La pensée qui se forme avec la seule histoire, comme celle qui se tourne contre toute histoire, enlèvent à l'homme le moyen ou la raison de vivre. La première le pousse à l'extrême déchéance du "pourquoi vivre"; la seconde au "comment vivre"', *Essais*, p.651.

response to the outbreak of war and the call for action which that evoked. In his exposition of his conception of absurdity, Camus states that just as the indivisibility of the elements which constitute the Absurd means that the human term of this equation cannot be abolished, the same applies to that of the world which as a dimension of the Absurd cannot be negated either. Therefore, the notion of revolt that Camus begins to sketch in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* involves both an affirmation of human life and an acceptance of the world in which we live. Whilst Camus acknowledges Grenier's 'philosophie de l'indifférence' as an alternative to his 'révolte humaine' in a footnote, he does nevertheless argue that consent, rather than indifference, in relation to the world is the most coherent conclusion to draw from the Absurd: 'Ce qui importe c'est la cohérence. On part ici d'un consentement au monde'.[44] Camus's exploration of the Absurd clearly moves him in the direction of some form of political action as he tends more towards the Malrucian response to absurdity than to that of his mentor Grenier.[45]

Camus's sketch of the conqueror reflects this view. Faced with the choice between the absolute and the relative, eternity and history, Camus's conqueror chooses to engage in the world:

---

[44] In acknowledgement of Grenier's perspective, Camus writes in a footnote to *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*: 'Ce qui importe c'est la cohérence. On part ici d'un consentement au monde. Mais la pensée orientale enseigne qu'on peut se livrer au même effort de logique en choisissant *contre* le monde. Cela est aussi légitime et donne à cet essai sa perspective et ses limites. Mais quand la négation du monde s'exerce avec la même rigueur on parvient souvent (dans certaines école védantas) à des résultats semblables en ce qui concerne par exemple l'indifférence des œuvres. Dans un livre d'une grande importance, *Le Choix*, Jean Grenier fonde de cette façon une véritable "philosophie de l'indifférence"', *Essais*, p.145.

[45] It is worth noting that Beauvoir too, although for different reasons, rejected a purely contemplative relationship with the world. Detached indifference in the face of absurdity Beauvoir perceived as a form of bad faith and in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* she criticizes the disengagement of some French intellectuals who preferred to look on from a distance at the events unfolding in the aftermath of France's defeat rather than choose freedom and act: 'hors du temps, loin des hommes, il se pose en face de l'histoire, à laquelle il ne croit pas appartenir, comme un pur regard. [...] Mais le présent n'est pas un passé en puissance; il est le moment du choix et de l'action, nous ne pouvons éviter de le vivre à travers un projet; et il n'y a pas de projet qui soit purement contemplatif puisqu'on se projette toujours vers quelque chose, vers l'avenir', *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, pp.94-6.

Pour qui se sent solidaire du destin de ce monde, le choc des civilisations a quelque chose d'angoissant. J'ai fait mienne cette angoisse en même temps que j'ai voulu y jouer ma partie. Entre l'histoire et l'éternel, j'ai choisi l'histoire parce que j'aime les certitudes. D'elle du moins, je suis certain, et comment nier cette force qui m'écrase? Il vient toujours un temps où il faut choisir entre la contemplation et l'action. Cela s'appelle devenir un homme. Ces déchirements sont affreux.(*E*, 165)

This passage echoes Camus's *Carnets* where he describes the intellectual anguish involved in trying to decide how best to respond to the reality of war and his reluctance not to engage in some form of action: 'Rien n'est moins excusable que la guerre et l'appel aux haines nationales. Mais une fois la guerre survenue, il est vain et lâche de vouloir s'en écarter sous le prétexte qu'on n'en est pas responsable. Les tours d'ivoire sont tombées'.[46] Although Camus's conqueror is portrayed as not unsympathetic to a contemplative approach, he insists, as Camus does himself earlier in his essay, that engagement in the world is the only lucid response to the Absurd:[47] 'Si je choisis

---

[46] Camus, *Carnets I*, p.172. His correspondence with Grenier reveals further the dilemma Camus faced at this time. In a letter dated the 26th May, 1940, he writes: 'Et c'est très dur d'essayer de se tenir en dehors, avec une âme égale. J'ai pensé à ce que vous me dites sur l'indépendance. "A condition d'être exigeant envers soi-même." Oui, bien sûr, et je ne l'ai jamais mieux senti qu'ici et en ce moment', Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.40. Moreover, betraying his difficulty in subscribing to Grenier's philosophy of indifference, Camus expresses his anxiety about the unfolding situation: '[La guerre] est peut-être éternelle, en effet, mais maintenant elle va trop vite pour nous et nous serons dépassés ou écrasés. Ce qui, au fond des choses, n'a qu'une importance relative, bien entendu', ibid., p.41.

[47] It is worth noting that, at this point in Camus's exposition of the implications of the Absurd, the debate pivots on the binary opposition between revolt and indifference. Implicit in the notion of revolt that Camus outlines in his sketch of the conqueror is his conception of revolution which, although the distinction is not fully developed here, will later serve as a counterpoint for Camus's theory of revolt: 'Voilà pourquoi je suis du côté de la lutte. L'époque s'y prête, je l'ai dit. Jusqu'ici la grandeur d'un conquérant était géographique. Elle se mesurait à l'étendue des territoires vaincus. [...] La grandeur a changé de camp. Elle est dans la protestation et le sacrifice sans avenir. Là encore, ce n'est point par goût de la défaite. La victoire serait souhaitable. Mais il n'y a qu'une victoire et elle est éternelle. C'est celle que je n'aurai jamais. Voilà où je bute et je m'accroche. Une révolution s'accomplit toujours contre les dieux, à commencer par celle de Prométhée, le premier des conquérants modernes. C'est une revendication de l'homme contre son destin: la revendication du pauvre n'est qu'un prétexte. Mais je ne puis saisir cet esprit que dans son acte historique et c'est là que je le rejoins', *Essais*, p.166. However, as I hope this study will

l'action, ne croyez pas que la contemplation me soit comme une terre inconnue. Mais elle ne peut tout me donner et, privé de l'éternel, je veux m'allier au temps. Je ne veux faire tenir dans mon compte ni nostalgie ni amertume et je veux seulement y voir clair' (*E*, 165). A letter Camus wrote to Grenier dated 28 May 1943 would seem to confirm the parallel between the passage on conquest in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and his own ethical dilemma in the face of conflict, which is discernible both in his *Carnets* and in his journalistic writing at the outbreak of war: 'je suis infiniment plus près de ce que vous dites que vous ne l'imaginez. Simplement, j'ai pris un chemin différent avec une ambition semblable – mais c'est le seul chemin que mes moyens me permettaient. [...] J'ai, moi aussi, éprouvé à des rares moments le flot de cette "éternité de l'âme et de l'amour". Mais, pour moi, il s'agit d'autre chose, ma soif est plus grande peut-être que ma patience. Et il me faut bien suivre son chemin'.[48]

However, mirroring the paradox implicit in Camus's reasoning on the Absurd, Camus's conqueror shows himself to be both committed to action and yet indifferent to its outcome, having no ethical criteria by which to distinguish between one act or another: 'Sachant qu'il n'est pas de causes victorieuses, j'ai du goût pour les causes perdues: elles demandent une âme entière, égale à sa défaite comme à ses victoires passagères' (*E*, 165). In its failure to address the ethical issues which action in a historical and social context implies, Camus's description of the conqueror's revolt betrays the problem central to Camus's reading of the Absurd. The conqueror's choice to engage in action is based on the understanding that, whilst the Absurd ultimately inhibits human liberty in the sense that all human beings are mortal, the inexistence of external

---

show, the more Camus addresses the problem of ethical action, the more he strives to open up a middle road both between political engagement and contemplation, and revolt and revolution.

[48] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, pp.95-6.

moral frameworks liberates the individual to act however she or he chooses: 'Je vous le dis, demain vous serez mobilisé. Pour vous et pour moi, cela est une libération. L'individu ne peut rien et pourtant il peut tout. Dans cette merveilleuse disponibilité vous comprenez pourquoi je l'exalte et l'écrase à la fois. C'est le monde qui le broie et c'est moi qui le libère. Je le fournis de tous ses droits' (*E*, 165-6). The consequence of this is that an individual's actions cannot be ethically evaluated because the Absurd offers no philosophical system by which to do this. Yet, implicit to the conqueror's justification for action is the value of human life:

> Les conquérants savent que l'action est en elle-même inutile. Il n'y a qu'une action utile, celle qui referait l'homme et la terre. Je ne referai jamais les hommes. Mais il faut faire "comme si". Car le chemin de la lutte me fait rencontrer la chair. Même humiliée, la chair est ma seule certitude. Je ne puis vivre que d'elle. La créature est ma patrie. Voilà pourquoi j'ai choisi cet effort absurde et sans portée. Voilà pourquoi je suis du côté de la lutte.(*E*, 166)

There is a fundamental contradiction underpinning Camus's notion of revolt which springs from the fact that whilst he justifies his decision to engage in action on the grounds that the Absurd affirms human life, he simultaneously denies the possibility of deriving any signification from the Absurd by which to govern or evaluate human action.

The consequence of this for the development of Camus's ethics is significant because he is caught in the position of advocating historical action without being able to address the question of how human beings should act and on what grounds these sorts of ethical judgements are to be based. This problem is illuminated by Camus's illustration of the conqueror who, in his revolt, aims to hold in tension the ambiguity at the heart of

the Absurd: 'Ne croyez pas cependant que je m'y complaise: en face de la contradiction essentielle, je soutiens mon humaine contradiction. J'installe ma lucidité au milieu de ce qui la nie. J'exalte l'homme devant ce qui l'écrase et ma liberté, ma révolte et ma passion se rejoignent alors dans cette tension, cette clairvoyance et cette répétition démesurée' (*E*, 166). A fusion of the notions of revolt and revolution which Camus would disentangle in subsequent years, the absurdist revolt Camus's conqueror advocates appears only to answer the first part of the question of whether and how to act. Driven by the value of human life, Camus's conqueror affirms his commitment to uphold human dignity, but because of the as yet unresolved question of deriving signification from the Absurd, he is unable to offer any account of the failure that will be involved in this ethical endeavour: 'Les conquérants peuvent le plus. Mais ils ne peuvent pas plus que l'homme lui-même, quand il le veut. C'est pourquoi ils ne quittent jamais le creuset humain, plongeant au plus brûlant dans l'âme des révolutions. Ils y trouvent la créature mutilée, mais ils y rencontrent aussi les seules valeurs qu'ils aiment et qu'ils admirent, l'homme et son silence' (*E*, 167). Camus's oblique reference to the need for limitation is the only indication of the relativistic proposal for which he would become known. His brief remark that it is by engaging with humanity that 'l'esprit sent le mieux ses pouvoirs et ses limites' (*E*, 167) is not expounded further and the ethical implications of balancing the need to affirm human life at the same time as fighting against that which negates it, to which he alludes in this chapter, are not addressed.

Towards Resistance

In the final section of this chapter, I would like to discuss the development of Camus's thought in the years immediately following the completion of *Le Mythe de*

Sisyphe, to explore how Camus responds to the problem of signification posed by the Absurd and to trace the emergence of his relativistic approach in the plans he outlines for *La Peste* and his essay 'Remarque sur la révolte' in his *Carnets*. Although Camus claims in *Lettres à un ami allemand* to have delayed engaging in political action following the outbreak of war, there is some evidence to suggest that he was involved in resistance activity as early as 1941 and had links with the resistance movement which was beginning to establish itself in Oran. Lionel Dubois notes that in 1941, at a time when Vichy was introducing anti-semite laws which excluded Jewish children from secondary education in France, Camus was teaching in a Jewish school in Oran and organized from there a resistance movement to send Jewish children who had been expelled by Vichy to Tunisia.[49] It is therefore worth remembering that although Camus presents his decision to engage in resistance activity as a single, identifiable, moment, so lending a coherence and structure to his intellectual journey in the initial years of the war, in reality the lines between thought and action were far more blurred. Nevertheless, it is clear from Camus's *Carnets* that the need for some form of moral code and the difficulty of establishing one continued to preoccupy his intellectual life at this time. Early in 1942, Camus wrote in his notebook: 'Parvenu à l'absurde, s'essayant à vivre *en conséquence*, un homme s'aperçoit toujours que la conscience est la chose du monde la plus difficile à maintenir. Les circonstances presque toujours s'y opposent. Il s'agit de vivre la lucidité dans un monde où la dispersion est la règle. [...] Ce qu'il s'agit de réaliser c'est la *règle dans le siècle*'.[50] Also apparent in Camus's notebooks is a desire to explore further the notion of

---

[49] Dubois, 'Le Combat d'Albert Camus', p.125. Some details of Camus's connections with different resistance groups and contacts during the period he was in Oran from 1941-2 can be found in Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, pp.287-8.
[50] Camus, *Carnets II*, pp.19-20.

revolt which had arisen from his enquiry into the Absurd in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*; he notes his intention to write an essay which would explore the relationship between the Absurd and revolt at the beginning of 1942.[51]

It is not insignificant that both Camus's fictional and non-fictional writing at this time focused exclusively on whether it was possible to derive an ethic from the Absurd. Although the following extract from his *Carnets* is thought by the editors to have been added to the manuscript on re-reading, it clearly reflects Camus's concerns during this period: 'Qu'est-ce que je médite de plus grand que moi et que j'éprouve sans pouvoir le définir? Une sorte de marche difficile vers une sainteté de la négation – un héroïsme sans Dieu – l'homme pur enfin'.[52] Camus perceived the purpose of his lifetime's work to be the quest for an ethic which would progress from the Absurd to revolt, so encompassing both his earlier work and his proposed work, drawing them into a coherent whole. Sketching the trajectory he envisaged, Camus writes: 'Cette œuvre comptera autant de formes que d'étapes sur le chemin d'une perfection sans récompense. L'Étranger est le point zéro. *Id.* le Mythe. La Peste est un progès, non du zéro vers l'infini, mais vers une complexité plus profonde qui reste à définir. Le dernier point sera le saint, mais il aura sa valeur arithmétique – mesurable comme l'homme'.[53] Lacking in clarity at this juncture, Camus's vision for *La Peste* is that it would develop a line of enquiry he had begun to explore in writing *L'Étranger* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, both of which address the problem of negation and meaninglessness at the heart of the Absurd, however

---

[51] Ibid., p.14. This essay was later published in 1945 under the title 'Remarque sur la révolte' in *L'Existence*, a volume edited by Jean Grenier, and Camus's plans for this piece can be seen to develop over the course of 1942 and into 1943. See *Carnets II*, pp.81-2.
[52] Ibid., p.31. Chronologically, this section comes towards the end of the first half of 1942 and just prior to notes taken at the end of August of that year.
[53] Ibid., p.31.

problematic *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* might be as a systematization of an earlier emotional experience.[54] In a letter to Grenier in September 1942, Camus tells him of his current work on *La Peste* and outlines his plans for an essay on revolt which clearly anchors his notion of revolt in his definition of the Absurd: 'Je travaille en ce moment à une sorte de roman sur la peste et je prends des notes pour un essai qui développera certaines parties du *Mythe de Sisyphe*'.[55] However, whilst Camus describes *La Peste* and his essay on revolt as a progression in his thinking on the Absurd, there is a lack of clarity in his understanding of precisely how *La Peste* will develop the conclusions he drew about the human condition in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*. He seems to perceive this progression, not in terms of a development as such of the conclusions he drew in his essay on the Absurd, but as an application of his absurdist reasoning to the social domain. Central to Camus's work on revolt is therefore a desire to work through the implications of the Absurd for human relations: '*L'Étranger* décrit la nudité de l'homme en face de l'absurde. *La Peste*, l'équivalence profonde des points de vue individuels en face du même absurde. C'est un progrès qui se précisera dans d'autres œuvres. Mais, de plus, *La Peste* démontre que l'absurde *n'apprend rien*. C'est le progrès définitif'.[56] However, the implicit difficulty of applying the logic of the Absurd to a social context, which by its nature presupposes values, since without them it would be impossible for human beings to act, proved profoundly problematic for Camus.

Indeed, towards the end of 1942 and through the course of 1943, Camus again began to question the possiblility of deriving meaning from the Absurd. Although he

---

[54] John Cruickshank describes *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* as an attempt to investigate rationally an emotional experience which Camus had felt earlier in his life and which he expressed in *L'Envers et l'endroit*, p.43.
[55] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.78.
[56] Camus, *Carnets II*, p.36.

seems to be convinced at times during this period of the relationship between the Absurd and revolt, his *Carnets* and correspondence with Jean Grenier reveal a long and turbulent process of self-reflection and questioning. In October 1942, Camus claims that implicit in our human experience of the Absurd is a social dimension: '*La Peste* a un sens social *et* un sens métaphysique. C'est exactement le même. Cette ambiguïté est aussi celle de *L'Étranger* '.[57] A month later, he turns again to the Absurd as the foundation for an ethics: 'Développement de l'absurde: I) si le souci fondamental est le besoin d'unité; 2) si le monde (ou Dieu) n'y peuvent satisfaire. C'est à l'homme de se fabriquer une unité, soit en se détournant du monde, soit à l'intérieur du monde. Ainsi se trouvent restituées une morale et une ascèse, qui restent à préciser'.[58] Yet, in the months that followed, Camus's underlying conviction that the Absurd could provide him with a basis for a mode of ethical revolt was severely shaken by his own doubts, firstly about the Absurd as a source of signification and secondly about the possibility of living out the ambiguity he perceived the Absurd to imply. Returning to the question of suicide, Camus argues that the Absurd both prohibits suicide, so affirming the value of human life, and yet negates life, so permitting suicide. Since, in Camus's view, the Absurd is implicitly contradictory, he concludes that it can provide no basis for human action and that it therefore leads to an ethical impasse: 'Absurde. Si l'on se tue, l'absurde est nié. Si l'on ne se tue pas l'absurde révèle à l'usage un principe de satisfaction qui le nie lui-même. Cela ne veut pas dire que l'absurde n'est pas. Cela veut dire que l'absurde est *réellement* sans logique. C'est pourquoi on ne peut *réellement* pas en vivre'.[59] Perplexed by the

---

[57] Ibid., p.50.
[58] Ibid., p.57.
[59] Ibid., p.109.

apparent contradiction of the Absurd and the impasse to which his absurdist reasoning had lead him, Camus turned to his friend and mentor Jean Grenier.

Their dialogue on the question of whether the Absurd can offer a foundation for action can be traced in a sequence of letters exchanged from March to May 1943. Highly revelatory, these letters offer an insight into the crisis of thought Camus experienced in his effort to reconcile theory and praxis. Camus begins by expressing his view that the Absurd does in fact lead to an impasse: 'Ne croyez pas en particulier que ce que vous écrivez *contre* l'absurde n'éveille rien en moi. Je vois bien que la pensée absurde [...] aboutit à une impasse, voilà le problème. En tout cas, cela montre que la vérité peut être inacceptable pour celui qui la trouve'.[60] Grenier replies at length to Camus's letter, confirming that it is impossible to live in an impasse, but questions whether the Absurd does in fact lead to this. However, Camus reasserts his view that his essay on the Absurd had ultimately failed to resolve the question of how and why human beings should act:

> Je ne pense pas du reste que mon essai résume tout. Il m'a semblé qu'on laissait dans l'ombre - tout en en profitant - les conséquences logiques d'une philosophie de la non-signification. J'ai fait cet effort de cohérence. Mais personne plus que moi peut-être ne sent la contradiction d'une pareille attitude. Elle revient en réalité à éliminer tous les jugements de valeur et cela est impossible, car tous les actes de notre vie sont des jugements de valeur. Tout est permis, bien entendu, mais je sais qu'il est des actions que je ne ferai pas, des paroles et des fidélités que je ne renierai pas (il est vrai que ce ne sont pas toujours celles qu'on a coutume de respecter) et surtout des bassesses que je regretterai toujours. Il y a un mythe absurde, il n'y a pas de pensée absurde.[61]

---

[60] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.89.
[61] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.95.

Highly revelatory of Camus's inner struggle to come to terms with the impossibility of the Absurd to create meaning, his *Carnets* and correspondence offer an insight into the intellectual jouney which led to his decision to engage in resistance activity.[62]

Yet the urgency of war demanded action not indecision and Camus, like many of his contemporaries, was to a certain extent compelled to find some resolution to the philosophical and ethical dilemma with which he was faced. Cruickshank comments: 'The circumstances of the Occupation emphasized the fact that an absurdist or quantitative ethic could not satisfy the demands of his humanity [...] this concrete situation did much to give both urgency and form to positive revolt against the absurd rather than negative connivance at it'.[63] It is worth emphasizing that Camus was not alone in the compulsion he felt to establish a coherent ethical position amidst the violence and chaos of contemporary events. Reflecting on this period in French intellectual history, Hannah Arendt is said to have remarked that Camus and his generation were sucked into politics as though with the force of a vacuum.[64] In this light, it is perhaps not insignificant that Beauvoir's autobiography covering this period is entitled *La Force de l'âge* and she explicitly states that the experience of war forced her to face up to the practical consequences of her pre-war thinking.[65] Despite Camus's

---

[62] Whilst Camus acknowledges the intellectual detour he made at this time in the introduction to *L'Homme révolté*, his presentation of revolt as the logical consequence of the Absurd seems to take little account of this period of intellectual uncertainty, or of its signficance in the evolution of his thought. A key phase in his quest to find a philosophically coherent ethical position, the detour which he traces in *Lettres à un ami allemand* was essential in order for Camus to address the seeming inadequacy of the Absurd to provide a basis for making ethical choices. Moreover, the way in which Camus resolves this problem of how values are created has profound implications for the theory of ethical revolt he develops. This is noted by John Cruickshank, who refers to the role of Camus's *Lettres à un ami allemand* as the first step in a long 'examen de conscience' which Camus took and which links his two major essays, culminating in *L'Homme révolté* which he describes as: 'the outcome of careful and patient self-interrogation in the course of which Camus has the courage to re-examine a number of his earlier conclusions', p.92.

[63] Ibid., p.92.

[64] Tony Judt, *The Burden of Responsibility*, p.105.

[65] Beauvoir, *La Force de l'âge* , p.561.

recognition that the Absurd led him to an impasse, he continued to pursue the possibility of a mode of ethical revolt rooted in the Absurd, and the time he spent at Le Panelier in 1943 proved a formative period for the development of his ethical position.[66] Camus moved to Le Panelier, near the village of Le Chambon-sur-Lignon in the southeastern corner of the Auvergne, in August 1943 in search of somewhere to convalesce from a particularly bad spell of tuberculosis. His time in this small, Protestant, community was important for two reasons. Firstly, resistance in this area was extremely active and it was here that Camus came into regular contact with active members of resistance groups.[67] Secondly, the relative seclusion of this mountain retreat allowed Camus to work through the dilemma he faced regarding his personal engagement in political action. The influence of this period on Camus is well-established and it was towards the end of this time that Camus became actively involved in the Resistance movement and in particular

---

[66] The tight-knit Protestant community of Le Chambon shared a strong ethos of resistance and hospitality, and many made it their duty and responsibility to shelter Jews. Todd refers to a local history of resistance in the Vivarais-Lignon area entitled *Plateau Vivarais-Lignon: Accueil et Résistance* written by André Bettex, the Pastor of the village of Riou near to Le Panelier, which describes the welcome offered by both the Church and the community to Jews at this time. Todd writes: 'En août 1942, une femme et deux enfants arrivent sous la pluie, cherchant un refuge. Le lendemain, culte du Dimanche, au village du Riou, proche du Panelier: le pasteur André Bettex déclare que les mesures prises contre les juifs sont illégales. La conscience ne peut que se *révolter*. Le devoir de tous est de secourir, cacher, sauver les juifs. Il conclut: "Je vous engage à le faire"', *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.319. The significance of the onomastic resonance of Riou with the name of Camus's principal protagonist in *La Peste*, Dr. Rieux, are clear.

[67] Having remained in close correspondence with Pascal Pia after returning to Algeria, Camus had been kept informed of Pia's efforts to set up *Prométhée*, a review which Pia hoped would provide a forum for intellectuals who refused to be identified with Drieu La Rochelle's collaborationist *Nouvelle Revue française*. Pia had worked tirelessly to find Camus work so that he could return to France, and once there he introduced him to people such as Francis Ponge, a resister and poet, René Leynaud, who would later be caught in crossfire and killed shortly before the Liberation (Todd, p.373) and Père Bruckberger, a Dominican 'moine-soldat' (Todd, p.327) as Camus often referred to him, all of whom were active Resistance workers in the area. This inner circle of intellectuals, poets and militants often met for collective readings of their work and both Ponge and Leynaud would send Camus their poetry for him to read. Other figures who occupied Camus's world at this time include Elsa Triolet, Blanche Balain, Michel Pontremoli and Louis Aragon.

Combat.[68] Indeed, Ajchenbaum in his introduction to Camus and Pia's correspondence remarks that if Camus finally came to the decision to 'entrer dans l'histoire avec le mépris qui convient' it was due to 'ses longues discussions lyonnaises avec Leynaud, en tête-à-tête, coincés par le couvre-feu dans une petite chambre de la rue de la Vieille-Monnaie'.[69]

Given the context in which Camus was living and working, it is perhaps unsurprising that his ideas on the question of resistance and action were profoundly challenged during this period. Critics readily perceive in *La Peste* the story of his own inner struggle to resolve on a course of action. Todd writes that '[e]n pratique et en théorie, Camus dépasse alors l'absurde'[70] and conflates Camus's journey towards resistance with his fictional portrayal of revolt in *La Peste*, commenting that 'Rieux, Rambert, Tarrou, Paneloux, Camus trouvent les chemins de la révolte. Un livre n'est pas seulement destiné aux lecteurs, il est le mouvement intérieur de l'écrivain'.[71] Whilst one may be suspicious of Todd's reading of *La Peste* as a direct representation of Camus's attitude towards resistance, it is nevertheless clear from Camus's *Carnets* that one of his intentions in writing both *La Peste* and 'Remarque sur la révolte' was to explore his newly developed idea of a relativistic mode of revolt:[72] 'Essai sur la révolte: [...] *Id.* le

---

[68] Todd notes that '[e]n contact avec le mouvement Combat, grâce à Pia et Leynaud, Camus est convoqué à la fin 1943 par Claude Bourdet, responsable du Comité national de la Résistance (CNR)', *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.341.

[69] See Ajchenbaum, p.XIX. Despite Ajchenbaum's remark that 'la correspondance entre Pascal Pia et Albert Camus ne dit rien de ces longs chemins intérieurs qui mènent à la Résistance', p.XX, an indication of the impact of contemporary events on Camus during this period in which Camus resolved on a course of action can be found in one of his letters to Pia written in December 1942. Camus writes: 'Ces événements m'ont plongé dans quelque chose qui ressemble à du marasme et j'en sors difficilement. [...] Je me suis remis à mon travail pour me forcer à dépasser toute cette actualité qui m'englue', p.121.

[70] Todd, *Albert Camus: une vie*, p.328.

[71] Ibid., p.331.

[72] An article by Maurice Nadeau which appeared shortly after the publication of *La Peste* in 1947 is a particularly interesting critical response to Camus's novel as an allegory of the Occupation, since it is written by someone for whom this experience was recent history. Nadeau argues that the allegory of *La*

thème du relatif – mais le *relatif avec passion*. Ex.: déchiré entre le monde qui ne suffit pas et Dieu qu'il n'a pas, l'esprit absurde choisit avec passion le monde. *Id.*: partagé entre le relatif et l'absolu, il saute avec ardeur dans le relatif'.[73] Planning the thematics of *La Peste*, Camus writes: 'Un des thèmes possible: lutte de la médecine et de la religion: les puissances du relatif (et quel relatif!) contre celles de l'absolu. C'est le relatif qui triomphe ou plus exactement qui ne perd pas'.[74] In contrast to an absolutist approach to the absurdity of the human condition and the totalitarianism that Camus believed it generates in human history, this relativisitic proposal sought to maintain what Camus understood to be the tension at the heart of the Absurd between affirmation and negation, and to forge a middle path between these two opposing terms: 'Médecine et Religion: Ce sont deux métiers et ils semblent se concilier. Mais aujourd'hui où tout est clair, on comprend qu'ils sont inconciliables – et qu'il faut choisir entre le relatif et l'absolu. "Si je croyais à Dieu, je ne soignerais pas l'homme. Si j'avais l'idée qu'on pût guérir l'homme, je ne croirais pas à Dieu"'.[75] The course of action Camus therefore proposes in *La Peste* is a path of measure, where the value of all human life is perpetually balanced against the need to achieve certain ends such as justice and liberty and which is underpinned by the recognition that ultimately the ends towards which we strive are impossible to achieve in any absolute sense. The purpose of taking a relativistic approach was to counteract the violent extremes of absolutism, both secular and religious, which in Camus's view had come to dominate contemporary history. However, central to this

---

Peste lies not in the simplistic representation of an historical event which, in his view, does not reflect the experience of French people living under occupation, but in the complexity of the moral dilemma it portrays. See Maurice Nadeau, 'La fin et les moyens: la tentation de sainteté', *Combat*, 13 June 1947.

[73] Camus, *Carnets II*, pp.62-3.

[74] Ibid., p.69.

[75] Ibid., p.121.

notion of revolt is the belief that it is possible to derive values from the Absurd. As we have discussed, it is evident both from Camus's attempt to translate theory into practice in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and his misgivings about the Absurd as a basis for an ethics which he subsequently expressed in his *Carnets* and correspondence, that the shift he makes from the Absurd to revolt was profoundly problematic.

It is clear from an exploration of the development of Camus's thought from the mid-1930s and his involvement with the PCF to the completion of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* in 1941, that central to Camus's intellectual concerns was the question of ethical action. His brief spell as a member of the Communist Party instilled in him a profound distrust of political orthodoxies and an unwillingness to compromise the deep-seated values he had acquired growing up in a working-class community in Algiers. His subsequent friendship with Pascal Pia and his journalistic work for *Alger Républicain* provided him with the freedom and space to forge his own political identity and reflect on the ethical issues posed by the mounting threat of conflict. A critical moment in the development of Camus's ethics, the outbreak of war challenged the core values on which Camus had based his approach to political action and catalyzed a period of intense self-examination and philosophical enquiry as he attempted to resolve on an intellectually coherent course of action. It is evident from both Camus's *Carnets* and *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* that this essay constitutes a textual response to the dilemma Camus faced. Fundamental to his investigation into the Absurd is the question of the creation of values and whether or not it is possible to derive meaning from absurdity. However, as I have shown, Camus's conclusion that the Absurd both affirms and negates human life proves problematic when transposed from the theoretical to the practical domain. An exploration of Camus's

illustrations of absurdist revolt in the context of his quest for an ethical response to war highlights the limitations of his interpretation of the Absurd as a foundation for an ethics. The contradiction at the heart of the Absurd which I have highlighted preoccupied Camus for some time following the completion of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and arguably not only delayed Camus's decision to engage in political action but also made the shift from the Absurd to revolt intensely difficult.

Having traced the development of Camus's ethical thought in Chapters 2 and 3, I embark in Chapter 4 on a re-reading of Camus's ethical approach. The purpose of Chapters 4, 5, 6 and 7 is twofold. Firstly, they will problematize the dominance of the Camus/Sartre polemic as a hermeneutic paradigm through a comparative study of Camus's theory of revolt and Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity. Secondly, they will offer a reading of Camus's contribution to discourses on ethics, both contemporary and modern, in the light of Maurice Blanchot's ethical viewpoint, resonant as it is with modern theories of alterity. Chapter 4 opens with an exploration of the transition between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté* through Blanchot's critical optic, since his reading of this pivotal and contentious moment in the formation of Camus's ethics opens up an alternative perspective on Camus's ethical position.

4
From the Absurd to Revolt

Whilst the intellectual coherence of the shift Camus makes from the Absurd to revolt was the subject of much critical discussion both prior to and immediately following the publication of *L'Homme révolté* in 1951, a consensus has emerged amongst critics in subsequent years which largely accepts Camus's presentation of this shift as seamless and unproblematic. This tendency to smooth over the transition between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and Camus's theory of revolt by affirming the coherence of his philosophical thought, I would argue, is in part a response to the intense criticism Camus received from Sartre and Jeanson on this issue, and in this sense can be seen to perpetuate the binarism of the *Temps modernes* polemic. Indeed, critical studies of Camus's ethical thought take little, if any, account of the series of articles written by Maurice Blanchot for *La Nouvelle Revue française* in 1954 which shed a radically different light on the relationship between Camus's two major essays.[1] Yet, Blanchot brings a new perspective to this debate which challenges the dominance of the existentialist agenda as a critical paradigm and offers an alternative way of assessing Camus's contribution to twentieth-century ethical thought. Therefore, before moving on to explore the limitations of the Camus/Sartre polemic as an interpretive framework through a comparative study of Camus's and Beauvoir's ethics, I would like to engage with Blanchot's reading of Camus's theory of revolt in order to show how, when read in the light of a different theoretical perspective, other critical concerns emerge which

---

[1] Given Blanchot's pre-eminence as a literary critic and theorist, it is somewhat surprising that Camus critics have not taken more account of the articles he dedicated to Camus's theory of revolt. Hill remarks: 'Blanchot is probably best known as a critic of literature. As such, he is the author of some of the most perceptive and probing essays of the last fifty years. His texts on Sade, Kafka, Hölderlin, Mallarmé, Rilke, Bataille, Char, Beckett, Duras and many others, make him one of the most distinctive and cogent analysts of modern and contemporary literary culture', *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary*, pp.2-3.

facilitate a richer interpretation of Camus's ethical approach. This chapter begins with an outline of the hermeneutic debate surrounding the transition Camus makes from the Absurd to revolt. I then explore Blanchot's analysis of the relationship between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté* before moving on to demonstrate the usefulness of this critical paradigm as an alternative way of evaluating Camus's approach to ethics through an exploration of the transitional piece he wrote towards the end of the war, 'Remarque sur la révolte'.

Critical Readings

Critics had already begun to challenge what they perceived to be a shift in Camus's position following the publication of *La Peste*. Questioning the philosophical coherence of the progression from the Absurd to revolt which Camus's novel portrays, Francis Jeanson writes: 'Mais, désormais, l'absurde prend une coloration morale: c'est le mal, c'est la peste, c'est tout ce qui fait la souffrance de l'humanité, une sorte d'objet métaphysique, c'est plutôt un permanent danger de malheur en l'homme'.[2] Similarly, Jean de Fabrègues questions the relationship between Camus's notion of revolt and the Absurd in an article on the problem of evil in contemporary literature. Fabrègues comments: 'si l'absurdité de ce monde est inéluctable, ma révolte sera vaine, et l'*ailleurs* de Baudelaire ou de Rimbaud offre la seule chance de retrouver un sens – mais si c'est cet ailleurs que Camus refuse, la révolte sera plus vaine encore et nous ne sortirons pas

---

[2] Francis Jeanson, 'Une évolution dans la pensée de Camus', *Erasme*, 2 (1947), 437-440 (p.438). Reiterating this point on *La Peste* in his critical response to *L'Homme révolté*, Jeanson writes: 'Mais si le *Mythe* systématisait *L'Étranger*, *La Peste*, à son tour, illustrait cette systématisation: ce n'était plus l'histoire d'un cas-limite, celui de Meursault, c'était la chronique d'un phénomène collectif, d'une ville en proie à une épidémie et contrainte de vivre en état de siège. Roman *métaphysique*, [...] la scène réelle n'était pas cette ville mais le monde; et les personnages réels n'étaient pas ces hommes et ces femmes d'Oran, mais l'humanité tout entière, ni cette maladie, mais le Mal absolu qui pèse sur toute existence consciente. Naturellement, dans la mesure où la lecture était renvoyée de la signification immédiate à cette signification essentielle, il y avait là quelque abus de la part de l'auteur, car le passage de l'une à l'autre est en réalité impossible', 'Albert Camus ou l'âme révoltée', p.2073.

du monde du malheur'.[3] The critical issues raised by Jeanson and Fabrègues concern firstly the nature of ethical values, whether they pre-exist or are determined by the individual consciousness, and secondly the possibility of deriving any values at all from the Absurd on which to base a theory of revolt. The former in particular became one of the main sources of contention between Camus and his existentialist counterparts in the *Temps modernes* debate. Raised here in relation to *La Peste*, Jeanson's criticism of Camus's shift from the Absurd to revolt and, implicit to this, his conception of the given value of human nature, fuelled both Jeanson's and Sartre's attacks on *L'Homme révolté* in 1952. Scathing of the jump he perceives Camus to have made between the rational and the irrational, the relative and the absolute, Jeanson describes Camus's theory of revolt as a 'pseudo-philosophie'[4] and 'un grand livre manqué'.[5] Sartre likewise accuses Camus of 'incompétence philosophique'[6] and questions both Camus's interpretation of the Absurd as external to human existence and the recourse he makes in *L'Homme révolté* to given values: 'L'univers du malheur n'est pas social ou du moins pas d'abord: c'est la Nature indifférente et vide où l'homme est étranger et condamné à mourir; en un mot c'est "le silence éternel de la Divinité". Ainsi votre expérience unissait étroitement l'éphémère et le permanent'.[7]

In contrast, or in response, to this dominant critical discourse, generations of critics have accepted Camus's presentation of revolt as a logical and coherent progression from the Absurd. For example, although Roger Mehl acknowledges that the

---

[3] Jean de Fabrègues, 'Le problème du mal dans la littérature contemporaine', in *Le Mal est parmi nous*, ed. by Paul Claudel (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1948), pp.57-111 (pp.86-7).
[4] Jeanson, 'Albert Camus où l'âme révoltée', p.2090.
[5] Ibid., p.2090.
[6] Jean-Paul Sartre, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', p.340.
[7] Ibid., p.346.

Absurd leads to an ethical impasse, he nevertheless roots Camus's notion of revolt unquestioningly in the Absurd.[8] R.P. Holstein similarly makes no distinction between Camus's absurdist reasoning and his theory of revolt. Summarizing Camus's notion of revolt, Holstein writes: 'Il faut vivre, mais les mains propres; vivre les yeux ouverts sur cet absurde'.[9] In the 1970s, Lev Braun also defended Camus's narrative of continuity, arguing that:

> Camus was led by his experience in the Resistance to endow all values connected with revolt with the same metaphysical status, for the simple reason that all were dormant in him and discovered at the same time in action. [...] the experience of solidarity against fate [...] had always been there, waiting for intellectual recognition. Thus Camus was right in asserting that there was no conversion in his case, no turning away from an absurd universe to meaningful solidarity.[10]

A decade later Bernard East took a similar line. Arguing in favour of Camus's notion of revolt as a coherent progression from the absurdity of the human condition, he writes: 'La révolte découle de cette expérience lucide et par voie de conséquence fait progresser la conscience contre l'absurdité. La conscience éveillée s'indigne, son besoin de clarté lui fait rejeter l'absurde'.[11] Latterly, the coherence between Camus's absurdist reasoning and his notion of revolt has again been asserted by critics. In particular, Lawrence Kritzman

---

[8] Mehl, p.519.
[9] Holstein, p.27. See also Albérès, pp.198-9.
[10] Braun, p.120.
[11] East, p.59. East's conception of the relationship between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté* is one of coherence and continuity and whilst he acknowledges that the Absurd leads to an ethical impasse, his reading of this juncture in Camus's ethical thought fails to address the conceptual disjunction between the Absurd as a philosophy of meaninglessness and Camus's theory of revolt, founded as it is on the value of human nature: 'L'homme absurde se sent frustré d'un paradis perdu. L'homme révolté, imbu de cette nostalgie, cherche à retrouver son unité perdue, à réparer le divorce opéré entre lui et le monde. L'homme absurde a perçu un manque, l'homme révolté cherche à le combler. [...] On peut dire que la révolte est contemporaine de la découverte de l'absurde. Au moment même où l'absurde lui saute au visage, l'homme se révolte contre ce non-sens', p.59.

writes: 'Camus's examination of the history of metaphysical revolt in *L'homme révolté* can be viewed as the logical outgrowth of the philosophy of the absurd articulated in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. In that regard it can be argued that the possible salvation of rational man before the vicissitudes of an irrational world can only be realized by the assumption of an ethic that gives meaning to the fragility of life'.[12] It is therefore clear that since the *Temps modernes* debacle in 1952, critical reception of this key moment in the foundation of Camus's theory of revolt has fairly consistently supported and defended the philosophical coherence of his ethical proposal.[13] The consensus of opinion I have traced can therefore be seen to perpetuate, whether explicitly or implicitly, the Camus/Sartre polemic as a hermeneutic paradigm, rather than to forge new ways of reading Camus's work. In order to disrupt this binarism, I would like to draw to the fore Maurice Blanchot's critical response to Camus's theory of revolt and, in particular, his perspective on the transition Camus makes from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* to *L'Homme révolté*.

Blanchot: An Alternative Ethical Optic

Blanchot's serialized reading of Camus's notion of revolt is unusual in that it focuses predominantly on the point of intersection between the Absurd and revolt. Moreover, in writing this series of articles, he quite deliberately intervened in an albeit short history of critical discourse, the terms of which he sets out to question and to challenge: 'Et si tant d'esprits ont été frappés par la distance qui sépare les deux livres, est-ce en raison des conclusions qui différeraient – peut-être diffèrent-elles à peine?

---

[12] Kritzman, p.552. See also Ewald, pp.43-45.

[13] For examples of the few critics who intimate that this transition is less than straightforward see Gros, p.20. Gros writes: 'Camus devra encore parcourir un assez long chemin de pensée pour transformer la révolte de Sisyphe en celle de l'homme'. More recently Mark Orme questioned the degree to which Camus fully appreciated the complexity involved in attempting to universalize his ethic of revolt: 'la distinction entre les niveaux individuels et collectifs de révolte est beaucoup plus nuancée que Camus ne le croit', Orme, p.94.

N'est-ce pas plutôt par leur point de départ, n'est-ce pas parce que l'homme élémentaire qu'est Sisyphe et l'esclave révolté sont déjà séparés par des mondes, exactement par le monde?'[14] Blanchot's contribution to the hermeneutic discussion surrounding Camus's theory of revolt is important because he brought to bear on this significant moment in the development of Camus's thought, an alternative theoretical paradigm which is governed by different ethical concerns. As I hope to show, the issues Blanchot raises about Camus's response to contemporary nihilism, shift the focus away from the question of the nature of values, which is central to the existentialist agenda, to that of the creation of values and the problem of constructing an ethics out of the Absurd – a problem faced not only by Camus but also other intellectuals at the time. Consequently, rather than reinforce the opposition between Camus and Sartre et al., Blanchot's reading of the foundation of Camus's theory of revolt draws them into proximity and opens up an alternative optic through which to read and assess Camus's contribution to twentieth-century ethical thought.

The central question Blanchot raises is whether Camus's notion of revolt follows logically from the Absurd or whether in fact there is a disjunction, a conceptual gap, between the toil of Sisyphus and the rebel's revolt: 'si l'intérêt de Sisyphe est dans cette lumière qu'il jette sur ce qu'il y a derrière l'homme, s'il est dans la véhémence de cet effort pour nous ramener vers un homme, infiniment derrière l'homme, qui pourtant le pousse et le maintient, s'il est l'image du dénuement extrême, peut-on dire que *L'Homme révolté* nous conserve cette image, parte d'elle comme d'un commencement véritable?'[15]

For Blanchot, the space of Sisyphus is one of extreme suffering. It is a space of being

---

[14] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur l'enfer', p.684.
[15] Ibid., p.684.

beyond being in the sense that the Self is severed from itself and no longer exists in relation to itself: 'L'homme tout à fait malheureux, l'homme réduit par l'oppression, l'abjection, la faim, la maladie, la peur, devient ce qui n'a plus de rapport avec soi, ni avec qui que ce soit, une neutralité vide, un fantôme qui erre, méthodiquement et avec soumission, dans un espace où il n'arrive plus rien'.[16] The 'limite extrême'[17] which Sisyphus symbolizes is, in Blanchot's view, therefore a totally different space to that of Camus's rebel who, in response to the absurdity of the human condition, affirms his or her own worth, and in so doing, the value of all humanity. For Blanchot, those who live in extreme suffering are a long way from even entering into a relationship of subjection, since even slavery requires the Self to be conscious of oneself as a slave in relation to a master. When this relation is lost, the possibility of revolt similarly evaporates and human suffering then becomes utterly abject: 'L'homme souffrant et l'homme de l'extrême malheur ou *soumis* à la misère sont devenus étrangers aux rapports maître-esclave qui constituent, par rapport à leur situation, un statut presque prometteur'.[18] It is on these grounds that Blanchot challenges Camus's claim that his notion of revolt is founded on the Absurd. Commenting on Camus's formula 'Je me révolte, donc nous sommes' (*E*, 432), Blanchot writes: 'Mais celui qui a perdu le pouvoir de dire "Je" est exclu de cette parole et de cet espoir. Il ne peut ni dire oui, ni dire non'.[19] Identifying Sisyphus as 'un esclave sans maître, une servitude sans maîtrise',[20] Blanchot concludes

---

[16] Ibid., p.679.
[17] Ibid., p.683.
[18] Ibid., p.680.
[19] Ibid., p.681.
[20] Ibid., p.684.

that 'la révolte de Sisyphe et la révolte de l'esclave qui dit "non" sont situées à des niveaux très différents'.[21]

In order to address this apparent *décalage* between the Absurd and Camus's theory of revolt, Blanchot turns to Camus's essay on the Absurd and his interpretation of that critical moment when Sisyphus throws himself against the boulder in full affirmation and acceptance of his condition:

> De quelle portée était cette affirmation? [...] Le livre ne nous le disait pas, il nous laissait une image, et une image est généreuse, elle peut dire beaucoup, elle peut promettre et donner. Mais ce qu'elle ne nous promettait pas, c'est déjà l'espoir de l'esclave qui dit "non" à son maître: on ne peut passer, sans le survol d'un véritable abîme, de l'enfer vide, de l'espace qui est celui de la dispersion et de l'extrême malheur, au moment de la communauté réelle et de la révolte à la première personne.[22]

In Blanchot's view, Camus, in search of a response to the excesses of contemporary nihilism, misreads the myth of Sisyphus. Rather than construct an ethics from the authentic basis of absurdity, as, paradoxically, he seeks to do in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus fixes a limit, a starting point, which establishes a safe, but false, distance between the individual and the extremity of the Absurd: 'Regarder en face le nihilisme pour le saisir est aussi ce qu'il attend pour se saisir de nous. [...] De là, assurément, l'exigence qui conduit Camus à établir un tel intervalle [...] entre le commencement véritable et ce que nous appelons [...] la région originelle'.[23] Locating this slippage, or 'saut'[24] as

---

[21] Ibid., p.684.
[22] Ibid., p.685.
[23] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', p.852.

Blanchot terms it, in Camus's interpretation of the Sisyphus myth, Blanchot argues that Camus's conclusion that Sisyphus's refusal of suicide equates to an affirmation of the value of life is mistaken: 'Que nous dit Sisyphe? Non pas qu'il ne veut pas se donner la mort, mais qu'il ne veut pas, parce qu'il ne le peut pas, parce qu'il ne peut pas en finir: il a précisément quitté l'espace de la possibilité, il a quitté le monde où mourir est possible, est un acte simple qui s'affirme et se termine'.[25] Those who occupy this space are incapable of confronting death in any rational or decisive way. Beyond a consciousness of death, they are already overcome and consumed by it: 'Cette figure, nous le comprenons donc, ne peut pas représenter contre la mort cette limite et cette décision ferme sur laquelle s'appuyer pour commencer'.[26] Therefore, in Blanchot's view, the *oui* of Sisyphus cannot affirm human life, it can only affirm its fragility and its nakedness: 'Étrange Oui qui enlève seulement au Non sa pureté de négation, sa force tranchante sans laquelle il n'y a pas de choix, Oui qui cependant n'affirme rien, qui est le flux et le reflux de l'indécision à partir de quoi rien ne commence, mais tout recommence sans commencement ni fin'.[27]

Highly critical of Camus's absurdist reasoning, Blanchot describes Camus's conclusion that the Absurd is a source of value as a '[p]aisible victoire logique qui nous

---

[24] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur l'enfer', p,684. It is not insignificant that Blanchot uses the same term in criticism of Camus which Camus himself uses in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* to criticize existentialist thinkers who he believed had made an illegitimate jump in their reasoning on the Absurd. In response to the question 'Et si tant d'esprits ont été frappés par la distance qui sépare les deux livres, est-ce en raison des conclusions qui différeraient – peut-être diffèrent-elles à peine?', Blanchot writes: 'N'est-ce pas plutôt par leur point de départ, n'est-ce pas parce que l'homme élémentaire qu'est Sisyphe et l'esclave révolté sont déjà séparés par des mondes, exactement par le monde? Cela est sûr, il faut faire un saut pour passer de l'un à l'autre – saut qu'a sans doute lui-même accompli Camus – et personne n'a voulu donner une pensée à l'élan qu'a demandé un tel saut; d'où, peut-être, la crispation du style et cette tension qui se délivre quelquefois par l'éloquence', p.684.

[25] Ibid., p.854.

[26] Ibid., p.855.

[27] Ibid., p.855.

tranquillise sur l'absurde'.[28] In Blanchot's view, Camus's derivation of values from the Absurd is merely a dissimulation of nihilism, since the affirmation of oneself simultaneously and implicitly involves the negation of otherness. Blanchot argues that in this way Camus can be seen to play the same nihilistic game he sets out both to condemn and to counteract in *L'Homme révolté*: 'On pourrait donc dire que l'une des erreurs de *L'Homme révolté* est, sous le prétexte d'une rapide mise hors jeu, de faire en réalité le jeu du nihilisme, de se tenir encore trop près de Sisyphe en acceptant cet effacement de soi-même, cette auto-disparition qui est seulement son visage et la séduction de ce visage'.[29] This 'Oui si douteux',[30] which Blanchot perceives in Camus's notion of affirmative negation, in his view, leads only to violence. Distinguishing between the affirmation which comes from the simple fact of our existence in the world, the debt the Self will perpetually owe the Other, and the sort of violent self-affirmation which seeks to negate the Other in order to assert the Self, Blanchot writes:

> Nous pressentons ici deux affirmations qu'il est difficile de désunir. Rappelons-le encore: dans le monde, nous sommes liés à la négation [...], cette mort est en général partielle, invisible, [...] mort jamais immédiate, ni visible, même dans le commandement qui donne la mort, mort toujours limitée et mesurée. Mais, dans cet instant que nous essayons de fixer, il en va tout autrement: là, la rencontre ne se borne pas à une destruction voilée légère, elle est rencontre qui va jusqu'à la mort, et mort non pas partielle, mais radicale.[31]

---

[28] Ibid., p.851.
[29] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', p.856.
[30] Ibid., p.855.
[31] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1063.

In contrast, Blanchot envisages an ethical approach which does not deny nihilism or seek to dissimulate it, but which recognizes the nakedness and vulnerability of alterity and so resists the urge to negate the Other. Indeed, it is in the very moment of violence, when, in our acute awareness of our own fragility, we seek to annihilate the Other, that there is the possibility of encountering him or her in a non-violent way. Describing this 'moment où l'absence de rapport devient le pur rapport de l'immédiat' as 'celui de la rencontre', Blanchot writes: 'Ce moment [...] se situe à la limite mouvante où, du fond de la profondeur originelle, région toujours autre, espace du vide et de la dispersion, ce vide, cette nudité devient le visage nu de la rencontre et la surprise du face à face'.[32] The focus of Blanchot's reading of Camus's ethics is therefore radically different from the dominant existentialist agenda of the day. Whilst Camus's notion of affirmative negation, and in particular his *pensée de midi*, is perhaps closer to Blanchot's vision than he acknowledges,[33] an issue which I will discuss further in Chapter 6, Blanchot's critique of Camus's response to nihilism calls into question, not the nature of the values on which Camus bases his theory of revolt, but the movement of affirmation which underpins it.

For Blanchot, Camus's ethical position is undermined not by his belief in the possiblity

---

[32] Ibid., p.1062. Blanchot's vision of human encounter as face to face is deeply resonant of Levinas's notion of the *visage*. For Levinas, alterity is intangible, elusive, distant and in encounter with the Other we desire this very intangibility that he/she expresses. This expression of otherness is *visage*; the free, unfettered, effusion of strangeness where form and content merge in the warmth of hospitality: 'Le visage est une présence vivante, il est expression. La vie de l'expression consiste à défaire la forme où l'étant, s'exposant comme thème, se dissimule par là même', Levinas, p.61.

[33] It is interesting to note that Blanchot seems to associate the gaze, a notion so intrinsic to Sartrian Existentialism, with the form of affirmation which pushes negation to the extreme in order to assert the Self. Referring to the moment of nihilistic excess which his criticism addresses, Blanchot writes: 'Là, le regard est la violence qui signifie la mort, l'atteinte effroyable; là aussi, la violence qui tue n'est rien d'autre que le regard qui veut voir par le mouvement extrême de la communication impatiente et du désir', 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1063. Reminsicent of Levinas's ethical perspective, Blanchot envisages an approach which respects the nakedness and fragility of the initial moment of encounter with the Other: 'Ce moment qui est celui de la rencontre le précède en même temps, se situe à la limite mouvante où, du fond de la profondeur originelle, région toujours autre, espace du vide et de la dispersion, ce vide, cette nudité devient le *visage* nu de la rencontre et la surprise du *face à face*' (italics mine), 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1062.

of given values, but by the desire for self-affirmation implicit to his theory of revolt and which, in Blanchot's view, pushes him towards the very dynamic he sets out to disrupt.

'Remarque sur la révolte'

Building on Blanchot's analysis, I would like to discuss the usefulness of this critical paradigm as an alternative way of evaluating Camus's approach to ethics through a reading of Camus's essay 'Remarque sur la révolte'. Published in 1945 in *L'Existence*, a volume edited by Jean Grenier, this article seeks to trace the relationship between the Absurd and revolt. As such, it provided the framework for Camus's introduction to *L'Homme révolté* and a number of sections appear in the later essay relatively unchanged. This essay can therefore be seen to constitute the interface between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté*.[34] But, despite the significance of this transitional piece, situated as it is at this critical juncture in the development of Camus's thought, it does not feature in Blanchot's analysis of Camus's theory of revolt. Yet, I would argue that an exploration of 'Remarque sur la révolte' in the light of Blanchot's work both affirms and, importantly, nuances his reading of Camus's ethical position. Portraying in slow motion the 'saut' Camus appears to make from the Absurd to revolt, this essay demonstrates the potential of Blanchot's theoretical framework to open up a new critical perspective which disrupts the binarism of the Sartre/Camus paradigm and resonates with the ethical concerns which now dominate modern literary and philosophical discourses. However, Blanchot's reading of Camus's theory of revolt does not take account of the somewhat tortured intellectual journey Camus underwent between the completion of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and the composition of *L'Homme révolté*. As I outlined in the previous chapter,

---

[34] In a letter to Grenier from Le Panelier on the 22nd September 1942, Camus writes: 'Je travaille en ce moment à une sorte de roman sur la peste et je prends des notes pour un essai qui développera certaines parties du *Mythe de Sisyphe*', Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.78.

Camus seriously questioned the conclusions he had drawn from his reasoning on the Absurd. Moreover, an analysis of 'Remarque sur la révolte' would indicate that he had a profound awareness of the extremity of negation which the Absurd implies and was clearly closer, at times, to Blanchot's perception of absurdity as an ethical space than Blanchot's reading would suggest. Since this has implications for an appreciation of Camus's ethics, it is important to nuance Blanchot's perspective through an exploration of 'Remarque sur la révolte', before going on to use his critical paradigm as an alternative optic through which to evaluate Camus's contribution to twentieth-century ethical thought.

Camus's notion of revolt, outlined in 'Remarque sur la révolte' and expounded further in the introduction to *L'Homme révolté*, will be considered in more detail in the following chapter. For the moment, I would like to concentrate on his initial attempt to define the value he perceives to be integral to the rebel's response to the absurdity of the human condition which can be traced in the pages of 'Remarque sur la révolte'. It is clear from this wartime essay that Camus was still very exploratory at this stage about the nature of the value he believes the movement of revolt to found and affirm. Opening his article, Camus invites the reader to explore with him the nature of the movement of affirmation which in his view constitutes revolt: 'Qu'est-ce qu'un homme révolté? C'est d'abord un homme qui dit *non*. Mais s'il refuse, il ne renonce pas: c'est aussi un homme qui dit *oui*. Entrons dans le détail avec le mouvement de révolte' (*E*, 1682). Indeed, throughout this piece Camus's approach is tentative. Broaching the question of the value he believes revolt to reveal, he writes: 'On se bornera, pour le moment, à identifier cette valeur avec ce qui, en l'homme, demeure irréductible' (*E*, 1683). He then goes on to

write: 'Précisons au moins qu'il s'agit bien d'une valeur. Si confusément que ce soit, il y a prise de conscience consécutive au mouvement de révolte' (*E*, 1683). Yet as the article progresses, a shift can be discerned towards a conception of affirmation which is more unambiguously that of the rebel than it is of Sisyphus. The purpose of the following pages is therefore to explore 'Remarque sur la révolte' in order to establish firstly the extent to which it resonates with Blanchot's reading of the transition Camus makes between the Absurd and revolt, and secondly how it might nuance Blanchot's critique of Camus's theory of revolt.

Camus begins his essay by asserting that in the movement of revolt, in the act of saying 'no', the rebel both founds and affirms a value that is implicit to human nature: 'On voit déjà que l'affirmation de la révolte s'étend à quelque chose qui transcende l'individu, qui le tire de sa solitude supposée, et qui fonde une valeur. [...] Une telle affirmation, bien entendu, ne peut être fondée que par la découverte, dans la révolte, de cette valeur qu'il faut encore préciser' (*E*, 1683-5). In Camus's effort to clarify the nature of this value through the course of his essay, two contrasting notions of affirmation emerge. Dominating Camus's discussion of the relationship between revolt and the Absurd in this essay is his conception of the value of human nature: 'Car si l'individu, dans les cas extrêmes, accepte de mourir et meurt dans le mouvement de sa révolte, il montre par là qu'il se sacrifie au bénéfice d'une vérité qui dépasse sa destinée individuelle, qui va plus loin que son existence personnelle' (*E*, 1684). This conception of the value revealed through the affirmative movement of revolt is indissociable from that which he later outlines in *L'Homme révolté* and which underpins his theory of revolt. However, underlying this notion of revolt in 'Remarque' is an understanding of the

Absurd as an affirmation of the fragility and brokenness of the human condition, and this conception of revolt is encapsulated by Camus in the following remark: 'cette affirmation contenue dans la révolte est une prise de parti en faveur de ce qu'il y a de plus limité et de plus relatif dans l'homme. La part irréductible de l'homme, celle qui sert de base à la complicité, c'est la part opprimée et persécutée qu'il doit toujours et par un effort incessant soutenir devant ce qui l'écrase' (*E*, 1692).

Indeed, it is clear from a reading of 'Remarque' that the space of negation, nakedness and vulnerability which Blanchot identifies as that of the Absurd also figures, if only fleetingly, in Camus's formulation of his concept of revolt. Whilst any evidence of this originary space has been erased in *L'Homme révolté* and, as Blanchot suggests, to a certain extent suppressed due to a fear of succumbing to the nihilism of the Absurd,[35] it is clear from a reading of Camus's earlier essay that he was deeply aware of the void which lies before the limit he believed revolt to establish: 'Ce n'est pas que le révolté arrête le pouvoir éternel à la limite qu'il a fixée, c'est qu'il y ait quelque chose en deçà de cette limite. Ce qui, en théologie, devrait rendre contradictoire la notion de Dieu c'est l'idée de l'enfer' (*E*, 1694). Reminiscent of Blanchot's 'Réflexions sur l'enfer', Camus's sense of there being an originary space leads him to question whether in fact revolt affirms nothing more than the absurdity of the human condition: 'Ainsi, il est possible de dire que la révolte métaphysique n'affirme rien de plus que ce contre quoi l'homme se révolte et, dans sa racine, c'est la situation humaine. [...] C'est donc la situation humaine qui est mise en question en même temps qu'elle est affirmée par la révolte' (*E*, 1695). In fact, Camus's *Carnets* would seem to support the argument that, in the formulation of his theory of revolt, he was aware of the limitations of the Absurd as a space of affirmation:

---

[35] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', p.856.

'Essais sur la Révolte: une des directions de l'esprit absurde c'est la pauvreté et le dénuement'.[36] Moreover, it is precisely this sense of poverty and alienation which, in Camus's view, unites human beings and which forms the basis of his notion of human solidarity, or 'complicité' (*E*, 1684) as he also describes it: 'Le premier progrès d'un esprit saisi d'étrangeté est de reconnaître qu'il partage cette étrangeté avec tous les hommes et que la réalité humaine dans sa totalité souffre de cette distance par rapport à soi et au monde' (*E*, 1685). Although Camus goes on to define his notion of *complicité* further as the affirmation of the universal value of human nature which is revealed through the movement of revolt, I would argue that his vision of human solidarity as founded on the mutual recognition of a common existential condition resonates with Blanchot's articulation of human encounter as hospitality, vulnerability and openness: 'Ce moment qui [...] se situe à la limite mouvante où, du fond de la profondeur originelle, région toujours autre, espace du vide et de la dispersion, ce vide, cette nudité devient le visage nu de la rencontre et la surprise du face à face'.[37]

Yet, it is clear that Camus is unable to pursue the implications of this more limited notion of affirmation. As Blanchot rightly suggests, the nihilism of the Absurd, or the 'point zéro'[38] as Camus terms it, proved far too disturbing a space for Camus to situate his ethics, to fix his starting point. Blanchot writes: 'Nous sentons tous,

---

[36] Camus, *Carnets II*, p.82.

[37] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1062. It is worth noting that Camus defines his conception of this space of solidarity as one of communication and connection in a way that is similar to Blanchot. Camus writes: 'la révolte est avant tout affirmation de la parole et de la complicité, entêtement dans la condition limitée de la créature', *Essais*, p.1693. In contrast, Blanchot writes: 'ce langage qui certes dit la mesure dans la démesure, mais dit la mesure de par la démesure, ne repousse pas l'enfer, y pénètre, consent au risque de cette migration infinie, parle au niveau de l'abîme, de l'immense faiblesse, du dénuement sans mesure, et donne ainsi parole à l'abîme, entente à ce qui est sans entente', 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1062. The resonance between Camus's and Blanchot's conceptions of communication and encounter is a line of enquiry which merits exploration and this is an area I will pursue further in future research.

[38] Camus, *Carnets II*, p.31.

instinctivement, le danger qu'il y a à chercher la limite de l'homme nu trop bas, où elle est pourtant, à ce point où l'existence paraît, par la souffrance, la misère et le désespoir, si privée de "valeur" que la mort s'en trouve réhabilitée et la violence justifiée'.[39] It is precisely this problem which Camus alludes to in his correspondence with Jean Grenier in 1943: 'Tout est permis, bien entendu, mais je sais qu'il est des actions que je ne ferai pas, des paroles et des fidélités que je ne renierai pas [...] et surtout des bassesses que je regretterai toujours. Il y a un mythe absurde, il n'y a pas de pensée absurde'.[40] Around the same time, Camus wrote in his *Carnets*: 'Imaginons un penseur qui dit: "Voilà, je sais que cela est vrai. Mais finalement les conséquences m'en répugnent et je recule. *La vérité est inacceptable même pour celui qui la trouve*." On aura ainsi le penseur absurde et son perpétuel malaise'.[41] Reflecting on this apparent impasse in 'Remarque sur la révolte', Camus writes: 'Pour finir, la révolte ne nous apprendra donc rien de plus quant à la solution dernière que l'analyse absurde. Le monde est toujours fermé. Nous sommes toujours dans le cercle, avec ceci de plus, toutefois, qu'il nous est possible de répondre affirmativement à la seule question qui nous paraisse de quelque importance: l'homme peut-il, à lui seul et sans le secours de l'éternel, créer ses propres valeurs?' (*E*, 1695-6)[42] This question represents a pivotal moment, not only in this essay, but in the development of Camus's ethical approach. Caught between what he perceives to be the impossibility of deriving values from the Absurd and his desire to resolve on an intellectually coherent course of action, Camus shifts away from the space of Sisyphus towards that of revolt:

---

[39] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', p.857.
[40] Camus and Grenier, *Correspondance*, p.96.
[41] Camus, *Carnets II*, p.82.
[42] It is worth noting that shortly before September 1944 Camus wrote in his *Carnets*: 'On arrive à cette idée qu'il faut choisir de sacrifier la liberté à la justice ou la justice à la liberté. [...] *L'homme peut-il à lui seul créer ses propres valeurs? C'est tout le problème*', *Carnets II*, p.123.

'Retenons en tout cas ce premier pas que la révolte fait faire à un esprit laissé dans un monde absurde. Ce progrès est inestimable. Car l'absurde est contradictoire en existence. Il exclut en fait les jugements de valeur et les jugements de valeur sont. Ils sont parce qu'ils sont liés au fait même d'exister' (*E*, 1696-7). Camus therefore returns to his reasoning on the Absurd and his initial reading of the Sisyphus myth as affirmative of the value of human life. Consequently, the notion of Sisyphus as a figure of extreme suffering, whose '[é]trange Oui'[43] affirms only the fragility and absurdity of human existence, becomes subsumed by Camus's interpretation of Sisyphus as a champion of absurdist revolt whose rebellion affirms the implicit value of human nature. Camus concludes his essay: 'Il faut donc déplacer le raisonnement de l'absurde dans son équivalent en existence qui est la révolte. Par elle, on trouve à affirmer en même temps une certaine part de l'homme placée au-dessus de tout et une condition humaine qui lui donne à la fois son évidence et sa relativité' (*E*, 1697). This transition is re-enacted and solidified in the introduction to *L'Homme révolté* where Camus makes the shift definitively from the impasse of the Absurd to the ethics of revolt.

It is clear from an exploration of 'Remarque sur la révolte' that there is much evidence to support Blanchot's reading of the transition Camus makes from the Absurd to revolt in this transitional piece. The fundamental problem Blanchot identifies of Camus's (mis-)interpretation of the Sisyphus myth and, in particular, of the signification of Sisyphus's labour, can be seen to define Camus's concept of the foundation of values and to shape his notion of revolt. Furthermore, central to 'Remarque' is the question of the sort of affirmation that is possible from the basis of absurdity, and this reinforces the pertinence of Blanchot's view that the question of the coherence between *Le Mythe de*

---

[43] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', p.855.

Sisyphe and *L'Homme révolté* turns not on the conclusions Camus draws in each about the nature of ethical values, but on the point from which he begins in each to construct an ethics. However, whilst 'Remarque' confirms the potential of Blanchot's reading to open up an alternative perspective on Camus's theory of revolt, it also serves to nuance his perspective by offering an insight into the intellectual process Camus went through in formulating his concept of revolt. It is clear from an analysis of this essay that present in Camus's exploration of the Absurd and its implications for ethical action is an awareness of the possibility that the toil of Sisyphus might in fact only be an affirmation of the acute suffering and absurdity of the human experience. I would therefore argue that, if Blanchot's critical paradigm is to provide an optic through which to evaluate Camus's ethics, the fact that Camus's vision of human encounter is founded in part on a recognition of the nakedness and fragility of human existence needs to be taken into account. Whilst critics are clearly justified in questioning the nature of the values on which Camus bases his theory of revolt, an exploration of Blanchot's theoretical perspective and a reading of 'Remarque sur la révolte' in the light of this, illuminate a different critical concern, that is, the problem of founding an ethics on a movement of affirmation which requires the negation of the Other for the creation of values.[44] Therefore, Blanchot's theoretical perspective offers a modern critical context in which to situate a re-reading of Camus's contribution to contemporary and modern discourses on ethics. Having established the significance of Blanchot's intervention in this critical debate and the importance of his reading as an alternative optic through which to assess

---

[44] Lucien Guissard identifies this commonality between Camus and his contemporaries when he writes: 'cette coïncidence, dans quelques esprits, d'une philosophie de la négation et d'une morale positive figure, en fait, le grand problème qui secoue douloureusement toute l'époque', 'Camus: à la recherche d'une légitimité', p.272.

Camus's ethical approach in relation to that of his contemporaries, I will now move on to a comparative study of Camus's theory of revolt and Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity.

5

The Foundation of Ethical Values

Despite appearing to occupy opposing camps, Camus and Beauvoir share a similar conception of contemporary history and a comparative study of the ethical approaches they developed in the immediate postwar years will show that, contrary to critical assumption, the polarity of the *Temps modernes* debate and the subsequent binarism of critical discourse offer a distorted view of the relationship between Camus and his existentialist counterparts. Both Camus and Beauvoir interpret contemporary history as the violent saga of the human struggle to overcome the absurdity of the human condition. Writing in *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus remarks: 'Cette nostalgie d'unité, cet appétit d'absolu illustre le mouvement essentiel du drame humain' (*E*, 110). He goes on to comment that '[s]'il fallait écrire la seule histoire significative de la pensée humaine, il faudrait faire celle de ses repentirs successifs et de ses impuissances' (*E*, 111). For Camus, the excesses of the first half of the twentieth-century are symptomatic of the profound and endemic sense of nihilism which had come to dominate Western European philosophical and cultural discourses. In the introduction to *L'Homme révolté*, he writes: 'Si notre temps admet aisément que le meurtre ait ses justifications, c'est à cause de cette indifférence à la vie qui est la marque du nihilisme' (*E*, 416). Likewise, Beauvoir begins *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* by reflecting on recent European history: 'Les hommes d'aujourd'hui semblent ressentir plus vivement que jamais le paradoxe de leur condition. [...] Il y a eu Stalingrad et Buchenwald et aucun des deux n'efface l'autre. Puisque nous ne réussissons pas à la fuir, essayons donc de regarder en face la vérité. Essayons d'assumer notre fondamentale ambiguïté' (*PM*, 13-14). Like Camus, Beauvoir perceives

the human desire for totality as futile and the effort to overcome the absurdity of human existence as a source of violence and oppression.[1] Given the similarity in their conceptions of contemporary history and given Beauvoir's significance, not only as a prominent existentialist thinker, but as the innovator of existentialist ethical thought, it is highly appropriate to turn to the work of Beauvoir in order to explore and expose the limitations of the *Temps modernes* debate as a hermeneutic framework.

The purpose of the remaining three chapters is therefore to engage in an exploration of Camus's and Beauvoir's ethics and to contrast their ethical approaches in a non-oppositional way. The aim of this comparative study is threefold: firstly to problematize the dominant critical paradigm in this field, secondly to provide a more nuanced reading of Camus's ethical position in relation to his contemporaries than critical discourse has so far allowed, and thirdly to offer an assessment of Camus's contribution to twentieth-century ethical thought in the light of Blanchot's theoretical perspective. Each chapter will take up one of the contentious issues which were central to the Camus/Sartre polemic and which continue to dominate critical discussion to this day, in order to demonstrate both the restrictiveness of this critical paradigm and the importance of opening up alternative perspectives through which to read and evaluate Camus's work. Chapter 5 will therefore begin by probing the proximity between Camus and Beauvoir through an exploration of their conceptions of the creation of values. First of all I will outline Sartre's criticism of Camus's belief in the given value of human nature and the prevalence of the issue of the nature of ethical values in subsequent

---

[1] Beauvoir writes: 'la passion de l'homme est inutile, il n'y a aucun moyen pour lui de devenir cet être qu'il n'est pas. [...] C'est dire que, dans sa vaine tentative pour *être* Dieu, l'homme se fait *exister* comme homme, et s'il se satisfait de cette existence, il coïncide exactement avec soi. Il ne lui est pas permis d'exister sans tendre vers cet être qu'il ne sera jamais; mais il lui est possible de vouloir cette tension même avec l'échec qu'elle comporte', *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, pp.16-18.

critical readings of Camus's theory of revolt. Once I have established the critical context surrounding this issue, I will probe Camus's understanding of the value which he perceives to be revealed through the movement of revolt. I will then contrast Camus's notion of the foundation of values with that of Beauvoir and will argue that, rather than conforming to the binary pattern of the *Temps modernes* polemic, there is discernible in their work a similarity of approach, conceptualization and purpose. Indeed, a comparative reading of Camus's concept of human nature and Beauvoir's principle of freedom, in the light of Blanchot's discussion of the problem of affirmation, would suggest that Camus's theory of revolt and Beauvoir's existentialist ethics are not as antithetical as either contemporary or modern critical debate would have us believe. Often perceived as diametrically opposed in their conception of ethical values, I will argue that, although certain differences do emerge, their respective approaches to this question are more nuanced and problematic than they are at times portrayed and that there are in fact close similarities in the way they respond to the problem of contemporary nihilism.

The Issue of Given Values

Profoundly critical of Camus's notion of the value of human nature as a limit which defines and measures action, Sartre engages in a critique of the foundation of his theory of ethical revolt in his article 'Réponse à Albert Camus'. Calling into question the recourse Camus makes to given values in *L'Homme révolté*, Sartre argues that the only force which can delimit an individual's freedom is the existence of another freedom: 'la limite d'un droit (c'est-à-dire d'une liberté) c'est un autre droit (c'est-à-dire encore la liberté) et non je ne sais quelle "nature humaine": car la nature – qu'elle soit ou non

"humaine" – peut écraser l'homme mais non le réduire vivant à l'état d'objet; si l'homme est un objet, c'est pour un autre homme'.[2] Challenging Camus's interpretation of the Absurd further, Sartre contests his assumption that because absurdity is the condition of all human beings, it exists as a force of suffering and evil external to human existence: 'Mais comme cette vérité est celle de tous, comme son extrême singularité est justement ce qui la fait universelle, comme vous brisiez l'écorce du pur présent où Nathanaël cherche Dieu et l'ouvriez sur "la profondeur du monde" c'est-à-dire sur la mort, vous retrouviez au terme de cette sombre et solitaire jouissance l'universalité d'une éthique et la solidarité humaine'.[3] Therefore, Sartre's objection to the conceptual basis on which Camus founds his ethics is the way in which Camus makes absolute the human experience of absurdity and, thereby, the value which he believes the movement of revolt to found and affirm.[4] The contemporary context and embittered tone of the exchange served to entrench Camus and Sartre in seemingly opposed and irreconcilable positions on this issue. As I outlined in the introduction, the polarity of the debate has influenced critical readings of Camus's theory of revolt ever since. Consequently, the question of the nature of Camus's ethical values and the foundation on which his ethical position is based has continued to define hermeneutic discourse in this area as critics have struggled to move beyond the confines of a 1950s critical agenda.

The influence of this polemic can be traced in studies of Camus's theory of revolt over the last few decades and has, in my view, created an apologetic culture in which the

---

[2] Sartre, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', p.344.
[3] Ibid., p.347.
[4] Other critics also raised the issue of Camus's recourse to given values. See for example Mehl's article 'De la révolte à la valeur' which, it ought to be noted, was written in the aftermath of the *Temps modernes* debate. Mehl writes: 'Camus insiste bien sur la double polarité de la révolte: elle dit non, sans doute, elle refuse, et à sa limite extrême, elle refuse la condition humaine elle-même. Mais ou bien ce refus est impuissance et absurdité, ou bien il se fait au nom de...', p.520.

activity of interpretation has become more defensive than critical, as commentators have taken up a position in terms of the Camus/Sartre debacle, so perpetuating the domination of this debate as a critical paradigm. Lev Braun presents *L'Homme révolté* unquestioningly as 'Albert Camus's defense of ethical values'[5] and defends the conceptual basis of Camus's theory of revolt against the charges of incoherence and inconsistency: 'Camus was right in asserting that there was no conversion in his case, no turning away from an absurd universe to meaningful solidarity'.[6] In 1979, René-Jean Dupuy reflects on Camus's notion of ethical revolt in terms of the *Temps modernes* debate, somewhat obscurely reformulating what he accepts to be the opposition between Camus and Sartre as one of intellectual purity: 'L'affirmation de la révolte vient ainsi compenser le refus de la révolution. C'est une attitude spirituelle; elle proteste de la dignité de l'homme face aux démesures de la révolution et de l'Histoire. [...] Pour Camus, être pur, c'est se donner un absolu moral refusant tout périssement dans l'histoire d'un système politique dans un Etat totalitaire'.[7] In 1984, Bernard East defended Camus's belief in the value of human nature against the philosophical views of 'certains penseurs' whose identity he only thinly veils: 'Pour certains penseurs, privilégier le respect de la nature humaine, équivaut à se retrancher derrière l'immobilisme. Favoriser ce concept reviendrait à inscrire l'homme dans l'immuable de la nature physique et à le rendre inapte à l'action. [...] Pour notre auteur, il est clair que l'homme révolté non seulement ne se retire pas du monde, mais il a besoin d'y travailler et de s'exprimer par l'action pour s'accomplir'.[8]

---

[5] Braun, p.107.
[6] Braun, p.120.
[7] Dupuy, pp.243-244.
[8] East, p.95.

In 1995, the issue of the foundation on which Camus bases his concept of revolt was raised at the *Colloque International de Poitiers*. In the round table discussion, 'Camus et la guerre 1939-45', the question was posed: 'est-ce qu'il y a une fondamentale différence entre l'action, énoncée par *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* et *L'Homme révolté*?'[9] Despite the critical climate in which this conference took place being one in which issues of otherness were central to theoretical and literary discourses, this question served only as an opportunity for critics to reassert Camus's position on the nature of ethical values and so reaffirm the dominance of the 1950s agenda as a critical framework: 'Avec la révolte, il trouve la justification de la vie et de la résistance, etc. dans le propre fond de la nature humine et dans le rapprochement de l'homme avec autrui, puisque la révolte fonde une communauté. Donc, ce qui est à méditer c'est si cela est encore une recherche du sens, ou si c'est le sens qui est déjà trouvé'.[10] More recently, Eric Bronner offered a highly apologetic discussion of Camus's theory of revolt and the value of human worth which underpins it: 'The rebel must assume that life has an intrinsic worth since, otherwise, he or she would not have contested injustice in the first place'.[11] Eager to defend Camus against Sartre and therefore preoccupied with the now restrictive terms of an old critical agenda, Bronner somewhat subjectively and unsatisfactorily concludes: 'Camus was surely right, against Sartre'.[12] It is therefore clear, from an exploration of the way the *Temps modernes* debate continues to influence Camus criticism in this area, that the dominance of this critical paradigm perpetuates a perception of Camus and Sartre as fundamentally opposed on the issue of ethical values.

---

[9] Maillard, 'Camus et la guerre 1939-45', p.97.
[10] Ibid., p.97.
[11] Bronner, p.83.
[12] Ibid., p.103.

Camus's Notion of the Value of Human Nature

Having explored the transition Camus makes from the Absurd to revolt in the previous chapter through an analysis of his preliminary essay 'Remarque sur la révolte', I would now like to outline Camus's account of this move in the introduction to *L'Homme révolté* before discussing his notion of the foundation of ethical values further. In the introduction to his theory of revolt, Camus reasserts his view that it is impossible to construct an ethic on the basis of the Absurd because it is implicitly contradictory. Referring to *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*, Camus writes: 'cette réflexion, pour le moment, ne nous fournit qu'une seule notion, celle de l'absurde. À son tour, celle-ci ne nous apporte rien qu'une contradiction en ce qui concerne le meurtre' (*E*, 414-15). Profoundly aware of the nihilism of the Absurd, Camus acknowledges that in one sense absurdity can be seen to permit murder because, by removing external ethical frameworks, it renders all acts morally indifferent: 'Si l'on ne croit à rien, si rien n'a de sens et si nous ne pouvons affirmer aucune valeur, tout est possible et rien n'a d'importance. Point de pour ni de contre, l'assassin n'a ni tort ni raison. [...] On décidera alors de ne pas agir, ce qui revient au moins à accepter le meurtre d'autrui, sauf à déplorer harmonieusement l'imperfection des hommes' (*E*, 415). Nihilism for Camus is inextricably linked to violence and, more specifically, murder on a massive scale. Given the unfolding horror of both the concentration camps and the Stalinist gulags, it is understandable that writers like Camus and Beauvoir read the violence of political extremism in metaphysical terms. Whilst Camus was deeply critical of absolute affirmation as a response to nihilism, he was equally wary of situating human action at the opposite end of the spectrum, at the point of absolute negation. Disturbed by what he perceived to be the nihilistic excesses of

contemporary history and therefore unable to see the potential of nihilism to provide a basis for an ethics, Camus sought in the Absurd some justification for a positive affirmation of human life. As we discussed in Chapter 3, Camus's analysis of the implications of the Absurd for the question of suicide leads him to conclude that the act of suicide is not the 'logical consequence' of the Absurd. Rather, the absurdity of the human condition requires human beings to exist. Camus's interpretation of the Sisyphus myth and its implications for human existence lead him to conclude that in requiring human beings to go on living, the Absurd positively affirms the value of human life. Whilst it is evident from Camus's *Carnets* and correspondence that he seriously questioned the possibility of deriving values from the Absurd following the publication of his essay, it is clear from 'Remarque sur la révolte' that he had begun to move again towards the idea that the Absurd affirmed the value of human nature.

In the introduction to *L'Homme révolté*, the ambiguity which I identified in Camus's preparatory essay concerning his conception of the affirmation offered by the Absurd is no longer present. Camus's interpretation of absurdity as a source of positive values, which in 'Remarque' is intermingled with and offset by a notion of the Absurd as a space of subdued affirmation, solidifies in his essay on revolt and becomes the basis on which he argues for the value of human nature and the prohibition of murder: 'il est clair que, du même coup, ce raisonnement admet la vie comme le seul bien nécessaire puisqu'elle permet précisément cette confrontation et que, sans elle, le pari absurde n'aurait pas de support' (*E*, 416). Perceiving the Absurd to be external to the human consciousness, Camus concludes that the value it founds is universal: 'Dès l'instant où ce bien est reconnu comme tel, il est celui de tous les hommes' (*E*, 416). Consequently,

according to Camus's reasoning, the Absurd not only prohibits suicide but also murder, since if my life is inherently valuable in the face of the Absurd, so is that of the Other: 'On ne peut donner une cohérence au meurtre si on la refuse au suicide. Un esprit pénétré de l'idée d'absurde admet sans doute le meurtre de fatalité; il ne saurait accepter le meurtre de raisonnement. Vis-à-vis de la confrontation, meurtre et suicide sont une même chose, qu'il faut prendre ou rejeter ensemble' (*E*, 416). The universality of this value, which I will discuss in more detail in a moment, is based on Camus's view that suicide and murder are somehow equivalent because both acts involve taking a person's life. Whilst this equivalence is widely accepted by Camus critics, others have questioned Camus's assumption that suicide and murder are essentially the same.[13] It could be persuasively argued, for example, that the responsibility I have for my own life is somewhat different from the responsibility I have towards that of others. Correlatively, the freedom I have over my own life differs considerably from the freedom I have over the life of another.[14] However questionable Camus's move from the individual to the universal might be, a move which is more easily understood in the light of his notion of revolt, his belief that the Absurd ultimately condemns suicide and murder alike, and

---

[13] In refererence to *Les Justes*, in which Camus dramatizes this principle, Blanchot writes: 'la mort de Kaliaev ne peut pas racheter la mort du grand-duc, elle ne "l'annule" pas, ne la purifie pas, elle ne la rend pas plus juste, plus légère, mais plus lourde au contraire, elle s'ajoute à elle, elle est la même mort', 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1066. I will discuss Blanchot's analysis of Camus's approach to the problem of violence in more detail in Chapter 7. Similarly, Cruickshank argues that Camus seems to force this conclusion on the grounds of logical necessity and fails to take into account the factors which may govern and differentiate my relationship to my own life and my relationship to the life of another, pp.94-5. For examples of those critics who do not problematize Camus's view that murder and suicide are equivalent, see Ewald, p.43; East, pp.60-1; R. Gloton, 'Albert Camus moraliste', *Lectures culturelles*, 35 (1958), 3-6 (p.5); A. Blanchet, '*L'Homme révolté* d'Albert Camus', in *La Littérature et le spirituel: la mêlée littéraire*, ed. by A. Blanchet, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959-61), I (1959), pp.233-249 (p.237).

[14] Indeed, Camus himself seems to suggest as much in the introduction to *L'Homme révolté* when he refers briefly to the question of collective suicide. He condemns this on the basis that, whilst we may choose to take our own life, we do not have the right to impose that decision on others: 'l'homme qui se tue dans la solitude préserve encore une valeur puisque, apparemment, il ne se reconnaît pas de droits sur la vie des autres', *Essais*, p.416.

thereby affirms the value of human nature, leads him to conclude that the Absurd is implicitly contradictory: 'Pratiquement, un tel raisonnement nous assure en même temps qu'on peut et qu'on ne peut pas tuer. Il nous abandonne dans la contradiction. [...] Il l'est [contradictoire] dans son contenu puisqu'il exclut les jugements de valeur en voulant maintenir la vie, alors que vivre est en soi un jugement de valeur' (*E*, 417).

Unable to perceive the nihilism of absurdity as anything other than a space of violence, a void in which all acts are rendered equivalent, dissatisfied with the strange affirmation of the Absurd as a basis for ethical choice and yet convinced that the Absurd does justify and reveal positive values, Camus concludes that any attempt to found an ethics on the Absurd will only fall back into contradiction. He consequently shifts away from the Absurd, reducing it in his schema to a preliminary phase, 'un passage vécu' and a 'point de départ' (*E*, 417): 'il est impossible de voir dans cette sensibilité, et dans le nihilisme qu'elle suppose, rien d'autre qu'un point de départ, une critique vécue, l'équivalent, sur le plan de l'existence, du doute systématique' (*E*, 419). Given that Camus states quite clearly in the preface of *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* that the Absurd is a starting point only, it could be argued that he only ever regarded the Absurd as provisional, 'a stepping-stone to eventual affirmation', a negative starting point for more positive recommendations.[15] However, as I discussed in Chapter 3, it is clear from an exploration of Camus's essay on the Absurd and other supporting material that he tried very hard to formulate an intellectually coherent code of ethics founded on the Absurd, only to conclude in later years that it could offer no basis for an ethical approach.

---

[15] Cruickshank, p.92. In the preface to *Le Myhe de Sisyphe* Camus writes: 'il est utile de noter, en même temps, que l'absurde, pris jusqu'ici comme conclusion, est considéré dans cet essai comme un point de départ', *Essais*, p.97. Camus also situates the cycle of the Absurd at the beginning of a series of three cycles of work, the second of which is that of revolt, in *Carnets II*, p.201.

Moreover, the extent to which the Absurd does in fact constitute a 'starting point' for his theory of revolt, as he claims it does in *L'Homme révolté*, is questionable in the light of Blanchot's critical analysis of the transition Camus makes between *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* and *L'Homme révolté*. Describing this moment of passage and progression in elusively figurative terms, Camus writes:

> Après quoi, il faut briser les jeux fixes du miroir et entrer dans le mouvement irrésistible par lequel l'absurde se dépasse lui-même. Le miroir brisé, il ne reste rien qui puisse nous servir pour répondre aux questions du siècle. [...] Je crie que je ne crois à rien et que tout est absurde, mais je ne puis douter de mon cri et il me faut au moins croire à ma protestation. La première et la seule évidence qui me soit ainsi donnée, à l'intérieur de l'expérience absurde, est la révolte.(*E*, 419)

It is this move, this *dépassement*, which constitutes the foundation of Camus's theory of revolt and through which, according to Camus, the value of human nature is revealed.

Revolt, for Camus, is therefore the expression of a limit which arises within the human consciousness in response to the nihilism of existence: 'La révolte naît du spectacle de la déraison, devant une condition injuste et incompréhensible. [...] Elle crie, elle exige, elle veut que le scandale cesse et que se fixe enfin ce qui jusqu'ici s'écrivait sans trêve sur la mer' (*E*, 419). Reminiscent of Beauvoir's notion of 'spontanéité' (*PM*, 210),[16] Camusian revolt is a dynamic movement of affirmation which both reveals and founds the value of human nature: 'Il démontre, avec entêtement, qu'il y a en lui quelque chose qui "vaut la peine de...", qui demande qu'on y prenne garde' (*E*, 423). In this moment of revolt, the Camusian rebel discovers his or her human worth and is willing to

---

[16] Beauvoir's description of freedom as *spontanéité* bears comparison with Camus's description of the movement of revolt as an 'élan' in *L'Homme révolté*, *Essais*, p.419 and p.424.

die in order to defend it: 'Cette part de lui-même qu'il voulait faire respecter, il la met alors au-dessus du reste, et la proclame préférable à tout, même à la vie. Elle devient pour lui le bien suprême' (*E*, 424). Furthermore, Camus argues that implicit to the rebel's willingness to die in the defence of human dignity is the realization that the value of human nature transcends the individual and is common to all human beings: 'Il agit donc au nom d'une valeur, encore confuse, mais dont il a le sentiment, au moins, qu'elle lui est commune avec tous les hommes' (*E*, 425). Therefore, the act of revolt constitutes the revelation of the universal value of human nature and as such drives the individual beyond the parameters of him- or herself into solidarity with others: 'cette évidence tire l'individu de sa solitude. Elle est un lieu commun qui fonde sur tous les hommes la première valeur. Je me révolte, donc nous sommes' (*E*, 432). Self and Other are integrally bound by mutual responsibility and common worth; what is true for one individual is equally true for another. Revolt, for Camus, is therefore far more than a code of action. It is a mode of existence where Self and Other are mutually dependent upon each other for their humanity: 'Pour être, l'homme doit se révolter, mais sa révolte doit respecter la limite qu'elle découvre en elle-même et où les hommes, en se rejoignant, commencent d'être' (*E*, 431).[17] The movement of revolt therefore reveals and affirms the given value of human nature. Before considering Camus's approach to the question of ethical values in relation to that of his contemporaries, I would like to explore the nature of the value Camus believes the act of revolt to reveal.

---

[17] Despite Camus's ethical aspirations, his position is arguably undermined by the movement of affirmation on which his ethics is predicated. As I will discuss further in the following chapter, although Camus seeks to disrupt the binarism of the master/slave dialectic through what he perceives to be the solidarity of revolt, the questionable move he makes from the strange yes of Sisyphus to the more affirmative and less compromising yes of the rebel risks drawing him into a dialectical approach, in which the affirmation of Self depends on the negation of the Other.

Camus is unambivalent in his claim that human nature exists and that it is a given value. He makes this very clear in the introduction to *L'Homme révolté* and in so doing distinguishes his theory of revolt from the position Sartre and other existentialists had taken up on the issue of given values: 'il importe de remarquer déjà que cette valeur qui préexiste à toute action contredit les philosophies purement historiques, dans lesquelles la valeur est conquise (si elle se conquiert) au bout de l'action. L'analyse de la révolte conduit au moins au soupçon qu'il y a une nature humaine, comme le pensaient les Grecs, et contrairement aux postulats de la pensée contemporaine' (*E*, 425). Indeed, Camus's notion that the value of human life is revealed, rather than created, in the movement of revolt can be traced in his earlier essay 'Remarque sur la révolte', and this article is helpful in illuminating not only his notion of ethical values but also the interrelatedness between his approach and that of Beauvoir. It is particularly revealing about Camus's understanding of the 'given' nature of the values he perceives to be founded in the moment of revolt, and this is vital to a (re-)reading of the relationship between his ethical position and that of his existentialist counterparts. In the beginning of 'Remarque', Camus describes the movement of revolt as the affirmation of a value which transcends the individual: 'On voit déjà que l'affirmation de la révolte s'étend à quelque chose qui transcende l'individu, qui le tire de sa solitude supposée, et qui fonde une valeur' (*E*, 1683). However, this reference to the notion of transcendence is qualified by Camus in a footnote where he states that he is referring to what he describes as *horizontal* rather than *vertical* transcendence. He writes: 'Il s'agit bien entendu, dans toute cette remarque, d'une transcendance qu'on pourrait appeler horizontale par opposition à la transcendance verticale qui est celle de Dieu ou des Essences platoniciennes' (*E*, 1683).[18]

[18] In Spring 1942, Camus writes in his *Carnets*: 'Secret de mon univers: Imaginer Dieu sans l'immortalité

This seemingly oxymoronic notion poses a number of questions about Camus's notion of ethical values. For example, how can an ethical value be both horizontal and transcendent, relative and absolute? Is it possible to create an ethics that is applicable to all, without making recourse to an objective reality?[19]

In 'Remarque', Camus argues that the value revealed in the movement of revolt, being both an affirmation of the value of human life and a refusal of the nihilism of human existence, is relative in the sense that it exists always and only in relation to the nothingness of the human condition, which can never be eradicated or overcome: 'cette affirmation contenue dans la révolte est une prise de parti en faveur de ce qu'il y a de plus limité et de plus relatif dans l'homme. La part irréductible de l'homme, celle qui sert de base à la complicité, c'est la part opprimée et persécutée qu'il doit toujours et par un effort incessant soutenir devant ce qui l'écrase' (*E*, 1692). However, conceiving the Absurd to be an external entity to which all human beings are subject, and therefore interpreting the affirmation he believes the Absurd to offer as universal, Camus concludes that the value of human nature is also absolute: 'l'homme peut-il, à lui seul et sans le secours de l'éternel, créer ses propres valeurs? Suggérons encore qu'à la limite on pourrait entrevoir un absolu d'*évidence* qui ne serait ni dans l'irréductibilité de l'homme ni dans la situation contre laquelle il est en lutte, mais dans le rapport que l'un et l'autre soutiennent entre eux, et qui est à proprement parler la condition humaine. C'est le relatif absolu' (*E*, 1696). In this way, the ethical position Camus proposes, somewhat

---

humaine', *Carnets II*, p.21.

[19] It is worth noting that in a footnote to his discussion of the distinction between revolt and revolution in *L'Homme révolté*, Camus remarks that although contemporary existentialists were looking to develop an ethics, in his view, they would find this very difficult without making recourse to given values: 'L'existentialisme athée a, du moins, la volonté de créer une morale. Il faut attendre cette morale. Mais la vraie difficulté sera de la créer sans réintroduire dans l'existence historique une valeur étrangère à l'histoire', *Essais*, p.651.

awkwardly straddles both relativistic and absolutist, phenomenological and empiricist perspectives, in the attempt to formulate an ethics which is both founded on absurdist principles and universally applicable. It is clear from Camus's notion of the Absurd as an external framework and his assertion that it is possible to derive positive values from the Absurd that the philosophical coherence of his ethical approach is problematic. In this sense, the concerns raised by Jeanson and Sartre relating to Camus's recourse to given values would seem to be legitimate. However, an exploration of Beauvoir's attempt to construct an existentialist ethics reveals similar problems and sheds a new light, not only on Camus's effort to find an ethical response to the absurdity of the human condition, but also on the relation between his ethical thought and that of his contemporaries.

Beauvoir's Principle of Freedom

Not unlike Camus, Beauvoir sought to develop an ethics which would occupy the middle ground between individualistic and holistic approaches to metaphysics. Her theory of intersubjectivity, and the principle of freedom on which it is based, is in part a response to the polarity of these perspectives which had traditionally dominated discourses on ethics. Closely associated with Sartre, Beauvoir has not until relatively recently been appreciated as a philosopher in her own right. Partly in response to this, critical readings of her work on ethics have tended to be apologetic, focusing on the distinctiveness of Beauvoir's thought, rather than on the conceptual framework underpinning her approach.[20] Consequently, it would be fair to say that Beauvoir's philosophical writing, in contrast to that of Camus, has not received the same critical scrutiny. Whilst the weaknesses of Camus's conceptual approach to the question of

---

[20] See for example Atack, 'Writing from the Centre: Ironies of Otherness and Marginality'; Simons, 'Beauvoir and Sartre: the philosophical relationship'; Edward Fullbrook and Kate Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

ethical values have been highly criticized, Beauvoir's notion of the creation of values has received far less attention.[21] Yet a comparative reading of *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* not only highlights the similarities between Camus's and Beauvoir's response to the problem of contemporary nihilism, but also the problems they respectively encounter in accounting for the values on which they found their ethics. In order to pursue this further, I would like to outline briefly the concept of freedom which lies at the heart of Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity.

Following Sartre, Beauvoir perceives freedom to be the self-negating movement of a being from consciousness to self-consciousness. It is the moment when an individual assumes the nothingness of what he or she is not in order to define his or her own being in the world. In Beauvoir's view, this perpetual and dynamic process of self-negation is freedom because it is only through 'being free', or negating oneself, that a consciousness can come into being: 'l'homme se veut aussi dévoilement de l'être [...]. Mais le dévoilement implique une perpétuelle tension pour maintenir l'être à distance, pour s'arracher au monde et s'affirmer comme liberté: vouloir le dévoilement du monde, se vouloir libre, c'est un seul et même mouvement' (*PM*, 31).[22] Like Sartre, Beauvoir emphatically rejects the notion of pre-existing values and argues that although human beings are 'condemned' to be free, freedom is not a given value but a mode of authentic being which can only be chosen, or 'founded' as Beauvoir often terms it, by the

---

[21] Some years later, Beauvoir suggested in her autobiographical work, *La Force des choses*, that she was not happy with the conclusions she had drawn in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*. Referring to this work, Beauvoir remarks: 'De tous mes livres, c'est celui qui aujourd'hui m'irrite le plus', pp.79-80.

[22] The philosophical foundations of Beauvoir's notion of being as only possible through internal negation can be traced in Sartre's *L'Être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998; first published 1943): 'le pour-soi doit-il être son propre néant. L'être de la conscience, en tant que conscience, c'est d'exister *à distance de soi* comme présence à soi et cette distance nulle que l'être porte dans son être, c'est le Néant. Ainsi, pour qu'il existe un *soi*, il faut que l'unité de cet être comporte son propre néant comme néantisation de l'identique', p.114.

individual consciousness: 'Se vouloir libre, c'est effectuer le passage de la nature à la moralité en fondant sur le jaillissement originel de notre existence une liberté authentique' (*PM*, 33). This choice for authenticity and freedom is made through the projection of certain goals and the movement towards these ends constitutes action: 'Pour convertir cette absence en présence, ma fuite en volonté, il faut que j'assume positivement mon projet' (*PM*, 34). Developing Sartre's notion of liberty further, Beauvoir argues that this choice of freedom is also an ethical choice because, in choosing to assume one's own nothingness, the individual is simultaneously choosing to value the freedom of others. Beauvoir comments that whilst Sartre tends to focus on the negative dimension of being, the ambiguity of our being he identifies involves both success and failure, being and non-being.[23] Since this ambiguity depends on the presence of other free consciousnesses in the world, the choice to be free is also the choice to work towards the freedom of others. Beauvoir concludes: 'Se vouloir moral et se vouloir libre, c'est une seule et même décision' (*PM*, 32).

On the surface, Beauvoir's notion of ethical values would appear to be radically different from that of Camus. Whilst Camus openly acknowledges his belief in human nature as a given value, Beauvoir categorically rejects the existence of any objective reality which imposes values on human beings. Yet, in the same way that Camus's notion

---

[23] Central to Sartre's phenomenological study of existence is the impact the Other's freedom has on my being. According to Sartre, when I am caught in the Other's gaze I am objectified in my being and reduced to nothingness. Referring to this state of non-being, or *en-soi* as Sartre terms it, he writes: 'Tout se passe comme si j'avais une dimension d'être dont j'étais séparé par un néant radical: et ce néant, c'est la liberté d'autrui; autrui a à faire être mon être-pour-lui en tant qu'il a à être son être; ainsi, chacune de mes libres conduites m'engage dans un nouveau milieu où la matière même de mon être est l'imprévisible liberté d'un autre', p.301. Focusing on the negative dimension of being and the potential of the Other to objectify me, Sartre perceives the existence of *autrui* to be a source of danger and consequently his treatment of alterity in *L'Être et le néant*, unlike the approach Beauvoir would go on to develop, is highly defensive and antagonistic: 'En tant que je suis l'instrument de possibilités qui ne sont pas mes possibilités, dont je ne fais qu'entrevoir la pure présence par delà mon être, et qui nient ma transcendance pour me constituer en moyen vers des fins que j'ignore, je suis *en danger*. Et ce danger n'est pas un accident, mais la structure permanente de mon être-pour-autrui', p.307.

of value, when probed, reveals a more nuanced and complex approach to the question of value, so Beauvoir's principle of freedom turns out to be equally problematic. Whilst many critics accept Beauvoir's rejection of pre-existing values,[24] some commentators have questioned the extent to which she succeeds in liberating herself from the idea of human nature in her conception of the value of freedom. Although it is not within the scope of this study to offer a full account of critical response to Beauvoir's philosophical thought, I would like to highlight two studies in particular which highlight the potential weaknesses in Beauvoir's position. Laurent Gagnebin in his study *Simone de Beauvoir ou le refus de l'indifférence* challenges Beauvoir's claim that despite the fact that individuals cannot but be free, freedom is not a given value common to all. This stance, Gagnebin writes, 'c'est reconnaître aux hommes un patrimoine commun et permanent; ne peut-on pas y voir la reconnaissance implicite d'une nature humaine?'[25] Terry Keefe raises a similar contention in response to Beauvoir's initial attempt to formulate an existentialist ethics in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*: 'If it is the very essence of human beings, metaphysically, that they are engaged in projects, forever reaching beyond themselves [...] then they will be transcending themselves however 'active' or 'passive' their way of

---

[24] See for example Fullbrook and Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction*, where, in a lengthy discussion of Beauvoir's ethics, they remark that she makes no false appeal to the universal, p.104. See also Ursula Tidd who remarks that Beauvoir 'did not advocate a universalist moral theory', *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999), p.7.

[25] Laurent Gagnebin, *Simone de Beauvoir ou le refus de l'indifférence* (Paris: Éditions Fischbacher, 1968), p.112. Gagnebin goes on to suggest that Beauvoir's discourse betrays a notion of freedom as a given value and cites as an example her reference to freedom as 'naturelle' which is then qualified ambiguously by 'pour ainsi dire', p.32. However, he also argues that Beauvoir describes liberty as both a 'donné' and a 'conquête'. In verifying the reference Gagnebin gives for this point, it is clear that this is not in fact the case. Beauvoir sets up this very criticism rhetorically in order to then launch her counter-argument: 'Quel sens peuvent garder les mots: se *vouloir* libre, puisque d'abord nous *sommes* libre? Il est contradictoire de poser la liberté comme une conquête si d'abord elle est un donné. Cette objection n'aurait de portée que si la liberté était une chose ou une qualité naturellement attachée à une chose; alors en effet: ou bien on la posséderait, ou bien on ne la posséderait pas; mais en vérité elle se confond avec le mouvement même de cette réalité ambiguë qu'on appelle l'existence', pp.32-3. Therefore, whilst the point Gagnebin makes needs to be treated with caution, it is clear from Beauvoir's discussion of this issue, cited in full above, that there is a lack of clarity on the question of freedom which underpins her ethics.

life may be'.[26] There is without doubt a sense in which Beauvoir conceives of freedom as universal. In introducing the idea of an ethics based on the principle of freedom, Beauvoir remarks that 'c'est en nous retournant vers cette liberté que nous allons découvrir un principe d'action dont la portée sera universelle' (*PM*, 31). Moreover, in a discussion of contemporary nihilism she refers to freedom as an absolute and universal value: 'La faute fondamentale du nihiliste, c'est que, récusant toutes les valeurs données, il ne retrouve pas, par-delà leur ruine, l'importance de cette fin universelle, absolue, qu'est la liberté elle-même' (*PM*, 74). It is therefore clear that despite her rejection of pre-existing values, Beauvoir's conception of freedom has a universal and absolute dimension. However, before concluding that Beauvoir's position is implicitly contradictory, I would like to explore her conception of these terms.

Firstly, for Beauvoir, freedom is universal in the sense that it is a choice which all individual consciousnesses face in determining their being. In Beauvoir's paradigm, the value of freedom is chosen by each individual rather than imposed from outside: 'L'homme, nous dit Sartre, est "un être qui *se fait* manque d'être, *afin qu'il y ait de* l'être". C'est dire d'abord que sa passion ne lui est pas infligée du dehors; il la choisit' (*PM*, 16). Secondly, Beauvoir's notion of freedom as situational, that is singular ends projected within a given context in the world, recognizes that in certain circumstances the projection of an individual's freedom is radically barred. In order to accommodate this inevitability of failure, the individual needs to posit a goal above and beyond the singular goals by which he or she projects his or her freedom, so ensuring 'le libre mouvement de l'existence': 'Si l'homme veut sauver son existence, ce qu'il est seul à même de faire, il faut que sa spontanéité originelle s'élève à la hauteur d'une liberté morale en se prenant

---

[26] Terry Keefe, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings* (London: Harrap, 1983), p.77.

elle-même pour fin à travers le dévoilement d'un contenu singulier' (*PM*, 42). Rather than an absolute value which is pre-ordained as a future goal towards which humanity must strive, Beauvoir's notion of freedom, as both an absolute goal and the movement towards that goal, is freely and individually chosen: 'Il ne s'agit pas de se rapprocher d'un terme fixé: le Savoir absolu, ou le bonheur de l'homme, ou la perfection de la beauté; alors tout effort humain serait voué à l'échec, car à chaque pas l'horizon recule d'un pas; il s'agit pour l'homme de poursuivre l'expansion de son existence et de récupérer comme absolu cet effort même' (*PM*, 99). Therefore, it cannot be argued either that Beauvoir makes recourse to given values in the traditional sense, or that she entirely liberates herself from the notion of human nature. The metaphysics she proposes straddles both the relative and the absolute, the individual and the universal, and in this way Beauvoir shares a common ground and a common vision with Camus. It is therefore clear that the differences between Camus and Beauvoir are far less extreme than critical readings of Camus's position in relation to contemporary thought would suggest.[27]

Moreover, when Camus's approach in relation to that of his contemporaries is considered in the light of Blanchot's reading of *L'Homme révolté*, the issues which highlighted their dissimilarity no longer operate as critical criteria. Instead, the question of the creation of values comes to the fore. On this issue, Camus's and Beauvoir's ethical positions are drawn into proximity. Despite the difference which clearly exists between

---

[27] Cruickshank's critical study is unusual in the history of interpretation of *L'Homme révolté* because he resists the temptation to take sides. Rather, he offers a critical assessment of Camus's theory of revolt in the light of the contemporary critical debate. His work is worth highlighting at this juncture because it offers a more nuanced reading of Camus's position on the issue of given values than many of the critical studies published since on Camus's ethics. Contrasting Camus's notion of human nature with the accepted existentialist viewpoint, Cruickshank writes: 'Existentialism denies the existence of a permanent and universal human nature. It also denies the existence of permanent and universal values deriving from such a concept [...] [Camus] is not saying that such values are absolute or eternal in the traditional sense. But contrary to Sartre he finds their pre-existence, in some form, essential to his picture of what it means to be a human being', Cruickshank, p.97.

Camus's conception of values and that of Beauvoir, by which I am referring to Beauvoir's emphatic rejection of pre-existing values in contrast with Camus's acceptance of them, both their ethical perspectives are founded on a movement of affirmation by the individual consciousness in response to alterity. Indeed, it is clear from this comparative reading that both Beauvoir and Camus respond to the nihilism of human existence through the positive affirmation of values. For Camus this is the value of human nature, for Beauvoir this takes the form of freedom. In both cases, the movement of affirmation represents a starting point, a limit, which creates a distance between being and nothingness, Self and Other, so providing the basis for an ethics. Although Camus and Beauvoir similarly emphasize the importance of ambiguity and balance, both rely on affirmation as the foundation of their ethical approach. Therefore, despite the fact that contemporary critical discourse privileges the question of given values as the key issue which separates Camus from his existentialist counterparts, in the light of Blanchot's study of *L'Homme révolté*, both Camus and Beauvoir are culpable of adopting a mode of encounter in which the first move is one of self-affirmation, with the corresponding and often violent negation which that entails. Camus and Beauvoir are thus drawn into proximity in their responses to the problem of nihilism. This *rapprochement* would seem to call into question the dominance of the Camus/Sartre paradigm, which continues to polarize intellectual debate today, and to expose its limitations as a hermeneutic perspective which is unable to take account of subsequent shifts in theoretical discourses and literary criticism. Indeed, this will be explored further in the following chapter which addresses the implications of Camus's and Beauvoir's conception of the creation of values for the treatment of alterity in the light of Blanchot's ethical optic.

An exploration of the conceptual roots of Camus's notion of values in his earlier essay 'Remarque sur la révolte' illuminates his conception of horizontal transcendence and his vision of human nature as a value which is both relative, in that it is born out of the absurdity of the human condition, and absolute in that all human beings face the choice of how to respond to the absurdity of their existence. This resonates closely with Beauvoir's idea that all human beings are condemned to be free and her notion of freedom as a value which is chosen and determined as an absolute goal by the individual consciousness. In this sense, the solutions which Camus and Beauvoir offer to the problem of contemporary nihilism both straddle the relative and the absolute in their effort to define an ethics which makes no recourse to absolute ethical frameworks but which nevertheless is universally applicable. This similarity of approach and purpose in Camus's and Beauvoir's thought on the issue of ethical values, which this chapter highlights, calls into question the dominance of a critical paradigm which perpetuates the view that conceptually Camusian revolt and existentialist ethics are radically opposed.

However, in problematizing the distance that critics have maintained between Camus and existentialist thinkers, it is important not to obscure the differences which clearly do exist between them. It is evident from an exploration of Camus's and Beauvoir's conceptions of the creation of ethical values that, although surprisingly similar in a number of ways, they do differ in their understanding and presentation of the values on which they base their ethics. It is not insignificant that Camus openly acknowledges his belief in human nature as a given value because this profoundly influences his treatment of human relations and the problem of failure. Nor is it irrelevant that Beauvoir emphatically rejects the existence of given values. Whilst Camus's

emphasis on the pre-existing value of human nature creates a tension between the absolute and relative terms of his ethical paradigm, which, as I will discuss in Chapter 7, lends a rigidity and inflexibility to his response to the question of violence in contrast to Beauvoir's more pragmatic approach, his focus on affirming the universal value of all human beings and his determination to disrupt the binarism of the master/slave dialectic, arguably opens up an intermediary space between Self and Other, being and non-being, in a way that Beauvoir struggles to do. The ethical nature of Camus's theory of revolt has been a source of controversy for decades. The purpose of the following section is to explore Camus's approach to Self-Other relations in contrast with Beauvoir's concept of intersubjectivity in the light of Blanchot's ethical perspective in order to problematize further the dominance of the Camus/Sartre critical paradigm and to offer an alternative reading of Camus's response to alterity, both in relation to his contemporaries and in terms of one of the key theoretical discourses which underpins modern ethical criticism.

6
Mastery or Slavery: Beyond the Dialectic?

Central to the *Temps modernes* debate is the issue of Camus's credibility as a moral figure and ethical thinker. Highly critical of the position Camus takes up in *L'Homme révolté*, Sartre dismissed Camus's theory of revolt and the mode in which it was presented and defended, as hypocritical and morally aloof. The views expressed by Sartre did much to destroy Camus's reputation. Ostracized from the Parisian élite, silent over the Algerian crisis and increasingly passé in a rapidly changing literary climate, Camus progressively retreated into intellectual obscurity. Marcel Domerc confirms this when he summarizes Camus's place in postwar French literary culture and popular opinion: 'À l'attention captivée qui, au sortir de la guerre et de l'occupation, s'attacha à lui comme à l'un des grands interprètes de la conscience humaine exaspérée, ont succédé le reflux, la prise de distance et même les haussements d'épaules et les ricanements'.[1] Since this period, Camus critics have sought to regain the moral high ground for Camus against Sartre and to re-establish him as a credible moral thinker, whose contribution to ethical thought continues to be relevant to the world in which we live. I would argue that on this issue, as with that of the nature of values, critical appreciation of Camus's contribution to ethics in relation to that of his contemporaries has been skewed by the Camus/Sartre debacle, such that, with some notable exceptions, critics have tended to take up a position in defence of Camus, rather than engage critically with the ethical approach he adopted and proposed.[2] This move on the part of commentators both

---

[1] Domerc, 'Camus est-il dépassé?'. Marc E. Blanchard also reflects on the changes in Camus's popularity over time in his article 'Before Ethics. Camus's "Pudeur"', *Modern Language Notes*, 112 (1997), 666-682 (pp.666-7).

[2] Noudelmann comments: 'On a trop longtemps réduit les rapports entre ces deux auteurs à un dénominateur commun, l'existentialisme, qu'en fait aucun des deux n'assumait vraiment. De même,

presupposes an acceptance of Camus's ethical approach and prevents critical engagement with theoretical discourses which have emerged in subsequent years.

Intervening in this history of interpretation, I would like to argue that a comparative study of Camus's treatment of Self-Other relations and Beauvoir's notion of intersubjectivity offers a new reading which neither caricatures Camus as morally pretentious, nor heralds him as ethically exemplary, but which draws out the shades of difference between his thought and that of his contemporaries in the light of Blanchot's ethical perspective. The purpose of this chapter is therefore firstly to expose the limitations of the Camus/Sartre debate as a critical framework through an exploration of Camus's approach to human encounter in relation to that of Beauvoir, and secondly, to offer a more nuanced reading of Camus's ethical approach than critical discourse has so far provided. Divided into four sections, this chapter will begin by outlining both Sartre's response to Camus's moral stance and the critical reception it has subsequently received. I will then problematize the dominance of the Camus/Sartre paradigm through a comparative reading of Camus's vision of Self-Other relations and Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity. This will reveal a strong correlation in their treatment of alterity and their view that the tension between affirmation and negation must be maintained. Moreover, the differences between Camus's and Beauvoir's approach to the question of otherness, which this non-oppositional study will draw out, serve to nuance critical portrayals of both Camus's ethical stance and his position in relation to his contemporaries. Finally, I will consider Camus's contribution to ethical thought in terms of Blanchot's critical perspective and will discuss the degree to which, in contrast to Beauvoir, Camus can be

---

ramener le différend ultime à l'opposition d'un marxiste et d'un moraliste revient à méconnaître le continuel souci éthique de la pensée sartrienne, et la réflexion camusienne sur l'émancipation sociale', p.134.

seen to open up an alternative ethical space beyond the master/slave dialectic, in which encounter rather than violence is possible.

Critical Response to Camus's Ethical Stance

One of Sartre's central objections to the ethical position Camus stakes out in *L'Homme révolté* was what he regarded as Camus's morally superior and sententious approach to the question of ethical action. Perceiving Camus to have arrogated a position of moral authority, Sartre writes: 'Une dictature violente et cérémonieuse s'est installée en vous, qui s'appuie sur une bureaucratie abstraite et prétend faire régner la loi morale'.[3] Moreover, Sartre suggests that Camus's stance is based not on a coherent philosophical agenda, but on a personal one, so discrediting his ethical proposal: 'vous êtes devenu la proie d'une morne démesure qui masque vos difficultés intérieures et que vous nommez, je crois, mesure méditerranéenne'.[4] In Sartre's view, Camus's theory of revolt constituted more style than substance. In a move which would make the hackles rise on the most moderate Camus supporter, Sartre set out to undermine Camus's ethical position by accusing him of moral hypocrisy. Describing Camus's treatment of Francis Jeanson as profoundly unethical, Sartre argues that his response to Jeanson directly contradicts the ethic of non-violence and non-assimilation for which he makes a stance in *L'Homme révolté*. In terms which are recognizably existentialist, Sartre writes: 'Vous parlez *de lui*, comme d'une soupière ou d'une mandoline; *à lui* jamais. Cela signifie qu'il s'est mis en dehors de l'humain: en votre personne, les résistants, les détenus, les militants et les

---

[3] Sartre, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', p.334.
[4] Ibid., p.334.

pauvres le métamorphosent en caillou'.[5] Underlying Sartre's accusation that Camus does not practise what he preaches is the assertion that very little theory supports what Sartre perceives to be Camus's moralistic zeal: 'Votre morale s'est d'abord changée en moralisme, aujourd'hui elle n'est plus que littérature, demain elle sera peut-être immoralité'.[6] It is clear from this outline of Sartre's response to Camus that his article dealt a serious blow to Camus's credibility as an intellectual and undermined his ethical proposal. I would like to argue that Sartre's intervention in this debate has had a profound impact on critical readings of Camus's theory of revolt. In the following pages, I will explore the way in which discourse in this area has been influenced by the *Temps modernes* polemic.

Early signs of the impact the Camus/Sartre debacle would have on critical opinion are discernible towards the end of the 1950s. In his article on Camus's quarrel with Sartre, A. Blanchet remarks: 'La débauche de moralisme qu'on nous signale chez Camus ne nous fera pas avaler l'immoralisme de Sartre'.[7] Partisan in the extreme, Blanchet's remark gives an indication of the sense of loyalty Sartre's criticism of Camus provoked in some quarters. More significant, perhaps, is Morvan Lebesque's study of Camus, *Albert Camus par lui-même*, which, as the title suggests, attempts to allow Camus's 'authentic' voice to resonate above the *mêlée* of negative criticism which surrounded him throughout the 1950s.[8] Lebesque offers a highly apologetic reading of Camus's contribution to ethical thought, which is, in essence, a response to the criticisms

---

[5] Ibid., p.338. It is worth noting that the word 'caillou' is often used by Sartre to represent or evoke a sense of non-being: the state of objectivation where the Self is reduced to an object in and by the Other's gaze. See *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

[6] Sartre, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', p.353.

[7] Blanchet, 'La Querelle Sartre-Camus', p.274.

[8] Critical of Lebesque's partiality and lack of critical distance, Guissard concludes his article 'Albert Camus moraliste "bourgeois"': 'Au lendemain de la mort de Camus, nous écrivions qu'il n'est pas simple de parler aux hommes. Il est encore moins simple de les entendre'.

made by Sartre almost a decade earlier: 'Rien que de la morale en tout cela, rien que de la bonne conscience, répliquent certains, et, naturellement, l'épithète "bourgeois" couronne ce jugement hâtif. Il n'y a qu'un malheur: ce sont ces gens, et non Camus, qui retardent de quelques décennies'.[9] The implications of adopting the *Temps modernes* debate as a critical paradigm were raised by Lucien Guissard in his review of Lebesque's book, where he outlines the pitfalls of such a hermeneutic approach. Referring to Lebesque's response to the criticisms made about Camus's ethics, Guissard writes: 'Ce qui ne fait, à notre humble avis, qu'une réplique imparfaite aux accusations portées contre la morale de Camus. [...] Je ne suis pas convaincu que Morvan Lebesque ait engagé le dialogue au fond'.[10] By 1966, a shift in critical opinion was clearly beginning to be discernible and the issue of Camus's status as an intellectual became a subject of public and critical debate. In his article, 'Camus est-il dépassé?', Marcel Domerc can be seen to address the criticism levelled at Camus by Sartre and others immediately following the publication of *L'Homme révolté* and to reopen, somewhat tentatively, the question of Camus's credibility as an ethical thinker.[11] Indeed, by 1970 there appears to have been a concerted effort to restore Camus to his rightful place in the French literary canon, and an exploration of the major studies on Camus's ethics over subsequent decades would confirm Robert Kanters' observation in 1970 of a sea change in critical

---

[9] Lebesque, p.178.
[10] Guissard, 'Albert Camus moraliste "bourgeois"'.
[11] Domerc writes: '[O]n découvre vite que dans l'absence de Dieu l'homme n'existe vraiment qu'au prix de se faire et de s'imposer lui-même sa loi, et une dure loi. Il me semble que Sartre et Camus se rejoignent dans cette certitude vitale qu'ils nous ont l'un et l'autre enseignée. [...] Mais ce qui m'atteint au plus vivant [...], c'est de savoir si, pour sauver l'avenir de l'homme, on est justifié d'opprimer et de tuer aujourd'hui des hommes [...]. Question à laquelle est clouée toute l'histoire humaine - du moins la conscience que nous en avons, question plantée aussi en plein cœur de l'œuvre de Camus'.

opinion towards Camus, revealing the degree to which the Camus/Sartre polemic has influenced critical discourse in this field.[12]

Published in 1974, Lev Braun's study, *Witness of Decline: Camus, Moralist of the Absurd*, aims to respond to those critics who, in his view, have misrepresented Camus and his work. Outlining the purpose of his study, Braun writes: 'It is the purpose of this study to follow the development of Camus's ethics and politics in order to show the fallacy of such simplifications and, having restored Camus to all his complexity and ambiguities, to try and appraise what remains valid today'.[13] Bernard Gros similarly, and somewhat defiantly, posits Camus's thinking in opposition to that of Sartre: 'Aux théories selon lesquelles il est rationnel d'assassiner une partie de l'humanité pour assurer le "bonheur" socialiste du reste, Albert Camus a opposé un non possumus. Il a refusé, comme son héros Diego, [...] de baisser les yeux devant une peste idéologique'.[14] Moreover, describing Sartre as 'ce valet des dieux de la Violence et du Totalitarisme',[15] Gros engages in an eulogistic account of Camus's theory of ethical revolt:

> Même dans la perspective du meurtre nihiliste, où le révolté sacrifie sa vie pour se réconcilier avec son acte meurtrier, la liberté de tuer n'est pas compatible avec la révolte, dont la profonde logique est celle, non de la destruction, mais de la création, non de la mort, mais de la vie. [...] Au-delà du nihilisme, il y a donc une pensée révoltée qui peut sauver le monde du meurtre, qui est le mouvement même de la vie, amour et fécondité.[16]

---

[12] Robert Kanters, 'Pour et contre Camus: les accélérations de la gloire', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 5-11 January 1970.
[13] Braun, p.13.
[14] Gros, p.6.
[15] Ibid., p.22.
[16] Ibid., pp.35-6. In a similar tone, Dupuy writes: 'cette conscience indignée, cette voix révoltée invite non au repli sur soi mais à l'action, sauf à ne pas oublier en chemin les exigences morales qui l'ont suscitée',

Over the last decade, studies dedicated to the question of Camus's ethics have done little to buck the critical trend that I have highlighted. Tony Judt offers a highly apologetic reading of Camus which clearly attempts to reinstate him as the moral, but misunderstood, figure of his time.[17] Likewise, Eric Bronner's work, *Camus, Portrait of a Moralist*, sets out to defend Camus's ethical integrity against Sartre.[18] More recently, Denis Charbit similarly returned to the battleground of the 1950s, rebutting Sartre's criticism of Camus as morally austere and arguing that Camus had no intention of being the sanctimonious voice of his era: 'Soucieux néanmoins de ne pas apparaître comme le censeur de son temps doublé d'un prophète de malheur redoutant le siècle à venir, Camus relève le défi et pose dans le chapitre qui constitue l'aboutissement du livre des fondements d'une orientation normative en politique qu'il intitule de façon sibylline: "La pensée de midi"'.[19] It is clear from this exploration of critical reception to Camus's ethics that, preoccupied with the agenda of the *Temps modernes* polemic, critics have tended to oversimplify Camus's position in relation to that of his contemporaries, with the result

---

p.239. He then goes on to argue in favour of Camus's moral position: 'Dénoncer le scandale n'est pas refuser l'action. Crier est agir mais c'est agir au plan pathétique', p.245. Five years later, East also adopted the terms of the Camus/Sartre debate in his reading of Camus's ethics and argued in favour of Camus's position as ethically engaged rather than morally aloof: 'Bien que l'éthique de Camus soit une éthique de la modération, cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle produise une politique de modération médiocre, ou encore une politique d'abstention. Au contraire, la mesure envisagée par Camus est faite de lucidité, elle rompt avec la monotonie de l'habitude et s'engage à travailler dans l'aujourd'hui de la vie', p.100.

[17] Judt writes: 'In an era of self-promoting media intellectuals, vacantly preening before the admiring mirror of their electronic audience, Camus's patent honesty [...] has the appeal of the genuine article, a handcrafted masterwork in a world of plastic reproductions', *The Burden of Responsibility*, p.134. Highlighting the partiality of Judt's reading of Camus and the lack of critical rigour with which he evaluates Camus's contribution to twentieth-century French thought, Colin Davis comments: 'The essays are all informative and nearly persuasive, but Judt nevertheless simplifies and schematizes his subjects by drawing too-neat oppositions between their integrity and the failings of the largely anonymous dullard intellectuals who are judged to have abdicated responsibility', review of *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century*, by Tony Judt (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), *French Studies*, 54 (2000), 404-405 (p.405).

[18] Bronner, pp.88-105.

[19] Charbit, p.12. Charbit later writes of Camus: 'Il était exclu, lui semblait-il, que la gauche non-communiste puisse lui reprocher de s'abstenir et de se réfugier dans la tour d'ivoire de l'art ou de la fiction. Camus ne s'était jamais autant engagé', p.39.

that the hermeneutics of Camus's ethical thought has become partisan, unnuanced and lacking in critical distance. I will demonstrate the limitations of this interpretive framework and offer a more nuanced reading of Camus's ethics, by engaging in a comparative study of Camus's vision of Self-Other relations and Beauvoir's treatment of human encounter.

The Proximity between Camus's and Beauvoir's Vision of Encounter

As I discussed in the previous chapter, Camus's concept of the universal value of human nature binds the individual in community with other human beings: 'C'est pour toutes les existences en même temps que l'esclave se dresse, lorsqu'il juge que, par tel ordre, quelque chose en lui est nié qui ne lui appartient pas seulement, mais qui est un lieu commun où tous les hommes, même celui qui l'insulte et l'opprime, ont une communauté prête' (*E*, 425-426). Camus's notion of a 'communauté naturelle' (*E*, 426), not to be confused with Beauvoir's concept of a 'communion des libertés' (*PM*, 83),[20] is defined not in terms of common interests, but in terms of common worth: 'Il ne s'agit pas non plus du sentiment de la communauté des intérêts. Nous pouvons trouver révoltante, en effet, l'injustice imposée à des hommes que nous considérons comme des adversaires' (*E*, 426). The vision of human community Camus offers in *L'Homme révolté* is one in which all human beings are united, irrespective of their status, difference, or actions. In this way, Camus's notion of revolt collapses the binary opposition between victim and

[20] Describing the *mauvaise foi* of the *passioné*, Beauvoir writes: 'on considère comme ennemie la solitude où cette subjectivité s'enferme; s'étant retirée en une région singulière du monde, ne cherchant pas à communiquer avec les autres hommes, cette liberté ne se réalise que comme séparation; tout dialogue, toute relation avec le passioné est impossible; aux yeux de ceux qui souhaitent une communion des libertés, il apparaît donc un étranger, un obstacle', p.83. It is worth noting, however, that Beauvoir categorically rejects the notion of human solidarity on the grounds that there can be no *a priori* relations between individual consciousnesses: 'Une morale de l'ambiguïté, ce sera une morale qui refusera de nier à priori que des existants séparés puissent en même temps être liés entre eux, que leurs libertés singulières puissent forger des lois valables pour tous', *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, pp.24-5.

executioner.[21] Camus's belief that '[i]l y a une complicité qui unit à la victime le bourreau' (*E*, 1684) is illustrated poignantly in *Lettres à un ami allemand* where the narrator explains to his German correspondent: 'nous voulons vous détruire dans votre puissance sans vous mutiler dans votre âme' (*E*, 243). Resisting the dialectics of contemporary politics, Camus wrote in his *Carnets* in September 1945: 'Antinomies politiques. Nous sommes dans un monde où il faut choisir d'être victime ou bourreau – et rien d'autre. Ce choix n'est pas facile. Il m'a toujours semblé qu'en fait il n'y avait pas de bourreaux, mais seulement des victimes. Au bout du compte, bien entendu. Mais c'est une vérité qui n'est pas répandue'.[22] An issue which Camus discussed at length in his controversial series of articles 'Ni victimes ni bourreaux' in 1946, the responsibility for the Other, which Camus believed the movement of revolt to reveal, constituted a new approach to Self-Other relations and differed radically from the vision of human encounter Sartre had elaborated three years previously in *L'Être et le néant*, based as it is on the dialectical economy of subject-object.

In contrast to Sartre's ontological perspective, Camus's notion of the Self's relation with the Other privileges the value of human nature above all else and seeks to uphold that value, even in the negation of revolt: 'le mouvement qui dresse l'individu pour la défense d'une dignité commune à tous les hommes' (*E*, 428). The corollary of this is that, for Camus, the *mode* of revolt must in no way transgress the limit which is revealed in the act of revolt: 'Pour être, l'homme doit se révolter, mais sa révolte doit

---

[21] East highlights the way in which Camus's notion of human nature disrupts the dialectic and unites human beings in a common identity: 'Au spectacle de l'oppression d'autrui, le témoin peut se révolter. Il lui arrive même de se révolter contre l'injustice infligée à son ennemi. Dans le fond, on reconnaît une même nature commune au supplicié, au spectateur et même au bourreau', pp.74-5. It is, however, important to note that Camus's position on the inclusivity of the human community alters when he comes to discuss the issue of murder. This is discussed in more detail in the final chapter of this study, see pp.185-220.

[22] Camus, *Carnets II*, p.141.

respecter la limite qu'elle découvre en elle-même et où les hommes, en se rejoignant, commencent d'être' (*E*, 431). Consequently, the affirmation of revolt must be held in balance with the negation it inevitably entails. Addressing the nihilism associated with contemporary politics, Camus argues that the fault of revolutionary ideologies lies in their pursuit of totality and their failure to maintain the ambiguity of the human condition:

> L'esclave commence par réclamer justice et finit par vouloir la royauté. Il lui faut dominer à son tour. [...] Ceci n'ira pas sans de terribles conséquences, dont nous ne connaissons encore que quelques-unes. Mais ces conséquences ne sont point dues à la révolte elle-même, ou, du moins, elles ne viennent au jour que dans la mesure où le révolté oublie ses origines, se lasse de la dure tension entre oui et non et s'abandonne enfin à la négation de toute chose ou à la soumission totale. (*E*, 437)

Camus therefore sets up revolt as an ethical alternative to revolution, and the *pensée de midi* which he elaborates proposes a measured and balanced approach to human relations, in contrast to the appropriative and reductive dynamic of the Hegelian dialectic.[23] It is clear from an exploration of critical studies on Camus's ethics since the 1950s that critics have largely accepted Camus's concept of revolt as an ethical solution to the problem of nihilism. Moreover, it is evident that Camus's moral integrity has been simplistically asserted above and in opposition to that of Sartre. Yet an exploration of Beauvoir's approach to Self-Other relations reveals a strong correlation between

---

[23] The dichotomy Camus establishes between revolt and revolution in *L'Homme révolté* was a particular source of contention between Camus and contemporary existentialists. However, as I will explore more fully in the following chapter, a comparative reading of Camus's and Beauvoir's approaches to the question of violence reveals far more proximity on the question of historical absolutism, which is the issue underlying this distinction, than either they themselves or subsequent generations of critics have recognized. One obvious reason for this is the historical and political context at the time.

Camus's concept of affirmative negation and her own existentialist ethic of ambiguity. As I will show, like Camus, Beauvoir stresses both the interdependence of Self and Other, and the need to respect the freedom of *autrui* in order to maintain the possibility of selfhood.[24] In order to expose the superficiality of the Camus/Sartre paradigm, I will now explore Beauvoir's approach to human encounter in more detail.

Founding her ethical paradigm on the ontology that Sartre elaborated in *L'Etre et le néant*, Beauvoir adopts Sartre's notion of subjectivity as the upsurge of freedom through the objectivation of the Other and the re-orientation of the world. Describing this appropriative movement in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*, Beauvoir writes: 'C'est parce que ma subjectivité n'est pas inertie, repliement sur soi, séparation, mais au contraire mouvement vers l'autre, que la différence entre l'autre et moi s'abolit et que je peux appeler l'autre mien; le lien qui m'unit à l'autre, moi seul peux le créer; je le crée du fait que je ne suis pas une chose mais un projet de moi vers l'autre, une transcendance' (*PM*, 210). In this way, the parameters of Self are defined and determined through the movement of transcendence and the delimitation of the Other's freedom. Permanently embattled, the Sartrian subject is in perpetual danger from the hostile gaze of the Other, whose own desire to *be* threatens to objectify me at every moment and to freeze my possibilities of being in the world. Describing this process of objectivation, Sartre writes: 'Ainsi tout à coup un objet est apparu qui m'a volé le monde. Tout est en place, tout existe toujours pour moi, mais tout est parcouru par une fuite invisible et figée vers un objet nouveau. L'apparition d'autrui dans le monde correspond donc à un glissement figé de tout

---

[24] In this sense, Raymond Gay-Crosier's remark that for Camus 'il n'y a pas de *je* sans *autre*', rings true for both Camus and Beauvoir. See Gay-Crosier, 'La Révolte génératrice et régénératrice', p.126. Indeed, Beauvoir writes in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas*: 'je ne peux rien ni pour autrui, ni contre autrui [...]. Car quoi que je fasse, j'existe devant lui', p.283.

l'univers, à une décentration du monde qui mine par en dessous la centralisation que j'opère dans le même temps'.[25] However, whilst Beauvoir founds her ethics on the basis of Existentialism, it would be misguided to conflate her approach to the issue of alterity with that of Sartre. Indeed, Beauvoir's purpose in writing *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* was precisely to explore further some of the issues which had arisen from her novel *Le Sang des autres* in which she sets out to address the problem of how we relate to others within complex social situations.[26]

In *L'Être et le néant*, Sartre argues that in order to protect my freedom and assert myself as subject, I must annihilate the alterity of the Other through the process of objectivation. The alienation and hostility the Other represents for Sartre is summed up in his oft-cited remark: 'ma chute originelle c'est l'existence de l'autre'.[27] Although Beauvoir subscribes to Sartre's belief that the Self defines itself in relation to the Other, she questions his intensely negative attitude towards the role the Other plays in delimiting my being and rejects such an approach as naïve: 'Mais cette haine est naïve et l'envie se conteste aussitôt elle-même; si vraiment j'étais tout, il n'y aurait rien à côté de

---

[25] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p.295. Alain Finkielkraut in his comparatively recent work *The Wisdom of Love* explores the question of alterity and, with reference to the experience of objectivation which to a large extent defines Sartre's treatment of the Other, writes: 'I am mired and dispossessed, fallen and alienated: the simple fact of being seen leaves me frozen, trapped in and robbed of myself. Under the gaze of the other I become this or that, with no hold over this petrified reality', Alain Finkielkraut, *The Wisdom of Love*, trans. by Kevin O'Neill and David Suchoff (Lincoln and London: Nebraska University Press, 1997), p.10.

[26] Keefe outlines the background to *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* and Beauvoir's motivation for formulating an existentialist ethics in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings*, p.74. Describing her motivation for writing *Le Sang des autres*, Beauvoir writes in *La Force des choses*: 'J'avais terminé *L'Invitée* pendant l'été 1941; mais dès le mois de janvier de cette année-là, ce roman était pour moi de l'histoire ancienne. J'avais hâte de parler des questions qui aujourd'hui me tenaient à cœur. La principale demeurait ma relation à autrui; mais j'en comprenais mieux qu'autrefois la complexité', p.555. See also Elizabeth Fallaize's third chapter which focuses on *Le Sang des autres*, pp.44-66; Alison S. Fell, 'The Perils of a Room of One's Own: Space in Simone de Beauvoir's *L'Invitée*, *Le Sang des autres* and *Les Bouches inutiles*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 39 (2003), 269-79 and Alex Hughes, *Simone de Beauvoir: 'Le Sang des autres'* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1995).

[27] Sartre, *L'Être et le néant*, p.302.

moi, le monde serait vide, il n'y aurait rien à posséder et je ne serais rien moi-même' (*PM*, 90). Beauvoir argues that, since it is only possible for me to project my freedom in the world by defining myself in terms of what I am not, it is vital that the Other is equally able to assert his or her freedom and possibility: 'cette forme qui vient de surgir n'est distincte que si le fond qui la supporte est lui-même distinct comme fond' (*PM*, 216). For Beauvoir, hatred of alterity is therefore short-sighted because it ignores my dependence on the Other both for my being and for my freedom to engage in the world: 'Vouloir qu'il y ait de l'être, c'est aussi vouloir qu'il existe des hommes par qui et pour qui le monde soit doué de significations humaines; on ne peut révéler le monde que sur un fond de monde révélé par les autres hommes; aucun projet ne se définit que par son interférence avec d'autres projets; faire "qu'il y ait" de l'être, c'est communiquer à travers l'être avec autrui' (*PM*, 90). Developing Sartre's position further, Beauvoir emphasizes the status of the Other as constitutive of my subjectivity and advocates both respect for the Other's alterity and responsibility for his or her freedom: 'Ce n'est qu'en tant qu'étranger, interdit, en tant que libre, que l'autre se dévoile comme autre; et l'aimer authentiquement, c'est l'aimer dans son altérité et dans cette liberté par laquelle il s'échappe. L'amour est alors renoncement à toute possession, à toute confusion; on renonce à être afin qu'il y ait cet être qu'on n'est pas' (*PM*, 85). In this sense, Beauvoir can be seen to move towards an ethical position which seeks to counterbalance the interests of the Self with the needs of the Other.[28]

---

[28] Beauvoir's struggle with this issue and her shifts in position on it can be seen in her fiction. In particular, *L'Invitée* can be read as an attempt to banish the Other, whilst *Le Sang des autres* represents an attempt to establish a balance between Self and Other. Commenting on the difference between these two texts, Fallaize writes: 'The subject of her first novel, however, was not easy to conciliate with her new conviction, and it was only with *The Blood of Others*, begun in the autumn of 1941 and written entirely during the period of the German occupation of France, that Beauvoir was able to approach the theme of the

It is clear from this juxtaposition of Camus's vision for Self-Other relations and Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity that there is a similarity in the way in which they approach the question of alterity. Both Camus and Beauvoir recognize that the value which is founded in the movement of affirmation on which their ethical approaches are based, is common to all human beings. Whilst they differ in their conceptions of this universality, the implications of which I will discuss in a moment, they both recognize the interdependence, or in Camus's case *complicité*, which exists between Self and Other. The modes of encounter they consequently advocate both emphasize the importance of maintaining the delicate balance between negation and affirmation. This proximity in their response to the problem of contemporary nihilism and their vision for ethical encounter calls into question the dominance of a critical paradigm which interprets Camus's ethics in terms of the opposition of the *Temps modernes* debate. Whilst there are differences in Camus's and Beauvoir's conception of ethical values, which, as I will discuss in a moment, do inflect their treatment of alterity, a comparative reading of their ethical positions does not support the critical consensus which has come to dominate discourse in this field. As I intimated above, not only does this contrastive approach problematize the usefulness of the Camus/Sartre polemic as a hermeneutic framework, it also allows for a more nuanced assessment of Camus's ethical stance. I will now consider how their notions of the creation of ethical values inflect the way in which they respond to the problem of alterity.

---

individual's responsibility to the community', p.44. See also Davis, *Ethical Issues in Twentieth-Century French Fiction*, pp.86-7.

Morally opposed or marginally different?

It is evident from a comparative reading of Camus's theory of revolt and Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity that their responses to the problem of nihilism are remarkably similar. Both philosophical perspectives are founded on affirmation and both seek to delimit the negation which the assertion of ethical values generates. However, although Camus and Beauvoir are drawn into proximity through their desire to maintain the ambiguity of the human condition, the differences between their conceptions of how values are created can be seen to influence their approach to the question of alterity. Whilst Beauvoir looks towards a mode of encounter which is more reminsicent of a Levinasian approach than it is of Sartre, she does nevertheless continue to operate, in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* at least, in the binary terms of Sartre's subject-object economy. Faithful to Sartre's view of human relations as asymmetrical, that is, that an individual consciousness cannot simultaneously be both the subject and the object term of the intersubjective relationship, Beauvoir maintains that ethical action and the failure it implies must be negotiated through the inherently reversible and integrally dynamic relation between Self and Other. Commenting on the interdependence between myself and others, Beauvoir remarks: 'le rapport moi-autrui est aussi indissoluble que le rapport sujet-objet' (*PM*, 92). In this ontological context, action would only be entirely ethical if it took place through the existential conversion of those who oppress. However, Beauvoir dismisses this prospect as utopian and turns her attention to what she perceives to be a more realistic ethical approach to historical action: 'Pour que l'action libératrice fût une action intégralement morale, il faudrait qu'elle se réalisât à travers une conversion des oppresseurs: alors s'effectuerait une réconciliation de toutes les libertés. Mais personne

n'ose plus s'abandonner aujourd'hui à ces rêveries utopistes' (*PM*, 120). Since freedom and subjectivity can only be assumed through the transcendence and objectivation of the Other, Beauvoir concludes that the 'facticité' (*PM*, 121), or physical presence in the world, of the Other must be acted upon in order to uphold liberty as a value. The oppressed must therefore become the oppressor in his or her turn: 'Il ne reste à l'opprimé qu'une solution: c'est de nier l'harmonie de cette humanité dont on prétend l'exclure, c'est de faire la preuve qu'il est homme et qu'il est libre en se révoltant contre les tyrans. [...] c'est l'opprimé qui se réalise comme liberté positive et ouverte, c'est l'oppresseur qui devient un obstacle, une chose' (*PM*, 104-5). Whilst Beauvoir recognizes that this approach to ethical action perpetuates the very oppression she condemns,[29] her conceptual paradigm of human relations does not easily allow for an understanding of the Other as radically other and beyond objectivation.

However, Beauvoir did come close to a recognition of the Other's alterity, in the Levinasian sense. This is evident in the notion of reciprocity which she developed during the 1940s and which she elaborates further in her later work *Le Deuxième Sexe*. Fullbrook and Fullbrook argue that in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* Beauvoir focuses on the negative aspect of intersubjectivity, whereas in her later work she explores the more positive potential of the subject-object relationship.[30] In *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Beauvoir develops her study of social oppression and considers the extent to which the

[29] Beauvoir writes: 'Et sans doute n'est-il pas question de reculer devant ces conséquences, car la mauvaise volonté de l'oppresseur met chacun dans l'alternative d'être ennemi des opprimés s'il ne l'est de leur tyran; il faut évidemment choisir de sacrifier celui qui est un ennemi de l'homme; mais le fait est qu'on se trouve acculé, pour conquérir la liberté de tous, à traiter certains hommes en choses', *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p.121.

[30] Fullbrook & Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction*, p.108. This said, evidence that Beauvoir did nevertheless look towards an equal encounter between Self and Other in her earlier work can be found in *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* where she writes: 'il faut être capable de maintenir face à face ces deux libertés qui semblent s'exclure: celle de l'autre, et la mienne; il faut que je me saisisse à la fois comme objet et comme liberté', p.277.

reversibility of the intersubjective relationship allows for a second mode of encounter where, rather than seek to assert themselves over *autrui*, individuals or groups opt to treat one another as both subject and object, equal freedoms which are simultaneously, rather than successively, 'original sources of value and of meaning'.[31] Exploring the possibility of 'des amours à égalité'[32] within the specific context of love and relationships, Beauvoir writes: 'L'amour authentique devrait être fondé sur la reconnaissance réciproque de deux libertés; chacun des amants s'éprouverait alors comme soi-même et comme l'autre; aucun n'abdiquerait sa transcendance, aucun ne se mutilerait; tous deux dévoileraient ensemble dans le monde des valeurs et des fins'.[33] Discussing the reciprocity of this 'libre rapport'[34] in relation to female independence more generally in her conclusion, Beauvoir remarks:

> Affranchir la femme, c'est refuser de l'enfermer dans les rapports qu'elle soutient avec l'homme, mais non les nier; qu'elle se pose pour soi elle n'en continuera pas moins à exister aussi pour lui: se reconnaissant mutuellement comme sujet chacun demeurera cependant pour l'autre un autre; la réciprocité de leurs relations ne supprimera pas les miracles qu'engendre la division des êtres humains en deux catégories séparées.[35]

However, although this development clearly marks an important shift in Beauvoir's treatment of the Other and displays a desire to reject the distinction between subjectivity and objectivity, the integrality of transcendence to her concept of Self-Other relations and her rejection of given values creates an ethics which privileges the status of the Other

---

[31] Fullbrook and Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction*, p.108.
[32] Simone de Beauvoir, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1949), p.580.
[33] Ibid., p.579.
[34] Ibid., p.617.
[35] Ibid., p.662.

in order to safeguard and sustain the freedom of the Self. Consequently, her approach can only gesture towards a more ethical mode of encounter, rather than open up an alternative space in which the Self can welcome the Other.[36] In this sense, Terry Keefe is justified in questioning the motives behind Beauvoir's recommendation of altruisim.[37]

Like Beauvoir, Camus advocated an ethics which sought to maintain the tension between negation and affirmation. However, I would like to argue that Camus's conception of ethical values allowed him to explore an ethical dimension which the intersubjectivity of Beauvoir's heavily Sartrian approach made it more difficult for her to do. Whereas the emphasis for Beauvoir rests on the intentionality of the value of freedom, which is chosen and founded by the individual consciousness across the liberty of *autrui*, Camus focuses on the given value of human nature which is revealed in the movement of revolt. Significantly different from Beauvoir's principle of freedom, which requires the Other to be free in order for me to assert my liberty, Camus's notion of revolt reveals the value of every human being, and therefore the respect for alterity he advocates is less driven by self-interest, than by a recognition of a shared identity and a common worth. Camus writes: 'On notera d'abord que le mouvement de révolte n'est pas, dans son essence, un mouvement égoïste. [...] Il y a seulement identification de

---

[36] Despite the optimistic, if not idealistic, tone of the closing chapters of *Le Deuxième Sexe*, Beauvoir's literary texts reveal the vision of human relations which she elaborates in these pages to be a utopian and unlivable ideal. See Elizabeth Fallaize and in particular her discussions of *Le Sang des autres*, pp.44-66, and *Tous les hommes sont mortels*, pp.67-87, of which she writes: 'Human relations do not emerge well from *All Men are Mortal*. This is partly intended as an illustration of the impossibility of relations between a mortal and an immortal being, but there is virtually no counterpart showing that human beings, conversely, *can* find reciprocity', p.84.

[37] It is worth noting that Beauvoir has been criticized for advocating an ethics based on and motivated by self-interest. Keefe objects to Beauvoir's recommendation that we should promote the development, health and well-being of others, only because we need them to be free to validate our own choices, on the grounds that this has nothing at all to do with ethics, but simply a matter of prudence and self-interest, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings*, p.78. Beauvoir does defend herself and Existentialism against this charge of solipsism in *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* where she writes: 's'il est vrai que tout projet émane d'une subjectivité, il est vrai aussi que ce mouvement subjectif pose de soi-même un dépassement de la subjectivité', p.91.

destinées et prise de parti. L'individu n'est donc pas, à lui seul, cette valeur qu'il veut défendre. Il faut, au moins, tous les hommes pour la composer. Dans la révolte, l'homme se dépasse en autrui et, de ce point de vue, la solidarité humaine est métaphysique' (*E*, 426). This movement towards the Other as integrally valuable in his or her own right, independent from and yet in solidarity with me, transgresses the boundaries of Self in an expression of identity: 'La révolte au contraire fracture l'être et l'aide à déborder' (*E*, 427).

Profoundly critical of the master/slave dialectic, Camus's vision of revolt is of a mode of encounter which recognizes the implicit value of both Self and Other. In this way, Camus seeks to disrupt the asymmetrical opposition of subject-object on which Sartrian Existentialism and Beauvoir's ethical paradigm is based: 'Le révolté exige sans doute une certaine liberté pour lui-même; mais en aucun cas, s'il est conséquent, le droit de détruire l'être et la liberté de l'autre. Il n'humilie personne. La liberté qu'il réclame, il la revendique pour tous; celle qu'il refuse, il l'interdit à tous. Il n'est pas seulement esclave contre maître, mais aussi homme contre le monde du maître et de l'esclave' (*E*, 688).[38] In this sense, Camus can be seen to go beyond the parameters which distinguish Self from Other. Far from morally opposed, Camus differs from Beauvoir in his search for a common space where human identity, rather than difference, defines the way in which we relate to one another. It is in this respect that Camus could perhaps most accurately be described as more 'prescient' than his existentialist counterparts.[39] Indeed, the question of how Camus's ethics stand in relation to the ethical concerns of future

---

[38] See also *Essais*: 'Il y a donc, grâce à la révolte, quelque chose de plus dans l'histoire que le rapport maîtrise et servitude', p.688.
[39] Bronner writes in his justification of Camus's position against Sartre: 'Camus was [...] more prescient than Sartre', p.103.

generations of literary theorists and critics is an important one and central to an understanding of the contribution he has made to twentieth-century ethical thought. In the final part of this chapter, I will therefore consider Camus's treatment of alterity, in relation to that of his contemporaries, through Blanchot's theoretical optic, in order to assess the significance of Camus's ethical perspective for the modern reader.

Beyond the Dialectic? In Search of an Alternative Ethical Space

Blanchot's criticism that Camus, despite his good intentions, engages in 'le jeu du nihilisme',[40] has profound implications for the extent to which Camus's perspective can be perceived as ethical. Blanchot is not alone in identifying this problem at the heart of Camus's theory of revolt. Raymond Gay-Crosier in his comparative study of the notion of sovereignty in *L'Homme révolté* and the work of Georges Bataille acknowledges the dialectical relations Camusian revolt establishes between Self and Other: 'Le paradoxe du sujet en quête de sa souveraineté est qu'il doit nier le donné pour se donner, nier autrui pour s'affirmer […] Transposé au plan de l'histoire, la négation affirmative qu'opère l'individu aux prises avec le monde est présentée par Bataille comme conflit constitutif'.[41] The affirmative negation which Camusian revolt constitutes requires the negation of the Other in order for the Self to reveal and affirm his or her given value. In this sense, the Self in Camus's schema is the privileged term and Camus himself seems to confirm this when he writes: 'le révolté défend ce qu'il est. [...] Il vise à faire reconnaître quelque chose qu'il a, et qui a déjà été reconnu par lui'. He goes on to write that the rebel 'lutte pour l'intégrité d'une partie de son être. Il ne cherche pas d'abord à conquérir, mais à imposer' (*E*, 427). However, despite the affirmation of Self on which

---

[40] Blanchot, 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', p.856.
[41] Gay-Crosier, 'Révolte, souveraineté et jeu chez Bataille et Camus', pp.21-2.

Camus's notion of revolt is founded, I would argue that Camus does seek a mode of human encounter which is beyond difference. In this sense, Camus's ethical vision is closer to Blanchot's perspective than his reading would suggest, and resonates more closely with modern ethical concerns than does Beauvoir's existentialist ethics.

Predicated on the positive value of human nature, the *complicité* revealed in the movement of revolt, in Camus's view, draws all human beings into community. In this sense, it can be compared to the vision of ethical encounter which Blanchot evokes in 'Tu peux tuer cet homme'. Blanchot envisages an alternative space, which both emerges in the moment of encounter and precedes it, where the Self recognizes in the Other's fragility and nakedness the alterity, or nihilism as Blanchot describes it, which also defines his or her own human condition: 'Ce moment [...] se situe à la limite mouvante où, du fond de la profondeur originelle, région toujours autre, espace du vide et de la dispersion, ce vide, cette nudité devient le visage nu de la rencontre et la surprise du face à face'.[42] However, whereas the space Blanchot envisages is situated before being, in the realm of Sisyphus where the frailty of human existence is exposed and welcomed in all its vulnerability, the space Camus looks for is one of affirmation and solidarity. Like Blanchot, Camus seeks a mode of encounter in which the violence which had come to characterize contemporary nihilism could be tempered and constrained. But whereas Camus sets a limit to the negation of absurdity, Blanchot refuses to establish a false distance between human existence and the nihilism of the Absurd. In Blanchot's vision of ethical encounter, the Self, in the moment of and before violence, resists the desire to negate in order to affirm, to reduce to nothing in order to bring into being: 'c'est en quelque sorte dans l'acte de mort seulement que cette nudité, cette simplicité se révèle

[42] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1062.

comme ce que la mort détruit mais n'atteint pas. [...] Comme s'il fallait donc l'exercice du pouvoir absolu pour rencontrer la limite de ce pouvoir, non plus sous sa seule forme négative, mais comme une étrange affirmation qui échappe et à l'être et à la négation de l'être'.[43] Therefore, although Blanchot acknowledges that there is an unavoidable degree of negation involved in being human, his ethical approach refuses to dissimulate the nihilism of the human condition in acts of affirmation which seek to assert the Self because of the violation of alterity which he believes this to entail. Building on Blanchot's critique of Camus's ethics, I would now like to explore further the intermediary space which Camus's theory of revolt seems to open up. I will do so through an exploration both of his *pensée de midi* and of the short fiction he wrote in the years succeeding his essay on revolt, which offers a unique insight into his approach to Self-Other relations.

The limit which Camus believes to be expressed in the movement of revolt is designed to hold in tension affirmation and negation, Self and Other. Both Camus and Beauvoir use similar discourse to describe what they think it means to balance these competing tensions. Camus refers to it as 'un conflit constant' (*E*, 704), 'une pure tension' (*E*, 704) and 'un interminable effort' (*E*, 704), whilst Beauvoir describes it as an 'incessante conquête' (*PM*, 120) and states that 'l'homme doit accepter la tension de la lutte' (*PM*, 120). However, whereas Beauvoir's theory of intersubjectivity envisages the dynamism of the subject-object relation in terms of alternation between these two modes of being through the successive upsurges of different freedoms, it is clear from Camus's discussion of the *pensée de midi* that the limit he conceives of offers a central point of fixity beyond and between the spaces of Self and Other. Comparing the given value of

[43] Ibid., p.1064.

human nature and its implications for human relations with the swing of a pendulum, Camus explains: 'En histoire, comme en psychologie, la révolte est un pendule déréglé qui court aux amplitudes les plus folles parce qu'il cherche son rythme profond. Mais ce dérèglement n'est pas complet. Il s'accomplit autour d'un pivot. En même temps qu'elle suggère une nature commune des hommes, la révolte porte au jour la mesure et la limite qui sont au principe de cette nature' (*E*, 697). The pivot which Camus's concept of ethical values provides and which transcends the boundaries of Self and Other, seeks an intermediary space, a third way, which 'ouvre un chemin difficile où les contradictions peuvent se vivre et se dépasser' (*E*, 693). Advocating revolt as an ethical approach which occupies this intermediary space in a sub-chapter which is optimistically entitled 'Au-delà du nihilisme', Camus writes: 'Il y a donc, pour l'homme, une action et une pensée possibles au niveau moyen qui est le sien' (*E*, 705). It is in this alternative space, between and beyond the spaces of master and slave, Self and Other, that Camus envisages the future of a new France and a new Europe to lie: 'Nos frères respirent sous le même ciel que nous, la justice est vivante. Alors naît la joie étrange qui aide à vivre et à mourir et que nous refuserons désormais de renvoyer à plus tard. [...] Avec elle, au long des combats, nous referons l'âme de ce temps et une Europe qui, elle, n'exclura rien' (*E*, 708-9).

Finally, far more ambiguous and subdued than his essay on revolt, the collection of short stories he wrote during the 1950s offers an insight into Camus's thought and illuminates his search for an ethical mode of encounter in what proved to be a turbulent time for Camus, both personally and politically. Written subsequently to Blanchot's critique of Camus's ethical position in *L'Homme révolté* and *Les Justes*, *L'Exil et le*

royaume nuances and complements Blanchot's reading of Camus's approach and can be seen to explore and to develop further the 'individualisme altruiste' (*E*, 702) implicit in Camus's theory of revolt. In particular 'La Femme adultère' reveals Camus's effort to find an alternative space of encounter beyond the parameters of subject and object. This narrative tells the tale of Janine, who accompanies her husband Marcel, a cloth merchant, on a sales and marketing trip to the outlying villages on the southern Algerian plateaux in order to generate business. Fundamentally, it is a story about lack; lack of communication, lack of love, lack of self-esteem, lack of self-identity within a relationship which in terms of human intimacy promises much. A bleak portrayal of Marcel and Janine's relationship, we are told that 'il ne lui donnait pas d'autre joie que de se savoir nécessaire. Sans doute ne l'aimait-il pas. L'amour, même haineux, n'a pas ce visage renfrogné'.[44] In Janine and Marcel, we unarguably witness a failure to encounter. However, this relational breakdown, this profound sense of solitude in the company of another, becomes the site of an intensely successful encounter where Janine discovers a sense of self and reopens the possibility of a meaningful encounter with Marcel.

Situated on the margins of the collection and offering a rare insight into the female experience of otherness, this story works the border between Self and Other and questions the fixity and solidity of these spaces.[45] The Self is portrayed as a shifting, unstable, notion, and identity as a conglomeration of signs which delimit the parameters of selfhood. Otherness is equally unfixed, perpetually shifting from hostility to intimacy, exclusion to inclusion. Between and beyond these relatively defined territories Camus identifies a nomadic, intermediary space, a desert of non-signification which figuratively

---

[44] Camus, *L'Exil et le royaume*, p.29.
[45] Mistacco, p.71.

recurs throughout his literary work. Intensely appealing, here there are no frontiers to demarcate kingdoms, no kingdoms to define exile; the realms of alterity and subjectivity are eluded. Evelyn Zepp alludes to this dynamic space when he writes: 'If exile seems "exterior" and kingdom "interior", nevertheless it is *between them* (in both senses, beyond both and with both) that they produce a *space* [...] exile and kingdom shape a dynamic of centering and decentering, of presence and absence, of coincidence and separation, of inner and outer'.[46] The climactic moment in the narrative figures Janine who, in the middle of the night, escapes to the solitude of the fort, from which vantage point she can look out across the vast expanse of the desert. Here she encounters a space without boundaries or limits to define her inclusion or exclusion: 'De l'est à l'ouest, en effet, son regard se déplaçait lentement, sans rencontrer un seul obstacle, tout le long d'une courbe parfaite'.[47] The absence of distinction and difference which attracts Janine is embodied by the nomads, the 'troupeau de dromadaires immobiles', which Janine glimpses in the distance, who 'formaient sur le sol gris les signes sombres d'une étrange écriture dont il fallait déchiffrer le sens'.[48] The 'étrange royaume'[49] of these nomadic figures evokes the metaphysical space between the margins of being and nothingness, mastery and slavery, exile and kingdom. Camus's search for an alternative ethical space is reminiscent of Blanchot's moment before the violent upsurge of being and can be seen, if not to foreshadow, then at least to point towards the theories of alterity which began to emerge from the 1960s onwards in the work of key figures such as Emmanuel Levinas, Jacques Derrida, Tzvetan Todorov and Marc Augé.

---

[46] Evelyn H. Zepp, 'Exile in the Kingdom: Where is the King?', in *Albert Camus's 'L'Exil et le royaume': The Third Decade*, ed. by Anthony Rizzuto (Toronto: Les Éditions Paratexte, 1988), pp.127-141 (p.129).
[47] Camus, *L'Exil et le royaume*, pp.25-6.
[48] Ibid., p.26.
[49] Ibid., p.27.

However, Janine's encounter with the desert space is short-lived. So appealing to both Camus and his protagonist, it is eclipsed in the end of the story by Janine's inevitable return to the world where Self is defined in terms of and in relation to the Other: 'Elle savait seulement que ce royaume, de tout temps, lui avait été promis et que jamais, pourtant, il ne serait le sien'.[50] Janine's reflection seems to pre-empt the ambiguity of the narrative's ending in which the double negation of her closing words evokes the absent presence of an alternative space, a different mode of being: 'Ce n'est rien, mon chéri, disait-elle, ce n'est rien'.[51] Therefore, although Camus's fiction clearly evokes the ethical aspirations he theorizes in *L'Homme révolté*, allowing him to explore the possibility of an alternative mode of encounter, which eludes the reductive and alienating dynamic of the master/slave dialectic, it is evident from 'La Femme adultère' that the space Camus seeks beyond selfness and otherness remains elusive and intangible. Indeed, the question of whether it is possible, given the movement of affirmation on which Camus's theory of revolt is based, to occupy an intermediary space is significant for the ethics of Camus's approach to human relations and most importantly perhaps, his treatment of the problem of violence. Whilst Blanchot does not explore the more ethical aspects of Camus's theory of revolt, his articles do highlight the implications of the movement of affirmation underpinning Camus's notion of revolt for encounter with the Other. In the light of Blanchot's reading, Camus's desire to open up an intermediary space through maintaining the balance between affirmation and negation is problematic because the very mechanics of his ethical approach work against his

---

[50] Ibid., p.27.
[51] Ibid., p.34.

evident desire to disrupt the master/slave dialectic, and this seriously undermines the extent to which Camus's position can be perceived as ethical.

It is clear from this comparative study that there is a strong correlation between Camus's treatment of Self-Other relations and Beauvoir's notion of intersubjectivity. Both Camus and Beauvoir recognize the interdependence of Self and Other and advocate a measured approach to ethical action, which maintains the ambiguity of the human condition. This proximity undermines the dominant critical discourse in this field which, based on the binarism of the *Temps modernes* polemic, perpetually represents Camusian ethics and Sartrian Existentialism as ethically incompatible and opposed. Moreover, a non-oppositional analysis of Camus's and Beauvoir's treatment of alterity serves to moderate critical readings which portray Camus as the moral voice of his (and our) time, by showing that whilst Camus's conception of the creation of values led him to look beyond the master/slave dialectic to a more ethical mode of encounter, his approach is by no means opposed to Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, since her principle of freedom also drew her towards a more equal relationship between Self and Other. It is nevertheless clear that Camus's theory of revolt, and the value of human nature underpinning it, opens up a different approach to alterity which seeks to disrupt the opposition between the victim and the executioner, by binding them in a common identity and common worth in a way that Beauvoir's theory of intersubjectivity fails to do. In this sense, Camus can be seen to differ from his contemporaries in the way that he foreshadows the ethical concerns of the theories of alterity which came to dominate critical discourses in subsequent decades. However, when read in the light of Blanchot's more modern perspective, Camus's ethical position, like that of Beauvoir, is profoundly problematic

since, despite Camus's desire for an alternative mode of encounter, which this chapter has highlighted, there is implicit to his theory of revolt a movement of negation which heightens the potential for violence, thereby jeopardizing the possibility of an ethical encounter with the Other. It is Camus's treatment of this issue, perhaps more than any other, which attracted so much criticism from his contemporaries following the publication of *L'Homme révolté* and which arguably lay behind his controversial and unpopular response to the Algerian War. The purpose of the final chapter is therefore to explore Camus's approach to the problem of violence both in relation to the contemporary context and in the light of later theories of alterity.

7
Violence and the Problem of Ethical Failure

The question of ethical failure preoccupied Camus throughout his intellectual life. Behind his departure from the Communist Party, his outrage at the prospect of world conflict, his reasoning on the Absurd and his theory of revolt is the issue of whether or not it is justifiable to use violence and how this might be delimited. As I suggested in the introduction, *L'Homme révolté* can be regarded as the culmination of Camus's reflections on this question, and the development of his ethical thought which I outlined in Chapters 2 and 3 certainly supports this view. Defining the purpose of his essay on revolt, Camus writes that '[i]l s'agit de savoir si l'innocence, à partir du moment où elle agit, ne peut s'empêcher de tuer [...] si nous avons le droit de tuer cet autre devant nous ou de consentir qu'il soit tué' (*E*, 414). Profoundly violent, the twentieth century was an era of extremes. To the extent that the human propensity for violence has resurged time and again since the Second World War, Camus's reflections on this issue retain their critical interest, perhaps even more so because of the controversy which surrounded his position. Indeed, increasingly at odds with the mood of political realism which dominated the times, Camus's theory of revolt, which sought to bind even the victim and executioner in solidarity, was dismissed by Sartre and others as politically impractical and an apology for abstentionism. Camus's retreat into silence during the Algerian crisis only served to consolidate the view that he had little to offer ethical discourse on this question, an opinion which, by this time, had been widely accepted.

As with the issue of given values and the question of Camus's credibility as an ethical commentator, critical response to his treatment of violence has swung dramatically since the negative reception of the 1950s. Few critics have ventured to offer

a reading of Camus's approach in the light of ethical perspectives which have emerged since this time, and all of these focus on Camus's fiction rather than his theoretical writing.[1] In response to this hermeneutic dialogue, the purpose of this chapter is to call into question the dominance of the Camus/Sartre polemic in critical readings of Camus's approach to violence through a comparative study of Camus's and Beauvoir's treatment of this issue and to offer an alternative interpretation of Camus's position both in relation to existentialist thought and in terms of Blanchot's ethical perspective. Divided into four sections, this chapter will firstly outline Sartre's criticism of Camus's stance on the use of violence in *Les Temps modernes* and the swing which has taken place in critical opinion since the 1950s. I will then problematize the polarity of this interpretive approach by highlighting the similarities between Camus's and Beauvoir's position on absolutism and the problem of ends versus means. Thirdly, I will consider the differences in their approaches to the question of violence and the way in which a contrastive study serves to nuance the current critical consensus which posits Camus's position on the issue of violence as 'morally superior' to that of Sartre and other existentialists. Finally, I will explore Blanchot's reading of Camus's treatment of violence in *L'Homme révolté* and *Les Justes* and will engage with Camus's short story 'L'Hôte', which, written on the eve of the Algerian War for Independence, both illuminates and develops further Blanchot's critique of Camus's approach to the problem of violence.

---

[1] Elizabeth Hart is well-known for her exploration of Camus's literature in the light of Levinasian thought and offers an insight into the ethical dimensions of his fiction. See Hart, 'Face à face: l'éthique lévinasienne dans "L'Hôte" ', p.177. See also Sarrochi, p.103-4. In contrast, Colin Davis questions the status of the Other in Camus's literary work, concluding that, in the light of modern theories of alterity, his treatment of otherness is positively 'altericidal'. This term, meaning the annihilation of the Other, was first coined by Colin Davis. See Davis, 'Altericide: Camus, Encounters, Reading', p.129.

The Issue of Violence

Central to Sartre's criticism of Camus's position is what he believes to be his indiscriminate denunciation of violence which does not, in his view, distinguish between or offer a means of distinguishing between which causes might legitimate the use of violence and which do not: 'Vous dénonciez partout l'usage de la violence et vous nous faites subir, au nom de la morale, des violences vertueuses'.[2] Responding to Camus's definition of revolt as the fight not only of slave against master, but humanity against the world of slavery and mastery, Sartre criticizes Camus for taking an unnuanced approach to the problem of oppression and argues that his 'argument-massue' is designed to justify 'un quiétisme': 'Et puis je regrette que vous produisiez votre argument-massue pour justifier un quiétisme qui refuse de distinguer entre les maîtres. Car c'est tout un, vous le dites vous-même, de confondre les maîtres et de confondre les esclaves'.[3] Whilst Sartre was by far the most forceful in his criticism of Camus's treatment of the problem of violence, his views were shared by a number of other critics at the time and clearly reflect a widespread concern about the extent to which Camus's theory of revolt effectively addressed the issue of failure.[4] Reflecting on the *Temps modernes* debate, R.

---

[2] Sartre, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', p.337.
[3] Ibid., p.343.
[4] Maurice Nadeau seems to confirm this in the introduction to his review of *L'Homme révolté* in November 1951 which precedes the *Temps modernes* polemic: 'Cette sagesse, fondée sur un postulat unique: l'interdiction de tuer, dont on sait assez que notre temps se passe, nous pouvons la juger inopérante ou utopique, muette sur beaucoup de questions immédiates qui nous requièrent', 'Albert Camus et la révolte', *Combat*, 8 November 1951. A number of other critics also questioned Camus's attempt to define a measured approach to revolt, arguing that, since the two are fundamentally incompatible, his position on the issue of violence is untenable. See Louis Pauwels, 'À propos de *L'Homme révolté*', *Arts*, 21 December 1951. Jean Onimus similarly rejects Camus's effort to find a middle way between what he describes as 'sagesse' and revolt, describing his position as 'intenable'. Onimus also argues that the problem of violence lies at the heart of Camus's theory of revolt and queries whether it is indeed possible to revolt without acting in any way that will cause harm to others and thereby contradict the principle on which Camus founds his notion of revolt. See 'Albert Camus ou la sagesse impossible', *Cahiers universitaires catholiques*, 7 (1952), 379-388. Although Patrick Waldberg applauds Camus's attempt to find a more

P. Holstein remarks that, despite its unsavoury nature, it had nevertheless underlined the problem central to *L'Homme révolté*, and defines it as follows: 'un engagement est-il possible sans accepter le risque de compromission? Et d'autre part, une révolte peut-elle être authentique et authentiquement altruiste sans engagement effectif?'[5] Yet, despite the fact that other critics raised similar questions about Camus's position on the question of violence, Sartre's influence as an intellectual heavyweight, the embittered tone of the debate and the personal nature of the confrontation, established this issue as a main source of contention between Camus and the existentialist camp.

The controversy surrounding Camus's response to the problem of violence and the tension between him and other contemporary intellectuals was exacerbated further by his approach to the Algerian War during the 1950s. The increasing conflict between France and Algeria, and the outbreak of the War for Independence in 1954, placed Camus in an extremely difficult position. His unwillingness to support either the colonial or the anti-colonial cause, and by so doing condone the use of violence to achieve political ends, brought much derision and criticism from both sides. His silent resignation baffled many of his supporters and bolstered his critics in their view that he stood for political *attentisme* and an impracticable morality.[6] It is this apparent failure to take up a position during the Algerian War which sealed Camus's reputation as an abstentionist who had little of value to say about the problem of violence. A glance through the obituaries written for Camus would seem to confirm this. Contrasting Camus's approach

---

measured approach to revolt, he also concludes that '[l]es conclusions de M. Camus, cependant, restent faibles', 'La Révolte en question', *Monde nouveau-paru*, 58 (1952), 97-98 (p.98).

[5] Holstein, p.27.

[6] In his obituary to Camus, Sartre writes: 'Son silence même, ces dernières années, avait un aspect positif: ce cartésien de l'absurde refusait de quitter le sûr terrain de la moralité et de s'engager dans les chemins incertains de la *pratique*', 'Albert Camus', *France Observateur*, 7 January 1960.

to political engagement in 1944 with his 'retrait progressif' from 1947 onwards, Claude Bourdet remarks: 'Camus pouvait avoir de fortes raisons de changer son mode de vie; ce qui est étrange, c'est le contraste entre une *volonté* d'action et un refus de toute action, une justification de ce refus, une théorisation comme celle de *L'Homme révolté*, qui malgré la lucidité des analyses, débouche sur le vide, exaltant finalement la révolte individuelle aux dépens de toute révolution, alors qu'un éditorial du 19 septembre1944 liée étroitement révolte et révolution'.[7] By the 1960s, the prevailing view amongst intellectuals reflected Sartre's opinion, expressed a decade earlier, that Camus was *passé* and that his influence, which had been so great in the immediate postwar years, was now a 'mirage'.[8]

During the following decade, critical interest in Camus's work waned significantly. The few articles which emerged during this period, rather than engaging with Camus's political and ethical ideas, raise the question of Camus's influence as an intellectual and the relevance of his thought to modern generations. As I discussed in the

---

[7] Bourdet, 'Camus ou les mains propres'. Echoing Sartre's criticism in *Les Temps modernes* almost a decade earlier, Bourdet questions the moral equivalence which Camus attributed to all acts of violence, irrespective of the ends which they served, and argues that it is impossible to change anything in this world without getting our hands dirty: 'Pour un homme de son cœur et de sa qualité d'esprit, il fallut alors légitimer les abstentions: tirer des crimes russes et du machiavélisme communiste des raisons de refuser toute protestation aux côtés d'un communiste, comme si les procès de Moscou ne dataient pas d'avant-guerre, le pacte germano-soviétique, de 1939, et les retournements du P.C.F., de toujours; invoquer les crimes des "fellaga" pour refuser de mener un véritable combat pour la paix en Algérie - comme si la négociation supposait l'approbation, comme si les crimes n'étaient pas des deux côtés, comme si notre Résistance à nous avait les mains parfaitement blanches. [...] si certains d'entre nous qui l'avons critiqué et avons souffert de ses attaques, avions su aller le convaincre, peut-être autrait-il compris, lui aussi, qu'il faut garder le cœur propre mais qu'il ne faut pas si précisément garder ses mains vierges de tout contact impur, si on veut changer quelque chose à ce monde'. More apologetic, Jean-Paul Déron published as an obituary a letter he had received from Camus in the early 1950s in response to his question: 'Pourquoi l'un des témoins les plus lucides de notre époque gardait-il le silence?', 'Un texte inédit: "Je sais seulement que je ne serais jamais du côté des bourreaux"', *Paris-Normandie*, 8 January 1960.

[8] Sartre, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', p.351. It is worth pointing out that Sartre's position on violence was not as straightforward as his response to Camus would suggest. Although he supported the Algerian fight for independence, his plays *Les Mains sales* (1948) and *Les Séquestrés d'Altona* (1960), are somewhat ambiguous on the question of the justification for violence. They seem to imply, in fact, that violence is never 'pure' but always driven by multiple and often contradictory motives.

previous chapter, Domerc challenges this dismissal of Camus and addresses the dominant opinion that he has nothing to offer younger generations.[9] Casting an eye over other articles which appeared during this time, it is clear that Camus's place in French literary history was far from secure. In 1968, a number of critics contributed to a full page debate in *Combat* about who the most influential intellectual figures were for young people.[10] Two years later, Guy Le Clec'h published an article in *Le Figaro littéraire* based on interviews with Jean-Louis Bergonzo, Alexandre Kalda and Patrick Modiano on the question of whether Camus had been outmoded by a new generation of intellectuals and writers.[11] Indeed, Camus's political views did not gain much credence until the emergence of the *nouveaux philosophes* in the late 1970s. These writers, amongst them André Glucksmann and Bernard-Henri Lévy, based much of their thinking on the ideas Camus first proposed in *L'Homme révolté* and supported his view that the seeds of twentieth-century totalitarianism were sown by earlier thinkers such as Hegel, Nietzsche and Marx who can in some way be held responsible for the ethical bankruptcy of modern European society.[12] However, despite the revival of interest in Camus's theoretical work, critics returned to the critical agenda of the 1950s in an attempt to reassert the relevance of Camus's position on the issue of violence, rather than engaging with the critical discourses which were emerging at the time such as poststructuralism, postcolonialism and ethical criticism. In his major study of *L'Homme révolté* in 1977, Gros explicitly

---

[9] Domerc, pp.32-35.
[10] Jean-Claude Guilbert, 'Les Nouveaux Maîtres à penser de la jeunesse: [Barthes, Camus, Foucault, Sartre, Sollers et al.]', *Combat*, 24 January 1968.
[11] Guy Le Clec'h, 'Pour et contre Camus: un classique démodé', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 5-11 January 1970. Moreover, Kanters reflects on this retrospection and return to Camus's œuvre on the part of critics: 'C'est à peine si, dix ans après sa mort, presque vingt ans après la publication de ses œuvres principales, une nouvelle génération va oser s'interroger sur la nature de cette étrange météore. Ascension d'autant plus remarquable au surplus, qu'elle va à contre-courant', Kanters, 'Les accélérations de la gloire'.
[12] See André Glucksmann, *Les Maîtres penseurs* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1977) and Bernard-Henri Lévy, *La Barbarie à visage humain* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1977).

defends Camus against the charges Sartre made and reaffirms Camus's mode of revolt as a persuasive approach to the problem of violence: 'Au-delà du nihilisme, il y a donc une pensée révoltée qui peut sauver le monde du meurtre, qui est le mouvement même de la vie, amour et fécondité'.[13] Although less vociferous in his defence of Camus's ethical approach to contemporary politics, East nevertheless echoes Gros in his study of Camus's approach to the issue of violence and responds directly to the charges made against Camus by Sartre and others in the 1950s: 'Bien que l'éthique de Camus soit une éthique de la modération, cela ne veut pas dire qu'elle produise une politique de modération médiocre, ou encore une politique d'abstention. Au contraire, la mesure envisagée par Camus est faite de lucidité, elle rompt avec la monotonie de l'habitude et s'engage à travailler dans l'aujourd'hui de la vie'.[14]

Critical readings of Camus's theory of revolt over the last decade have done little to buck the trend. Commentators have continued to engage with Camus's work in terms of the polemics of the 1950s, revisiting the same debate without seeming to move on from it, so perpetuating the binarism of this interpretive approach. For example, the

---

[13] Gros, p.36. Highly apologetic, Gros attempts to reclaim the moral high ground for Camus, portraying him as a romantic hero, alone against the world of revolutionary ideals and popularist ideology: 'À une époque où il était de bon ton de développer des idées progressistes et révolutionnaires, on imagine que l'accueil fait à *L'Homme révolté* reflète aussi le mépris et renvoie Camus à sa solitude d'homme de culture', p.48.

[14] East, p.100. In contrast, the extensive work of Raymond Gay-Crosier on Camus's theory of revolt focuses on the creative and regenerative aspects of Camus's *pensée de midi*, manifesting a desire to move away from the polemics which had dominated critical debate in this area. In a private conversation with Professor Gay-Crosier, he indicated that he had steered away from discussing certain sources of conflict and competition between Camus and Sartre in published work because of the way in which this might be read as partisan and thereby perpetuate the binarism which has dominated critical discourse in this area, 11th September 2001. Nevertheless, he does, at times, clearly operate within the critical framework of the *Temps modernes* polemic, addressing implicitly rather than explicitly the concerns raised by Sartre et al. This is particularly evident in his discussion of the difference between aporia and measure in his article 'La Révolte génératrice et régénératrice' where he argues that, rather than an advocation of ataraxy as many of Camus's contemporaries claimed, the *pensée de midi* constitutes 'une méthode pour apprivoiser la tension que créent les contradictions insolubles qu'il ne faut abolir ni intellectuellement ni spirituellement', pp.113-134.

critical discourse Kritzman employs in his discussion of Camus's treatment of violence is identifiably that of the postwar era in its preoccupation with praxis and its suspicion of idealism: '[Camus] invoked a humanitarian idealism that could be implemented by the magical formulation of common objectives proposed by competing opponents'.[15] In a similar vein, the Camus/Sartre polemic provides Simone Debout with a framework in which to discuss Camus's perspective on the question of violence and her article is fashionably apologetic towards his point of view.[16] Most recently, Denis Charbit argued strongly for the continued relevance of Camus's approach and his reading of *L'Homme révolté* 'fifty years on', somewhat ironically appears not to have moved on at all from the critical agenda of the 1950s: 'Si pourtant, cette polémique, en dépit de la violence du ton, reste un débat important, c'est parce qu'elle recèle, au-delà de la brouille entre ces deux figures emblématiques, deux conceptions divergentes du devoir intellectuel, de la mission du clerc face à l'Histoire et à la violence qui l'accompagne'.[17] Whilst I would agree with Charbit that the issues of absolutism and the use of violence to achieve ethical ends are as relevant now as they have ever been, I would also argue that the polarity on which this interpretive framework relies limits the extent to which it can offer an insight into Camus's ethics. The implicit binarism of this optic emphasizes the points of conflict between Camus and his contemporaries on the issue of violence whilst neglecting the areas of consonance of which there are several. The aim of the following pages is therefore to explore the similarities between Camus's and Beauvoir's appproach to the question of nihilistic violence, in order to contest the monopoly of this critical paradigm and to consider Camus's treatment of the problem of violence in a different light.

---

[15] Kritzman, pp.590-560.
[16] Debout, pp.600-607.
[17] Charbit, pp.42-3.

The Similarities between Camus's and Beauvoir's Treatment of Violence

Central to the question of when it is legitimate to use violence is the issue of absolutism. Camus's vision of historical revolt opposes what he perceives to be the absolutism of political doctrines which justify the use of violence in order to achieve absolute values such as justice and liberty. Although some perceive Camus's notion of the relationship between metaphysical and historical revolt to be somewhat problematic,[18] he perceives the seeds of revolution to lie in the metaphysical desire for full self-presence which is born in the moment of revolt. However, whereas the rebel recognizes the ambiguity of his or her condition and seeks to maintain the balance between affirmation and negation, the revolutionary embarks on a quest for totality and so collapses the tension between these competing terms: 'L'esclave commence par réclamer justice et finit par vouloir la royauté. Il lui faut dominer à son tour. [...] La rébellion humaine finit en révolution métaphysique' (*E*, 437). In Camus's view, this absolutist response to the absurdity of the human condition underpins contemporary nihilism and generates the tyranny and servitude which has come to characterize twentieth-century European history:[19] 'ces conséquences ne sont point dues à la révolte elle-même, ou, du moins, elles ne viennent au jour que dans la mesure où le révolté oublie ses origines, se lasse de la dure tension entre oui et non et s'abandonne enfin à la négation de toute chose ou à la soumission totale' (*E*, 437). Born out of the political extremism of the 1930s and his fraught relationship with the revolutionary idealism of the PCF, Camus's distrust of orthodoxy continued to inform and shape his ethical

---

[18] Jeanson, 'Albert Camus ou l'âme révoltée', p.2075.

[19] Evoking the Hegelian dialectic which has dominated modern ethical discourses, Camus writes: 'En la [la pensée révoltée] suivant dans ses œuvres et dans ses actes, nous aurons à dire, chaque fois, si elle reste fidèle à sa noblesse première ou si, par lassitude et folie, elle l'oublie au contraire, dans une ivresse de tyrannie ou de servitude', 'L'Homme révolté', *Essais*, p.431.

thought.[20] His interpretation of contemporary history led him to conclude that an absolutist approach to political action ultimately contradicts the value it seeks to establish, and it was the comparative willingness, as Camus saw it, of Sartre and other existentialists to engage in and justify such action to which he objected.[21] However, a reading of Beauvoir's treatment of absolutism can be seen to problematize the polarization which took place between Camus and the existentialists on this issue and to call into question the way in which commentators have continued, somewhat uncritically, to place Camus and Sartre in opposing camps.

Like Camus, Beauvoir identifies the human desire for totality and the impossibility of ever achieving full self-presence as the root of nihilistic violence: 'Les hommes d'aujourd'hui semblent ressentir plus vivement que jamais le paradoxe de leur condition. Ils se reconnaissent pour la fin suprême à laquelle doit se subordonner toute action. [...] chacun d'entre eux a sur les lèvres le goût incomparable de sa propre vie, et cependant chacun se sent plus insignifiant qu'un insecte au sein de l'immense collectivité' (*PM*, 13-14). Moreover, it was in response to the extreme manifestations of nihilism in contemporary history that Beauvoir attempted to formulate an ethics which would respect the ambiguity of the human condition. As I established in Chapter 5,

---

[20] Charbit remarks on the consonance between Camus's ethical concerns during the 1930s, expressed in his involvement and subsequent break with the Communist Party and his objection to the Second World War, and his theory of revolt: 'Mais la révolte était aussi pour Camus un gage librement consenti, une attestation de fidélité aux idéaux qui l'avaient animé depuis sa prise de conscience politique à la fin des années Trente et durant la Seconde Guerre mondiale', p.28. Camus's reference to Jean Grenier's *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* in his discussion of absolutism in *L'Homme révolté* is also an indication, of the formative influence Grenier had on Camus, not only during his early years, but also throughout his adult life, *Essais*, p.691. Bernard Gros remarks on the influence on Camus of 'la sagesse de son ancien Maître Jean Grenier' in a discussion of Camus's approach to the praxis of revolt following the Liberation and his search for an ethical position, Gros, p.16.

[21] Distinguishing the difference, as he sees it, between revolt and revolution, Camus is at pains to criticize contemporary existentialists for what he regards as their historicist approach to political action: 'Elle n'est pas bien définie lorsqu'on dit, comme nos existentialistes par exemple (soumis eux aussi, pour le moment, à l'historisme et à ses contradictions), qu'il y a progrès de la révolte à la révolution et que le révolté n'est pas révolutionnaire', 'L'Homme révolté', *Essais*, pp.650-1.

measure, balance and limit are as central to Beauvoir's approach as they are to Camus's: 'Puisque nous ne réussissons pas à la fuir, essayons donc de regarder en face la vérité. Essayons d'assumer notre fondamentale ambiguïté' (*PM*, 14). Furthermore, in the same way that, for Camus, collapsing the tension at the heart of revolt constitutes 'lassitude' and 'folie' (*E*, 431), so for Beauvoir, the pursuit of totality is a mode of bad faith, a way of (non-)being which does not assume or maintain the ambiguity of freedom. Having described the condition of the 'sous-homme' who holds back from making the choice to be free, Beauvoir goes on to outline the 'sérieux' and to explore different forms of *mauvaise foi*. In Beauvoir's view, the refusal to accept the duality of the human condition and the pursuit of either full self-presence or absolute negation violates both my freedom and that of others: 'L'attitude de sous-homme passe logiquement dans celle de l'homme sérieux: il s'efforce d'engloutir sa liberté dans le contenu que celui-ci accepte de la société, il se perd dans l'objet afin d'anéantir sa subjectivité. [...] Il y a sérieux dès que la liberté se renie au profit des fins qu'on prétend absolues' (*PM*, 60-61). For Beauvoir, absolutism, or 'fanatisme' as she frequently describes it, leads directly to tyranny and servitude: 'l'homme sérieux ne met rien en question; pour le militaire, l'armée est utile; [...] pour le révolutionnaire sérieux, la révolution: armée, route, révolution, production devenant des idoles inhumaines auxquelles on n'hésitera pas à sacrifier l'homme lui-même. Par là, l'homme sérieux est dangereux; il est naturel qu'il se fasse tyran' (*PM*, 64).[22] Therefore, the argument that Camus has a monopoly on anti-absolutism over his existentialist counterparts is problematic. Indeed, the proximity of Camus's and

---

[22] It is worth noting here the way in which Beauvoir qualifies her definition of the revolutionary with the term 'sérieux'. Although Beauvoir takes a similar position to Camus on the issue of absolutism, her perspective on the problem of failure and the use of violence differs distinctly from that of Camus. Failure and authenticity for Beauvoir are not mutually exclusive and her conception of ethical failure sheds light on an area of weakness in Camus's ethical approach which I will discuss in detail in the following section.

Beauvoir's approaches to the issue of absolutism in contemporary history becomes even more apparent in an exploration of their respective treatment of the relationship between ends and means.

Underlying Camus's ambivalence towards ideological absolutism is the question of whether or not the end justifies the means. An ethical concern which had preoccupied him from his earliest days as a member of the *Parti communiste français* in Algiers, this problem became increasingly important to him in the postwar years as the polemics of the Cold War began to polarize political opinion. Rejecting both action and contemplation as contemporary responses to the absurdity of the human condition, Camus searched for a third way which would hold in tension means and ends, present and future, being and becoming: 'La calomnie de ce monde ramène au nihilisme que Nietzsche a défini. La pensée qui se forme avec la seule histoire comme celle qui se tourne contre toute histoire enlèvent à l'homme le moyen ou la raison de vivre. La première le pousse à l'extrême déchéance du "pourquoi vivre"; la seconde au "comment vivre"' (*E*, 651). In this way, Camus situates himself in between the approaches of both his mentors, Malraux and Grenier, in his quest for an intellectually coherent ethical position. More significantly perhaps for the purpose of this study, in *L'Homme révolté* Camus associates Existentialism with 'les pensées purement historiques' (*E*, 652) and, rejecting Sartre's philosophical approach, takes up a position which conforms to neither the essentialist nor the existentialist approach to metaethics, so creating a point of tension between him and his existentialist counterparts: 'on ne peut dire que l'être soit seulement au niveau de l'essence. Où saisir l'essence sinon au niveau de l'existence et du devenir? Mais on ne peut dire que l'être n'est qu'existence. Ce qui devient toujours ne saurait être,

il faut un commencement' (*E*, 699). Highly critical of other philosophical perspectives which, in his view, privilege and absolutize the objectives to be achieved, Camus is insistent on the importance of balancing ends and means: 'La fin justifie les moyens? Cela est possible. Mais qui justifiera la fin? À cette question, que la pensée historique laisse pendante, la révolte répond: les moyens' (*E*, 696).[23]

In Camus's view, the reduction of history to movement and existence to action risks reducing human life to a means by which to achieve full self-presence at some future point in time: 'La révolte, en effet, lui dit et lui dira de plus en plus haut qu'il faut essayer de faire, non pour commencer d'être un jour, aux yeux d'un monde réduit au consentement, mais en fonction de cet être obscur qui se découvre déjà dans le mouvement d'insurrection' (*E*, 653). For Camus, the means used must therefore be consistent with the ends pursued and in this way there is implicit to his notion of revolt a continuity which prevents future goals from being severed from present reality: 'Malgré ses prétentions, elle [la révolution] part de l'absolu pour modeler la réalité. La révolte, inversement, s'appuie sur le réel pour s'acheminer dans un combat perpétuel vers la vérité. [...] Si elle veut une révolution, elle la veut en faveur de la vie, non contre elle' (*E*, 701). Whilst Camus clearly sets himself up in opposition to existentialist thought, both in *L'Homme révolté* and in the debate which followed, critics have been very willing to accept the polarity of the *Temps modernes* polemic as a representation of Camus's and Sartre's positions on the question of means versus ends. However, an exploration of Beauvoir's treatment of this issue reveals a close proximity in their views on the relationship between means and ends and suggests that the difference between Camus

---

[23] As is evident from Camus's journalistic writing prior to the outbreak of war in 1939, which is discussed at length in Chapter 2, the question of means versus ends is an issue which had preoccupied Camus for some time prior to the development of his theory of revolt.

and his contemporaries might not have been as stark or as unproblematic as critics have assumed.[24]

As we have discussed, although the rejection of the absolute as an external framework is central to Beauvoir's existentialist ethics, her understanding of freedom does nevertheless involve a notion of the absolute. That is to say that freedom, for Beauvoir, is an absolute value which is founded by and through the individual consciousness. Indeed, Beauvoir's concept of human liberty could be described in the same terms Camus uses to encapsulate his own notion of the value of human nature: as a *relatif absolu*. Not unlike Camus, absolutism, for Beauvoir, constitutes a violation of the meaning of freedom because it fixes goals outside of the movement of 'fixing' which is freedom. She too rejects Hegel's dialectical absolutism, which advocated the negation of the present in order to bring about full self-presence in the future, for the reason that it legitimates the use of any means in the pursuit of absolute goals. Criticizing this approach, Beauvoir writes: 'Le présent, c'est l'existence transitoire qui est faite pour être abolie: elle ne se récupère qu'en se transcendant vers la permanence de l'être futur: c'est seulement comme instrument, comme moyen [...] que le présent se réalise valablement [...]. C'est là le sens achevé de la formule: la fin justifie les moyens; tous les moyens sont

---

[24] For example, in his study of Camus's ethics, East unquestioningly presents Camus's position on the issue of means versus ends as in opposition to that of the existentialists. Moreover, his account of Camus's treatment of the relationship between ends and means does not address the implications of Camus's stance for political action or explore his treatment of ethical failure: 'Camus oppose à une éthique de l'action une éthique de l'être. Il y a quelque chose de permanent et d'irréductible que l'on ne peut sacrifier: l'homme. Il y a cette dignité de l'homme qui doit présider à tout développement d'une éventuelle morale', p.84. See also Pierre de Boisdeffre who writes: 'Entre la révolte et l'amour, il faut choisir, Camus a d'abord opté, comme beaucoup de contemporains, pour la révolte contre l'amour. Depuis *La Peste*, on le voit faire une place à l'amour au sein de la révolte; parti de l'absurde, il aboutit sans se l'avouer à une spiritualité limitée, mais concrète et positive puisqu'elle inclut la justice et la charité', 'Réflexions sur la révolte', *Travaillons. Revue mensuelle des cadres de la L.F.A.C.F.*, 471 (1952), 19-20 (p.20); in a similar vein Albérès comments: 'la littérature morale de notre temps, et la pensée de la révolte, se définissent par cette absence de notions médiatrices', p.216.

autorisés de par leur indifférence même' (*PM*, 145).[25] In an emphatic rejection, not of historical engagement, but of philosophical perspectives which perceive history as a totality, Beauvoir writes: 'Les tâches que nous nous proposons et qui, tout en débordant les limites de nos vies, sont nôtres, doivent trouver leur sens en elles-mêmes et non dans une fin mythique de l'Histoire' (*PM*, 159).

In Beauvoirian terms, freedom is both present and future; the future goal and the dynamic activity which posits that goal: 'l'avenir, c'est le sens défini d'une transcendance singulière et il est si étroitement lié au présent qu'il compose avec lui une seule forme temporelle' (*PM*, 144). The corollary of this is that human action only carries significance when it constitutes an expression of freedom: 'les activités constructives de l'homme ne prennent un sens valable que lorsqu'elles sont assumées comme mouvement vers la liberté' (*PM*, 101). Since the individual is dependent upon the freedom of the Other for his or her own freedom, the means used to achieve certain ends must reflect the overall goal of freedom expressed by the individual consciousness through authentic action: 'Si l'on renie la tension subjective de la liberté, on s'interdit évidemment de vouloir universellement la liberté dans un mouvement indéfini' (*PM*, 63). Therefore, for Beauvoir, the relationship between means and ends is one of continuity and unity. Freedom constitutes both the absolute goal chosen by the individual and the mode of achieving it: 'Ceci exige que chaque action soit considérée comme une forme achevée dont les différents moments, au lieu de fuir vers l'infini pour y trouver leur justification,

---

[25] It is worth noting the consonance between Beauvoir's views on the way in which historical absolutism reduces human beings to objects and those of Camus. Referring to past historical movements and more recent political figures who, having posited certain goals, in Beauvoir's view, slipped into the *sérieux*, she remarks: 'Nous avons vu que ce recours au sérieux est mensonge; il entraîne le sacrifice de l'homme à la Chose, de la liberté à la Cause', *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p.165.

se réfléchissent les uns sur les autres, se confirment les uns les autres, si bien qu'il n'y a plus de séparation tranchée entre présent et avenir, moyens et fins' (*PM*, 162).

It is evident that, although Beauvoir clearly does not subscribe to the essentialist view that human nature is a pre-existing value, there is a sense in which she nevertheless seeks to maintain the tension between present and future, being and becoming, in a way which resonates closely with the intermediary position Camus attempts to establish between essentialist and existentialist discourses. Moreover, I would argue that, when considered in the light of the questions I raised earlier concerning the extent to which Beauvoir truly liberates herself from the notion of given values, the distance between Camus and Beauvoir shrinks even more, further problematizing the binarism underpinning critical readings of Camus's thought in relation to that of his contemporaries. However, whilst Camus and Beauvoir share far more common ground than critics have acknowledged, it is undeniable that they differ in their approach to the use of violence as a means of achieving ethical ends. The purpose of the following pages is therefore to explore the differences which do exist between Camus's and Beauvoir's treatment of this issue in order to assess the extent to which Camus's theory of revolt accommodates the problem of ethical failure.

Profoundly ethical or politically impractical?

As I have discussed, both Camus and Beauvoir acknowledge that maintaining the tension between Self and Other, affirmation and negation, will involve an element of failure since it is humanly impossible to serve all causes all of the time. Beauvoir sums up this reality succinctly when she writes: 'Ainsi on se trouve en présence de ce paradoxe qu'aucune action ne peut se faire pour l'homme sans se faire aussitôt contre des hommes.

Cette vérité évidente, universellement connue, est cependant si amère que le premier souci d'une doctrine de l'action est ordinairement de masquer cette part d'échec que comporte toute entreprise' (*PM*, 124). Similarly, Camus alludes to the inevitability of human failure when he acknowledges that 'si l'homme était capable d'introduire à lui seul l'unité dans le monde, s'il pouvait y faire régner, par son seul décret, la sincérité, l'innocence et la justice, il serait Dieu lui-même' (*E*, 689). However, despite the common ground between them, Camus and Beauvoir differ significantly in their understanding of how this balance is to be maintained in practice. In contrast to Beauvoir's more pragmatic approach, Camus's position on the issue of violence appears to be self-contradictory. On the one hand he argues that murder and revolt are incompatible and on the other he rather reluctantly acknowledges that in certain circumstances and under certain conditions violence might in fact be necessary to achieve ethical ends. Whilst many critics view Camus's ethical position to be entirely coherent,[26] others have questioned the relationship between the absolute and the relative underpinning his conceptual approach. Following the publication of *L'Homme révolté* in 1951, a number of commentators described Camus's notion of the *relatif absolu* as fundamentally flawed and argued that it weakened his ethical position.[27] Amongst them, Jean Onimus contends that '[e]ntre mesure et démesure il n'y a pas de synthèse humaine possible. Entre le

[26] For example, René-Jean Dupuy focuses on Camus's notion of moral purity and his belief in absolute values, but does not address the role of the relative in Camus's conceptual framework or the relationship between the two, Dupuy, pp. 237-249. East also argues in favour of the moral fixity at the heart of Camus's ethics and rejects the criticism that this leads to immobility on the rather dubious grounds that Camus was politically active all his life: 'Pour certains penseurs, privilégier le respect de la nature humaine, équivaut à se retrancher derrière l'immobilisme. Favoriser ce concept reviendrait à inscrire l'homme dans l'immuable de la nature physique et à le rendre inapte à l'action. On a souvent dit que la nature était à droite, qu'elle était au service du conservatisme. La question qui se pose est de savoir si, dans la pensée de Camus, vivre selon les exigences propres de la révolte revient à prôner l'abstention. Pour notre auteur, il est clair que l'homme révolté non seulement ne se retire pas du monde, mais il a besoin d'y travailler et de s'exprimer par l'action pour s'accomplir', p.95.

[27] See, for example, Mehl, 'De la révolte à la valeur', p.520; Victor-Henry Debidour, '*L'Homme révolté*', *Le Bulletin des Lettres*, 135 (1952), 56-59.

respect du relatif et la passion de l'absolu, il n'y a pas de compromis, et si l'une et l'autre attitude sont indispensables à une vie d'homme on peut dire à la lettre qu'il est impossible à l'homme de vivre'.[28] In order to offer a more nuanced reading of Camus's contribution to ethical discourse than the dominant Camus/Sartre paradigm has so far allowed, I will now explore Camus's response to the problem of failure in relation to Beauvoir's approach to this issue.

Camus's concept of the value of human nature, and the notion of solidarity to which it gives rise, are fundamental in defining his approach to the issue of the legitimacy of murder as a means to achieve ethical ends. As we discussed in the previous chapter, solidarity, for Camus, is established in the moment of revolt through the recognition that the value which the Self affirms is common to all human beings: 'En assignant à l'oppression une limite en deçà de laquelle commence la dignité commune à tous les hommes, la révolte définissait une première valeur' (*E*, 684). Camus's conception of this value as absolute makes the question of violence extremely problematic for him: 'Au niveau de l'absurde, en effet, le meurtre suscitait seulement des contradictions logiques; au niveau de la révolte, il est déchirement. Car il s'agit de décider s'il est possible de tuer celui, quelconque, dont nous venons enfin de reconnaître la ressemblance et de consacrer l'identité' (*E*, 685). In Camus's view, any act which violates the value of human nature simultaneously fractures the solidarity which binds the human community and thereby compromises the principle at the heart of revolt: 'Nous serons donc en droit de dire que toute révolte qui s'autorise à nier ou à détruire cette solidarité perd du même coup le nom de révolte et coïncide en réalité avec un consentement meurtrier' (*E*, 431). Camus thereby concludes that, in principle at least,

[28] Onimus, pp.386-7.

murder and revolt are incompatible: 'Forcer à la solitude celui qui vient d'apprendre qu'il n'est pas seul, n'est-ce pas le crime définitif contre l'homme? En logique, on doit répondre que meurtre et révolte sont contradictoires' (*E*, 685). Intransigent on the value of humanity, Camus goes as far as saying that in committing murder, the perpetrator irreversibly excludes him- or herself from the human community in which every individual finds his or her being: 'Dès qu'il frappe, le révolté coupe le monde en deux. Il se dressait au nom de l'identité de l'homme avec l'homme et il sacrifie l'identité en consacrant, dans le sang, la différence. Son seul être, au cœur de la misère et de l'oppression, était dans cette identité. Le même mouvement, qui visait à l'affirmer, le fait donc cesser d'être' (*E*, 685).[29] In an attempt to address the seriousness of violence when used as a means to achieve certain political or ethical objectives, Camus argues that the only suitable response to murder is for the murderer to compensate for his or her actions by committing suicide.[30] The extremity of this proposal is an indication of Camus's intransigence on the issue of violence and the difficulty he encountered in trying to relativize what is essentially an absolutist position.[31]

Indeed, Camus's discussion of murder in the final section of his theory of revolt is dominated by competing discourses which, I would argue, undermine his search for a

---

[29] It is worth noting that, in contrast to Levinas's notion of otherness, Camus's ethics are based on the idea of sameness, of identification with the Other as the same, not in terms of common interests, or even identity, but of common worth. Whilst Camus's approach does not allow him to encounter the Other as radically other in the Levinasian sense, his conceptual approach does inspire in him a respect and responsibility for the Other which, unlike that of Beauvoir, is not, ultimately, driven by the need to protect one's own freedom.

[30] In this sense, Kaliayev's choice in *Les Justes* to commit suicide and so condemn the act of murder he has committed through his own annihilation, is exemplary of Camus's ethical stance on the issue of violence.

[31] In this respect, I would entirely concur with Debidour's point that, despite Camus's theory of revolt being a critique of absolutism, his essay achieves an absolutization of revolt in its insistence on the value of human nature as a 'première valeur' (*E*, 684). Referring to Camus's comment that '[Le révolté] n'humilie personne. La liberté qu'il réclame, il la revendique pour tous; celle qu'il refuse, il l'interdit à tous. Il n'est pas seulement esclave contre maître, mais aussi homme contre le monde du maître et de l'esclave' (*E*, 688), Debidour writes: 'lorsque Camus parle ainsi, il pose un absolu unissant et pacifiant', p.59.

coherent approach to ethical action. The central problem, which Camus himself identifies, is that if violence does not constitute a legitimate means of achieving a given objective then it becomes extremely difficult to engage effectively in revolt. Acknowledging the impasse to which his notion of ethical revolt risks leading him, Camus writes: 'La valeur positive contenue dans le premier mouvement de révolte suppose le renoncement à la violence de principe. Elle entraîne, par conséquent, l'impossibilité de stabiliser une révolution. La révolte traîne sans cesse avec elle cette contradiction' (*E*, 690). Faced with the inevitability of ethical failure, Camus outlines his position on the use of violence for ethical ends.[32] In his view, violence must retain its provisional character and remain linked to personal responsibility and immediate risk. The systematization of violence which reduces human beings to a means of achieving certain ends is therefore unacceptable. A reflection of his stance against the PCF in the mid-1930s, Camus insists that if the rebel is to engage in authentic revolt, then he or she must refuse in advance to engage in violence which serves a particular doctrine or which justifies the political objectives of a State: 'L'action révoltée authentique ne consentira à s'armer que pour des institutions qui limitent la violence, non pour celles qui la codifient' (*E*, 695). Violence, in Camus's view, should therefore be considered as a 'risque relatif' rather than a legitimate means to achieve political goals. In this way, competing causes are held in tension and failure is minimalized: 'En tout cas, s'il ne peut pas toujours ne point tuer, directement ou indirectement, il peut mettre sa fièvre et sa passion à diminuer la chance du meurtre autour de lui. Sa seule vertu sera, plongé dans les ténèbres, de ne pas céder à leur vertige obscur; enchaîné au mal, de se traîner obstinément vers le bien'

[32] Note that Camus never accepts that violence might sometimes be legitimate, only that, in some circumstances, it might be inevitable: 'S'il [le révolté] peut participer, par la force des choses, au crime de l'histoire, il ne peut donc le légitimer', *Essais*, p.693.

(*E*, 689). However, whilst this relativistic approach seems to resonate with Beauvoir's ethic of ambiguity, there is underlying Camus's discussion of the problem of violence a discourse of intransigence which, in my view, threatens the persuasiveness of his stance on this issue and distinguishes his position from Beauvoir's arguably more pragmatic approach.

Through the course of his discussion on the question of murder, Camus returns time and time again to the inviolability of the value revealed in the movement of revolt. This value, for Camus, constitutes a point of fixity which delimits human action: 'La raison profonde de l'intransigeance révoltée est ici. Plus la révolte a conscience de revendiquer une juste limite, plus elle est inflexible' (*E*, 688). Moreover, despite his outline of the conditions under which the use of violence might be justifiable and his claims that the rebel's 'univers est celui du relatif' (*E*, 693), Camus's rhetoric on the question of the means used to achieve ethical ends remains uncompromising: '[La révolte] serait fidélité à la condition humaine. Intransigeante sur ses moyens, elle accepterait l'approximation quant à ses fins' (*E*, 694). Again, in reference to what form of action the rebel might take, Camus writes: 'L'action intransigeante et limitée, issue de la révolte, maintient cette réalité et tente seulement de l'étendre de plus en plus' (*E*, 696). Therefore, whilst Camus's conception of the value of human nature as a 'valeur médiatrice' would suggest a degree of compromise, it is evident from an exploration of his treatment of violence that his notion of the absolute and universal nature of this value, for Camus, renders failure extremely difficult to accommodate.[33] The implications of this tension between the absolute and the relative for the practicability of Camus's ethics are

[33] I would therefore contest the view of critics such as Albérès who neglect the absolutist tendency underpinning Camus's conceptual approach. See Albérès, p.215.

key both to his treatment of failure and to an understanding of the controversy surrounding his position. Yet, Beauvoir too occupies this intermediary space between the absolute and the relative in her approach to ethics and, like Camus, advocates that ends and means, Self and Other, be held in tension. Therefore, before discussing the degree to which the tension implicit in Camus's notion of revolt facilitates or inhibits ethical action, I would like to explore further the way in which the interplay between the absolute and the relative in Beauvoir's thought inflects her approach to the problem of failure.

As we have discussed, unlike Camus for whom the value of human nature is given, freedom for Beauvoir is an absolute value only in the sense that it is chosen and intended as such by the individual consciousness. Although the upsurge of freedom entails the simultaneous negation of the Other, the universal characteristic of freedom demands that, in assuming his or her freedom, the individual must respect the freedom of the Other, since it is only through his or her freedom that the Self can be free. However, because not all individuals use their liberty positively, in Beauvoir's view, the ethics of freedom demand that oppressors are suppressed by attacking their subjectivity. Since the only way to do this is through the oppressor's facticity, his or her presence in the world must be negated through the use of violence. The corollary of this is that the oppressed becomes an oppressor in his or her turn in the effort to assert the value of freedom:

les oppresseurs, du fait même qu'ils refusent de coopérer à l'affirmation de la liberté, incarnent aux yeux de tous les hommes de bonne volonté l'absurdité de la facticité; la morale, en réclamant le triomphe de la liberté sur la facticité, réclame aussi qu'on les supprime; et puisque, par définition, leur subjectivité échappe à notre emprise, c'est

seulement sur leur présence objective qu'il sera possible d'agir: il faudra traiter ici autrui comme une chose, lui faire violence. (*PM*, 120-1)

The negation, or failure, which this entails is, for Beauvoir, equally as scandalous and morally unacceptable as the actions of the oppressor. However, since, in Beauvoir's view, '[s]e vouloir moral et se vouloir libre, c'est une seule et même décision' (*PM*, 32), failure must be assumed and accepted as an integral part of ethical endeavour.[34] In accepting the fact that 'aucune action ne peut se faire pour l'homme sans se faire aussitôt contre des hommes' (*PM*, 124), Beauvoir acknowledges that in order to achieve certain ethical goals it might be necessary, not only for us to sacrifice the people who stand in our way, but to sacrifice those who fight with us or even ourselves: 'Il se peut donc, et il arrive même souvent, qu'on se trouve obligé d'opprimer, de tuer des hommes qui poursuivent des buts dont on reconnaît soi-même la validité' (*PM*, 123). As I outlined in the discussion of Beauvoir's approach to the question of means versus ends, the antinomies between Self and Other, present and future, must be maintained in perpetual tension if freedom is to be authentically assumed: 'Pour que le retour au positif soit authentique, il faut qu'il enveloppe la négativité, qu'il ne dissimule pas les antinomies entre moyen et fin, présent et avenir, mais qu'elles y soient vécues dans une tension permanente; il ne faut ni reculer devant le scandale de la violence, ni le nier, ou, ce qui revient au même, l'assumer d'un cœur léger' (*PM*, 165). Therefore, the violence which ensues from the individual's engagement in the world must, in Beauvoir's view, be accepted as an inevitability.

---

[34] In his discussion of violence in Beauvoir's fiction and theoretical work, Davis begins by stating: 'If, then, *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* is a defence of violence, it is at best a hesitant one. Violence may turn out retrospectively to have been justified; but by definition its perpetrators cannot know what a retrospective judgement would be at the moment of action. Existentialist morality entails risk and the real possibility of being disastrously wrong', *Ethical Issues in Twentieth-Century French Fiction*, pp.95-6.

The centrality of failure to Beauvoir's ethical thought contrasts sharply with Camus's reluctance to address in any practical detail the implications of maintaining the ambiguity of human existence. Indeed, the inadequacy of Camus's treatment of failure is brought into relief by Beauvoir's lengthy and detailed discussion of the complexities of ethical choice. I would like to illustrate this by looking at two examples of the way in which Beauvoir's more pragmatic and nuanced approach exposes the potential weakness of Camus's position on the problem of violence. Firstly, debating the practical difficulty of choosing between causes, Beauvoir argues that the choice of which cause to support is extremely complex and involves numerous factors, not least those of opportunity, effectiveness and 'situation'. Citing the Black civil rights movement in America during the Second World War as an example, Beauvoir illustrates the way in which the individual's situation in the world plays a significant role in defining which causes are deemed to be paramount and which can be sacrificed in the fight for another.[35] Beauvoir's recognition of the impossibility of serving all causes simultaneously and her willingness to engage with the ethical dilemmas this poses, contrasts with Camus's reluctance to acknowledge the problem of failure and to address the need to distinguish between competing causes. Consequently, Camus's discussion is limited to general and theoretical statements, for example, 'La révolte, au contraire, dans son principe, se borne à refuser l'humiliation, sans la demander pour l'autre' (*E*, 427) or obscurities such as 'sa

[35] Beauvoir writes: 'Il se peut qu'il soit amené à sacrifier provisoirement une cause dont le succès est subordonné à celle d'une cause plus urgente à défendre; il se peut au contraire qu'on juge nécessaire de maintenir la tension de la révolte contre une situation à laquelle on ne veut à aucun prix consentir; ainsi, l'Amérique en guerre ayant demandé aux leaders noirs de renoncer dans l'intérêt général à leurs revendications propres, Richard Wright a refusé, estimant que même à travers la guerre sa cause devait être défendue', *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, pp.111-12.

seule vertu sera, plongé dans les ténèbres, de ne pas céder à leur vertige obscur; enchaîné au mal, de se traîner obstinément vers le bien' (*E*, 689).

Camus's tendency to remain on a theoretical level instead of addressing the practical implications of his ethical principles is further evident in the guidelines he proposes for the use of violence. Underlining the importance of the democratic process and the power of the electorate in determining who holds power, Camus argues that even if we have no control over the historical crises which arise, we do have an influence over who has the power to respond to such events: 'Toute crise historique, [...], s'achève par des institutions. Si nous n'avons pas de prise sur la crise elle-même, qui est le risque pur, nous en avons sur les institutions puisque nous pouvons les définir, choisir celles pour lesquelles nous luttons et incliner ainsi notre lutte dans leur direction' (*E*, 695). This pre-emptive policy is part of a package of measures which, as I outlined above, aim to prevent the systematization of violence as a means to achieve ethical objectives. Yet, even if it were possible to control which political institutions held power, the nature of political decision-making is so complex that this is no guarantee that historical crises will be dealt with ethically. Moreover, Camus's insistence on the provisionality of violence fails to address the awful truth about war, that is, that in order to suppress an opponent, it is necessary to annihilate or imprison those who serve him or her, irrespective of their own guilt or innocence. In contrast to Camus's reluctance to engage with the practical implications of ethical action, Beauvoir's approach appears far more pragmatic. Offering the ethical dilemma posed by the Hitler Youth as an example, Beauvoir argues that, even though they were arguably indoctrinated into Nazism and misled by their oppressors and therefore not guilty of the crimes they committed, in war there is no time to pursue non-

violent solutions, such as re-education programmes, which would minimalize failure. Consequently, as happened in 1944, the urgency of the situation dictates that all those who serve the oppressor be killed along with him or her, since this is the only way of acting upon his or her facticity and upholding the chosen cause of liberty.[36]

It is therefore clear that, despite the common ground Camus and Beauvoir hold on the question of absolutism and the relationship betweeen means and ends, their approaches to the problem of failure differ conspicuously. I would argue that the difference between Camus's and Beauvoir's treatment of violence lies in their concept of the creation of ethical values. It is apparent from a comparative reading that the tension between the relative and the absolute implicit to Camus's theory of revolt makes the inevitability of failure very difficult for him to accommodate. His concept of the value of human nature as an absolute which pre-exists the human consciousness dictates that his notion of the absolute lies beyond and external to the individual. For Camus, coming to consciousness through the movement of revolt is therefore a process of revelation rather than creation. Since the only way in which this value can be affirmed is through the simultaneous negation of the Other, so establishing a limit to action, revolt constitutes the relativization of an absolute which is externally defined. Consequently, there is a separation in Camus's conceptual paradigm between the absolute and the relative which, despite the questions which hang over Beauvoir's notion of freedom, does not exist in Beauvoir's conception of the creation of ethical values. Since freedom, for Beauvoir, does not pre-exist but is chosen and intended as an absolute by the individual consciousness, and since the foundation of this value through the upsurge of freedom involves the negation of the Other in order to assume my own nothingness, failure

---

[36] See Beauvoir, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté*, p.122.

constitutes a fundamental and integral part of Beauvoir's notion of freedom in a way that it does not in Camus's concept of the value of human nature. The absolute and the relative for Beauvoir, though in tension, remain integral and not separate to the individual consciousness. Consequently, for Beauvoir, the use of violence does not constitute a betrayal of the universal human spirit, or a violation of the human community, as it does for Camus. Whilst it is deeply unethical and to be avoided if at all possible, violence forms an integral and accepted part of Beauvoir's ethical paradigm. Having offered a re-reading of Camus's treatment of violence in relation to that of his contemporaries, I would now like to consider Camus's position in the light of Blanchot's theoretical optic in order to open up a more modern perspective on Camus's ethical approach.

Tu peux tuer cet homme?

In his article, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', Blanchot addresses the issue of violence and elaborates on the possibility of encounter which he evokes towards the end of 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme' and which I outline in Chapter 4. Central to his discussion is a critique of Camus's treatment of violence in his play *Les Justes*. Blanchot suggests that Camus was drawn to the story of the Russian nihilists' assassination attempt on the Grand Duke Serge in 1905 because 'il a reconnu en eux, dans leur histoire, cachée sous l'accomplissement de la violence, l'ombre ou la trace de l'exigence qui conduit à une communication véritable'.[37] Perceiving in Camus's dramatization a recognition of the possibility of ethical encounter, Blanchot questions his interpretation of this historical narrative as an affirmation of the value of human life: 'sans doute ils furent les hommes

---

[37] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1065. For an outline of this historical event see Camus's preface to *Les Justes* (Paris: Éditions Gallimard, 1950), p.7.

de la décision négative, mais d'où vient qu'à travers cette force négative, négation d'eux-mêmes, négation des autres, prend jour comme une affirmation, s'exprime la transparence d'une parole nue et simple?'[38] Pushing the signification of *Les Justes* beyond the superficial parameters of a statement about the moral and political necessity of violence, Blanchot calls into question Camus's assertion that self-sacrifice cancels out the act of murder and redeems the murderer, an assertion which he makes in *L'Homme révolté* and fictionalizes in *Les Justes*:

> "Mourir, dit Camus en exposant les pensées de Jeliabov, de Kaliaev, mourir annule la culpabilité et le crime lui-même." Peut-être, mais pas au regard de la morale ni de la vérité du monde. [...] la mort de Kaliaev ne peut pas racheter la mort du grand-duc, elle ne "l'annule" pas, ne la purifie pas, elle ne la rend pas plus juste, plus légère, mais plus lourde au contraire, elle s'ajoute à elle, elle est la même mort.[39]

For Blanchot, the self-sacrifice of Kaliaev does not constitute an affirmation of the value of human life, a defiant attempt to retrieve something positive from a double negation. Rather, it signifies Kaliaev's awareness that, in harnessing the nihilism implicit to the human condition, in using death itself as a tool, he becomes subject to it and must consent to occupy the space of utter negation: 'dès l'instant qu'il a fait entrer, par son initiative, la mort dans le monde, il est, lui aussi, entré dans la mort'.[40] Therefore, instead of a response to a moral problem, as Camus articulates it, Kalaiev's death constitutes, in

---

[38] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', pp.1065-6.
[39] Ibid., p.1066.
[40] Ibid., pp.1066-7.

Blanchot's view, an acceptance of the nothingness of the human condition and in this way echoes Sisyphus's 'étrange Oui'.[41]

Indeed, Blanchot's reading of Camus's essay on the Absurd, as a misinterpretation of the myth of Sisyphus, informs his analysis of the ethical dimensions of Camus's fictional work. For Blanchot, Camus's misappropriation of this myth as an affirmation of the value of human nature leads him to miss the crucial moment before the violence of negation in which ethical encounter is possible, thereby impoverishing his ethical approach. Recalling the moment when Kaliaev drew back from launching his attack because he had caught sight of the Grand Duke's wife and children alongside him in the carriage, a moment which Camus dramatizes in *Les Justes*, Blanchot argues that, rather than an articulation of the incompatibility of murder and revolt and therefore a rejection of violence on moral grounds, as Camus suggests,[42] beyond the innocence of the wife and children, Kaliaev glimpsed the nakedness and vulnerability of the human condition: 'Ce que nous pressentons, c'est que le recul, l'arrêt de la violence devant la faiblesse des enfants, le "Je ne peux pas" de Kaliaev coïncide avec le moment où la violence dénude le visage, fait de l'homme ce visage nu, cette faiblesse enfantine, ce dénuement extrême devant quoi la mort recule, parce qu'elle ne peut pas l'atteindre, parce que cette faiblesse est l'arrêt, le recul lui-même'.[43] It is therefore in encountering the radical alterity of the Other that we recognize the depths of our own frailty and fragility. In this moment, there is the possibility of encounter and communication, or

---

[41] Blanchot writes: 'il ne s'agit pas seulement ici de responsabilité, de la revendication personnelle d'un acte auquel on veut ainsi garder son efficacité. Il ne s'agit pas d'étonner le monde en mourant courageusement: pour beaucoup, il s'agissait de vivre, obscurément et désespérément, dans cet espace de la mort qu'ils avaient ouvert et où il leur fallait demeurer, privés de toute justification et de tout recours', ibid., p.1067.

[42] Kaliayev states: 'J'ai choisi de mourir pour que le meurtre ne triomphe pas. J'ai choisi d'être innocent', Camus, *Les Justes*, p.67.

[43] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', pp.1068-9.

'parole' as Blanchot describes it, which is born out of the moment of violence.[44] Blanchot sets up his reading in contrast and opposition to that of Camus, and it is clear from his analysis of both *L'Homme révolté* and *Les Justes* that, from his theoretical perspective, Camus fails to establish a position which could, in Blanchot's terms, be described as ethical. However, I would like to argue that Camus came far closer to Blanchot's vision of ethical encounter than Blanchot acknowledges and that he does, in fact, open up a space of ethical encounter in a way that reflects Blanchot's vision for human relations as outlined in 'Tu peux tuer cet homme'. Building on Blanchot's analysis, I would therefore like to offer a reading of Camus's ethics through an exploration of his short story 'L'Hôte' which both challenges and develops further Blanchot's assessment of Camus's ethical thought.[45]

Poised on the eve of Algeria's war of independence, Camus's story 'L'Hôte' unravels the tale of a French school teacher called Daru who comes into encounter, somewhat reluctantly, with an Arab. The small, isolated school where Daru works is perched on the top of a rocky outcrop, well above the plains in a region of Algeria which is both climatically and socially inhospitable, if not positively hostile. Daru is visited by a local *gendarme*, Balducci, who, trailing with him an Arab who has been arrested for murder, asks Daru to take the Arab to the nearest town the next morning and hand him over to the authorities. The scenario Camus depicts, situated as it is in a desert landscape, is curiously resonant with Blanchot's evocation of encounter which he describes

---

[44] Describing the relationship between his notion of 'parole' and nihilism, Blanchot writes: 'Parole, il faut le redire encore, infiniment risquée, car elle est environnée par la terreur, elle a pour frange et pour halo la violence radicale, elle est unie à l'obscurité de la nuit, au vide de l'abîme', ibid., p.1069.

[45] The reading I will offer of 'L'Hôte' in the following pages draws on my article '*Le Regard*: Face to Face in Albert Camus's "L'Hôte"', which adopts the contrastive theories of Jean-Paul Sartre and Emmanuel Levinas and engages in an analysis of both the function of the *regard* and the notion of the *visage* in 'L'Hôte', in an effort to probe the interplay and epiphany of selves which take place in this short story.

figuratively as follows: 'il se peut que tout rapport de l'homme avec l'homme tourne [...] autour de cette rencontre, [...][où] dans l'immense vide du désert, nous rencontrons le compagnon équivoque qui tout à coup surgit à nos côtés'.[46] Indeed, Balducci's visit is unexpected and unannounced. Transfixed by the figure of otherness that enters his self-contained, almost misanthropic, world, Daru is described as being 'tout entier occupé à regarder l'Arabe'.[47] The factors which define the Arab's status as Other are twofold. Ethnically he belongs to a colonised indigenous group which is on the verge of revolt against the colonial administration. Secondly, in murdering his cousin he has violated prevailing moral and social codes. Both of these factors define and shape the Arab's status in relation to Balducci and Daru, representatives as they are of the French colonial system in their respective positions as law-enforcer and educator. Moreover, in the climate of civil unrest and racial tension, in which this narrative is situated, the Arab's arrest becomes inextricable from issues of national independence and colonial oppression. His racial identity and legal status thus fuse and define his difference in relation to Daru and Balducci. It is not insignificant that the Arab is narratively defined by both his legal and his ethnic status. Given no proper name, he is referred to throughout as either 'l'Arabe' or 'le prisonnier'.[48] It therefore becomes clear that the Arab's otherness is an expression of all that is difficult for Daru and Balducci to make sense of or assimilate, both racially and legally. In terms of Blanchot's description of human encounter, what follows this initial meeting between Daru and the Arab is very significant and can be seen to reflect the moment of encounter Blanchot envisages in all its fragility and danger.

---

[46] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1061.
[47] Camus, *L'Exil et le royaume*, p.84.
[48] Ibid., p.91.

The sudden presence of the Other in our world, for Blanchot, represents a call, a test, a questioning of ourselves both in relation to the alterity of our existence and that of *autrui*: 'il se peut que tout rapport de l'homme avec l'homme tourne aussi autour de cette rencontre, l'élude, la méconnaisse à cause de son danger, l'oublie pour en oublier le risque, mais cependant l'exige implicitement, nous interroge obstinémeent sur elle, nous presse passionnément d'y revenir'.[49] I would argue that this sequence of retreat, evasion and *rapprochement* can be traced in the initial encounter which is played out between Daru and the Arab. After the arrival of Balducci and the Arab, Daru serves them tea. Kneeling down beside the Arab and untying his wrists so that he can drink, he seems to initiate a silent unknotting of selves: 'Daru, posant le verre sur le sol, s'était agenouillé près de l'Arabe. Celui-ci, sans rien dire, le regardait faire de ses yeux fiévreux'.[50] However, the fervour of altruism Daru first displays, in untying the Arab's hands and giving him something to drink, disperses in the intensity of the Arab's gaze: 'Daru revint vers le prisonnier qui n'avait pas bougé, mais ne le quittait pas des yeux'.[51] Finding himself the object of scrutiny, his instinct is to retreat to safety. He escapes to his bedroom, where lying on the bed he stares vacantly at the sky. Moreover, having initially refused and then reluctantly consented to Balducci's offer of his revolver, Daru on his way into the bedroom, suddenly backtracks, takes the revolver from the drawer to which he had confined it and stuffs it into his pocket. Previously reluctant to entertain the thought of violence even as self-defence, Daru now re-establishes the possibility of aggression as a means to preserve his own possibilities and dominance in the presence of the Other. Describing the potential for violence that accompanies this moment of encounter and the ever-present temptation to subjugate the

---

[49] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1061.
[50] Camus, *L'Exil et le royaume*, p.85.
[51] Ibid., p.90.

Other in an attempt to subsume our own nothingness and frailty, Blanchot writes: 'tout nous conseille, si nous ne voulons pas périr dans l'illusion fascinante de l'absence, si nous voulons nous dérober au mirage qui nous fait soudain rencontrer le désert sous la figure d'un compagnon, de lui faire subir cette interrogation extrême, nécessairement violente, qui a la mort pour horizon'.[52] It is precisely this ethical dilemma which prompts Daru's withdrawal to a space where he can be alone. As Daru's mind drifts, he becomes acutely conscious of the silence around him. His hope is that the Arab has fled so that the decision of how to act will no longer nag at his conscience: 'Il s'étonna de cette joie franche qui lui venait à la seule pensée que l'Arabe avait pu fuir et qu'il allait se retrouver seul sans avoir rien à décider'.[53] Implicit to Daru's aversion is an acknowledgement that mere encounter with the Other entails an ethical responsibility which in turn presents him with a choice. Therefore, already at the heart of Daru's encounter with the Arab is a painful and disturbing recognition of his need to respond, to leave the security and familiarity of his world in order to approach the Other in all his or her alterity.

Daru's acknowledgement of this choice is signalled by his invitation '"Viens"'.[54] Once mobilized he sets about to make them both a meal. What follows is a sequence of hospitality and although the Arab watches the whole process, there is no bestowal of the gaze on Daru's part, no attempt to diffuse or disrupt the Arab's attentiveness. Instead, the motions of Self in response to the Other take place: 'Daru installa deux couverts. Il prit de la farine et de l'huile, pétrit dans un plat une galette et alluma le petit fourneau'.[55] It is a silent-speak, a quiet beckoning to solidarity, a turning of self outwards, towards exteriority, that

---

[52] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', pp.1061-2.
[53] Camus, *L'Exil et le royaume*, p.91.
[54] Ibid., p.91.
[55] Ibid., p.91.

we witness. In this sense, the passage resounds with Blanchot's notion of being *face à face*, not physically, but essentially: 'Ce moment qui est celui de la rencontre le précède en même temps, se situe à la limite mouvante où, du fond de la profondeur originelle, [...] cette nudité devient le visage nu de la rencontre et la surprise du face à face'.[56] Describing Daru's hospitality towards the Arab, Moishe Black comments: 'an adequate word for all this is not *égalité*, nor even Camus's own word, used in the story, *fraternité*, but something more akin to *identité*'.[57] It is indeed a process of identification that unfolds, of both Self and of the Other as Other. This resurgence of ethical generosity towards the Arab-Other is underlined by Daru when he inadvertently knocks the revolver in his pocket whilst preparing the meal: 'Dans un de ses mouvements, il heurta le revolver enfoncé dans sa poche droite. Il posa le bol, passa dans la salle de classe et mit le revolver dans le tiroir de son bureau'.[58] Therefore, contrary to Blanchot's interpretation of Camus's earlier theoretical and fictional work, Camus can be seen to open up a space of encounter in 'L'Hôte' which resonates very closely with Blanchot's ethical vision and sheds a more positive light on Camus's approach to alterity. Whilst the ambivalent ending of Camus's narrative might qualify to some degree this reading of Camus's ethics,[59] it is clear from an exploration of 'L'Hôte' in the light of Blanchot's theoretical paradigm that, although Camus's treatment of violence is inherently problematic, he does nevertheless catch a glimpse of the possibility of ethical encounter and

---

[56] Blanchot, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', p.1062.
[57] Moishe Black, 'Camus's "L'Hôte" as a Ritual of Hospitality', *Nottingham French Studies*, 28 (1989), 39-52 (p.49).
[58] Camus, *L'Exil et le royaume*, pp.91-2.
[59] Despite Daru's generosity towards the Arab in the closing stages of the narrative, he ultimately leaves the Arab to walk the road which will lead him to imprisonment rather than to freedom: 'L'Arabe s'était retourné maintenant vers Daru et une sorte de panique se levait sur son visage: "Écoute", dit-il. Daru secoua la tête: "Non, tais-toi. Maintenant, je te laisse." Il lui tourna le dos, fit deux grands pas dans la direction de l'école, regarda d'un air indécis l'Arabe immobile et repartit', p.98. For a discussion of the ambivalence of Camus's ending, see my article, pp.190-2; Black, pp.48-51 and Susan Léger, 'Camus's "L'Hôte": The Lessons of an Ending', *French Literature Series*, 17 (1990), 87-97.

in this way anticipates the ethical concerns of subsequent generations of theorists and literary critics.

It is therefore clear from a comparative reading of Camus's and Beauvoir's treatment of violence that the polarity of the Camus/Sartre paradigm does not fairly reflect the relationship between Camus's thought on this issue and Beauvoir's approach to ethical failure. Rather than confirm the binarism of critical debate in this field, this chapter has shown that there is great proximity between Camus and Beauvoir in their responses to the problem of absolutism and the question of ends versus means. Moreover, this contrastive approach allows for a more nuanced reading of the differences which clearly do exist betweeen them. Camus's notion of ethical values, in particular the given value of human nature, makes it extremely difficult for him either to accommodate or to tolerate the use of violence. In contrast, the corollary of Beauvoir's concept of freedom as absolute only in the sense that it is chosen as such by the individual consciousness is that failure forms an integral part of human existence and ethical endeavour. In terms of contemporary discourse on this issue, Camus's ethical proposal appears to lack coherence and does not lend itself to practical application. Indeed, the implications of Camus's theory of revolt for ethical action and human conflict are evident in Camus's subsequent political life. Whether his retreat into silence during the Algerian crisis be interpreted as abstentionism or altruisim, it nevertheless points to a reluctance on his part to compromise his ethical values and reveals the difficulty he experienced in accommodating failure.[60] However, Blanchot's optic opens up an

---

[60] Whilst Camus's silence was perceived by many of his contemporaries as abstentionism, Élie Wiesel in a recent article sheds an alternative light on the position Camus took during this period, suggesting that Camus's refusal to support either side was a testament to his ethics and not a mark of his political incompetence: 'Il la [sa "petite phrase" concernant la guerre d'Algérie] voulut subjective et éthique, mais

alternative perspective on Camus's thought and offers the opportunity to consider his stance on the issue of violence in terms of a more modern theoretical agenda. Critical of the nihilistic basis on which, in his view, Camus founds his theory of revolt, Blanchot finds Camus's ethical position wanting. Yet, an exploration of Camus's later fictional work, in the form of his short story 'L'Hôte', reveals an ethical dimension to his approach which concords closely with that of Blanchot and illuminates the way in which Camus's perspective can be seen to resonate with the ethical concerns of modern literary theory and criticism.

---

elle reçut une interprétation politique, donc objective. [...] Jamais indifférent à la souffrance humaine, celle que l'armée française infligeait aux musulmans algériens ne pouvait que tourmenter sa conscience d'homme engagé qui rejetait l'ambiguïté comme choix honorable', 'L'Homme de conscience', *Europe*, 77 (1999), 9-11 (p.10). In contrast, Edward Hughes points to the utopianism of Camus's response to the Algerian crisis in manuscript drafts of his unfinished novel *Le Premier Homme*, see *Writing Marginality in Modern French Literature*, p.130.

Conclusion

A controversial figure, Albert Camus has attracted a wide variety of response since he rose to prominence in the post-Liberation years. Whilst critical reception of his literary output has retained its diversity, readings of Camus's theoretical work have polarized into two distinct and opposing camps since his public wrangling with Sartre in the pages of *Les Temps modernes*. Moreover, the terms of this debate, based as it is on the philosophical and ethical concerns of the 1950s, have come to dominate critical discourse in this field and to define the way in which Camus's theory of revolt is read and interpreted. Such an interpretive approach has led to a stylization and simplification of Camus's and Sartre's position on the question of ethical values, the issue of means versus ends and the problem of violence. Moreover, this schematization of their thought has resulted and continues to result in highly defensive accounts of Camus's ethical thought which return to the battleground of the *Temps modernes* debate rather than engage critically with Camus's work. This comparative study has shown that this retrospection and return on the part of Camus critics is problematic for two reasons. Firstly, in adopting the binarism of the Camus/Sartre debate as a hermeneutic paradigm, this critical approach perpetuates a reading of the relationship between Camusian revolt and Sartrian Existentialism as philosophically and ethically opposed, and so fails to address the common ground between these two philosophical perspectives. Secondly, in returning to the philosophical agenda of the 1950s, it prevents any possibility of engaging with Camus's theory of revolt in terms of the theoretical discourses which have emerged since the mid-twentieth century. Drawing Camus into proximity with Beauvoir, whose thought is both distinct from and closely associated with Sartrian Existentialism, this

study disrupts the binarism of this critical debate and offers a more nuanced reading of Camus's contribution to contemporary discourse on ethics.

A reading of Camus's theory of revolt in relation to Beauvoir's existentialist ethics sheds a very different light on the relationship between Camusian revolt and Existentialist thought. Whilst Camus and his existentialist counterparts seem to be divided on the issue of given values, it is clear from an exploration of his concept of human nature and Beauvoir's principle of freedom that they both seek an ethical approach which is at once universally applicable and faithful to the belief that there is no organizing unity beyond human existence. Conceiving of human nature as a value which is both relative and absolute, Camus situates his ethics between universalist and relativist discourses. Likewise, Beauvoir's notion of freedom as an absolute value freely chosen by the individual consciousness sets out to bridge the gap which has traditionally separated individualistic and holistic methodologies in the field of metaethics. This similarity in Camus's and Beauvoir's purpose and approach draws them into proximity and so collapses the polarity of critical discourse on this issue. Moreover, the questions raised by critics over whether or not Beauvoir does in fact liberate herself from given values further problematizes the distance which some critics are keen to maintain between Camus's ethical perspective and that of existentialists. However, in contrast to Beauvoir who explicitly rejects the idea of pre-existing values, Camus openly affirms his belief in the given value of human nature and this presentational and conceptual difference inflects their respective treatment of alterity and their approach to the problem of ethical failure.

Whilst both Camus and Beauvoir advocate a mode of ethical action which seeks to balance the ambiguity of the human condition and to hold in tension the competing interests of individual freedoms, the differences in their conceptions of ethical values influence the way in which they understand human relationships and respond to the Other. Perceiving in the absurdity of the human condition an affirmation of human life, Camus believes human beings to be united by a common bond in the face of the Absurd. Therefore, for Camus, the movement of revolt both reveals the individual's value and binds him or her in solidarity with all other human beings who share a common identity. In Camus's view, this profound sense of community disrupts the master/slave dialectic and draws into relationship the victim and executioner, the oppressor and the oppressed. Like Camus, Beauvoir envisages an ethical approach which values and respects the freedom of the Other, since it is only because the Other is free that the Self can define his or her being. However, whereas Camus seeks to disrupt the master/slave dialectic, Beauvoir reluctantly accepts that the only way to uphold freedom as a value is to act on the Other's freedom in the world through objectivation. It is therefore only through the reduction of the oppressor-Other to an object that the greater value of freedom can be achieved. Beauvoir's struggle to stabilize the asymmetrical dynamics of the subject-object relation in *Le Deuxième Sexe* is an indication of her desire to encounter the Other in a non-reductive way. However, in contrast to Camus, the ontology on which Beauvoir bases her ethics does not easily allow her to escape the Sartrian economy of subject and object. This non-oppositional reading of Camus's and Beauvoir's treatment of Self-Other relations nuances the relationship between Camus's ethical position and that of Beauvoir and calls into question the way in which critics have sought to establish the moral high

ground for Camus over Sartre and other existentialists since the *Temps modernes* polemic.

Yet it is also clear from this comparative study that the integrality of failure in Beauvoir's ethical paradigm, her acknowledgement that it is impossible to serve all causes all of the time, leads her to formulate an ethics which, when faced with hard choices, enables her to distinguish between different courses of action and competing interests in a way that Camus evidently found it difficult to do. When the implications of Camus's vision of Self-Other relations for his treatment of violence are considered in conjunction with Beauvoir's more pragmatic approach, it is evident that, whilst he and Beauvoir share much common ground in their views on absolutism and the relationship between means and ends, his concept of human nature as given privileges the absolute term of his 'relatif absolu' (*E*, 1696) and so lends a rigidity to his position on violence. Contrary to the critical consensus on Camus's position in relation to that of his existentialist counterparts, violence, for Beauvoir was neither undertaken readily nor lightly. Moreover, the paralysis which Camus experienced in the face of violence, most notably in the context of the Algerian War, not only indicates a profound ethical conviction on his part, as Camus critics have consistently underlined, but also a reluctance to accept the inevitability of failure and consequently an inability to resolve on a course of action when some form of action was required. Beauvoir's philosophical work is therefore extremely important in disrupting the binarism of the Camus/Sartre polemic and providing a more nuanced reading of the relationship between Camus's thought and existentialist ethics.

Whereas Beauvoir's ethical paradigm provides a new and productive way of assessing Camus's contribution to contemporary discourse on ethics, Blanchot's theoretical optic opens up an alternative perspective which allows us to evaluate Camus's theory of revolt in terms of more modern critical discourses such as feminism, postcolonialism and ethical criticism, all of which are informed to some degree by the theories of alterity developed by Blanchot, Levinas, Derrida and others. Blanchot brings an entirely different and radically new agenda to bear on Camus's approach to ethics, allowing us to raise questions about Camus's ethical position which resonate with the critical concerns of modern readers. For Blanchot, Camus's transition from *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* to *L'Homme révolté* is problematic, not because of his recourse to given values as such, but because, in Blanchot's view, in founding his ethics on the value of human nature Camus establishes a starting point, a limit, which maintains a safe distance from the nihilism of the human condition. Whilst Camus's preliminary essay 'Remarque sur la révolte' serves to nuance Blanchot's reading of Camus's notion of the value affirmed in the movement of revolt, it is nevertheless the case that revolt, for Camus, involves the affirmation of a positive value and not merely the strange acceptance of absurdity which, in Blanchot's view, is all that Sisyphus's labour signifies.

Since the rebel must simultaneously negate all that is not him- or herself in order to affirm his or her human worth, Camusian revolt for Blanchot dissimulates nihilism and, in privileging the Self over the Other, prevents the possibility of ethical encounter. For this reason, Blanchot is critical of Camus's approach and finds it wanting. In his view, the movement of negation underlying Camus's theory of revolt means that, when confronted with the absurdity of his or her existence in the alterity of the Other, the Self

annihilates the Other in order to assert him- or herself, instead of recognizing and welcoming the vulnerability of the Other as an expression of the fragility of human existence. However, this space of encounter, which Blanchot defines as being both in and before the moment of violence, can also be discerned in Camus's theory of revolt. Integral to Camus's notion of the value of human nature is the absurdity of the human condition which is common to all. Whilst his conception of this value goes beyond the 'étrange [o]ui' of Sisyphus to a mode of revolt which involves negation, as Blanchot argues, Camus's notion of the universal value of human nature leads him to a vision of human encounter in which the dignity of all human beings is paramount. Camus's desire to disrupt the master/slave dialectic can therefore be seen to open up an intermediary space between Self and Other in which ethical encounter is possible. This is evident in Camus's short story 'La Femme adultère' which illuminates both Camus's treatment of Self-Other relations and Blanchot's reading of his ethical approach.

When Camus's response to the problem of violence is considered in the light of Blanchot's theoretical perspective, similar issues emerge about the extent to which his position can be regarded as ethical. Central to Blanchot's objection to Camus's stance on the use of violence, both in *L'Homme révolté* and in *Les Justes*, is Camus's mis-reading of the Sisyphus myth. Eliding suicide and murder, Camus's interpretation of Sisyphus's labour as affirmative of human life leads him to conclude that murder is incompatible with revolt and therefore that violence is fundamentally wrong and to be avoided at all cost. In Blanchot's view, the conceptual basis on which Camus founds this moral position prevents him from encountering the Other as radically other. Challenging Camus's portrayal of Kaliaev's failure to launch the attack on the first attempt, Blanchot

argues that rather than a refusal to commit murder on moral grounds, as Camus suggests it is, Kaliaev's hesitation marks a moment of ethical encounter when he recognized in the vulnerability of his victims the frailty of his own human existence. Therefore, for Blanchot, in his conceptualization of the problem of violence Camus ultimately fails to respond ethically to the Other. However, an exploration of Camus's short story 'L'Hôte' would suggest that he drew far closer to Blanchot's vision of ethical encounter than he gives him credit for in 'Tu peux tuer cet homme'. To read 'L'Hôte' is to be drawn into the rapids of human encounter, to grapple with the notion of our subjectivity and to engage with the Other. The tentative, fraught, risk-ridden, struggle to welcome alterity, which Camus evokes in this narrative, ultimately challenges Blanchot's conclusions about Camus's ethical approach and demonstrates the way in which Camus's ethics resonate with the concerns underlying modern theoretical and literary discourses.

Bibliography

Ajchenbaum, Yves Marc, 'Préface', in Albert Camus and Pascal Pia, *Correspondance 1939-1947* (Paris: Fayard/Gallimard, 2000), pp.VII-XXV.

Albérès, René-Marill, *Les Hommes traqués* (Paris: La Nouvelle Édition, 1953).

Arland, Marcel, 'Albert Camus et la révolte', *Gazette de Lausanne*, 12 January 1952.

Armel, Aliette, '*L'Homme révolté* aujourd'hui', *Magazine littéraire*, 276 (1990), 46-47.

Aron, Raymond, *Introduction à la philosophie de l'histoire* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

Ascher, Carol, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Life of Freedom* (Brighton: The Harvester Press, 1981).

Atack, Margaret, 'Writing from the Centre: Ironies of Otherness and Marginality', in *Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex': New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Ruth Evans (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp.31-59.

Aubery, Pierre, 'Camus et la classe ouvrière', *The French Review*, 32 (1958), 14-21.

Autrand, François di Dio and Charles, 'La Révolte en question (suite et fin)', *Combat*, 5 March 1952.

Barilier, Étienne, *Albert Camus: philosophie et littérature* (Lausanne: Éditions l'Âge d'Homme, 1977).

Beauvoir, Simone de, *La Force des choses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1963).

Beauvoir, Simone de, *La Force de l'âge* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960).

Beauvoir, Simone de, *Pour une morale de l'ambiguïté* suivi de *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* (Paris: Gallimard, 1947; *Pyrrhus et Cinéas* first published 1944).

Beauvoir, Simone de, *Le Deuxième Sexe*, 2 vols (Paris: Gallimard, 1949).

Beauvoir, Simone de, *L'Invitée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1943).

Beauvoir, Simone de, 'Œil pour œil', *Les Temps modernes*, 1 (1945-6), 813-830.

Beauvoir, Simone de, 'Faut-il brûler Sade?', *Les Temps modernes*, 7 (1951), 1002-1033; 'Faut-il brûler Sade? (fin)', *Les Temps modernes*, 7 (1952), 1197-1230.

Beauvoir, Simone de, *Le Sang des autres* (Paris: Gallimard, 1945).

Bechtel, Guy, 'Albert Camus, Prix Nobel. Les Contradictions d'un homme engagé', *Carrefour*, 23 October 1957.

Beer, Jill, '*Le Regard*: Face to Face in Albert Camus's "L'Hôte"', *French Studies*, 56 (2002), 179-192.

Bernard, Marc, 'La Contradiction d'Albert Camus', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 87 (1960), 594-597.

Biermez, Jean, 'Camus et le non-agir', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 498-499 (1994), 173-181.

Black, Moishe, 'Camus's "L'Hôte" as a Ritual of Hospitality', *Nottingham French Studies*, 28 (1989), 39-52.

Blackburn, Simon, *The Oxford Dictionary of Philosophy* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1994).

Blanchard, Marc E., 'Before Ethics. Camus's "Pudeur"', *Modern Language Notes*, 112 (1997), 666-682.

Blanchet, A., 'La Querelle Sartre-Camus', in *La Littérature et le spirituel: la mêlée littéraire*, ed. by A. Blanchet, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959-61), I (1959), pp.267-279.

Blanchet, A., '*L'Homme révolté* d'Albert Camus', in *La Littérature et le spirituel: la mêlée littéraire*, ed. by A. Blanchet, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959-61), I (1959), pp.233-249.

Blanchet, A., 'Le Pari d'Albert Camus', in *La Littérature et le spirituel: classiques d'hier et d'aujourd'hui*, ed. by A. Blanchet, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions Montaigne, 1959-61), III (1961), pp.193-229.

Blanchot, Maurice, 'Quand la morale se tait', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 3 (1954) 96-104.

Blanchot, Maurice, 'Réflexions sur l'enfer', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 3 (1954) 677-686.

Blanchot, Maurice, 'Réflexions sur le nihilisme', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 3 (1954), 850-859.

Blanchot, Maurice, 'Tu peux tuer cet homme', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 3 (1954), 1059-1069.

Boisdeffre, Pierre de, 'Réflexions sur la révolte', *Travaillons. Revue mensuelle des*

cadres de la L.F.A.C.F., 471 (1952), 19-20.

Bourdet, Claude, 'Camus ou les mains propres', *France Observateur*, 7 January 1960.

Bourdet, Claude, 'Le "vrai débat" de Camus', *France Observateur*, 6-7 June 1955.

Braun, Lev, *Witness of Decline. Camus Moralist of the Absurd* (Rutherford N.J.: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 1974).

Brée, Germaine, *Camus and Sartre: Crisis and Commitment* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1974).

Brée, Germaine, *Camus* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1959).

Bréhier, E., 'Albert Camus. *L'Homme révolté*', *Revue philosophique de la France et de l'étranger*, 143 (1953), 125-127.

Breton, André and Aimé Patri, 'Dialogue entre André Breton et Aimé Patri à propos de *L'Homme révolté*', *Arts*, 16 November 1951.

Bronner, Stephen Eric, *Camus, Portrait of a Moralist* (Minneapolis and London: Minnesota University Press, 1999).

Broyelle, Claudie and Jacques Broyelle, *Les Illusions retrouvées: Sartre a toujours raison contre Camus* (Paris: Grasset, 1982).

Camus, Albert, *Essais*, ed. by Roger Quilliot (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).

Camus, Albert, *L'Envers et l'endroit* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937).

Camus, Albert, *L'Étranger* (Paris: Gallimard, 1942).

Camus, Albert, *Les Justes* (Paris: Gallimard, 1950).

Camus, Albert, *L'Exil et le royaume* (Paris: Gallimard, 1957).

Camus, Albert, *Noces suivi de L'Été* (Paris: Gallimard, 1959).

Camus, Albert, *Carnets I: mai 1935-février 1942* (Paris: Gallimard, 1962).

Camus, Albert, *Carnets II: janvier 1942-mars 1951* (Paris: Gallimard, 1964).

Camus, Albert, 'Révolte dans les Asturies/ L'État de siège', *L'Avant-Scène: numéro spécial sur Albert Camus*, 1-15 November 1968.

Camus, Albert, *La Mort heureuse* (Paris: Gallimard, 1971).

Camus, Albert, *Fragments d'un combat 1938-1940*, ed. by Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi and André Abbou (Paris: Gallimard, 1978).

Camus, Albert and Jean Grenier, *Correspondance 1932-1960* (Paris: Gallimard, 1981).

Camus, Albert and Pascal Pia, *Correspondance 1939-1947* (Paris: Fayard/Gallimard, 2000).

Camus, Albert, *Le Premier Homme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1994).

Champigny, Robert, 'The Comedy of Ethics', *Yale French Studies*, 25 (1960), 72-74.

Champigny, Robert, 'Compositions philosophiques et concepts', in *Albert Camus Second International Conference*, ed. by Raymond Gay-Crosier (Gainesville: University of Florida Press, 1980), pp. 49-54.

Champromis, Pierre, 'De la révolte à la fraternité', *Gavroche*, 7 December 1944.

Char, René, 'Lettre à Guy Dumur à propos de la révolte en question', *Combat*, 3 March 1952.

Charbit, Denis, '*L'Homme révolté*: grandeur et servitude de la fonction intellectuelle', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 19 (2001), 11-53.

Chartrand, G.-A., 'De l'absurde à la découverte de la charité', *Bulletin de l'association canadienne des bibliothécaires de langue française*, 6 (1960), 4-9.

Coady, C. A. J., 'Politics and the Problem of Dirty Hands', in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp.373-383.

Comte-Sponville, André, 'L'Absurde dans *Le Mythe de Sisyphe*', in Anne-Marie Amiot and Jean-François Mattéi, *Albert Camus et la philosophie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp.159-171.

Crochet, Monique, *Les Mythes dans l'œuvre de Camus* (Paris: Éditions Universitaires, 1973).

Cruickshank, John, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1959).

D'Astier de la Vigerie, Emmanuel, 'Arrachez la victime aux bourreaux. Réponse à Albert Camus', *Caliban*, April (1948), 12-17.

D'Astier de la Vigerie, Emmanuel, 'La Grande Tribune politique d'action: Ponce-Pilate

chez les bourreaux. Réponse à Albert Camus', *Action*, 14-20 July 1948.

Daunais, Isabelle, 'L'Expérience de l'espace dans les nouvelles de Camus', *The French Review*, 67 (1993), 47-60.

Davis, Colin, 'Altericide: Camus, Encounters, Reading', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 33 (1997), 129-141.

Davis, Colin, *Levinas: An Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996).

Davis, Colin, *Ethical Issues in Twentieth-Century French Fiction: Killing the Other* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2000).

Davis, Colin, review of *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century*, by Tony Judt (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1998), *French Studies*, 54 (2000), 404-405.

Davison, Ray, *Camus: The Challenge of Dostoevsky* (Exeter: Exeter University Press, 1997).

Debidour, Victor-Henry, '*L'Homme révolté*', *Le Bulletin des lettres*, 135 (1952), 56-59.

Debout, Simone, 'Sartre et Camus, témoins de la liberté', *Modern Language Notes*, 112 (1997), 600-607.

Déron, Jean-Paul, 'Un texte inédit: "Je sais seulement que je ne serai jamais du côté des bourreaux"', *Paris-Normandie*, 8 January 1960.

Djemai, Abdelkader, 'Camus journaliste', in *Les Trois Guerres d'Albert Camus: actes du colloque international de Poitiers 4-5-6 mai 1995*, ed. by Lionel Dubois (Poitiers: Éditions du Pont-Neuf, 1995), pp.41-57.

Domerc, Marcel, 'Camus est-il dépassé?', *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 9-15 February 1966.

Dostoïevski, Fyodor, *Les Frères Karamazov*, trad. by Henri Mongault and Marc Laval, 3 vols (Paris: Éditions Bossard, 1923).

Dubois, Lionel, 'Le Combat d'Albert Camus contre les totalitarismes', in *Les Trois Guerres d'Albert Camus: actes du colloque international de Poitiers 4-5-6 mai 1995* (Poitiers: Éditions du Pont-Neuf, 1995), pp. 123-137.

Dubois, Lionel, 'Camus et la guerre 1939-49', in *Les Trois Guerres d'Albert Camus: actes du colloque international de Poitiers 4-5-6 mai 1995* (Poitiers: Éditions du Pont-Neuf, 1995), pp. 68-100.

Dumur, Guy, 'Camus et ses juges', *Combat*, 28 February 1952.

Dumur, Guy, 'Une lettre de René Char à propos de la révolte en question', *Combat*, 3 March 1952.

Dupuy, René-Jean, 'Camus, moraliste politique', *Annales de la Faculté des lettres et sciences humaines de Nice*, 38 (1979), 237-249.

Durand, Anne, *Le Cas A. Camus* (Paris: Éditions Fischbacher, 1961).

East, Bernard, *Camus ou l'homme à la recherche d'une morale* (Paris: Cerf/Bellarmin, 1984).

Engels, Friedrich and Karl Marx, *The Communist Manifesto with an Introduction by A. J. P. Taylor* (London: Penguin, 1967).

Evans, Martin, *The Memory of Resistance: French Opposition to the Algerian War (1954-62)* (Oxford and New York: Berg French Studies, 1997).

Ewald, François, 'L'Absurde et la révolte', *Magazine littéraire*, 276 (1990), 43-45.

Fabrègues, Jean de, 'Le problème du mal dans la littérature contemporaine', in *Le Mal est parmi nous*, ed. by Paul Claudel (Paris: Librairie Plon, 1948), pp.57-111.

Fallaize, Elizabeth, *The Novels of Simone de Beauvoir* (London and New York: Routledge, 1988).

Fallaize, Elizabeth, 'Introduction', in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth Fallaize (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.1-16.

Felman, Shoshana and Dori Laub, *Testimony: Crises of Witnessing in Literature, Psychoanalysis and History* (New York and London: Routledge, 1992).

Fell, Alison S., *Liberty, Equality, Maternity in Beauvoir, Leduc and Ernaux* (Oxford: Legenda, 2003).

Fell, Alison S., 'The Perils of a Room of One's Own: Space in Simone de Beauvoir's *L'Invitée*, *Le Sang des autres* and *Les Bouches inutiles*', *Forum for Modern Language Studies*, 39 (2003), 269-279.

Finkielkraut, Alain, *The Wisdom of Love*, trans. by Kevin O'Neill and David Suchoff (Lincoln and London: Nebraska University Press, 1997).

Fitch, Brian T., *'L'Étranger' d'Albert Camus: un texte, ses lecteurs, leurs lectures* (Paris: Librairie Larousse, 1972).

Fitch, Brian T., *The Narcissistic Text: A Reading of Camus's Fiction* (Toronto and London: Toronto University Press, 1982).

Fullbrook, Edward and Kate Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Introduction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998).

Fullbrook, Kate and Edward Fullbrook, *Simone de Beauvoir and Jean-Paul Sartre* (Hemel Hempstead: Harvester Wheatsheaf, 1993).

Gagnebin, Laurent, *Simone de Beauvoir ou le refus de l'indifférence* (Paris: Éditions Fischbacher, 1968).

Garfitt, J.S.T., *The Work and Thought of Jean Grenier (1898-1971)* (London: The Modern Humanities Research Association, 1983).

Gay-Crosier, Raymond, *Albert Camus: paradigmes de l'ironie – révolte et négation affirmative* (Toronto: Les Éditions Paratexte, 2000).

Gay-Crosier, Raymond, 'La Révolte génératrice et régénératrice', in *Albert Camus: œuvre fermée, œuvre ouverte?*, ed. by Raymond Gay-Crosier and Jacqueline Lévi-Valensi (Paris: Gallimard, 1985), pp.113-134.

Gay-Crosier, Raymond, 'Révolte, souveraineté et jeu chez Bataille et Camus: étude conceptuelle', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 12 (1985), 7-34.

Gay-Crosier, Raymond, *The Stranger* (New York: The Gale Group, 2002).

Gélinas, Germain-Paul, *La Liberté dans la pensée d'Albert Camus* (Fribourg: Éditions Universitaires Suisses, 1965).

Gloton, R. 'Albert Camus moraliste', *Lectures culturelles*, 35 (1958), 3-6.

Glucksmann, André, *Les Maîtres penseurs* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1977).

Gregg, John, *Maurice Blanchot and the Literature of Transgression* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

Grenier, Jean, *Entretiens sur le bon usage de la liberté* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

Grenier, Jean, *Albert Camus, Souvenirs* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).

Grenier, Jean, 'Un oui, un non, une ligne droite', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 26 October 1957.

Grenier, Jean, *Essai sur l'esprit d'orthodoxie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

Grenier, Roger, *Albert Camus: soleil et ombre* (Paris: Gallimard, 1991).

Grimaud, Michel, 'Humanism and the "White Man's Burden": Camus, Daru, Meursault

and the Arabs', in *Camus's 'L'Étranger': Fifty Years On*, ed. by Adèle King (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.170-82.

Gros, B., *Camus: 'L'Homme révolté'* (Paris: Hatier, 1977).

Guérin, Jeanyves, 'Camus, philosophe pour classes terminales?', in *Albert Camus et la philosophie*, ed. by Anne-Marie Amiot and Jean-François Mattéi (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp.85-99.

Guilbert, Jean-Claude, 'Les Nouveaux Maîtres à penser de la jeunesse [Barthes, Camus, Foucault, Sartre, Sollers et al.]', *Combat*, 24 January 1968.

Guissard, Lucien, 'Albert Camus: moraliste "bourgeois"?', *La Croix*, 3 June 1963.

Guissard, Lucien, 'Camus. À la recherche d'une légitimité', in *Écrits en notre temps: Saint-Exupéry, Simone Weil, Ramuz, Paul Claudel, Jules Roy, Aragon, André Malraux, Albert Camus, François Mauriac*, ed. by Lucien Guissard (Paris: A. Fayard, 1961), pp.267-282.

Hare, R. M., *Essays On The Moral Concepts* (London and Basingstoke: MacMillan, 1972).

Hart, Elizabeth, 'Face à face: l'éthique lévinasienne dans "L'Hôte"', in *Les Trois Guerres d'Albert Camus*, ed. by Lionel Dubois (Poitiers: Les Éditions du Pont-Neuf, 1995), pp.172-177.

Hart, Elizabeth, 'Levinasian Ethics and the Works of Albert Camus' (unpublished doctoral dissertation, State University of New York, 1997).

Hegel, Friedrich, *Philosophy of Mind* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1894).

Henriot, Émile, 'Le Moraliste de l'absurde', *Le Monde*, 6 January 1960.

Hervé, Pierre, 'La Grande Tribune politique d'action: la trouille qui tue...', *Action*, 7-13 April 1948.

Hervé, Pierre, 'La Grande Tribune politique d'action: "Les Chevaliers de la table ronde"', *Action*, 4-10 February 1948.

Hervé, Pierre, 'Les "Honnêtes gens" de la famille [Camus, Malraux, Mounier, Sartre et al.]', *Action*, 10-16 November 1948.

Hill, Leslie, *Blanchot: Extreme Contemporary* (London and New York: Routledge, 1997).

Hoffmann, Claude, 'L'Humanisme absurde d'Albert Camus', *Action*, 5-11 May 1948.

Holstein, R. P., '*L'Homme révolté*', *Facultés catholiques de l'ouest*, 2 (1953), 27-30.

Honderich, Ted, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* (Oxford and New York: Oxford University Press, 1995).

Hourdin, Georges, *Simone de Beauvoir et la liberté* (Paris: Les Éditions du Cerf, 1962).

Hughes, Alex, *Simone de Beauvoir: 'Le Sang des autres'* (Glasgow: Glasgow University Press, 1995).

Hughes, Edward, *Writing Marginality in Modern French Literature from Loti to Genet* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2001).

Hunwick, Andrew, 'Albert Camus, Meursault, et le lecteur "dupé"', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 15 (1993), 153-179.

Ikor, Roger, 'Une œuvre en débat devant la nouvelle génération: confiance à l'homme, à l'énergie, à la loyauté', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 26 October 1957.

Imbert, Claude, 'De *L'Étranger* à *L'Homme révolté*', *Modern Language Notes*, 112 (1997), 595-599.

Jackson, Julian, *The Popular Front in France: Defending Democracy, 1934-1938* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1988).

Jeanson, Francis, 'Albert Camus ou l'âme révoltée', *Les Temps modernes*, 7 (1952), 2070-2090.

Jeanson, Francis, 'Une évolution dans la pensée de Camus, *Erasme*, 2 (1947), 437-440.

Jones, Rosemarie, 'Telling Stories: Narrative Reflections in *L'Étranger*', in *Camus's 'L'Étranger': Fifty Years On*, ed. by Adèle King (London: MacMillan, 1992), pp.114-124.

Judt, Tony, *The Burden of Responsibility: Blum, Camus, Aron, and the French Twentieth Century* (Chicago and London: Chicago University Press, 1998).

Judt, Tony, *Past Imperfect: French Intellectuals 1944-1956* (Berkeley, Los Angeles & London: California University Press, 1992).

Kanters, Robert, 'Pour et contre Camus: les accélérations de la gloire', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 5-11 January 1970.

Keefe, Terry, *Simone de Beauvoir* (Basingstoke and London: MacMillan Press, 1998).

Keefe, Terry, *Simone de Beauvoir: A Study of Her Writings* (London: Harrap, 1983).

King, Jonathan H,. 'Sartre-Camus: The Quarrel as Biography', *French Cultural Studies*, 13 (1994), 39-56.

Klein, Wolfgang, 'Des révolutionnaires cyniques: Camus sur Hegel, Marx et Lénine', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 15 (1993), 123-151.

Kruks, Sonia, *Situation and Human Existence: Freedom, Subjectivity and Society* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1990).

Kruks, Sonia, 'Beauvoir: The Weight of Situation', in *Simone de Beauvoir: A Critical Reader*, ed. by Elizabeth Fallaize (London and New York: Routledge, 1998), pp.43-71.

Koestler, Arthur, *Le Zéro et l'infini* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1945).

Koestler, Arthur, *Le Yogi et le commissaire*, trad. by Dominique Aury and Jeanne Terracini (Paris: Charlot, 1946).

Kojève, Alexandre, *Introduction à la lecture de Hegel*, ed. by Raymond Queneau (Paris: Gallimard, 1947).

Kravchenko, Victor, *J'ai choisi la liberté! La vie publique et privée d'un haut fonctionnaire soviétique*, trad. by Jean de Kerdéland (Paris: Éditions Self, 1947).

Kritzman, Lawrence D., 'Camus's Curious Humanism or the Intellectual in Exile', *Modern Language Notes*, 112 (1997), 550-575.

LaCapra, Dominick, *History and Memory after Auschwitz* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1998).

Lanoux, Armand, 'Une œuvre en débat devant la nouvelle génération: par le ton, par la voix, cet étranger est un ami', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 26 October 1957.

Lebesque, Morvan, *Albert Camus par lui-même* (Paris: Seuil, 1963).

Le Clec'h, Guy, 'Pour et contre Camus: un classique démodé', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 5-11 January 1970.

Le Doeuff, Michèle, *L'Étude et le rouet* (Paris: Seuil, 1989).

Léger, Susan, 'Camus's "L'Hôte": The Lessons of an Ending', *French Literature Series*, 17 (1990), 87-97.

Levinas, Emmanuel, *Totalité et Infini: essai sur l'extériorité* (Paris: Le Livre de poche;

original edition Martinus Nijhoff, 1971).

Lévi-Valensi, Jacqueline, 'L'Entrée de Camus en politique', in *Camus et la politique. actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp. 137-151.

Lévy, Bernard-Henri, *La Barbarie à visage humain* (Paris: Bernard Grasset, 1977).

Lundgren-Gothlin, Eva, *Sex and Existence: Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex'* (London: Athlone, 1996).

MacIntyre, Alasdair, *A Short History of Ethics*, 2nd edn (London: Routledge, 1998; first edition 1967).

Mackenzie, Catriona, 'A Certain Lack of Symmetry: Beauvoir on Autonomous Agency and Women's Embodiment', in *Simone de Beauvoir's 'The Second Sex': New Interdisciplinary Essays*, ed. by Ruth Evans (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1998), pp.122-159.

Mackie, J. L., *Ethics: Inventing Right and Wrong* (London: Penguin Books, 1990; first published by Pelican Books, 1977).

Madaule, Jacques, 'Camus et l'actualité', *Revue du Caire*, 16 (1954), 232-235.

Malraux, André, *L'Espoir* (Paris: Gallimard, 1937).

Marx, Karl, *Early Writings* (London: Penguin, 1992).

Masson, André, 'L'Œuvre d'Albert Camus en débat devant la nouvelle génération. Un témoignage de l'Île Maurice', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 10 November 1957.

Mehl, Roger, 'De la révolte à la valeur', *Foi et Vie*, 6 (1952), 516-532.

Mistacco, Vicki, 'Nomadic Meanings: The Woman Effect in "La Femme adultère"', in *Albert Camus's 'L'Exil et le royaume': The Third Decade*, ed. by Anthony Rizzuto (Toronto: Les Éditions Paratexte, 1988), pp.71-84.

Mole, Gary D., *Levinas, Blanchot, Jabès: Figures of Estrangement* (Gainesville: Florida University Press, 1997).

Morot-Sir, Édouard, '*L'Homme révolté*: entre oui et non', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 12 (1985), 35-64.

Morot-Sir, Édouard, '1942-1943. L'Homme à la recherche de l'impossible', *L'Esprit créateur*, 33 (1993), 5-15.

Nadeau, Maurice, 'La Fin et les moyens: la tentation de sainteté', *Combat*, 13 June 1947.

Nadeau, Maurice, 'Albert Camus et la révolte', *Combat*, 8 November 1951.

Négroni, Jean, 'Albert Camus et le Théâtre de l'Équipe', *Revue d'histoire du théâtre*, 12 (1960), 343-349.

Niel, André, *Les Grands Appels de l'humanisme contemporain, christianisme, marxisme, évolutionisme, existentialisme...et après?* (Paris: Éditions "Courrier du Livre", 1966).

Noudelmann, François, 'Camus et Sartre: le corps et la loi', in *Albert Camus et la philosophie*, ed. by Anne-Marie Amiot and Jean-François Mattéi (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997), pp.133-155.

Onimus, Jean, 'Albert Camus ou la sagesse impossible', *Cahiers universitaires catholiques*, 7 (1952), 379-388.

Orme, Mark, '*L'Homme révolté* vers une justification éthique de la justice', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 19 (2001), 91-119.

Patri, Aimé, '*L'Homme révolté* par Albert Camus', *Monde nouveau-paru*, 53-4 (1951), 152-155.

Pauwels, Louis, 'À propos de *L'Homme révolté*', *Arts*, 21 December 1951.

Pervillé, Guy, *Les Étudiants algériens de l'université française 1880-1962* (Paris: CNRS, 1984).

Pia, Pascal, 'Un homme de métier', *Carrefour*, 6 January 1960.

Pia, Pascal, 'D'*Alger républicain* à *Combat*', *Magazine littéraire*, 67-68 (1972), 28-31.

Pilla, Francesco di, 'Camus en Italie', in *Camus et la politique: actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp.69-92.

Pingaud, Bernard, 'Une œuvre en débat devant la nouvelle génération: l'autorité doit s'exercer jusqu'au bout', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 26 October 1957.

Planche, Jean-Louis, 'Une jeunesse algéroise. Camus 1914-1940', *Europe*, 77 (1999), 17-39.

Quilliot, Roger, 'Camus et le socialisme', in *Camus et la politique: actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp.31-38.

Rioux, Jean-Pierre, 'Camus et la seconde guerre mondiale ou "rentrons dans l'histoire avec le mépris qui convient"', in *Camus et la politique: actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp.97-106.

Roblès, Emmanuel, 'Jeunesse d'Albert Camus', *La Nouvelle Revue française*, 87 (1960), 410-421.

Rousseaux, André, 'La Morale d'Albert Camus', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 21 October 1950.

Rousseaux, André, '*L'Homme révolté* d'Albert Camus, *Le Figaro littéraire*, 17 November 1951.

Rousset, David, 'Appel aux déportés des camps nazis. Au secours des déportés dans les camps soviétiques', *Le Figaro littéraire*, 12 November 1949.

Royle, Peter, *The Sartre-Camus Controversy: A Literary and Philosophical Critique* (Ottawa: Ottawa University Press, 1982).

Sarrochi, Jean, 'L'Autre et les autres', in *Albert Camus's 'L'Exil et le royaume': The Third Decade*, ed. by Anthony Rizzuto (Toronto: Les Éditions Paratexte, 1988), pp. 95-104.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Cahiers pour une morale* (Paris: Gallimard, 1983).

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 'Albert Camus', *France Observateur*, 7 January 1960.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 'Qu'est-ce que la littérature?', in *Situations*, 10 vols (Paris: Librairie Gallimard, 1947-76), II (1948), pp.55-330.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *L'Être et le néant: essai d'ontologie phénoménologique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1998; first published 1943).

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 'Présentation', *Les Temps modernes*, 1 (1945-6), 1-21.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, 'Réponse à Albert Camus', *Les Temps modernes*, 8 (1952), 334-353.

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *Les Mains sales* (Paris: Gallimard, 1948).

Sartre, Jean-Paul, *La Nausée* (Paris: Gallimard, 1938).

Schlette, Heinz-Robert, 'Remarques sur la réception des idées politiques de Camus en RFA', in *Camus et la politique: actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp.61-67.

Schneewind, J. B., 'Modern Moral Philosophy', in *A Companion to Ethics*, ed. by Peter Singer (Oxford: Blackwell, 1993), pp.147-157.

Schulte Nordholt, Anne-Lise, *Maurice Blanchot: l'écriture comme expérience du dehors* (Geneva: Librairie Droz, 1995).

Simons, Margaret, 'Beauvoir and Sartre: The Philosophical Relationship', *Yale French Studies*, 72 (1986), 165-179.

Smith, Douglas, *Transvaluations: Nietzsche in France 1872-1972* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1996).

Spengler, Oswald, *Le Déclin de l'Occident: esquisse d'une morphologie de l'histoire universelle*, trad. by Mohand Tazerout, 2 vols (Paris: Nouvelle Revue Française, 1931-3).

Suffran, Michel, 'Buzzati/Camus: le désert et le royaume', *Magazine littéraire*, 336 (1995), 57-60.

Tidd, Ursula, *Simone de Beauvoir: Gender and Testimony* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

Todd, Olivier, *Albert Camus: une vie* (Paris: Gallimard, 1996).

Todd, Olivier, 'Camus and Sartre', in *Camus's 'L'Étranger': Fifty Years On*, ed. by Adèle King (Basingstoke and London: Macmillan, 1992), pp.244-251.

Trageser-Rebetez, Françoise, 'Paradigme cyclique dans la philosophie camusienne de l'histoire: la symbolique de *L'Homme révolté*', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 19 (2001), 55-89.

Vannetzel, M., 'À la recherche d'un art de vivre [Camus, Sartre, Saint-Exupéry]', in *Reflets de vie culturelle*, ed. by M. Vannetzel (Le Mans: Martin, 1967), pp.133-149.

Vasil, Dean, *The Ethical Pragmatism of Camus. Two Studies in the History of Ideas* (New York: City University of New York, 1980).

Verdès-Leroux, Jeannine, 'Les Communistes français et Albert Camus: un rejet sans malentendu', in *Camus et la politique: actes du colloque de Nanterre 5-7 juin 1985*, ed. by Jeanyves Guérin (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1986), pp. 7-17.

Viallaneix, Paul, 'Le Défi du mal. Dialogue avec Camus', *Foi et Vie*, 94 (1995), 25-34.

Viallaneix, Paul, *Le Premier Camus suivi de Écrits de jeunesse d'Albert Camus* (Paris: Gallimard, 1973).

Waldberg, Patrick, 'La Révolte en question', *Monde nouveau-paru*, 58 (1952), 97-98.

Weyembergh, Maurice, 'Révolte et ressentiment', *La Revue des lettres modernes*, 12 (1985), 65-82.

Weyembergh, Maurice, *Albert Camus ou la mémoire des origines* (Paris and Brussels: De Boeck & Larcier, 1998).

Whitmarsh, Anne, *Simone de Beauvoir and the Limits of Commitment* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

Wiesel, Élie, 'L'Homme de conscience', *Europe*, 77 (1999), 9-11.

Zepp, Evelyn H., 'Exile in the Kingdom: Where is the King?', in *Albert Camus's 'L'Exil et le royaume': The Third Decade*, ed. by Anthony Rizzuto (Toronto: Les Éditions Paratexte, 1988), pp.127-141.