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Upbuilding Oppositions: Kierkegaard, Camus, and the Philosophy of Love

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UPBUILDING OPPOSITIONS:
KIERKEGAARD, CAMUS, AND THE PHILOSOPHY OF LOVE

by

JESUS LUZARDO

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements
for the Honors in the Major Program in Philosophy
in the College of Arts and Humanities
and in the Burnett Honors College
at the University of Central Florida
Orlando, Fl

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Thesis Chair: Dr. Michael Strawser

ABSTRACT

Despite the fact that they are both known as leading figures of existentialism, the relationship between 19th century Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard and 20th century French philosopher and novelist Albert Camus has largely gone unexplored in secondary scholarship. In the few times that their relationship is discussed, focus is heavily placed on the most obvious difference between the two thinkers: their religious orientations, which tends to prevent any further analysis or discussion. Furthermore, popular conceptions of each thinker — largely informed by their most popular works, arguably *Fear and Trembling* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*, respectively — tend to depict them as pessimistic and individualistic figures, the former basing his philosophy on an irrational leap of faith and the latter basing his own on the world's meaninglessness and absurdity. The purpose of this thesis is to provide an alternative, or rather a corrective, to these aforementioned views on the two thinkers. Through literary and philosophical analyses, I will attempt to demonstrate not only that there is a concrete, fecund relationship between Kierkegaard and Camus, but furthermore that this relationship is grounded in a practical, duty-based philosophy of love.

The thesis will look at three concepts that play a key role in both philosophies: the absurd, love, and aesthetic creation. As the analysis progresses, it is repeatedly shown that the thinkers' opposing views on theology do not prevent us from finding similar conceptions and practical manifestations of selfhood, neighborly and romantic love, and the social role of the artist. Thus, I shall argue that they are most properly understood as philosophers of love who saw themselves as social critics whose main goal was to help eradicate the corrupting and dangerous nihilism of their respective eras rather than as traditional philosophers.

DEDICATION

Por mis padres

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

An acknowledgement page likely represents the biggest challenge of this entire endeavor, for it requires me to perform two actions for which I'm largely lacking in proficiency: being concise and expressing my gratitude to those who deserve it. I would first and foremost like to thank Dr. Michael Strawser for all his guidance, patience, and for leading me, knowingly or unknowingly, to find a whole new way of thinking which ultimately made this work possible. I would also like to thank Dr. Bruce Janz and Mr. Stephen Schlow for their help and support as committee members, which they provided despite their busy schedules. I must additionally thank Dr. Jason Danner, for all his support and enthusiasm, and Dr. Gordon Marino, for his generosity and faith.

I would like to thank the entirety of the UCF Philosophy Department and the UCF Philosophical Society, the members of which have for three years (mis)taken me for someone worthy of their stimulating conversations and their warm company. I must single out Jahfre Colbert, Ben Cook, Lorraine Cornillie, Manuel Deschamps, Alfredo Domador, Asher Ford, Mikey Goldenberg, Ariel Gonzales, Leah Kaplan, Ramon Lopez, Metrah Pashae, Jared Russo, Sebastian Jones, Olga Tomasello, and Doug Zimmerman, amongst many, many others, whom I hope my most sincere thanks will reach.

How I feel is best expressed by the words of Cormery — the protagonist of Camus' final manuscript — to an old friend and teacher who saved him from a life of poverty: "...I am not generous," he says, "I'm stingy with my time and my energy, with anything that tires me, and that disgusts me. But what I said is true...One word from you, right now, and everything I have is yours. You have no need of it and it's only an example. But I didn't choose it arbitrarily. Truly, everything I have is yours."

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Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is.
Albert Camus, *The Rebel*

INTRODUCTION

THREE AGES

Now, little boy lost, he takes himself so seriously
He brags of his misery, he likes to live dangerously
Bob Dylan, "Visions of Johanna"

Danish philosopher Søren Kierkegaard was born 200 years ago. French philosopher Albert Camus was born 100 years later. These distances have allowed the present age, as is customary for any age, to appropriate them in the way that would prove least offensive to its sensibilities. Thus, in an age of cynicism, mistrust, and arrogance, two of the great moralists of the 19th and 20th century are instead read as fashionable proponents of subjectivism, isolation, and contempt for others, whose thoughts are nonetheless seen as incompatible. However, any careful reading of Kierkegaard and Camus will reveal that this is a misapprehension of their thoughts.

This misapprehension is the point of departure for my thesis, which will take the form of a comparison between the two thinkers. I intend to accomplish several things through this comparison, though two explicit purposes stand out. Primarily, I intend to establish that the philosophies of Kierkegaard and Camus can be found to have a concrete relationship based on love. Beyond this, I wish to analyze and compare the role of aesthetics in these love-based philosophies and, additionally, the role of the individual artist in society. More implicitly, I aim to help dispel the notions that the metaphysical foundations of each thinker should prevent any kind of developed and fruitful comparison and that either thinker advocated purposeful wallowing in despair, pure individualism, or, even worse, anything resembling a nihilistic attitude.

The thesis is tentatively divided into three main chapters corresponding to the three concepts in relation to which we will look at the works of Kierkegaard and Camus: the absurd, love, and aesthetics. These concepts are not wholly independent, they are consecutive and cumulative. Because these concepts manifest themselves in different manners and degrees in each of the thinkers' texts, the analysis will focus more on one thinker at times, while the other's philosophy will then be used as grounding for the analysis. Thus, the chapter focused on love will place heavy focus on Camus' philosophy, where this aspect remains more overlooked than ever before, given his appropriation by postcolonial thought in the past few decades. Alternatively, the chapter on aesthetics will be more attentive and rigorous towards Kierkegaard's philosophy, for this will allow for some problematizations of the widely-accepted view that Kierkegaard relegates aesthetics to a mere initial rung on a ladder towards his real goal of religiosity.

The first chapter will deal with the concept of "the absurd" and its relation to the emergence of selfhood. While Kierkegaard, along with others, uses the term "absurd" numerous times in his philosophy, it is most closely associated with Camus as a concrete philosophical concept. Thus, we must explain Camus' definition of the absurd and then ascertain whether it corresponds to Kierkegaard's ideas or the manner in which they operate, rather than simply comparing their respective usages of the word.

Camus formally defines the concept of the absurd in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, the essay that will serve as the primary source for his thought in the first chapter. In this essay, Camus describes the absurd as the tension arising between man's natural longing for meaning and the indifferent world that provides none. Rather than resigning ourselves to this absurd condition

(through suicide, the validity of which prompts Camus' study) or attempting to ameliorate it through any kind of comforting ideology (which he regards as philosophical suicide), we must always remain aware of the tension and, through it, find a sense of absurd freedom and passion that will henceforth fuel our desire to live.

Camus is not interested in proving God's nonexistence or the world's meaninglessness. His view is instead that both reason and experience have a clear limit, one which would have to be transgressed in order to reach God or any kind of objective or universal meaning. The absurd hero formulated by Camus is one who is aware of the limit and lives at its verge but never jumps or retreats. It is this tension which, for Camus, constitutes the self, since before the realization of the absurd the person in question lived an immediate life with lucidity or freedom.

In Kierkegaard's case, *The Sickness unto Death* will be used as the primary source for the first chapter. *The Sickness unto Death* is Kierkegaard's exploration of despair and largely deals with the constitution of the self, for despair is conceived as a sickness of the self and as sin. In order to best describe the various forms and levels of despair, Kierkegaard personifies them and writes about the mode of being of each of the despairing selves. One of these forms of despair, that of the person who despairs at not willing to be him/herself, has a significant similarity to the condition of the absurd man described by Camus. This form of despair produces in the despairer a realization of himself qua self and his consequent separation from the rest of the world, realizations which lead to fear and further despair. It is particularly relevant that this is the last level of despair to be reached before a transcendence of despair (or at least this form of it) is reached and the individual can truly become a self before God, Whom we must believe in by "virtue of the absurd."

Because Kierkegaard preceded Camus by a century, his characterizations and critiques can only, at most, correspond to general viewpoints and lifestyles that are found in the latter's work rather than the work itself. Camus, on the other hand, clearly read and considered Kierkegaard's thought, for he provides an analysis and critique of the Danish thinker in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. This then forms a basis for a certain dialogue — one which will be found throughout the thesis — between the two thinkers that will force us to test each other's claims about the other. In this case, it is necessary to evaluate Camus' claims about Kierkegaard as an unknowing proponent of philosophical suicide and to see whether Kierkegaard's conclusions about the man who despairs at being himself match or could be derived from Camus' — not to mention the relationship between despair and the absurd for both.

This analysis will allow us to show that Camus' absurd values are in fact reflected in Kierkegaard's conception of the self. When we explore this concept even further, we will find that the relationship between the two thinkers is ultimately inverse, for it will be shown that Kierkegaard also requires a tension and that Camus also takes a leap. Thus, though they start with opposite foundations and move in opposite directions, both thinkers nonetheless share a structure and a goal and ultimately end in a similar place, namely the reflective self, the individual par excellence.

The second chapter corresponds to love in the most colloquial sense of the word: namely general love for people — or in this case, the neighbor — and preferential or romantic love. Though this central chapter addresses love in this traditional sense, it will be argued that even the first chapter on the absurd and the emergence of the individual might in fact represent a

movement already grounded in love, which is after all the core concept upon which the present work is based.

In a way, Camus will take the forefront in the second chapter, with Kierkegaard remaining as much more of a background figure. Such is the case because Kierkegaard makes clear his views on love in *Works of Love*, which will obviously serve as the main source for the chapter, along with M. Jaime Ferreira's commentary on it, *Love's Grateful Striving*. Camus, on the other hand, had no major texts dealing philosophically with love, and thus the chapter will develop his views on love through the analysis of numerous major texts, including *The Rebel*, *The Misunderstanding*, *The First Man*, and *The Plague* (the order in which the texts will be analyzed is conceptual rather than chronological).

The Rebel, Camus' second major philosophical essay, deals with his concept of rebellion and delves into a history thereof that largely shows the manners in which rebellion can and has become warped and destructive. Camus starts by describing a slave who one day decides to stand up to his master upon being whipped. The slave's rebellion represents the realization of the existence of values, of right and wrong, one which derives from experience and intuition rather than from external forces and institutions. The rebellious slave does not determine that he does not deserve such mistreatment in an exclusively individual sense, but he also realizes that this must apply to all fellow slaves. In fact, that individuals have often been willing to sacrifice their lives for such beliefs is a demonstration of their understanding that these values apply to humankind universally.

What will be argued is that the main features and the relations engendered by Camus' concept of rebellion are not unlike Kierkegaard's own notion of love. Both descriptions regard

their object, rebellion or love, as arising from an experience and evaluation of the self (rather than being essentially and always other-regarding) and assert that the awareness of the Other reveals proper love for him/her to be a duty, to name only two major similarities.

But such an analysis cannot overlook Christianity, which stands as the base of Kierkegaard's philosophy. Thus, what will be argued here is not that God is irrelevant in this discussion, but that despite the difference in metaphysical foundations between the two thinkers, their commandments and descriptions of love are nonetheless significantly similar. As was the case with their experience of the absurd, each thinker offers a critique of the opposite position. For Kierkegaard, all secular love (or un-Christian love) is overly poetic (Kierkegaard's critiques of poetic love will play a major role in providing a negative definition of his views), largely unilateral, and too fickle and materialistic. For Camus, Christianity is one of many ideologies that stand in opposition to rebellion (which will be equated to love), for it is necessarily eschatological and will therefore neglect present conditions and duties in search of an unobtainable end.

What will be argued is that both thinkers manage to avoid the criticisms of the other. While Camus denies God's existence (or at least refuses to believe it), he nonetheless presents a view of rebellion/love that is largely reciprocal, and most importantly, one that is purely rooted in the natural experience of the emergence of values and the Other. The values derived by the slave when he rebels must be equated to some sense of a human nature and are therefore far from fickle. The few times Camus does mention love, he refers to it as something that is immediately experienced but that remains, along with its origins, undefined. This is not completely unlike Kierkegaard's view that love originates in God and that we must therefore refrain from seeking

its origins in any kind of materialistic or logical manner. While Kierkegaard does believe in God and salvation, he explicitly rejects eschatological views and practices, dedicating a whole chapter in *Works of Love* to our “Duty to Love Those We See” rather than looking for love elsewhere or passively waiting for it.

While the first section of the second chapter will focus on our duties to and relationship with the neighbor in a fairly general sense, the second section will place more focus on relationships between individuals and a further specification of the features of their duties to one another. One of Camus’ plays, *The Misunderstanding*, along with the unfinished manuscript found in the car wreck in which he died, *The First Man*, will be used to explore ideas related to the individual’s need for love. In *The Misunderstanding*, a man intends to surprise his estranged mother and sister upon his return home but refuses to tell them who he is, hoping instead that they will realize it on their own. His mother and sister, who for years have murdered the wealthy guests at the hotel they run, end up murdering him as well, only discovering his identity afterwards from his wife, who had insisted that he simply reveal himself all along. The play will be examined in terms of Kierkegaard’s view on the need for love as a value in itself, which apply to the main character’s insistence that his visit is for his family’s benefit alone rather than his own. Of particular significance are also Kierkegaard’s ideas on the expression of love as owed to others as part of our debt to them, making it so that love cannot remain concealed if we are to do it properly.

The First Man presents some difficulties due to how recently it was published, which is itself a result of the larger problem, that it is an unfinished manuscript. On the other hand, the manuscript represents Camus’ first attempt to deal with the topic of love directly and is the most

relevant source for any discussion of Camus and personal love. The title of the book refers to the main character, who is largely a surrogate of Camus. Because of his doubts over his relationship with his mother — whose near deafness and muteness prevented them from having a true, loving bond — and his nation of Algeria — the colonization of which prevents him from regarding it as an authentic homeland or culture to belong to — Cormery, the main character, exists without roots or history. In this sense, he is “the first man.” While Camus never wrote an ending, the course of the story, along with Camus’ notes, reveal that the resolution the story drives towards is the simple realization by Cormery that he is in fact loved, and that it is on such a realization that his ability to love others depends.

Thus, given the undefinability of love and its origins, we cannot ascertain whether we are loved, we must presuppose it. This is Kierkegaard’s concept of love as “upbuilding.” Love can only build up from itself — it cannot be built upon any other base — and it can only be built up through the action of loving and being loved. However, we cannot create or generate love in someone else and thus, in order to build up love in them, we must presuppose that they love and have love, and thus we are able to love and be loved through this presupposition.

The final section of the second chapter will address our ability to hold neighborly and preferential love simultaneously, as dramatized by Camus’ *The Plague*. This is a particularly contentious issue in Kierkegaardian scholarship. Many argue that such a synthesis of types of love is possible and encouraged by Kierkegaard, while others argue that, despite the initial claims in *Works of Love* to the contrary, Kierkegaard has a clear preference for neighborly love. M. Jamie Ferreira’s explanation of the need to ground preferential love in neighborly love will be of particular relevance here. Rambert, one of the main characters in *The Plague*, will serve as the

main example of this grounding. Rambert spends a major part of the novel attempting to escape the town of Oran — which has been locked from the outside due to the spread of a deadly plague — in order to be with his beloved. It is only when he witnesses both the suffering and the solidarity caused by the plague that he realizes that he, too, has a duty to stay. Thus, Rambert's discovery of the neighbor render him unable to focus solely on one individual and the conclusion of his story will illustrate the nature of the proper synthesis of these two kinds of loves.

The first and the second chapter are connected in a fairly intuitive manner, one discussing the emergence of the individual and the other discussing how the individual properly interacts with others. The leap from love to art is perhaps less intuitive and there are more obstacles to be addressed once it is made. In a sense, the third chapter will be approached as a reversal of the second; while Camus' views on love were grounded on Kierkegaard's there, some of Kierkegaard's views on aesthetics might have to be grounded on Camus' here. This will at least be the case for the transition from love to art, which is fueled by Camus' belief that rebellion is best expressed and engendered through aesthetic creation, as explained in the fourth section of *The Rebel*. The two initial tasks of the chapter are therefore to ascertain whether this is commensurable with the previously established equation between love and rebellion, and most importantly, how this could reflect upon Kierkegaard's views on love and art.

Here we will momentarily return to *The Myth of Sisyphus* in order to discuss its ideas on the absurd and aesthetic creation, given that it must establish the condition between rebellion and creation. Once we analyze both texts, we will see that for Camus, the artists' task is that of the absurd man and of the rebel, that he epitomizes these figures and thus the moral element of the absurd and rebellion is inherent in his art.

Having established the equivalence of the work of art and the work of love for Camus, we must proceed to the challenging task of establishing the same equivalence for Kierkegaard. The entry point for this relationship will be his criteria for the proper way to praise love. While he makes sure to clarify that this doesn't refer to art specifically, he nonetheless allows for art to fulfill the criteria, which is a combination of self-renunciation and self-denial on the part of the artist that will allow him to become an instrument of God. That Camus does not believe in God will not impede us from applying the same definition to Camus's work, as long as its structure remains the same.

Once we establish at least a basic connection between aesthetic creation and love for both thinkers, we move forward to the more specific issue the novel, which was our reason for delving into the topic in the first place. Here we will see a momentary convergence, for there is textual proof that both authors equally held the novel in a similar regard, as the most concrete and ethical medium available. In analyzing their respective views on the novel, we come to a major parallelism, for they both require a balance between the purely theoretical and the purely detached work and an attitude of hope and goodwill (regarded as a "life-view") towards the Other in order to ground the novel.

This convergence might not last long, for Kierkegaard will move beyond it out of the fear that even the novel has become antiquated in an increasingly nihilistic society. This is where our analysis of *The Point of View of My Work as an Author* will begin. Using George Pattison's analysis of Kierkegaardian aesthetics as well as Kierkegaard's explanation of his own authorship, we will attempt to demonstrate that many of his pseudonymous writings were structurally meant to point out the failure of traditional genres and mediums and pointed towards

the need for radical religiosity. Though the nihilistic society of the time would not be fixed by ethically-written novels, they would likely be more vulnerable to indirect communication, the manifestation of which is the pseudonymous authorship. This would require martyrdom, or the self-renunciation of all rewards, along with a total isolation from the society, which is clearly the choice Kierkegaard made. However, a closer look at Kierkegaard's literary reviews (*From the Papers of One Still Living and Two Ages*) brings into doubt the complete rejection of the novel that Pattison attributes to Kierkegaard.

Thus, it seems that we will be left with two very similar ways, one of which ends in Kierkegaard's religious martyrdom and one which ends in Camus' literary creation, along with the realization that both choices involve — if our analysis has any weight — seemingly equal amounts of rigor, an infinite amount in fact, placed upon the self.

These are the issues I would like to tackle, the ideas I want to establish, and the questions I want to open up in my undergraduate the present work, an exploration of the relationship between Søren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus grounded on the philosophy love. Kierkegaard and Camus must be regarded as critics of their age. They were reactive, cared little for purely intellectual approaches to philosophy or life, and most importantly, were both fueled by an intense love that allowed them to believe in others. Their criticisms therefore remain as relevant as ever in this third age through which the specter of nihilism continues to make its presence known. It appears clear that if both thinkers accurately describe the problem, then we would do well to attempt to understand and enact their proposed solutions. I hope that, at the very least, my work may contribute to the former of these.

CHAPTER 1 THE ABSURDITY OF SELFHOOD

Kierkegaard may shout in warning: “If man had no eternal consciousness, if, at the bottom of everything, there were merely a wild, seething force producing everything, both large and trifling, in the storm of dark passions, if the bottomless void that nothing can fill underlay all things, what would life be but despair?” This cry is not likely to stop the absurd man. Seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable. If in order to elude the anxious question: “What would life be?” one must, like the donkey, feed on the roses of illusion, then the absurd mind, rather than resigning itself to falsehood, prefers to adopt fearlessly Kierkegaard’s reply: “despair.”

Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*

Though the term holds completely different meanings for both thinkers, both Kierkegaard and Camus hold “the absurd” as foundational for their beliefs. Thus, it is with this concept that any analysis and comparison of their philosophies must begin.

It only seems natural that one would use early texts by each thinker for such an analysis, for it is often there that most thinkers properly establish some basis for the rest of their thought. This will be the case for Camus, whose first philosophical essay, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, will be primarily used here. The case is more complex for Kierkegaard, whose entire body of work is often interpreted as representing an ascension through “existence-spheres”: the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious, with many of the works, especially those supposedly corresponding to the first two stages, consisting of pseudonymous writings. Thus, one of his final texts, *The Sickness unto Death* — which also happens to be pseudonymous — will be used here for reasons that will soon become clear. For now, it should suffice to say that the topic of Kierkegaard’s authorship and his existence-spheres will be dealt with in detail in the final chapter of the present work. Though Kierkegaard has historical precedence, it was Camus who most concretely defined

“the absurd” as a philosophical concept within his philosophy, dedicating his first major works to an explanation and exploration of it, and thus it is with his work that we begin.

The Self in the World

The Myth of Sisyphus is prompted by the question of the validity of suicide.¹ The very possibility of suicide and the discussion about it is based on one main presupposition which is eventually elaborated upon: that the existence of God or any “objective” meaning cannot be proven, which is not to say — it must be emphasized — that they do not exist at all. Camus is not interested in dealing with metaphysics and theology; he wishes to explore the issues of suicide and meaning within the boundaries of the knowledge available to him. Though he explicitly rejects the label within the very first chapter of the essay, we may categorize Camus, as Robert Solomon does², as a phenomenologist in a very basic sense of the term: his sole interest is in human experience.

The path towards suicide necessarily begins in reflection. To commit suicide is not only to reject immediate circumstances; it is an assertion about living in general: that it is not worth it.³ This feeling resulting from “the why,” which strikes in the middle of our routine and uproots us from our immediacy, is precisely the feeling of the absurd.⁴ Camus reformulates his original question and now asks whether suicide is a necessary consequence of the absurd. But he investigates the feeling further before answering the question. The reason why reflection, which incites and seeks to respond to “the why,” should drive one to suicide must be precisely that no

¹ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 3.

² Robert C. Solomon, *Dark Feelings, Grim Thoughts: Experience and Reflection in Camus and Sartre* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006), 4.

³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 5.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 13.

satisfactory answer could ever be provided for it. The reflective mind emerges from the doldrums of immediacy and seeks its foundation in the world, a meaning behind it, and finds nothing. The only answers are the constructions of the philosophers and the theologians (and scientists),⁵ but these depart from the few “human truths” we have access to and thus lead to their own invalidation and negation, which Camus refuses to allow.⁶ Here we reach a final frontier: to answer the mind’s longing is to invalidate the process of reflection that led it there and to retreat back into the routine that preceded the process results in the same. Camus realizes that this tension is necessary, foundational, and is itself the absurd, now defined as “the confrontation of this irrational and the wild longing for clarity whose call echoes in the human heart.”⁷ But this provides no solutions, no way forward from the initial problem, for the possible choices seemingly remain the same: “suicide or recovery.”⁸

Despite a difference in terminology, Kierkegaard describes a similar phenomenon in *The Sickness unto Death*. Most analyses of Kierkegaard’s views on absurdity, faith, and his relationship to Camus seem to use *Fear and Trembling*, which focuses directly on the leap of faith against which Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. However, the juxtaposition with *The*

⁵ Ibid., 20. There is only one passage regarding science in the essay and not much more, if any, discussion on it in the rest of Camus’ thought. Nonetheless, his reasons for the grouping of scientists with rationalist philosophers and theologians can respond to the possible objection that the absurd is based on a false tension (man’s longing for meaning and unity and the lack thereof in the world), given that science shows us that the world is perfectly ordered and united. Camus does not reject this assertion or science in general, but he demonstrates something of a scientific anti-realist position: science can demonstrate certainty in its enumeration of phenomena, but its explanations thereof are necessarily metaphorical and thus yet another departure from what one can be truly certain of. “...you give me the choice between a description that is sure but that teaches me nothing and hypotheses that claim to teach me but that are not sure.”

⁶ Ibid., 21.

⁷ Ibid., 21.

⁸ Ibid., 13.

Sickness unto Death reveals important complexities in Camus' philosophy and furthermore, the work is structured in a manner that engenders a more cogent comparison.⁹

Though Kierkegaard's concept of the absurd is explained in the second half of the book, we will concern ourselves for now with the first half, in which Kierkegaard provides a quasi-phenomenological description not unlike Camus'. The central theme of the text is despair, which, Kierkegaard states, is the "sickness unto death."¹⁰ Kierkegaard explains that "Christianly understood...not even death is 'the sickness unto death'," nor is any physical illness which we would give such a label, for death does not represent the end of life for the Christian.¹¹ Despair, on the other hand, represents an illness of the self that eliminates even the hope of death; it is "to be perpetually dying, to die yet not die, to die death."¹² But what, precisely, is despair? If "a human being is a synthesis of the infinite and the finite, of the temporal and the eternal, and of freedom and necessity" and "the self is a relation [such as one of these syntheses] that relates itself to itself,"¹³ then "despair is the misrelation in the relation" of one these syntheses.¹⁴

⁹ As was previously mentioned, the issue of the pseudonymous writings will be explored in detail further on but it should be noted that Anti-Climacus, the pseudonym Kierkegaard used for *The Sickness unto Death*, represented for him an ideal, unlike the aesthetic pseudonyms whom he considered to be "lower," and thus there's less ambiguity involved in the usage of this text. (Howard V. Hong and Edna Hong, Introduction to *The Sickness unto Death: A Christian Psychological Exposition for Upbuilding and Awakening*, by Søren Kierkegaard, [Princeton: Princeton University Press, xxi]).

¹⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 17.

¹¹ Ibid., 7, 8.

¹² Ibid., 18. There is an interesting and fecund set of relationships between various thinkers to be found in this statement. Kierkegaard's description of despair is particularly reminiscent of Emmanuel Levinas's concept of the "horror over being" or the "horror over the *there is*," which he describes as "a participation in the *there is*, in the *there is* which returns in the heart over every negation, in the *there is* that has 'no exits.' It is...the impossibility of death, the universality of existence even in its annihilation." Emmanuel Levinas, *Existence and Existents*, Alphonso Lingis, (Pittsburgh: Duquesne University Press), 56. Levinas explicitly contrasts his concept of the horror of being with Martin Heidegger's concept of the anxiety over death or Being-towards-death (Ibid., 58), which Robert Solomon happens to interpret as a major influence in Camus' views on death, to be explored further in this analysis. Solomon, 31.

¹³ Ibid., 13.

¹⁴ Ibid., 15.

Finally, Kierkegaard states that the relation (the self) must have established itself or must have been established “by another,” which is a clear hint of the role God will play in this conception of the self. If the latter is the case, he explains, the relation must relate itself to the relation that established it.¹⁵ As M. Jamie Ferreira explains, these seemingly impersonal definitions, which will gain greater prominence as the analysis advances, nonetheless serve to establish two main features of the self: that it is reflective (for it must relate itself to itself to be considered a proper self) and that selfhood is an act in which we must engage.¹⁶

After analyzing despair somewhat abstractly (or at least “without regard to its being conscious or not”¹⁷), Kierkegaard finally delves into his explorations of the various types of despair as they would manifest in people. Two forms of despair represent a convergence with Camus’ description of the “absurd awakening,” both of which fall under the category of “despair at not willing to be oneself.” This feeling of despair comes from an unwillingness to relate oneself properly to that which has established one; simply put, it is a despair resulting from a refusal (passive or active) to accept God and the eternal.

The two categories are that of the person despairing over the earthly and that of the person despairing over the eternal, both of which together possess many of the same fundamental experiences as Camus’ example. While the former largely comprises people who are purely immediate, who unreflectively despair as a result of an external loss, reflective people are not completely excluded. Kierkegaard clarifies that those belonging to this level of despair only have

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ M. Jamie Ferreira, *Kierkegaard* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009), 153.

¹⁷ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 29.

“a certain degree of reflection,”¹⁸ for reflectivity has a positive correlation with despair and thus a much more reflective person would have a much more profound level of despair. Thus, “with this certain degree of reflection begins the act of separation whereby the self becomes aware of itself as essentially different from the environment and external event.”¹⁹ As was the case in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, we find here a view of reflection as a necessarily displacing quality, as a result of which we derive a concept of our selfhood apart from our current circumstances. Given this displacement, the type of people in question are able to adapt to their condition (to a degree), for they understand, having derived some semblance of a selfhood from their situation, that they (or their selves) will remain intact despite external changes, and perhaps even that there might be something eternal in them. Camus would likely claim that their “dim idea of the eternal” is instead a deeply-held yearning for it. Regardless, their reflectivity not being strong enough, these people end up retreating back into immediacy or, perhaps worse, they become detached from themselves, only seldom “returning” to see whether the despair remains.²⁰

The next category of despair, that of those despairing over the eternal, are perhaps too advanced, already “aware” of themselves as eternal (and thus they despair of it), to be compared to Camus’ description. Yet two main characteristics of this form of despair stand out. While the previous type of despairer becomes displaced from the earthly and perhaps becomes suspicious that this betrays something beyond it, the person who despairs over the eternal is already aware of what lies beyond and yet nonetheless despairs in the same manner. Here we can see a characteristic reminiscent of Camus’ description, a kind of stubborn entrenchment in one’s

¹⁸ Ibid., 54.

¹⁹ Ibid., 48.

²⁰ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 56.

condition. In the same way as Camus finds himself stuck with a few concrete and yet ultimately unsatisfactory truths to hold on to, the person who despairs over the eternal is aware of what he “ought to do” to solve the situation and yet hangs on to the despair instead. As Kierkegaard states, this level of despair is the first step towards defiance,²¹ a term which will be central to Camus’ response to his condition. The second relevant characteristic is the fate of such a person if they are unable or unwilling to find someone to whom to express their despair: suicide.²²

Leaps and Balances

The Leap of Faith

Kierkegaard already made it clear that the more reflective or self-conscious a person is, the more profound their despair. More reflection or a deeper understanding therefore cannot be the solution to the despair that has been described. But our view is incomplete. Kierkegaard explains that the exploration of the various levels of consciousness was done under the “criterion of man,” an exploration which undergoes a qualitative change with the addition of a new criterion: “before God.”²³ When this new dimension is added, despair becomes sin. Because *The Sickness unto Death* is an exposition of the nature of despair and sin, the solution to them are presented somewhat succinctly. Sin is the same and yet not the same as despair. The despairing person can be described in the same manner, as despairing over not willing to be themselves, for example, and yet now they despair before God, and are thus in sin. Kierkegaard has no desire to establish a standard, normative ethical system, for he is dealing with sin as a state rather than as any particular transgression. Thus, he explains, the opposite of sin is not virtue, it is faith, which

²¹ Ibid., 66.

²² Ibid.

²³ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 79.

he defines as “the self in being itself and in willing to be itself [resting] transparently in God.”²⁴ Kierkegaard, as is well-known, does not attempt to compel us logically into faith. He instead asks us to believe by virtue of the absurd.

But what does the absurd mean for Kierkegaard? For Camus, as it was explained, it is a necessary tension between man’s longing for meaning and the silence he finds when he asks the universe to provide it. Kierkegaard, it seems, holds the very opposite opinion. Inherent in the qualification “before God” is what Kierkegaard calls “Christianity’s crucial criterion: *the absurd, the paradox, the possibility of offense.*”²⁵ One could frame the nature of the Kierkegaardian absurd in two ways, in terms of rigor and in terms of love. The explanation for the former is located in the very qualification “before God,” which as stated before is a new criterion, that of God and the eternal. This, in the first sense, is the absurd: that finite, flawed beings such as ourselves could ever be placed under such a criterion. Christianity is offensive to the intellect because “it wants to make man into something so extraordinary that he cannot grasp the thought” and thus he must simply believe or be offended.²⁶

The concept (or, Kierkegaard would say, the existence) of Jesus Christ serves to explain the other aspect of the absurd, that of love. In the same way in which we become offended by the mere thought of being placed before God, for such standards are too high, we cannot conceive of the opposite, that an infinite being such as God would possibly love and care for us, would even listen to our prayers. Our understanding becomes even more offended upon learning that this love would lead God to become a man, the infinite to reduce itself into the finite, let alone to

²⁴ Ibid., 82.

²⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 83.

²⁶ Ibid.

sacrifice Himself for us.²⁷ When framed in the latter manner, we can see the complete contrast between Camus' and Kierkegaard's conceptions of the absurd. If for the former, it consists of the world's indifference towards man's longing for unity and meaning, it seems as if, for the latter, it is instead an excess in the unity and meaning provided; our human desire for a standard by which to live is met with the standard of the infinite, which places us "before God." This over-saturation of meaning establishes the perfect conditions for belief, since "to believe is indeed to lose the understanding in order to gain God."²⁸

The Absurd Tension

"Still it must be said that excess justifies nothing,"²⁹ responds Camus, who clearly had *The Sickness unto Death* in mind while he was writing his critique of Kierkegaard. Camus maintains his modest reasoning,³⁰ he will not depart from the few things he can understand. God's love, it seems, is not worth the loss of his understanding. Rather than a retreat back into immediacy or Kierkegaard's leap into the irrational, Camus picks steadfastness in his position between the two. Thus, maintaining that foundational tension between his yearning for meaning and the realization that it will go unanswered becomes his mission. Camus realizes now that the tension has value and, rather than being his sole and final prescription, must become his true point of departure, from which he shall derive a way of life.

²⁷ Ibid., 85.

²⁸ Ibid., 38.

²⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 40.

³⁰ Pride and moderation are arguably two of the virtues most often emphasized by Camus throughout his career. His untimely death prevented him from completing what would be his third philosophical essay, based on the myth of nemesis, on the concept of "measure." (Ronald D. Srigley, *Albert Camus' Critique of Modernity* [Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 2011], 5; Germaine Brée, *Camus* [New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1972], 254).

The Myth of Sisyphus began by asking whether suicide is a consequence of the absurd. Having established what the absurd is, Camus realizes that this is far from the case, for suicide, like religion (which represents philosophical suicide),³¹ dissolves the tension of the absurd.³² Camus is wary of the eternal and its ability to sneak itself into our beliefs, thus discreetly unbalancing the absurd equation. He thus realizes that vigilance must be maintained if the absurd is to be kept alive. From this realization, he derives revolt as a necessary rule and consequence of his condition.

Careful attention and emphasis is necessary here, however. Too often has Camus' position been interpreted and taught as being that of "an advocate of the absurd,"³³ and Camus' lack of precision in his explanation only serves to propagate this view. The absurd is a divorce between man and the world, the necessary conclusion of which is that life lacks meaning in any objective sense of the term. Camus' revolt is precisely against the possibility of allowing this divorce from determining or diminishing the value of our lives. We must be lucid about our absurd condition precisely in order to oppose it; this is the tension we keep alive through our revolt. "The absurd has meaning only insofar as it is not agreed to."³⁴

Here we may return to Kierkegaard's "gradation of consciousness," to find that the final level of despair, that of willing to be oneself (which he, appropriately enough, also calls

³¹ As heavily-connotative as it might seem, Camus makes it clear that "philosophical suicide" is a convenient term, rather than a judgment, to represent various philosophies and systems of beliefs by which thought negates itself, under which phenomenology and existentialism are included (*The Myth of Sisyphus*, 41). As Ronald D. Srigley points out repeatedly, Camus has no problem with Christianity or theology in itself, but rather with the fact that their methods eliminate the tension of the absurd (*Albert Camus' Critique of Modernity*, 23). On the other hand, Camus never seems to provide any examples of the Christian Absurdism he claims is possible (*Ibid.*, 112).

³² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 53.

³³ Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1981), 220.

³⁴ Camus, 31.

defiance),³⁵ once again has a clear correspondence to Camus' own example. Kierkegaard describes the defiance as "despair," not as a result of the earthly or as a result of a rejection of the eternal but instead "through the aid of the eternal."³⁶ He also divides this type of despair into two subtypes, the acting self and the self that is acted upon, the latter of which is most relevant since Camus' absurd man, too, feels himself to be acted upon by the universe (for otherwise the absurd would be located in the individual). The defiant self, in the process of relating itself to itself, finds an obstacle it cannot overcome. While a properly formulated self would either succeed in overcoming it or would at least hope, by virtue of the absurd, that their malady will someday come to pass, the defiant self "[convinces] himself that this thorn in the flesh gnaws so deeply that he cannot abstract himself from it."³⁷ This becomes the defiant self's *raison d'être* and he becomes spiteful, maintaining himself in this position out of scorn for all of existence and in the process excluding himself from eternity.³⁸

Camus would obviously disagree with such a characterization, but his own admission (which he himself calls a shocking statement) that the "absurd is sin without God"³⁹ and thus a kind of eternal malady the only solution to which appears to be absent, might betray its accuracy. James Woods, Robert Solomon, and Ronald D. Srigley provide similar critiques of Camus' notion of revolt, all three expressing in some way that "underlying the metaphysics of the Absurd lies the ghost of a much older metaphysics" and that "Camus...is still stuck under 'the shadow of God.'"⁴⁰ Also of note is the character of Sisyphus, whom Camus, at the end of the

³⁵ Kierkegaard, 67.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, 67.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, 70.

³⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 72.

³⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 40.

⁴⁰ Solomon, 56.

essay, characterizes as driven by his scorn for the gods who have punished him and, more importantly, as happy.⁴¹ Here we find a similar problem. It is understood that Sisyphus is a mere symbol, one which Camus finds to contain all characteristics of the absurd man as he envisions him. But what import should Sisyphus' scorn against the gods have in our lives? To what practical manifestation should it translate if we were to hold him as a symbol to uphold? Is it existence itself that has placed us in such a position? Not only does this seem to corroborate Kierkegaard's characterization but furthermore seems to contradict the love for life that supposedly stands at the core of Camus' philosophy.

A defense, or at least some qualifications, on Camus' side might be in order. To properly understand Camus' reasons for upholding revolt as a necessary value, we must remember that his sole interest lies in concrete human experiences. Even the abstract philosophies that would accept the meaninglessness of the universe and the invalidity of any desire or active attempt to find objective meaning would not go far enough for Camus, for the need for revolt comes from the fact that we cannot simply call such desires invalid and do away with them, for they are pervasive, both in us and in society at large. "At a certain point," he says, "the absurd man is tempted. History is not lacking in either religions or prophets."⁴² It is not enough to take a philosophical position against the absurd, we must continually and perpetually maintain it through awareness and revolt. Revolt is thus based on a sense of modesty, on the admission that we will never lose the tendency to hope or isolate ourselves from the social conditions that would engender it, even if we renounce God, eternity, and meaning.

⁴¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 120, 123.

⁴² Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 53.

Revolt is also based on the fact that such rationalistic philosophies, as Woods explains, generally lack value judgments,⁴³ in this case about death and guilt. Camus does not only accept and uphold the basic truth that we are mortal, he also embraces the horror we naturally feel towards death.⁴⁴ His revolt and his scorn are waged against the death he inevitably wishes to escape and also against the institutions and natural tendencies which would make his “crushing fate” any more palatable, for he derives a certain pride and integrity from his opposition to it.⁴⁵ The doctrines and institutions which would remove the need for his revolt would also, he asserts, attempt to humble him, to introduce into him guilt and sin (likely by placing him before God). All the absurd man feels, however, is “his irreparable innocence.”⁴⁶ Revolt is for Camus a rigorous methodology that prevents him from forgetting (or allowing others to do away with) his innocence, his pride, and his value. While it appears life-negating on its own, as Solomon regards it,⁴⁷ it is in fact the negative manifestation of a love for life and for humanity.

Solomon offers Nietzsche’s concept of *Amor Fati*,⁴⁸ the idea of loving our fate and our lives, as an alternative to Camus’ supposedly self-victimizing revolt. However, this is exactly what we find in Camus’ concept of freedom, the second rule he derives from the absurd. It is here that Camus’ continually-overlooked differences from existentialists like Sartre are most clear. From the beginning of his discussion of freedom, Camus makes it clear that he has no interest in approaching the concept metaphysically. As with God and eternity, he wishes only to

⁴³ James Woods, “The Sickness *unto* Life,” *The New Republic* (November 8th, 1999), 3.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 15.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 55.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 53.

⁴⁷ Solomon, 57.

⁴⁸ Using Nietzsche’s philosophy would provide a wider range of terms and relations with which to trace the relationship between Kierkegaard and Camus, but it would excessively widen the scope of this analysis.

maintain those truths which are accessible to him.⁴⁹ More importantly, the concept of pure freedom which the existentialists derive from the absence of God is counter-productive to Camus' purposes. The idea of total freedom, he believes, necessarily makes our approach to life eschatological, for it leads us to plan for a future that is supposedly ours and that we can direct. We plan a life and this plan is imbued with a narrative that gives it overarching meaning, which we henceforth hold ourselves to, until we are "[slaves] of [our] liberty."⁵⁰ For Camus, then, freedom is an inward matter, it is a sense of inner liberation from our routines, our guilt, and all external forces that would trap us and compromise our selfhood.⁵¹

The final rule of the absurd man, deriving from revolt and freedom, is passion. If all value is derived solely from revolt against the absurd and our freedom consists only of a consciousness of ourselves and our situation, then a long life is more valuable than a good one, Camus concludes.⁵² Here we can see a clear problematization of Solomon's judgments. The scorn and revolt expressed by Camus, the apparent defensiveness of his approach, exist only in relation to a love of life, whatever form such a life may take, that does not desire to be extinguished. The supposed contrast between the absurd life and Nietzsche's amor fati now appears largely unwarranted.

While passion is not as (explicitly) prominent in *The Sickness unto Death* as in his other works, Kierkegaard nonetheless establishes its importance for the faithful individual, thus providing us with yet another point of convergence with Camus. In one of the few instances in which passion is discussed, Kierkegaard explains that the degree to which one feels offended at

⁴⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 56.

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 58.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 59.

⁵² *Ibid.*, 61.

the concept of God is correlated to the amount of passion and imagination they possess.

Passionate people are more offended than others and yet they are also closer to being able to have faith.⁵³

The Tension of the Self

Faith, as was initially explained, not only requires the proper relationship of the self to God but also the proper relationship of the self to itself. In that sense, passion can be seen as being conducive to the proper conception and formation of the self. Having explored Camus' vision of a proper self, we find that the dimensions or categories of the self in *The Sickness unto Death* display a significant similarity with Camus' absurd values, which themselves serve to maintain the integrity of the self.

The self, we must remember, is a relation that relates itself to itself. The relations constituting the self can be characterized as infinity/finitude and possibility/necessity. Here we may go back to Kierkegaard's more abstract definition of despair, for it is here that he deals with despair as defined by a misrelation between these concepts. For each relationship, two forms of despair may be produced, each corresponding to a lack of tension between the concepts (possibility without necessity and vice versa, for example). The focus here will be on those forms that correspond to Camus' values.

Kierkegaard characterizes the self who lacks (or in Camus' case, rejects) infinity as lacking an eternal self that can be placed before God. This is precisely Camus' goal, to do away with any infinite dimension of himself which he cannot apprehend. Kierkegaard finds that this complete "finitization" of the self removes any trace of individuality and makes them "just one

⁵³ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 86.

more man.”⁵⁴ Though Camus affirms his selfhood and individuality, he clearly does not find them to be derived from eternity and makes no attempt to locate or define them, lest he enters the realm of metaphysics.⁵⁵

The other despair arising from a misrelation, this one corresponding to Camus’ concept of freedom, is that of the self who lacks possibility. Camus opposes pure freedom because it necessarily engenders hope, one of the enemies of the absurd man. A lack of hope and of faith is precisely what Kierkegaard criticizes in the self who lacks possibility. The belief in possibility is, more than anything, a belief that “with God all things are possible.”⁵⁶ This idea allows for the paradox that we may believe the impossible⁵⁷ despite the offense such an idea causes to the understanding, which is henceforth sacrificed in the name of faith. Those who lack possibility are thus trapped in necessity, or worse — though Camus would perhaps gladly accept this — pure triviality.⁵⁸

This is not the first time we’ve found such similarities between their visions of the proper (or the improper) form of the self. But there’s a difference here that is much more illuminating than other instances. Because these relationships are composed of opposite concepts, Kierkegaard’s description and critique of the other two forms of unbalance/despair, the lack of finitude and the lack of necessity, seem to be perfectly in line with Camus’s critique of “the eternal” and pure freedom. In the case of the former, both thinkers agree that infinity (for Kierkegaard infinity without finitude) leads to a volatilization and an abstraction of the self, a

⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 33.

⁵⁵ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 61.

⁵⁶ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 38.

⁵⁷ Here Kierkegaard seems to be alluding to his treatment of faith in *Fear and Trembling*.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, 40; Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 62.

loss of one's concrete existence for the sake of a fantasy. In the case of the latter, similarly, they both agree that the self becomes lost in possibilities, never actualizing any of them but instead only dreaming of what could be.

The Leap of Awareness

Here we must return once again to Camus' critique of Kierkegaard. For Camus, it has been established, the tension of the absurd must be maintained. Camus' opposition to Kierkegaard arises not from the fact that he's a Christian, but that his leap of faith destroys the balance between the "irrational of the world and the insurgent nostalgia of the absurd."⁵⁹ Yet the prior excursion into Kierkegaard's self-constituting syntheses demonstrates what Camus did not properly realize, that from Kierkegaard's point of view, it is he whose leap destroys a necessary balance. Faith, beyond the leap by virtue of the absurd (Kierkegaard's absurd, that is), requires a proper relation of the self to itself. But Camus, in his steadfastness, in his obsession with those tangible truths he can understand, negates the eternal in his self, remains in temporality, and thus destroys the balance between temporal and eternal. This corresponds well with Jacob Golomb's conclusion that "Camus is in many ways an inverted Kierkegaard...Kierkegaard's absurd under the wing of God resembles Camus' absurd in the Godless world of immanence. In Camus, too, we 'leap' to the dogma of the absurd."⁶⁰

But their leaps are not identical. Within Camus' philosophy, Kierkegaard's leap is precisely what destroys the absurd tension. Here the concepts are inverted again, for Camus' leap instead follows his dissolution of the Kierkegaardian tension. Camus begins *The Myth of Sisyphus* by establishing the absurd and then proceeds to derive its consequences. But the

⁵⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 38.

⁶⁰ Jacob Golomb, *In Search of Authenticity: From Kierkegaard to Camus* (London: Routledge, 1995), 179.

establishment of the absurd betrays the presupposition that Camus was instead supposed to prove, that there's any value in the maintenance of the absurd tension, or that there's any value at all. Camus opposes the attitude that derives that life is not worth living from the meaninglessness of the world, but he can only argue against this through premises that imply meaning. He tells us that a "principle can be established that for a man who does not cheat, what he believes to be true must determine his conduct,"⁶¹ and then goes on to point out that suicide itself implies meaning and thus the nihilist and the suicidal man cannot enact it, lest they contradict themselves at the moment of their death.

Later on, Camus compares himself to Kierkegaard in terms of danger, a criterion they both apply to their conduct. If for Kierkegaard the danger or the offense lies in the leap of faith, for Camus it lies in "being able to remain on that dizzying crest" that precedes the leap, "that is integrity and the rest is subterfuge."⁶² Yet what can truth and integrity mean to one who has forgone all meaning? These presuppositions in Camus' argument serve to lead him, as Woods describes it, "into his own kind of leap, which is the assertion — and it is not much more than this — that we must oppose the world's meaninglessness."⁶³ Camus rejects the eternal aspects of Kierkegaard's syntheses and finds no God or meaning in the world. His leap consists, then, in not committing suicide or returning to the beliefs that provided him with meaning, in simply remaining alive and aware. He appears to realize and admit this at the end of his delineation of

⁶¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 6.

⁶² *Ibid.*, 50.

⁶³ Woods, 3.

the absurd man and his principles: “The preceding merely defines a way of thinking. But,” he finally reveals, “the point is to live.”⁶⁴

Towards the Self as Lover

We are now able to look at both thinkers and their corresponding philosophies from a distance and clearly see their parallel structures that represent the same movement, that of the emergence or rather the formation of the self. Kierkegaard establishes definitions for the self and for faith at the beginning of *The Sickness unto Death* and then proceeds negatively, tracing the various levels of despair and in doing so making his definitions more concrete.⁶⁵ At face value, it could be said that Kierkegaard proceeds downwards into the lowest forms of despair, but of the despair over the eternal, he states that because it “is more intensive, it is in a certain sense closer to salvation,”⁶⁶ and thus there is a sense in which he is nonetheless proceeding upwards into proper selfhood.

We could say that Camus’ absurd and the values derived from it are but a rule of conduct rather than criteria for proper selfhood, as is the case with Kierkegaard. But if we accept, as he does, that the institutions and doctrines that dissolve the absurd balance serve “to impoverish that reality whose inhumanity constitutes man’s majesty,” then we may agree with him that these ultimately also “[impoverish] man himself.”⁶⁷ The absurd man, then, is a model for a proper selfhood whose integrity and pride have not been impoverished by doctrines of meaning.

This is for both thinkers the foundation to a proper life, the formation of a self. For both thinkers, this formation proceeds through a leap that provides it with meaning. For Kierkegaard,

⁶⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 65.

⁶⁵ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 13, 14.

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 62.

⁶⁷ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 55.

it is a leap of faith, a leap into the irrational and yet nonetheless evident fact of God's existence and His love for His creation. For Camus, it is a leap made against faith, a leap into a life-affirming, if not life-maintaining, value to be found in awareness itself. For both, the leap is the beginning, but the self represents a balance that must be maintained. Kierkegaard sees this as a proper balance between the relations that constitute him, possibility and necessity, infinity and finitude. Camus sees this as a balance between the nostalgia he feels for a meaningful existence and the knowledge that such a nostalgia will never and must never be assuaged. Most important of all is that both believe the leap and the maintenance of the balance to fall entirely upon the self. "The self has the task of becoming itself in freedom,"⁶⁸ says Kierkegaard; and, Camus adds, "I must carry it alone."⁶⁹

Even at its most concrete, this chapter focused largely on the relationship between the self and its surroundings. However, we must remember one of the essential premises of this whole inquiry, that Kierkegaard and Camus were social critics, largely reacting and working against the tendencies of their times. Thus, the emergence of the self does not simply require a displacement from one's physical and psychological surroundings, it more importantly requires a realization of and separation from the passive and unreflective societies in which we initially find ourselves. But we must also not overstate this separation. Inherent in *The Sickness unto Death* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* is a critique of modern society which instructs us to become individual, actualized selves, but it does not instruct us henceforth to remain apart from all others. On the contrary, it is precisely at this point that must face the other.

⁶⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Sickness unto Death*, 35.

⁶⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 55.

This is therefore the question that must drive us into our next point of inquiry: having properly formed a self, in what manner do we deal with and relate to another?

CHAPTER 2 THE GRAVITY OF LOVE

Absurdity is king, but love saves us from it.

Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1942*

Love's command forbids despair — by commanding one to love.

Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*

In a short scene midway through *The Plague*, Camus provides us with the next step in the current analysis. The small and dusty town of Oran, Algeria is besmirched by a fatal plague which forces its gates to be shut. Rambert, a foreigner separated from his home and his beloved by the plague, converses with his two friends, Dr. Rieux, a doctor who works endlessly to fight the pestilence, and Tarrou, a strange man who forms a squad of volunteers to aid in dealing with the sick. Rambert, who plans to escape Oran, expresses his admiration for Rieux and Tarrou but justifies his absence from the squads and his planned getaway through the appeal that he has no interest in dying for ideas or heroics, that his interest only lay in dying for love. A short silence follows his diatribe, after which Rieux quietly objects: “Man isn’t an idea, Rambert.”⁷⁰

Just as he refused to use abstract philosophies to approach the self and the rules of conduct that would allow him to justify his own existence, Camus refuses to use them in order to approach and discuss fellow human beings. Much like the self, they must be discussed as the immediate evidence presents them to us, as they are given. Due perhaps to the recognizability of his early works and his views on the absurd, this social aspect of Camus’ philosophy has not been given the attention it is due. A close analysis of several of his texts will reveal not only that

⁷⁰ Albert Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Random House, 1948), 149.

solidarity and, most importantly, love, played a major role in the writer's thought, but furthermore that it stood at its center. These aspects of Camus' philosophy will be brought to the foreground with the assistance of Kierkegaard's *Works of Love*, thus demonstrating that the complex relationship between the two thinkers does not end with the absurd but extends further into love, where it finds its grounding.

Two texts should be noted for their discussion of the role of love in Camus' work, though their problems and shortcomings should also be discussed, if only so as to not be repeated. In the decade following Camus' death, Thomas Merton, the Catholic literary critic, published several essays analyzing various texts by Camus, which were eventually collected and published as "Seven Essays on Albert Camus."⁷¹ The mention of Merton's religious beliefs isn't arbitrary here, for it plays a major role in his approach to Camus' texts, which is why his essays stand out amongst other secondary sources on the subject. Though only used sparingly in the previous chapter, Merton is one of few scholars who made an active effort to counteract popular views of Camus as a philosopher who supported the absurd or, worse, nihilism.

Merton's religious approach to Camus' writings prove to be both his greatest strength and, it eventually becomes clear, his greatest weakness as well. While he makes it clear that he has no intentions of claiming that Camus was a covert Christian, Merton dedicates a fair amount of time and space to discussing the ways in which Camus misunderstood Christianity, hypothesizing about which thinkers could have presented him with a viable look at Christianity, and categorizing him as a post-Christian.⁷² Merton is far from aggressive in such claims and remains reasonable throughout these discussions, but they ultimately hinder his analyses by

⁷¹ Thomas Merton, *The Literary Essays of Thomas Merton* (New York: New Directions, 1981).

⁷² *Ibid.*, 202, 211.

becoming too heavily entrenched in the issue of Camus as an unbeliever. Given the inclusion of Kierkegaard in the present analysis, it is important to take Merton's approach as an example, both of the fact that Camus' theological beliefs or lack thereof need not prevent a fruitful comparison of his values with those founded on religious doctrine and furthermore that such a discussion will benefit from a lack of categorizing and labeling of views as Christian, Post-Christian, or non-Christian.

While Merton emphasizes themes of love and morality in his seven essays, Anthony Rizzuto's study, *Camus: Love and Sexuality*, places its entire focus on the subject of love.⁷³ Rizzuto attempts, in five chapters, to present an intellectual evolution of Camus' complex and ever-changing views on love, sex, marriage, and family. Camus' trajectory as developed by Rizzuto through textual analyses grounded in biographical information and Camus' journals is, while interesting, surprisingly conventional. Starting with the writer's youth in Algeria, Rizzuto gives us an image of a man who slowly moves from a selfish and purely physical hedonism to an eventual, albeit hesitant, acceptance of fraternity, and finally to traditional love as embodied in marriage and the family.⁷⁴ That the narrative presented by Rizzuto adheres to the somewhat standard development of a person's view of love⁷⁵ is not the book's major problem. It is instead the obvious contradiction between Rizzuto's attempt to ground these stages in Camus' biography and his decision to use the entirety of his work as evidence in the analysis of any given period, presenting in each stage notebook entries and characters from various eras, many of which contradict each other.

⁷³ Anthony Rizzuto, *Camus: Love and Sexuality* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 1998).

⁷⁴ Ibid.

⁷⁵ Dale Cospers, Review of *Camus: Love and Sexuality* by Anthony Rizzuto, *Philosophy and Literature* 23 (April 1999): 233.

Rizzuto makes it clear that the evolution he presents is neither linear nor steady,⁷⁶ but his results are nonetheless a series of five separate essays, each appropriating the whole of Camus' thought to prove its thesis. That there are clear omissions in both biographical information — — Camus' entire affair with Maria Casares goes unmentioned, despite the clear effect it had on his views — and textual sources — *The Rebel*, where Camus directly explains the views of love and solidarity he dramatized in several fictitious works, goes largely unmentioned — makes the text even more problematic.⁷⁷ While still heavily influenced by Camus' biography and journal entries, the current study will, unlike Rizzuto's, focus largely on the literary and philosophical discussion of Camus' texts rather than attempting the dangerous venture of ascertaining the thinker's personal machinations at any point in his life.

While Camus' early, pre-war essays will not be analyzed in detail here, a brief contextualization of them will be beneficial, if only to show the seeds of his exploration of social relations and love. These early writings consist largely of short lyrical essays released in two series, *The Wrong Side and The Right Side* and *Nuptials*.⁷⁸ These essays, all written by a young Camus prior to his move to Europe from his native city of Algiers, are characterized by their bareness and their youthful passion. Besides from seeing the beginning of Camus' immediate and concrete philosophical approach, we can find in both series of essays, especially *The Wrong Side and The Right Side*, Camus' first elaboration on "this theme of the essential futility or absurdity of human existence — including human suffering."⁷⁹ Furthermore, we can see here his interest

⁷⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁷⁷ Dale Cospser, Review of *Camus: Love and Sexuality*, 234

⁷⁸ Albert Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, Inc., 1968).

⁷⁹ Brée, *Camus*, 76.

in his relationship with his mother, the focus of the collection *Between Yes and No*,⁸⁰ which would continue to be of utmost importance to him. It is in all likelihood the content of *Nuptials*, which consists largely of rather sensuously-described experiences of the Mediterranean coast, that has led this early period to be seen as particularly hedonistic and uninterested in any kind of traditional form of love.⁸¹ However, a closer reading of the texts, especially the essay titled “Between Yes and No,” make it clear that the young Camus is neither as certain of himself — as the essay’s title implies — or as unempathetic to non-physical love as critics like Rizzuto believe. That Camus describes his mother’s love as hidden and impartial and love in general as a restoring force⁸² will later be shown to be an early and particularly insightful demonstration of his similarities with Kierkegaard.

“I Rebel — Therefore We Exist”

The Myth of Sisyphus provided us with a path towards a lucid selfhood, but the only elements in this dialectic were the individual and the unresponsive world. *The Rebel* represents the discovery of the Other in this dynamic. Whereas *The Myth of Sisyphus* was fueled by the question of suicide, *The Rebel* is fueled by that of murder. In the essay’s introduction, Camus, without specifically naming himself or *The Myth of Sisyphus*, makes it clear that the “absurdist position” alone cannot answer this question insofar as it allows total freedom while prohibiting total negation (as represented by suicide). Like Cartesian doubt, the absurdist position is only tenable as a point of departure.⁸³

⁸⁰ Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 32.

⁸¹ Rizzuto, *Camus: Love and Sexuality*, 12.

⁸² Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 30, 33.

⁸³ Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 8.

There are two purposes at play in *The Rebel*, one of which is of more interest than the other here. First, Camus wants to outline an ethic based on revolt by presenting “a personal study of the implications of an individual act of revolt” and thus a characterization of the rebel.⁸⁴ Less relevant to the issue at hand is what ends up constituting a majority of Camus’ study, a genealogy of revolt from the French Revolution to the middle of the 20th century.⁸⁵ This historical analysis is political, literary, and aesthetic; it traces both the meaning of revolt and its manifestations in various realms of modern society. However, it is useful in the manner in which it arguably mirrors the character established at the outset of the study. In tracing the nihilistic perversion of Prometheus,⁸⁶ Camus creates a more specific image of the limits of the ideal rebel.

Camus’ initial example in his delineation of the rebel is that of a slave, which perfectly illustrates the mechanics of rebellion and which conveniently allows for the inclusion of one of the most essential tenets of Kierkegaard’s philosophy of love, namely the idea of neighborly love. “A slave who has taken orders all his life suddenly decides that he cannot obey some new command. What does he mean by saying ‘no’?” asks Camus at the outset of his study.⁸⁷ The slave’s negation establishes, at the very least, that there are limits to the abuse he is willing to suffer; it is a rejection of his condition, a line being drawn in the sands of the ethical plane.⁸⁸ Implicit in this negation is a set of values, for the drawing of this limit entails a differentiation between what is permissible and what isn’t. Camus’ argument here is no different, methodologically speaking, from those early explorations of death and poverty, they both

⁸⁴ Brée, 222.

⁸⁵ Ibid., 223.

⁸⁶ Ibid., 219.

⁸⁷ Camus, *The Rebel*, 13.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

originate in human experience rather than abstract reasoning. This introduction of the rebel and his birth in negation is simply a politicization of the absurd man's birth; they both emerge out of the intuitive refusal to resign themselves to their condition.⁸⁹

In his rebellion, the rebel asserts his limits and his values absolutely, for his rebellion can only come from a perception of what ought to be, rather than simply what is preferable. This value is placed by the rebel above all things, including his life. However, this introduces him to the whole of humanity, for his willingness to sacrifice his life for any value reveals that it belongs to all men.⁹⁰ In affirming this universal value, Camus answers the question of the viability of murder in the same way in which, almost a decade before, he answered that of suicide: with a resounding no. The values that the rebel establishes through his actions represent the limits of his freedom, which ends, as the colloquial phrase goes, where the other's begins. If any rebellion that forgoes or transgresses this essential balance between values and freedoms loses its validity, rebellion can rightly be said to be a perpetual state of tension.⁹¹

Here we find the first major point of convergence with Kierkegaard's philosophy of love, the idea of neighborly love. The second deliberation of *Works of Love* centers on a biblical verse, from Matthew 22:39, stating that "you shall love the neighbor as yourself."⁹² "[The] *Neighbor* is what philosophers would call the *other*," Kierkegaard says, "it means *all men*."⁹³ Kierkegaard

⁸⁹ Ibid., 23.

⁹⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 16. There's an interesting contradiction here. While Camus believes that the act of rebellion, which extends to all individuals, allows him to "surpass himself" and that "from this point of view, human solidarity is metaphysical," he nonetheless goes on to state that rebellion, as described here, truly exists only in Western society (20).

⁹¹ Ibid. 22.

⁹² Søren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love* (New York: Harper Perennial, 2009), 34.

⁹³ Ibid., 37.

introduces this term in contrast to that of the “beloved,”⁹⁴ but such an element is not yet relevant in relation to Camus. What is more relevant here is what Kierkegaard first discusses in his deliberation of the command, the phrase: “as yourself.” This aspect is essential for Kierkegaard’s philosophy of love because it creates a bond between the self and the neighbor. While poetic and pagan views of love take it for granted that love should be placed higher than the self, Kierkegaard finds such a proposition risky and problematic, for it discourages people from loving themselves properly.⁹⁵ Insofar as the neighbor must be loved as the self, the self must be loved as the neighbor, and thus a lack of love for the self would naturally undermine the relationship between the two.⁹⁶

It might seem, superficially at least, that there’s a clear difference between the two points of view. Camus’ view of rebellion, after all, falls with what Kierkegaard calls the poetic or pagan conception of love, for it is a necessary part of the emergence of the rebel that he place his value, that for which he rebels, above his life. This may not necessarily be the case, however, for this would imply that Camus’ view significantly deprioritizes the self and that Kierkegaard’s view completely rejects the notion of self-sacrifice. Camus does not delve too deeply into the specifics of the self and the neighbor, but of great significance is the idea as explained by Germaine Brée, that the rebel must be “*willing* to lose his life in order to assert [his right].”⁹⁷ That the requirement of rebellion is a willingness, rather than any kind of necessity, to sacrifice one’s life keeps the rebel from violating the “as yourself” in the love commandment. The tension of

⁹⁴ Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving: A Commentary on Kierkegaard’s Works of Love* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001), 44.

⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 39.

⁹⁶ Ibid.

⁹⁷ Brée, *Camus*, 222 (emphasis mine).

rebellion lies not only between the individual and the other, it lies within the individual as well, for rebellion simultaneously “springs from everything that is most strictly individualistic in man” and yet “questions the very idea of the individual,” and thus both processes must be maintained.⁹⁸ This is safe-guarded even further by what is arguably Camus’ equivalent to “proper self-love,” the rejection of suicide and all values thereby derived.

A similar clarification can be made for Kierkegaard, thus dissolving even further the perception of a major difference here. M. Jamie Ferreira provides great insight in discussing the apparent contradiction in the Kierkegaardian principles of equality, which commands us to love the neighbor as we love ourselves, and asymmetry, which commands us to be in infinite debt to the other and to learn to love in a way that demands no reciprocity.⁹⁹ Ferreira eliminates the apparent contradiction by thinking of the “as yourself” command as one dealing with inclusion. In dealing with the other (as will be explained further), we are to place ourselves in infinite debt to them and must, if possible, forgo any claim to reciprocity. The role of the command to love the neighbor as oneself assures that our preferences, which are a form of self-love, will not keep us from engaging in this infinite debt with anyone in particular, given that such exclusion would violate the command; naturally, this debt includes the willingness to sacrifice ourselves.¹⁰⁰ The emphasis of the command, Ferreira explains, is on “the other as oneself and not...oneself as the other.”¹⁰¹ Such an emphasis, too, can be found in *The Rebel*, where Camus explains that the ability, or rather the tendency, to identify with others must not be confused with pure “psychological identification — a mere subterfuge by which the individual imagines that it is he

⁹⁸ Camus, *The Rebel*, 15.

⁹⁹ Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving*, 219-221.

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 222.

¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, 221.

himself who has been offended. On the contrary, it can often happen that we cannot bear to see offenses done to others which we ourselves have accepted without rebelling.”¹⁰²

The formulation of the neighbor and its similarity to Kierkegaard’s conception is what most clearly appears from the beginning of *The Rebel*. However, there are highly significant ideas lying at the core of both conceptions which must also be analyzed, which inevitably requires us to discuss God once again. Thus far, we have only explored one side of Kierkegaard’s view of equality. For Kierkegaard, the “as yourself” command entails not only that we are all equals, but that we are all equals before God and thus it represents the expansion of the religious criterion discussed in the first chapter.¹⁰³ This is not a purely abstract move on Kierkegaard’s part, for he derives very clear ethical implications from it. Kierkegaard believes that unconditional obedience can only be directed towards God. But to place the beloved or the neighbor above oneself is precisely to be unconditionally devoted and obedient to them. Thus, simply put, that we are willing, and in fact required, to interfere with the beloved or the neighbor’s will for their own good demonstrates that we assign an equal amount of validity to them as to ourselves.¹⁰⁴

Given Camus’ aforementioned lack of belief in God and his exaltation of rebellion and man, it could be argued that in suggesting that the rebel places his values above his life, coming to see it as “the supreme good,”¹⁰⁵ Camus suggests a supplanting of God by these values. Such a strategy, however, is one of the several that Camus comes to identify and reject in his genealogy of revolt, for this would be no different than the transformation of the slave into the master. After

¹⁰² Camus, *The Rebel*, 16.

¹⁰³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 72. Chapter 1, 18.

¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, 36, 37.

¹⁰⁵ Camus, *The Rebel*, 15.

the dethroning of God “begins the desperate effort to create, at the price of crime and murder if necessary, the dominion of man,” and thus this “metaphysical revolution” represents a transgression of rebellion.¹⁰⁶

After his discussion of equality before God, Kierkegaard moves on to what is often seen as the principal term in the command, the “shall,” from which he derives our divine duty to love. Duty is the greatest and only protection against contingency, Kierkegaard explains. All “lower” forms of love can certainly be sincere, fruitful, and even long-lasting, but even the best of these is still subject to change, the present circumstances, and the whims of those who engender it.¹⁰⁷ It is at this point that the commandment to love is enacted, in order to “eternally secure love against every change” and in doing so to provide it with complete independence.¹⁰⁸ Kierkegaard acknowledges that the latter of these two effects appears intuitively contradictory, but explains that “spontaneous” love, which, earthly understood, appears to be completely free, forces man, as a result of its instability and its falsity in the face of the eternal, to become dependent. “Eternal” love, however, provides eternal freedom through duty, it provides the freedom to fulfill said duty rather than the freedom from it — the former of which is the greater freedom — and consequently yields independence out of the dependence on the eternal.¹⁰⁹

While nihilism and historical materialism, rather than religion, eventually reveal themselves to be the two main targets of Camus’ critique, this is because Camus in many ways equates all three based on their eschatological foundations. The dream of paradise/eternity in Christianity and of the end of time in historical materialism as characterized by Hegel and Marx,

¹⁰⁶ Ibid., 25.

¹⁰⁷ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 45.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 44.

¹⁰⁹ Ibid., 53.

in its assuredness, serves to justify all actions in the present, abstracting all individuals in the name of eternity. “In both cases one must wait,” states Camus, “and meanwhile the innocent continue to die.”¹¹⁰ Thus, Camus refuses to derive duty from eternity and instead locates it in rebellion. Insofar as the value derived from rebellion becomes the supreme good, which the rebel extends to all people and is therefore willing to sacrifice his life for, rebellion becomes a duty, for it is what defines men.¹¹¹ Out of this idea Camus formulates his maxim: “I rebel — therefore we exist.”¹¹²

The idea of rebellion perhaps seems too political for a comparison with Kierkegaard’s idea of love, but it is love that Camus finds at the center of rebellion, explaining that “rebellion cannot exist without a strange form of love.”¹¹³ Camus refuses to derive a duty from eternity, for this duty will inevitably come to be negated through the acceptance the application of any means whatsoever to bring it about. Having instead derived the duty to rebel from rebellion itself, Camus reveals what lies at the heart of this duty and of his philosophy: “If someone here told me to write a book on morality, it would have a hundred pages and ninety-nine would be blank. On the last page, I should write: ‘I recognize only one duty, and that is to love.’ And, as far as everything else is concerned, I say *no*.”¹¹⁴ Absolute moralities produce entire narratives imbued with values and duties that man must perform to be accepted into the paradise they promise or to aid in bringing it about. To these doctrines Camus responds that “I do not believe there is another

¹¹⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 303.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 304. Here we interpret “strange” as inaccessible and inexpressible.

¹¹⁴ Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1935-1942* (New York: Marlowe & Company, 1998), 54. It should be noted that this quote, used by all major sources dealing with the issue of love in Camus’ thought, was written at some time during Camus’ trips to Italy in 1937. This need not be taken as an invalidation of the connection between love and rebellion, but it serves to point out that Camus starts with love and then derives the rebellion he ends up equating with it, rather than the other way around.

world in which we shall have to ‘render account.’ But we already have our account to render in this world — to those we love.”¹¹⁵ In the same way in which he refuses to transgress the limit of his reason in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he refuses here to transgress the limits of what is born out of him in the act of rebellion, love for himself and his fellow man, both of whom stand together against the same malady.¹¹⁶

In keeping with his emphasis on action and experience, Camus stresses that “in the act of rebellion...an abstract ideal is not chosen through lack of feeling and in pursuit of a sterile demand.”¹¹⁷ Rebellion is not logical, at least not strictly so, for it is a passionate affirmation of life in the face of death and oppression and is thus necessarily active. The revolution that is calculated, “in preferring an abstract concept of man to a man of flesh and blood, denies existence as many times as necessary, puts resentment in the place of love.”¹¹⁸ While crime and murder become the greatest perversion of any form of revolt or any doctrine, silence and inaction are equally troublesome, and they are both inevitably tied to the abstraction of man by these eschatological ideologies.¹¹⁹

These charges of eschatology and abstraction are extremely relevant to any discussion regarding Kierkegaard’s philosophy of love, for they have been made against him by various

¹¹⁵ Ibid., 72.

¹¹⁶ Camus, *The Rebel*, 22.

¹¹⁷ Ibid. 19.

¹¹⁸ Ibid., 304. Camus is here referencing his short discussion in the essay’s introduction about resentment, which Max Scheler equated with rebellion (17).

¹¹⁹ Ibid. Camus does not see all aspects of Christianity as equal to “Historical Christianity.” He, like Kierkegaard (Ferreira 82), has an appreciation for Jesus of Nazareth as a man who, regardless of the question of divinity, was a respectable and ethical man, leading Merton to call him (as perhaps Kierkegaard would) a “good pagan.” (Merton 235). Our scope is not wide enough to address this discussion, but we must mention the appropriateness of Merton’s comment given Ronald D. Srigley’s main assertion in *Albert Camus’ Critique of Modernity*, which is precisely that Camus sought to escape Christianity and modernity in order to return to (and to help to restore) a Greek and neo-pagan ethic. Srigley, 4.

critics — Theodor Adorno among them — and are ultimately one of the main reasons for Ferreira’s commentary on *Works of Love*, where she seeks to find coherence and humanity where others see contradiction and abstraction.¹²⁰ That Kierkegaard’s philosophy of love is far from abstract can be seen most clearly in two deliberations within *Works of Love*, “Love is the Fulfilling of the Law” and “The Duty to Love Those We See.”

“Love is the Fulfilling of the Law” begins with a problematization of promises. Kierkegaard explains that promises indirectly discourage action when they, rather than their fulfillment, are seen as meritorious and as guarantees of that which is promised.¹²¹ However, love is the fulfilling of the law, explains Kierkegaard, aware of the indeterminacy of such a description. The description is nonetheless necessary, for “as soon as anything else is answered to the question ‘What is love?’ questions of time, intervals, and spare moments are introduced...but if love is the fulfilling of the law, then there is no time even for a promise,”¹²² especially that promise which “postpones to a point beyond the span of history the cure to evil and crime,”¹²³ given that the cure, for both thinkers, is love.

Kierkegaard’s analysis of the promise in some ways applies to the next deliberation, “The Duty to Love Those We See.” The chapter is largely in response to the idea of “objects of love” to be found by the lover. Despite the disposition towards love inherent in all people, there is nonetheless a tendency to deceive ourselves, to convince ourselves that there is nothing or no one amongst us to whom we can direct our love.¹²⁴ This self-deception is not unlike a promise, which

¹²⁰ Ferreira, *Love’s Grateful Striving*, 6, 7.

¹²¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 100.

¹²² *Ibid.*, 105.

¹²³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 304.

¹²⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 155.

through a guarantee of its object in the future allows us to forego the necessity to work and to love in the present. But we have a duty to love the one we see, explains Kierkegaard. We believe that we must find amongst our social surroundings an object of love, but our true task is instead to learn how to love those who surround us.¹²⁵ Whereas “Love is the Fulfilling of the Law” forces us to forget the possibility of love beyond the “now,” “The Duty to Love Those We See” forces us to forget the possibility of it beyond the “here.”

Kierkegaard goes on to mirror Camus’ earlier sentiments on the consequences of a rebellion against God. Love is the fulfilling of the law and the law is indeterminate, thus our certainty of its nature and its fulfillment is found in the knowledge that it is God’s law.¹²⁶ But men, as Camus explains at great lengths, come to rebel against God and His rule, which attempts to force them into eternal servitude. For Kierkegaard as for Camus, the dethroning of God inevitably leads to the enthroning of man, who is placed in charge of the law. But men, in the absence of God, are not only fickle and self-interested, they are finite. Thus, any attempt to determine the law will fail to create any rule of life by which all men may live justly and peacefully, and will instead allow doubt and confusion to be the rule.¹²⁷

Camus doesn’t share Kierkegaard’s pessimism as to the inevitability of metaphysical revolution, however. Based on the principle of limitations and humility inherent in Camus’ philosophy, “the [true] rebel, defies more than he denies. Originally, at least, he does not suppress God; he merely talks to Him as an equal.”¹²⁸ Rebellion must lead to the dethroning of God, but the throne must remain empty, for the lack of a master presents less risk and more

¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, 158.

¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, 110, 112.

¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, 119, 120.

¹²⁸ Camus, *The Rebel*, 25. “But it is not a polite dialogue,” Camus clarifies.

justice than the promise of a just one. But if the rebel rejects God's law and refuses to supplant him and provide one, from where does our duty derive? The answer may be found in Ferreira's analysis of ethics in *Works of Love*. In defending Kierkegaard from charges that his ethic can be reduced to standard divine commandment theory, Ferreira invokes H. Richard Niebuhr's differentiation between an ethic of obedience and an ethic of response/responsibility. Whereas the former demands that we love and act ethically in response to a command, the latter demands that we do so in response to the other and his/her needs.¹²⁹ Ferreira adapts this idea to Kierkegaard's idea of God's relationship to love to demonstrate that both ethics are present and inextricably tied in his philosophy. For Kierkegaard, she explains, the ethics of responsibility entail loving the neighbor not simply for himself, but more specifically because "[he/she] is loved by God, who wants us to love what God loves."¹³⁰ The ethic of obedience is also not as simple as it appears at first either, for Ferreira proposes that the command is not an arbitrary imposition upon us but instead exists in the background of what is already inherent to us, the need to love and be loved, from which arises our sense of responsibility.¹³¹ Camus, who completely rejects the ethic of obedience, has a similar view of the ethic of responsibility, one lacking in a foundation in God's love, however. Our duty to love can be affirmed without a master to impose upon us, it instead arises from the solidarity, responsibility, and love we naturally feel towards all people when we actualize ourselves through rebellion.¹³²

¹²⁹ Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 243.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹ *Ibid.*, 41.

¹³² Camus, *The Rebel*, 16.

The Lover's Need

Thus far, we have only discussed the nature and actions of the lover towards the neighbor. Much care has been paid to presenting a concrete conception of the neighbor and the duty to love, but this has nonetheless ignored the reception of love and the vicissitudes of loving and being loved by individuals. *The Misunderstanding*, one of Camus' various plays from the mid-war years, and *The First Man*,¹³³ the project Camus was working on at the time of his death, will be used to illuminate these issues.

The story in *The Misunderstanding*¹³⁴ is fairly simple and rather dark. Jan, a Czechoslovakian¹³⁵ man who left his family and their hotel in his youth, is now married and financially successful and returns home for the first time. Despite his wife Maria's insistence that he simply reveal his identity, Jan goes to the hotel on his own and incognito in order to surprise the mother and sister he hasn't seen in decades. His mother and sister, who have for several years enacted the practice of murdering wealthy men in their hotel, don't recognize him and eventually come to murder him as well. Upon discovering who Jan is, his mother commits suicide and his sister Martha, whose bitterness and sterility is only interrupted by her dreams to leave Central Europe, is left alone with her nihilism and her hatred.

¹³³ Albert Camus, *The First Man* (New York: Vintage House, 1995). Perhaps more than any other of Camus' works, *The First Man* is incredibly multifaceted. While it will be used here to talk specifically about preferential love and the need to be loved, it is truly deserving of a much more dense and comprehensive analysis, which it has yet to receive.

¹³⁴ Albert Camus, *Caligula and Three Other Plays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1958), 75.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, 84. That Camus sets the play in a dreary Czechoslovakian town and that Maria's name stands out as foreign should not be overlooked. Camus is very clearly hinting at his preference for Mediterranean rather than European values. Maria reveals that her and Jan live in (and their relationship is nurtured by) "a land of endless sunshine beside the sea," and thus she feels suspicious of "This Europe of [his]."

Jan embodies two of the characteristics Kierkegaard most harshly condemns: the refusal to express one's love¹³⁶ and the refusal to admit that one needs to be loved.¹³⁷ Part of his idea of debt is in regards to the expression of love. Because it is the beloved and/or the neighbor who evoke in us the feeling of love, our expression thereof is due to them and our silence is thus a refusal to participate in the infinite debt we owe them.¹³⁸ This command is in direct relationship to the command of action discussed previously. Our refusal to express our love represents an interruption in our loving of the other and thus a break in our infinite payment of our debt. Maria, who serves as a surrogate for Camus (and Kierkegaard), explains that "men do not know how real love should be. They're always dreaming dreams, building up new duties... Women are different; they know that life is short and one must make haste to love... When one loves one has no time for dreams."¹³⁹

More than once, Jan evokes his duties, which he believes to consist of providing love, companionship, and financial stability but not an openness to the other's love.¹⁴⁰ Kierkegaard writes that the acceptance of our need for love is not only necessary, but that the need itself is a benefit, an expression of riches.¹⁴¹ Jan's insistence that he has no need for his mother and sister and that his return was incited by the possibility that they may need him,¹⁴² is a revelation of his inner bankruptcy, which is the reason why he is unable to rescue them from theirs. Perhaps his biggest transgression comes when his wife tells him that they won't find happiness there, to

¹³⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 29.

¹³⁷ *Ibid.*, 53.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 29.

¹³⁹ Camus, *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, 86.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 83.

¹⁴¹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 78.

¹⁴² Camus, *Caligula and Three Other Plays*, 84.

which he replies that “happiness isn’t everything; there is duty, too.”¹⁴³ Not only does Jan refuse to see himself as an equal to others in his need for love, he does not even understand the inextricable relationship between love, which is joy itself, and “the law.”¹⁴⁴ Thus his abstraction of others is equal to that of the sister who sees him as a mere means to achieve her goal of freedom from her life in the hotel.

If *The Misunderstanding* explores the acceptance of our need to be loved, *The First Man* demonstrates the need to accept that we are actually loved. The incomplete novel, the manuscript of which was found within the wreckage of the car accident in which Camus lost his life, is highly autobiographical and largely deals with the relationship between Camus’ surrogate, Jacques Cormery, and his mother. After visiting his father’s grave for the first time, Cormery becomes interested in the man’s identity. From then on the narrative alternates between Jacques’ search for information about his father in the present and his childhood in Algiers.¹⁴⁵

Comery’s relationship with his mother derives its uniqueness and its complications from the fact that she, like Camus’ own mother, is illiterate and nearly deaf and mute.¹⁴⁶ The mother’s constant silence and idleness and Camus/Comery’s consequent doubts as to whether she truly loves him are a major element in the novel. Writing about the novel, Camus states: “Nothing in any case prevents me from dreaming that I shall succeed, that I shall still place in the center of this work the admirable silence of a mother and the effort of a man to rediscover a justice or a love which could counterbalance that silence.”¹⁴⁷ Regardless of Camus’ conclusion about this

¹⁴³ Ibid.

¹⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 112.

¹⁴⁵ Camus, *The First Man*.

¹⁴⁶ Brée, 15.

¹⁴⁷ Ibid., 255.

silence during his life, the novel itself appears to contain the solution to his and his surrogate's problem.

Jacques Cormery is the first man, a stranger, an alien.¹⁴⁸ He is the first man because he has no roots. He never knew his father and never felt the need to,¹⁴⁹ he remains uncertain about his mother's affection for him, and his nation, Algeria, is in itself without real roots, given the history of its colonization. While Camus was never able to elaborate upon Cormery's personal life, it is clear from the last available chapter and from his notes that Cormery enters various sexual and romantic relationships throughout the novel and that romantic love and Cormery's issues in dealing with it would in all likelihood be a major theme in the novel.¹⁵⁰ Thus, his lack of connections and a concrete grounding to the world makes him a stranger to all and renders him unable to truly love.

From a Kierkegaardian point of view, Cormery's main problem is in doubting his mother's love in the first place. The first deliberation of *Works of Love*, "Love's Hidden Life and Its Recognisability by Its Fruits," addresses this issue. We can only recognize love by its fruits, the works of love, because its origin within us cannot be penetrated, "like the source of a spring which just when you are nearest to it is farther away."¹⁵¹ Kierkegaard equates this source with God, and from such an equation derives that to seek knowledge and familiarity with it represents an invalidation of the love it produces. We must therefore have faith.¹⁵² Camus's rejection of God has been established, but he nonetheless appears to agree on the indeterminacy of love and

¹⁴⁸ Camus, *The First Man*, 133.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, 24.

¹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, 283, 299, 303, 311, 312, 315.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵² *Ibid.*, 27.

its origin, asserting in a journal entry that “starting from the absurd, it is not possible to live revolt without reaching at some point or other an experience of love that is still undefined.”¹⁵³

Just as his phenomenological study of the absurd man betrayed a faith in lucidity and life, here Camus betrays a sense of faith in the love that he feels for the neighbor but which he cannot, or must not, attempt to trace.

The process of believing in love is further elaborated in the deliberation “Love Builds Up,” in which Kierkegaard dedicates a portion of the deliberation explaining the concept of building up, the main characteristic of which is the act of building from the ground up.¹⁵⁴ Kierkegaard goes on to specify two main principles to be later synthesized with the first: that all love is naturally “upbuilding,” and that there is no action or word that is inherently loving; loving is thus the mode of an action rather than the action itself. For this reason, all words and actions can be performed lovingly and can be upbuilding.¹⁵⁵ Kierkegaard continues developing an outline of love and its relation to building up. If building up is the building from the ground up, then in the case of love it must be said that love builds up from itself, or from the ground of love. Thus, love must be present for building up to take place. To believe ourselves capable of creating love in the other and then to build it (and therefore them) up is arrogant, for we cannot create love.¹⁵⁶ We must therefore presuppose the existence of love in the other and in doing so build them up. This presupposition of love in the other, furthermore, reflects back onto us and builds us and our love up as well. Thus, this presupposition becomes the origin of the lover and the beloved’s mutual upbuilding. A sense of doubt towards the other’s love for us thus renders us

¹⁵³ Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*, 138. The journal entry, written in 1946, in all likelihood relates to *The Rebel*.

¹⁵⁴ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 201.

¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 202.

¹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 205.

unable to be able to truly love ourselves or the other. To love, then, is to understand that we are loved.¹⁵⁷

Cormery must therefore make no attempt to find a balance to his mother's silence. He must accept it and fill it with the presupposition that love is present. It should be noted that Cormery visits his father's gravestone out of respect for his mother, and it is only when he realizes that he is now older than his father was at the time of his death that he feels a connection to him. But this is not "the stirring of the soul that leads the son to the memory of the vanished father, but the overwhelming compassion for an unjustly murdered child."¹⁵⁸ For the first time, Cormery feels compassion towards his father but this comes only in the recognition that he is a fellow man, the neighbor, and he still cannot love him or feel loved by him, for he refuses to presuppose the love that fills the silence of his mother, his father, and his land.

Ferreira explains that a major reason for Kierkegaard's insistence in the command to love the neighbor as yourself is that it "reminds us of the essential Lutheran commitment — God has loved you first...I can only love because I am loved."¹⁵⁹ Thus, though the love for the other is tied to one's proper self-love, even this proper self-love originates in God's love for them. Camus does not accept God's love. His mother's love, it seems, would have sufficed. Though the truth will remain forever unknown, it is possible that he understood the value of the presupposition of love at the end of his life. For amongst the handwritten notes and sketches for his last novel is a note that begins with the words "the end" and from it follows a passage, which should not be summarized but only reproduced:

¹⁵⁷ Ibid., 211.

¹⁵⁸ Camus, *The First Man*, 26.

¹⁵⁹ Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 135.

She lifts her knotted hands to him and strokes his face. “You, you’re the greatest one.” There was so much love and adoration in her somber eyes (under the somewhat worn brow) that something in him — the one who knew — rebelled...A moment later he took her in his arms. Since she, who saw more clearly, loved him, he had to accept it, and to admit that to love he had to love himself a little.¹⁶⁰

The Neighbor and The Beloved

In his explanation of the movement from the absurd to rebellion, Camus makes the clearest reference to the correspondence between *The Rebel* and *The Plague*: “the first progressive step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men...the malady experienced by a single man becomes a mass plague.”¹⁶¹ In the novel, which he wrote four years prior to *The Rebel*, Camus de-emphasizes the political themes that constitute the essay and instead presents its characters with death itself,¹⁶² which is why it serves as a point of convergence between the two facets of love which have been presented. Despite its density and potential for lengthy discussions, then, the novel will only be analyzed in regards to the way in which it merges these two aspects through its elaboration of debt to the other and its depiction of preferential love, each of which is embodied in a particular character.

As was mentioned before, *The Plague* depicts a year in the town of Oran during which a deadly plague comes upon it, forcing its complete isolation from the rest of the world. The

¹⁶⁰ Camus, *The First Man*, 297.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, 22.

¹⁶² Camus, *Notebooks 1942-1951*, 52. Though *The Plague* is more “immediately” political: “I want to express by means of the plague the stifling air from which we all suffered and the atmosphere of threat and exile in which we lived.” However, he makes clear his intension to also “extend that interpretation to the notion of existence in general.”

novel's structure and story is particularly simple: the plague appears, intensifies, and eventually dissipates, having taken the joy and the lives of thousands of townspeople. As Brée explains, "The plague is not the symbol of an outer abstract evil; it merely applies and carries to their logical limits the values implicit in the unconscious attitudes of the citizens of Oran."¹⁶³ The plague creates no heroes, villains, or victims, it brings about no real change to the town, only the actualization of that which it already was. A major theme of the novel is thus the issue of heroism and responsibility, which are placed in contrast. While the exploration of the two concepts can be addressed from the point of view of various characters, it finds its nexus in a secondary character named Joseph Grand.

Grand is civil servant whose job eventually becomes dealing with the administrative tasks involved in the cleaning squads organized by Tarrou, one of the novel's main characters.¹⁶⁴ Grand is the only main character who is also part of the bureaucratic government which is perceived by the main characters (and the novel itself) to be an obstacle in their handling of the plague, and thus he spends most of the year working devotedly for both causes. In various ways, Camus makes sure to undermine Grand's merits: he is docile, ineloquent, and has "nothing of the hero about him." This is exactly what makes him the novel's true "hero."¹⁶⁵ Grand has no self-consciousness regarding his work for the squads, he has no conception of the choice in the matter. His response to Dr. Rieux's gratefulness is shock, for the "plague is here and we've got to make a stand, that's obvious."¹⁶⁶

¹⁶³ Brée, *Camus*, 118.

¹⁶⁴ Camus, *The Plague*, 123.

¹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, 123, 126.

¹⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, 123.

Grand perfectly embodies Kierkegaard's idea of love as debt. Kierkegaard describes love as an infinite debt to the other, one which the lover must have no wish of dissolving or repaying. To apply any principle of reciprocity to love's debt is to treat it as a kind of currency that could be calculated, but such "bookkeeping" practices, for Kierkegaard, would ground the infinite in finitude and would be a denial of our responsibility to the neighbor.¹⁶⁷ Thus, not only must the lover go to great lengths not to compare his love to that of other people, he must not concentrate on his own love as an object, for to do so would take it out of its element.¹⁶⁸ As was established in relation to *The Misunderstanding*, there is a necessary relationship between the debt to the other and the duty to act.¹⁶⁹ To take love out of its element is ultimately to interrupt its flow towards the other, to make it "momentary." The possibility of this interruption is and must be a grave matter, given the infinity of our debt to the other. The infinite debt, like the infinity of the duty to love, is not an excuse not to love or to enact a stagnant love (for we can never finish paying an infinite debt, after all), it is an encouragement to continue striving to provide the neighbor with the love we owe him or her.¹⁷⁰ Any discussion of God or infinity in *The Plague* is irrelevant, for the plague only reveals who Joseph Grand already is and what he already feels. Regardless of his theological foundations, he experiences his debt as infinite insofar as he acts in response to what is imminent for all people at all times, death itself.

Rambert, the outsider constantly trying to leave, is the novel's true main character (though not its "hero") insofar as he is the only character who changes. He alone represents our ability to hold both preferential and neighborly love without contradictions. As mentioned at the

¹⁶⁷ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 174.

¹⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, 177.

¹⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, 182.

¹⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, 183.

outset of the present analysis, Rambert supports the other character's efforts to fight the plague, but rather than helping, dedicates all his time and efforts to escaping from the town to be with his beloved. Rambert, who sees Rieux and Tarrou as heroes but has only regard for his beloved, is at first in complete contrast with Grand, who lost his wife years earlier¹⁷¹ and knows only a purely selfless love for the neighbor. Thus, Rambert does not understand Rieux's explanation that there are no heroics in their fight against the plague, that it was for them simply "a matter of common decency."¹⁷² His dichotomy of heroism and love is in fact a dichotomy of neighborly and preferential love, respectively, one which critics tend to emphasize as a problem in Kierkegaard's philosophy.¹⁷³ To sacrifice one's life for an unspecified other, Rambert believes, is to sacrifice for an abstract ideal, for love must be concrete and directed towards an individual.

The moment of Rambert's transformation is unclear and the revelation thereof is just as surprising to the reader as to the other characters. After several delays in his escape and after learning that Rieux's own wife was in a sanitarium outside of the town, Rambert decides to work with the squads while a new getaway plan is put into motion.¹⁷⁴ On the eve of his escape several weeks later, Rambert visits Rieux at a hospital and eventually reveals his decision to stay in the town. Rieux, who never blamed Rambert's desire to escape, questions his decision and assures him, despite his belief that he would "embarrass his relation with the woman he loved," that "there was nothing shameful in preferring happiness." "Certainly," Rambert touchingly and insightfully replies, "but it might be shameful to be happy by oneself."¹⁷⁵

¹⁷¹ Brée, *Camus*, 125.

¹⁷² Camus, *The Plague*, 150.

¹⁷³ Ferreira, *Love's Grateful Striving*, 7.

¹⁷⁴ Camus, *The Plague*, 150.

¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 188.

In Kierkegaardian terms, Rambert undergoes a transformation from self-love to eternal love. For Kierkegaard, preference, as embodied in erotic love or friendship, is a form of self-love.¹⁷⁶ Insofar as any form of preferential love is a manifestation of one's own inclinations, the object of love can be seen as an "other-I" rather than an other in him/herself.¹⁷⁷ Kierkegaard's solution is self-renunciation, the manifestation of which is neighborly love. In foregoing all preferences and distinctions, we come to love the neighbor, who is all people, as an end in him/herself.¹⁷⁸ The use of blindness and vision as an example is particularly relevant here. In upholding preference as the ultimate determinant of who we ought to love, we become blind to all but the object upon we choose (or are chosen by),¹⁷⁹ as is initially the case with Rambert. Having finally seen the neighbor, he realizes that to escape to be with his beloved would truly mean to close his eyes once again to all but himself and to bring shame upon his relationship with her.

Kierkegaard does not, as his critics may have accused him, suggest that all personal relationships be abandoned. To do so would be contradictory, he explains, for it would show an exclusion based on preference and would thus be another form of self-love. What one must do is instead to see and to love the beloved as the neighbor, to preserve the neighborly love even in our preferential relationships. This preservation of the neighborly within preference involves an acceptance of God as the mediator of love and of oneself and the other as equal before God.¹⁸⁰

¹⁷⁶ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 65.

¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, 66.

¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 68.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, 50.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, 73, 74.

Camus, unsurprisingly, will not accept this. However, he clearly accepts the value and the possibility of a coexistence of the two kinds of love. Rizzuto claims that Camus' only successful love scene takes place between Jacques Cormery and his mother in *The First Man*, that final novel which will remain unfinished.¹⁸¹ The greatest omission in his entire analysis is then undoubtedly the penultimate chapter of *The Plague*, in which Rambert reunites with his beloved. Having accepted his responsibility to the neighbor by staying behind, he accepts her embrace without shame, while "[momentarily wishing] to behave like all those others around him who believed...that plague can come and go without changing anything in men's heart."¹⁸² Rambert is able to have his beloved back, but now, having faced that imminent death which forced him to acknowledge all people as his neighbors, he understands the burden such knowledge and its corresponding responsibility will forever bear on his vision. He is the only character in Camus' entire career to experience such a consummate and comprehensive form of love.

Towards the Lover as Artist

Here we have reached the moral center of Kierkegaard's and Camus' respective philosophies, the command to love that stands before all others. Though the metaphysical foundation upon which their thoughts are built create what appears to be the a final and necessary rift between the two, we have once again delineated a clear relationship which, despite these differences, ultimately led us to a significantly similar result. This is likely due to the aspect of hiddenness in love's origin discussed earlier. Whereas Kierkegaard presupposes

¹⁸¹ Rizzuto, *Camus: Love and Sexuality*, 109. Rizzuto does not include Camus' notes and sketches in his analysis and thus the ending love scene discussed earlier goes unmentioned. Rizzuto instead presents a scene in which, following a musical performance in front of his grandmother's friends, a young Cormery hears his mother call him intelligent and suddenly understands that she does love him after all. Though the scene is particularly touching, it lacks interpretative significance insofar as it has no real effect, as demonstrated by the fact that Cormery nonetheless grows up to be a stranger with no grounding in love.

¹⁸² Camus, *The Plague*, 266.

that God lay in this impenetrable source from which all love springs forth, Camus refuses to look deeper than his human faculties will allow and instead builds his philosophy from the experience of rebellion. From these seemingly inverse views, both thinkers develop a view of love as the essential duty for humans, one which is fulfilled and yet never completely fulfilled in relation to ourselves, to humanity as a whole, and to the few people whom we call our beloveds. Regardless of whether one lives a life that continually strives towards eternity or away from it, it has been shown that love abides.

And yet Camus dedicates the last chapter of *The Rebel* to the subject of art and in it explains that there's an inherent spirit of rebellion in the medium of the novel.¹⁸³ As an artist, Camus' philosophical explorations were necessarily personal. Brée goes as far as to suggest that all "Camus' thought inevitably led him to a discussion of the question of art: his problem as writer."¹⁸⁴ While Kierkegaard seems to find common ground in regards to the novel as medium — it appears that he found it to be the only artform "in which ethical maturity is essential"¹⁸⁵ — there nonetheless appear to be a contradiction between the somewhat common view of his philosophy as one in which "the aesthetic" is the lowest rung on a kind of existential ladder ending with "the religious" and the degree to which his methodology can be regarded as artistic. Though there have been numerous analyses on each of the thinkers and the aesthetic aspect of their respective philosophies, what may instead be in order is a comparative analysis of them not only as aesthetic thinkers but furthermore as artists whose works find their basis in the philosophy of love.

¹⁸³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 259.

¹⁸⁴ Brée, *Camus*, 195.

¹⁸⁵ George Pattison, "Art in an Age of Reflection," in *The Cambridge Companion to Kierkegaard*, ed. Alastair Hannay and Gordon Marino (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 92.

CHAPTER 3 CREATION AND MARTYRDOM

Inside the museums, infinity goes up on trial,
Voices echo “this is what salvation must be like after a while.”
Bob Dylan, “Visions of Johanna”

She said “Do you realize that you’re the only concealed?”
And I said “Well, ma’am, it’s a masquerade party,
And this is how I’m revealed.”
Willis Earl Beal, “Masquerade”

Our inquiry thus far can be described as the trajectory any regular individual could — and, according to the two thinkers, should — undergo in their lifetime. For this reason, the previous chapter could be seen as a conclusion, though this must be qualified. We started the inquiry with the emergence of the self through reflection, along with a leap and the maintenance of a tension, and we proceeded to the discovery and the constitution of the loving relationship with the Other, which both thinkers, we showed, regard as the highest (if not the only) duty to be followed. This is the sense in which the previous chapter served as a conclusion to the trajectory, albeit an elliptical one, for though the relationship to the neighbor and/or the beloved represents the highest relationship one could reach, this nonetheless must be actively maintained.

Our original purpose, however, was to define and establish the relationship between Kierkegaard and Camus, especially as it pertains to the philosophy of love. While the proper trajectory through which the individual must traverse has reached a likely end, we find that the relationship between Kierkegaard and Camus extends further, now in a much more personal

manner, into the topic of authorship, both as a general concept and as an active process they both undertook.

Those who are familiar with Kierkegaard and Kierkegaardian scholarship may find this to be a surprising destination after a discourse on love. After all, the idea most often attributed to him is that of the “existence spheres,” the first and therefore the lowest one of which represents the aesthetic. Whereas in the previous chapter Kierkegaard’s thought provided the occasion for us to place Camus in the relatively unexplored discussion of his philosophy of love, the inverse will be the case here, for it is Camus who now provides the occasion to discuss Kierkegaard’s authorship in the light of his views on the self and on love.

Absurd/Rebellious Creation

Though we explored both *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel* in detail in the previous chapters, we have yet to delve into their respective sections on aesthetic creation. Given that the concept of rebellion derives out of the absurd, both sections, which address aesthetic creation as the embodiment of each respective concept, are intrinsically connected and fairly similar. In fact, the former is contained within the latter. Having presented three models of the absurd,¹⁸⁶ Camus goes on to state that the creator is the absurd hero par excellence.¹⁸⁷ One of the essential elements of the absurd, we may remember, is the need to maintain the absurd tension lucidly, to be aware. This is also, Camus believes, a necessary component of aesthetic creation. Artistic

¹⁸⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 68. These are Don Juan, the actor, and the conqueror. Camus is at great pains to emphasize that these are not ideals anyone should live up to, they are rather a variety of models of the absurd in its purest state. Interestingly, Camus emphasizes this point by asserting that the absurd man could practice the (absurd) values of Don Juan and yet be a married man and those of the conqueror and yet be a civil servant (Ibid., 90). This is highly reminiscent of Johannes de Silentio — the pseudonym under which Kierkegaard wrote *Fear and Trembling* — and his assertion that the Knight of Faith, who largely operates inwardly, could simply be a tax collector (Søren Kierkegaard, *Fear and Trembling* [Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1983], 39).

¹⁸⁷ Ibid., 92.

creation requires an awareness of oneself as an individual apart from the world being represented. More importantly, art is a manifestation of the artist's inability and refusal to process the world reasonably. To represent the world is to attempt to recreate it, this time with a human stamp, and thus to bring to light the rift between reality and our expectations.¹⁸⁸

But here a limit must be drawn, for now that we find that the artistic endeavor engages with the world in an absurd manner, we must allow the absurd tension to permeate and inform the way in which we engage with art. Just as we must refrain from allowing hope and religion from breaking the tension of the absurd in our lives, we must also refrain from creating art that seeks to assuage the nostalgia that constitutes one side of the tension. This is meant both externally and internally. That is, we must not assign a meaning to the activity of artistic creation that would ultimately answer the silence that the universe refuses to answer.¹⁸⁹ Furthermore, the content of the work of art itself must not attempt to objectively represent the totality of experience so as to conceal that we have no access to such a thing. The work of art must serve as an aperture, it must point to a void that it refuses to fill.¹⁹⁰

Creation comes to play a similar role within the realm of rebellion, but it is framed slightly differently and here Camus elaborates more on the formal qualities that art should possess. Whereas *The Myth of Sisyphus* frames art as embodying the tension of the absurd, *The Rebel* frames it as consisting, much as rebellion itself, of a negation and an affirmation. Here we must remember the metaphor of the slave who affirms his values and that of others. The seed of rebellion and the realization of values is precisely the same movement: that of a negation (of his

¹⁸⁸ Camus. *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 97

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.* 98

¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.* 102

subordination) and an affirmation (of his right to exist and resist). The same can be said for the work of art, for it negates reality for what it is and for what it lacks, but it nonetheless does not provide an escape, and thus ultimately affirms this reality and our place in it. “To create beauty,” Camus says, “[the artist] must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain of its aspects.”¹⁹¹ This is the tension of the rebellious work of art, it can neither affirm nor deny the whole of reality, for the former would lack rebellion and the latter would lack a referent.

Camus here appears to be contradicting himself, but this is only the case if we miss the relationship between the absurd and rebellion. We must remember that the absurd is implicit in rebellion, that the latter is a move forward from that absurd point of departure. The absurd work must emphasize its futility in answering man’s beckoning for an answer from beyond. It must deny transcendence. With the absurd tension in place, the rebellious artist can use his art to reject the world, for the tension ensures that this rejection will not turn into an escape. For the rebellious artist, the rejection of the world is an accusation — that the world does not live up to his representation of it — and his creation is a permanent witness to this crime. The movement from the absurd to the rebellious is precisely the slave’s movement from the no to the yes, from the rejection of the metaphysical to the acceptance of the political. It is a transfiguration of hope brought about via its own death: with the absurd work of art ends the hope for another world and in the rebellious work of art it is revived and directed towards our own.

This is why a discussion on artistic creation must follow the discussion on love. If art embodies rebellion, the dynamics of which we have successfully equated with those of Kierkegaardian love, then we must speak of a work of art as constituting a work of love.

¹⁹¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 258.

Thus, the artist imposes order and justice through his or her art and in doing so points to the lack thereof in the world. Art is for Camus essentially anti-eschatological, for “it tries to give its form to an elusive value which the future perpetually promises, but of which the artist has a presentiment and wishes to snatch from the grasp of history.”¹⁹² The work of art is an attempt to recreate the world as it ought to be in the present. Insofar as art is discursive, it not only embodies rebellion but, if successful in its reception, must necessarily engender it in those it affects. “There is not a single true work of art,” Camus states in an interview towards the end of his life, “that has not in the end added to the inner freedom of each person who has known and loved it.”¹⁹³ The work of art necessarily speaks of the injustices that have gone unspoken (perhaps because of the promise for a solution in the future) and liberates those it touches. This latter aspect hints at the fact that artistic creation can even serve to engender the awareness required for the constitution of the absurd self as presented in *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

From the discursiveness of art also arises a certain risk for the artist. This is not meant merely insofar as the artist’s career or artistic reputation may be at risk. If the artist is to be witness to the injustices of the times, if to the artist falls the responsibility of taking a stand and liberating others, then the rebellious artist must possess some degree of self-renunciation. “To create today is to create dangerously,” Camus says, for all attempts at artistic expression “[expose] one to the passions of an age that forgives nothing.”¹⁹⁴

We can see now some of the ways in which art is an extension, an application, of rebellion and, in turn, of love. But what would Kierkegaard say of such a thing? Given his

¹⁹² Ibid.

¹⁹³ Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York: Vintage International, 1995), 241.

¹⁹⁴ Ibid., 251.

reputation for regarding aesthetic lifestyles as the lowest possible existential mode of being and, perhaps more to the point, his active effort to create a dichotomy between neighborly love and anything that “the poet” could possibly speak about, it would seem that he would reject such a possibility. But the matter, it will be shown, is far more complex and nuanced.

The final chapter of *Works of Love*, “The Work of Love in Praising Love,” is likely a good place to start this consideration. Quite simply, it is for Kierkegaard a work of love to speak of and to praise love. However, he is quick to preemptively deflate the notion that we ought to think about this in relation to works of art. While we may do so, we must remember that the works of love do not require talent, they can (and must) be performed by all, and thus the poet has no special privilege to this manifestation of love.¹⁹⁵ Though the ability to praise love is (supposedly) available to all, Kierkegaard nonetheless establishes rigorous criteria, adding that we must, if we are to do it properly, praise love “inwardly in self-denial”¹⁹⁶ and “outwardly in sacrificing unselfishness.”¹⁹⁷ The first of these entails a kind of extreme focus and emptying out of oneself, leading one to the strenuous realization that “God is,” and to their transformation into an instrument for God.¹⁹⁸ To praise love properly we must, after all, know love properly and this knowledge can only come through a profound, inward relationship with God, who is love itself.¹⁹⁹ This means that by Kierkegaard’s standard, a work of art can only be interpreted as a work of love if its creator engages in an inward relationship with God. The latter of the two

¹⁹⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 359.

¹⁹⁶ *Ibid.* 360.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.* 365.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 364.

requirements entails simply that we must be completely unselfish in our expression of love, that we gain no reward — and in fact, create offense — through our praise of love.²⁰⁰

It seems that the latter of these can be applied to Camus' description of being an artist in the 20th century, but he nonetheless lacks the former quality and therefore does not meet the criterion that would allow us to call (his and most other) art a work of love by Kierkegaardian standards. This is by now a familiar impasse resulting from the difference in metaphysical foundations between the two thinkers. Yet here we once again see that this is not enough to create a complete rift. We may, after all, still accept Kierkegaard's idea that we must praise love and that the praise of love must come from one who properly knows what love is while disagreeing with the foundation for and definition of love. "One should praise at length what still deserves to be praised. After all, this is why I'm an artist," states Camus.²⁰¹ Art provides Camus with a way of praising love unselfishly and, more importantly, it gives him the right to do so because it embodies what for him is proper love.

But now Kierkegaard must be seen as more than a judge in this inquiry, for we realize that his definition of the proper praise of love applies to his own work; *Works of Love* is itself a work of love. Kierkegaard does not deny this, in fact, for amongst his notes there is a discarded paragraph that was to be included in the chapter in question, which states: "thus, self-sacrificing unselfishness is required. Just because we in this regard are conscious of our endeavor as being truly unselfish, I dare to call this book a work of love."²⁰²

²⁰⁰ Ibid. 366.

²⁰¹ Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 239.

²⁰² Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 455.

Here we see that there is a sense in which Kierkegaard does not deny that art can be the embodiment of love. Though we used *Works of Love* for the sake of ease, we must now wonder whether we can regard the whole of Kierkegaard's authorship as a work of love. Thus far, the only criterion Kierkegaard has established is that of the inward God-relationship, but if the whole authorship is a work of love, we must analyze its (various, complex) features, for this will provide us with a proper criterion that relates to art exclusively. Similarly, we must move from Camus' general view of art as the embodiment of rebellion towards a further assertion that allows us to focus specifically on his authorship: that the novel is the medium which best embodies rebellion.

The Novel

For Camus, the novel is the rebellious artform par excellence both historically and formally. The novel, he explains, did not always exist in its current form, but was instead "born at the same time as the spirit of rebellion."²⁰³ We must remember that Camus regards rebellion as product of the west and of its time (despite the seeming contradiction that it is through it that we derive some sense of a human nature), and thus it makes sense that the embodiment of rebellion would precisely be the medium that best represents the current milieu.²⁰⁴ What's more important is the manner in which the novel is formalistically the best vehicle for rebellion. If rebellious art consists of the recreation of the world, one imbued with the (human) reason and unity it otherwise lacked, then the novel represents the practice at its most extreme, for it is the rearrangement of established signs to create a new entity: a totally human universe.²⁰⁵ The fact

²⁰³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 259.

²⁰⁴ Chapter 2, 37n90.

²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

that we engage, relate, and suffer with those fictional characters of the novel, whose lives possess the unity we can only obtain in death, is testament to this.²⁰⁶

Camus further elaborates on the kind of tension the proper novel must possess, which is more specific than the general tension of the work of art constituted by the degree to which reality is denied or affirmed. The two extremes that constitute the tension of the novel, each of which necessarily negates the rebellion inherent in it, are those of “formalist” and “realistic” art.²⁰⁷ Formalist art refers to that art which is empty form without real content, whereas “realistic” art is a misnomer. All art, even that of the landscape artist, is after all an intentional representation by a subjective being, which was Camus’ main criticism of the art that would attempt to represent the totality of reality in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. While the former “[floats] up among the clouds,” the latter “[drags] along the ground with weighted boots,”²⁰⁸ and the novel’s true nature, the occasion to enter into an ordered, albeit (or precisely) artificial, universe that engenders the spirit of rebellion, is unable to thrive through either of them.

Here we find what will be the greatest point of convergence between the two authors in the present analysis. For Kierkegaard, George Pattison states, “the novel was the most concrete form of art.”²⁰⁹ To understand Kierkegaard’s reasoning, we must establish Poul Møller’s main influence on him. Møller was a Danish thinker, critic, poet, and friend of Kierkegaard.²¹⁰ One of the many ideas which Kierkegaard took from Møller was that of the “life-view,” a position one takes which provides an overarching narrative and thrust to one’s life. This is what, for Møller,

²⁰⁶ Ibid., 261

²⁰⁷ Ibid., 268

²⁰⁸ Camus, *The Rebel*, 259.

²⁰⁹ George Pattison, “Nihilism and the Novel: Kierkegaard’s Literary Reviews,” *British Journal of Aesthetics* 26 (1986), 169.

²¹⁰ George Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious* (London: SCM Press, 1999), 28.

authenticated one's life and, if the general intellectual public accepted it, would eradicate the nihilism that permeated society at the time.²¹¹

Kierkegaard's first usage of the concept of the life-view precedes his proper authorship (which officially began with *Either/Or*)²¹² and can be found in *From the Papers of One Still Living*, a long-form review of the novel *Only a Fiddler* by Hans Christen Andersen. Kierkegaard begins the review by speaking about another novel, Thomasine Gyllembourg's *A Story of Everyday Life*, in order to establish a positive standard against which to judge Andersen's novel. The difference between the two is precisely the life-view to be found in *A Story of Everyday Life* and the lack thereof in *Only a Fiddler*.²¹³ Here Kierkegaard describes the life-view to be found in Gyllembourg's work as "the sublimate joy of life, the battle-won confidence in the world...the confidence in people, that even in their most trivial manifestations there is to be found...a divine spark."²¹⁴ This is reminiscent of various aspects of Kierkegaardian philosophy we have described thus far, especially the beliefs that all things are possible and that all beings are equally valuable before God.²¹⁵ The life-view is therefore a loving basis which provides the novel with its internal coherence and continuity and which remain intact regardless of the events that may transpire within it.

Secondly, we must establish the idea of genre. Inherent in Kierkegaard's ideas and writings on art, is the "principle that [it] can only be evaluated in the categories appropriate to its

²¹¹ Pattison. "Nihilism and the Novel: Kierkegaard's Literary Reviews," 163.

²¹² Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 5.

²¹³ Søren Kierkegaard, "From the Papers of One Still Living," in *Early Polemical Writings*, ed. Julia Watkin (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1990), 65.

²¹⁴ *Ibid.*

²¹⁵ Chapter 1, 26; Chapter 2, 39.

particular genre.”²¹⁶ Thus, the nature of the medium itself dictates a limit to what it could accomplish and consequently the grounds on which it can be judged. For Kierkegaard, the theater represents pure aesthetic immediacy and the novel represented a higher level of existence: the ethical.

What can be seen in Kierkegaard’s writings on art is that he, likely after Møller,²¹⁷ used the idea of the life-view as a literary criterion. Thus, the novel could only fulfill its potential as the most concrete and ethical medium if produced out of the proper life-view described above. We may find commonalities between this idea and the life-affirming nature of the absurd, the influences of Mediterranean culture on Camus’ thought and writings as established in the last chapter, and the necessary connection between art and the values of rebellion. It is in fact this life-view which will provide the novel with an ethical grounding manifested in a balance between two extremes that highly resemble those described by Camus: the theoretical, “doctrinaire” work, which has no true content corresponding to human existence, or the overly-subjective work, which — despite sounding like the opposite of realistic art — is simply too finite and only seeks to describe, rather than reconstruct or transpose reality, as is the case with Andersen’s novel.²¹⁸

As per Pattison’s argument, it is a lack of optimism and hope for the society in which he lived that led Kierkegaard to move past such a view and thus once again diverge from Camus’. Much like Camus, Kierkegaard and Møller believed that the proper novel provided readers with a space, an occasion, in which the constituting life-view was engendered, and “as such unites

²¹⁶Pattison, “Nihilism and the Novel: Kierkegaard’s Literary Reviews,” 162.

²¹⁷ Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 126.

²¹⁸ Kierkegaard, *From the Papers of One Still Living*, 81.

author and reader in ethical seriousness.”²¹⁹ However, it appears that the two believed that their age was one that had grown too ironic, aesthetic, and apathetic to be able to enter the ethical seriousness provided by the novel. Eventually, Kierkegaard came to believe that only “a religion of radical interiority,” one which was not proposed by the authorities at the time, could possibly solve the nihilism of his age.²²⁰

Indirect Communication

It is this historical and intellectual context that gave rise to the central characteristic of Kierkegaard’s authorship: indirect communication. In *The Point of View for My Work as an Author*, written by Kierkegaard during the final years of his authorship but published posthumously, the thinker provides an explanation for the nature of the authorship and its change from pseudonymous writings to signed — or veronymous — writings. Kierkegaard establishes, first of all, that his entire authorship, even including the pseudonymous “aesthetic” writings, was always religious.²²¹ “Christendom,” as Kierkegaard regards the loosely-Christian, bourgeoisie society he lived in, existed in a state of illusion and could only be raised to the aforementioned radical inwardness through indirect communication. To address them directly, he states, “would only strengthen a person in the illusion and infuriate him.”²²² Thus, he had to find people “where

²¹⁹Pattison, *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 131.

²²⁰ Pattison, “Nihilism and the Novel: Kierkegaard’s Literary Reviews,” 169.

²²¹Søren Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), 15. In *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification*, Michael Strawser argues that it is highly problematic and myopic to read *The Point of View* as an objective text standing outside of Kierkegaard’s authorship. Thus we cannot simply accept Kierkegaard’s own subjective interpretation of the overarching meaning of the authorship and must instead read *The Point of View* as a philosophical text, one which, as per Strawser’s argument, is, like Kierkegaard’s entire authorship, highly ironic. Michael Strawser, *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard from Irony to Edification* (New York: Fordham University Press, 1997), 229. For the sake of the present study, we have chosen to take seriously Kierkegaard’s assertion that his whole authorship was religious, but we do not deny the equivalent virtue of much more suspicious and philosophical readings of *The Point of View* and the authorship as a whole.

²²² *Ibid.*, 43.

they were and begin there” by writing works that reflected the aesthetic and ironic mode of being they embodied; only in that way could he slowly — by advancing from the aesthetic, to the ethical, and eventually to the question of faith — evoke awareness in them, at which point it would be their choice to take the leap of faith required for true Christianity.²²³ While Kierkegaard seems to describe the process of indirect communication as one in which the content of the books itself slowly drove people to become aware and faithful, Pattison believes the technique to be much more complex.

Kierkegaard, Pattison asserts, used the relationships between genres and modes of being in order to incite people to awareness and, eventually, faith. Pattison argues that both the aesthetic and the ethical works lack resolution and unity and thus leave a space for the reader to judge the inadequacy of these genres and their corresponding modes of being.²²⁴ Thus we find the inverse of Camus’ tension of the novel in Kierkegaard’s *reductio ad absurdum* of the medium. Whereas for Camus, the unity in the novel points to the lack thereof in the external world, the lack of unity in Kierkegaard’s novelistic writings force people to seek this unity outside of it and its mode of being.

Having established the procedure of Kierkegaard’s authorship, we must analyze it as a possible embodiment of his philosophy of love. This will be shown through the usage of two chapters of *Works of Love*, one dealing with the proper way of lovingly helping others and the one — already discussed — dealing with the proper way of communicating about love.

In “Love Seeks Not Its Own,” Kierkegaard begins with a discussion of justice and possessions. Christian love, he says, eliminates the very concept of possession, the “your” and

²²³ Ibid., 45.

²²⁴ Pattison. *Kierkegaard: The Aesthetic and the Religious*, 143.

the “mine.”²²⁵ In eliminating possessions and, in turn, individualities (for “mine” necessarily arises out of “me”), Christian love establishes the ground by which we can help each other and yet remove ourselves from considerations of credit. We must help others in a way in which it is they who feel they have helped themselves, for otherwise they would feel indebted and love would become finitized.²²⁶ Perhaps the central statement and explanation for the entire chapter is that the person “stands alone — by my help.” This is the proper relationship of benefaction, for the one who helps must hide “behind the dash.”²²⁷

This perfectly characterizes the nature of indirect communication. It is a deception, and yet this must not be meant in any malicious manner. In the same way in which the pseudonymous works deceived the audience “into what is true,” the person who helps another and “hides behind the dash” deceives him out of the false idea that he must be in debt or that the categories of “mine” and “yours” exist eternally.

Finally, we must return to the first criterion we spoke of, that of “The Work of Love in Praising Love.” This chapter presents what may arguably be called one of the most rigorous criteria in the book. For, despite the fact that praising love is a mere work rather than a talent, and thus anyone can do it, Kierkegaard’s idea of inward self-renunciation seems like a particularly privileged God-relationship. Yet Kierkegaard’s description of his authorship can be seen to perfectly fulfill the criteria established in the chapter. After all, Kierkegaard explains in details the major efforts he made during both periods of his authorship in order to evade receiving proper credit for his work. During the aesthetic, pseudonymous period, he made sure to

²²⁵Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 248.

²²⁶ *Ibid.*, 256.

²²⁷ *Ibid.*, 257.

be — outwardly — as social as possible, so as to be regarded as nothing much than a loafer and thus undermine the possibility that anyone could suspect that it was he who wrote *Either/Or*.²²⁸ For the next period of his authorship, the veronymous period, he incited the attacks of a local newspaper (this series of attacks and exchanges is known as “the Corsair affair”), once again so as to renounce any possible credit that could be attributed to him for his authorship.²²⁹ This, it seems, is a perfect case of existing “outwardly in sacrificing unselfishness.”

From the beginning of *The Point of View*, Kierkegaard establishes that his work is “without authority.”²³⁰ This, he explains later, is due to the fact that while he certainly conceived of the authorship and certainly wrote the books within it, he was nonetheless not outside of it. If the authorship consists of the upbuilding movement into faith, it is a movement that he himself underwent and thus he renounces his title as author. Is this not correspondent to the idea of praising love “inwardly in self-denial”? Did Kierkegaard not, after all, deny himself so as to become God’s instrument?

Thus, while Kierkegaard speaks of himself as an author, he renounces authority. How can we properly regard him, then? Kierkegaard rejects the titles of apostle and teacher,²³¹ and thus leaves only one option: martyr. This is the job and the method of the martyr, after all, “to compel people to become aware.”²³² Kierkegaard himself begins the conclusion of *The Point of View* — speaking through “his poet” — by describing the authorship — and perhaps his life — thus:

²²⁸ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 61.

²²⁹ *Ibid.*, 66.

²³⁰ *Ibid.*, 12.

²³¹ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 78.

²³² *Ibid.*, 50.

“The martyrdom this author suffered can be described quiet briefly this way: he suffered being a genius in a market town.”²³³

Ethical Persuasion

We have found an apparent schism between Kierkegaard’s and Camus’ methodologies in manifesting their love and inciting rebellion through art, yet such a strong dichotomization is unnecessary, as will be shown with the aid of two veronymous writings from Kierkegaard’s mid-to-late authorship. *Two Ages*, a literary review of the novel of the same name, also written by Gyllembourg, was published eight years after *From the Papers of One Still Living* and one month after *Concluding Unscientific Postscript*²³⁴ — the latter of which represents the end of the aesthetic and ethical writings Pattison writes about. The book is perhaps most well-known for containing a particularly insightful and focused critique of the present age, but we will instead focus on the more literary aspects of the review, in which Kierkegaard reiterates his views on the life-view and presents some amelioration between indirect communication and the novel. *The Lily in the Field and the Bird of the Air*, a set of three short discourses published to coincide with the second edition of *Either/Or*,²³⁵ will allow us to see further concordance between Kierkegaard’s and Camus’ conception of art and help us understand the discordance between these conceptions and Kierkegaard’s view of the poet.

Kierkegaard, now at the beginning of his “second authorship,” marked by *Two Ages*, seems to be able to reconcile (though not synthesize) the novel and the indirect communication.

²³³ Ibid., 95.

²³⁴ Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Historical Introduction to *The Point of View*, by Søren Kierkegaard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998), xxiv-xxv.

²³⁵ Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong, Historical Introduction to *Without Authority*, by Søren Kierkegaard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), ix.

Kierkegaard spends a large portion of the review's conclusion explaining the role of authority in the present age. In the past, in the passionate age of revolution, people could look to recognizable figures of authority for guidance. The present age, however, has leveled, or equalized by means of abstraction, itself to such a degree that those who can provide guidance are precisely the least recognizable.²³⁶ We can see that this is a further contextualization of indirect communication, which we explored above. Yet the need for indirect communication in the face of the age's ironic over-reflectivity does not exclude the usefulness of the novel, the ethical artwork par excellence, as Pattison had suggested. It relativizes it, dethrones it from the absolute.

In the present age, the novel — as exemplified by *A Story of Everyday Life* (Kierkegaard reassess it before moving on to *Two Ages*)²³⁷ — serves the ethical purpose of persuasion. The role of the ethical, persuasive novel is to operate, unlike poetry and unlike the religious address, moderately and within actuality. “Esthetically, the individual is led away from actuality and translated to the medium of imagination; religiously, the individual is led away and translated into the eternity of the religious,” Kierkegaard explains, whereas ethically, the individual remains in actuality, which is given stability and value through the life-view. Clearly, the novel cannot aspire to the (necessary) heights reached through indirect communication, but it is nonetheless a modest and “friendly force.”²³⁸ If Kierkegaard's radical Christianity represents a striving towards the infinite, the persuasive novel represents a “place of rest.”²³⁹

²³⁶ Søren Kierkegaard, *Two Ages: The Age of Revolution and The Present Age, A Literary Review* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1978), 107.

²³⁷ Kierkegaard, *Two Ages*, 12.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*, 21.

Kierkegaard once again apprehends the novel in the same way as Camus, as a (subjective) representation of unity which does not seek to point beyond but instead only points back to actuality, now ethically transfigured. *The Lily in the Field and The Bird of the Air*, a set of devotional discourses which not inappropriately happen to be some of Kierkegaard's most lyrical and beautiful writings, will provide a final example of the proper role of the novel and its difference from the problematic role of the poet.

The poet, like Kierkegaard, appreciates the value, the beauty, the lessons to be learned from the lily in the field and the bird in the air. The poet in fact wishes he could be like them. That he *wishes*, however — and that he does so despairingly — precisely betrays his error. For the poet, the lily and the bird can only be metaphors, for we can only wish to be like them. He therefore mocks the gospel's command that he shall be like them.²⁴⁰ The poet's art can only conceive of what is unattainable and thus it abandons actuality for the realm of imagination, unlike the novelist with a life-view, who as we explained never leaves actuality behind. Camus similarly (though obviously more radically) rejects transcendence in art and instead posits the idea of a "living transcendence, of which beauty carries the promise, which can make this mortal and limited world preferable to and more appealing than any other."²⁴¹ The unity and justice to be found in the ethical novel must be a model which illuminates what the world can be, rather than a mere metaphor that betrays a disconsolate wish for a world beyond our grasp. Would Camus, on the other hand, oppose this co-existence of the ethical novel and Kierkegaard's indirect communication? It is unlikely. If we accept the premises and arguments presented thus

²⁴⁰ Søren Kierkegaard, "The Lily in the Field and The Bird of the Air," in *Without Authority*, ed. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1997), 9.

²⁴¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 258.

far, we find once again that while the metaphysical premises of each thinker would like repel one's views from the other, the case is nonetheless that Kierkegaard's works engender a love that is equivalent to Camus' own rebellion.

The Self in the World, Revisited

We started the present study with a discussion of the formation of the self, which necessarily begins with the moment in which the individual is uprooted from their immediacy by reflection and eventually ends with the free actualization of selfhood via Camus' absurd or Kierkegaard's faith, both of which ultimately lead to a highly similar result. This movement, we posited, is necessarily experienced individually. However, this final discussion on aesthetics forces us to modify our view. While the individual may still engage in the task of selfhood on their own and while actualization itself ultimately remains in the hands of the individual, we now see that the role of the artist is nonetheless to lovingly incite this movement. Thus, we find ourselves back the beginning of our inquiry and our movement, yet now we see what was concealed then. We traced the movement from the absurd to the recognition of the other, but now it is clear that the realization of the absurd that will lead us to become free, reflective, passionate individuals is itself already imbued with love from another, one who has already undergone this process. This loving aid from immediacy to selfhood may come in the form of Kierkegaard's indirect address or Camus' rebellious recreations of the world; in both cases we see that the work of art, now properly framed as a work of love, represents both the ends and the beginnings of love's incessant movement.

CONCLUSION

KIERKEGAARD, CAMUS, AND PHILOSOPHY AS LOVE

...It is the culpability of this era that it always needed sorrow and constraint in order to catch a glimpse of a truth also found in happiness, when the heart is worthy.

Albert Camus, *Notebooks 1951 – 1959*

It would be ridiculous to assert that the present study is exhaustive or definitive. After all, we have, for the sake of time and space, excluded numerous texts that could have provided us with many new insights and directions — such as *Either/Or*, *Stages on Life's Way*, *Christian Discourses*, *The Book on Adler*, *Practice in Christianity*, *The Stranger*, and *The Fall*. Moreover, we may simply agree with Kierkegaard's assertion in the preface to *Works of Love* that the topic of love is essentially inexhaustible and thus we simultaneously bring into view the limitedness of the present work and yet make this limitedness much easier to forgive. Thus, we must instead hope simply that the present work may represent an occasion to explore and flesh out a relationship that has strangely gone unnoticed in the scholarship dedicated to Søren Kierkegaard's and Albert Camus' respective philosophies. We must now swiftly re-examine what has been found thus far, make some final clarifications, and analyze the implications of these findings for the two philosophers, the philosophy of love, and the practice of philosophy in general.

Stages on Love's Way²⁴²

In the preceding three chapters, we attempted to establish a concrete relationship between Kierkegaard and Camus by analyzing their philosophy in relation to the concepts of the absurd, love, and aesthetic creation. This analysis provided us with what appears to be a clear movement through three consecutive stages. Such a structure may be reminiscent of the supposed structure of Kierkegaard's philosophy, which is popularly conceived as consisting of three stages or "existence-spheres": the aesthetic, the ethical, and the religious. However, as much as the present study has given us some reason to doubt the conclusiveness of this structure in Kierkegaard's philosophy, we must bring into critical consideration the structure conceived and presented here, in order that it may not be accepted unquestioningly as the idea of the existence-spheres often is.

Our inquiry began at the starting point of Camus' philosophy: the question of suicide and the absurd, though the latter soon became our central focus, along with its relationship to selfhood. Camus, we explained, defines the absurd as the collision between our natural desire for meaning and the apparent meaninglessness of the world. He then develops a set of values out of this collision which must always remain unsynthesized: lucidity, freedom, and passion — and establishes them as criteria for proper selfhood, a task in which we must each freely engage.

Kierkegaard, who Camus criticizes for breaking the tension of the absurd via a leap of faith, has his own conception of the absurd which justifies such a move. For Kierkegaard, the absurd is the very existence of God and his incarnation in the form of Jesus Christ, which must cause us great offense or force us to sacrifice the understanding in order to obtain faith. In doing so, we understand ourselves as eternal beings, and are able to find a proper balance between the

²⁴² This clever and useful turn of phrase comes from Sharon Krishek's *Kierkegaard on Faith and Love* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 1.

eternal and the temporal, infinity and finitude, and possibility and necessity — relationships which in their outward manifestation have some concordance with Camus' absurd values. These syntheses, in relating themselves to themselves, constitute the proper self and in relating themselves to God eradicate despair (a misrelation in the relations), which is Christianly defined as sin. Thus we see that each conception of the self requires a kind of leap (of faith or of revolt) and the maintenance of a tension, and both are posited as a task for the individual.

Things become a bit more complex when we attempt to carry our analysis further towards a proper discussion about love. Camus, as we established in Chapter Two, didn't write any books that explored the topic in detail, whereas Kierkegaard's thoughts on the subject are clearly outlined in *Works of Love*. Nonetheless, we find a parallel to Kierkegaard's conception of neighborly love in *The Rebel*, Camus' second philosophical essay. In *The Rebel*, Camus moves from an individualistic ethic of selfhood based on the absurd, which he defines as a point of departure, to an ethic of revolt which provides us with a proper approach to the other, one based on duty, equality, and action. Despite what appears to be a radically different basis for the philosophy of love expounded by Kierkegaard in *Works of Love*, these are precisely the same major values to be found in it, for we *shall* love the neighbor — a term that refers to all people equally — infinitely and immediately.

The integration and analysis of Camus' *The Misunderstanding* and *The First Man* demonstrated that both thinkers' conception of love is nonetheless not a purely external, command-based one. The lover must accept his or her need for love and must even presuppose the love of others in order to be lovingly built up rather than uprooted through suspicion and doubt. Finally, our analysis of *The Plague* was used as occasion to discuss the synthesis of

neighborly and preferential love, which the lover — in this case the character of Rambert — accomplishes by grounding his love for another in neighborly love, which requires the framing of the beloved as an equal before God, or, in Camus' case, as an equal before an imminent death as represented by the plague.

Having established a proper definition of selfhood and a love-based ethic, we were brought into the much more particular question of aesthetic creation by Camus' assertion that the artist is the rebel par excellence. By creating works that contain a unity not to be found in the world itself, the artist, especially the novelist, is a witness to the injustices of his or her time and engenders a sense of rebellion and freedom in the reader.

While a superficial reading of Kierkegaard shows a major discordance with such a view — or any positive view of art and aesthetics — we found in *From the Papers of One Still Living* and *Two Ages* a similar view of the role of the novel and art in general. His discourse on the “Works of Love in Praising Love” then provided an image of the artist's necessary self-renunciation for the sake of properly speaking of and praising love, which shows further agreement with Camus' views on the subject. Finally, George Pattison's analysis of Kierkegaard's thoughts on aesthetics as manifested largely in and through *Stages on Life's Way*, along with our own analysis of *The Point of View*, provided the distinction of the artist and the martyr, the latter of which was used to describe Kierkegaard. We then proceeded to problematize this dichotomy by interpreting the aforementioned reviews in a way that allowed us to maintain Kierkegaard's status as a martyr while ameliorating the dichotomy between the novel and the religious address. Thus, we undermined the view that both forms, along with those who produce them, cannot peacefully co-exist.

We ended our inquiry back where we began, with the self in the world, the individual who is brought by reflection to an experience of selfhood and of separation from their surroundings. Our initial consideration of the experience presented it, along with the task of achieving proper selfhood, as naturally individualistic. But if the role of the artist and the martyr, is precisely to engender both the condition for selfhood and the insight necessary to achieve it — though the task to receive and follow them necessarily remains with the individual — then we can see that these proposed stages aren't exclusively consecutive.

As we mentioned in the third chapter,²⁴³ Kierkegaard explicitly states that the praise of love must not be regarded exclusively as an activity done by the poet, and we must similarly remember that the act of love is not only upbuilding for the lover, but also for the beloved. Thus, both the artist and the lover are able to engender love and rebellion in others. This love, by virtue of requiring some sense of selfhood, can be said to engender selfhood as well. That the third of these proposed stages proceeds from an actualized self is problematized by Kierkegaard's interpretation of his own authorship, which he describes as his own upbringing and development²⁴⁴ and which represents a "necessary emptying"²⁴⁵ of the aesthetic in him. Thus we can even speak of the artist as someone who is possibly not yet a proper self or a lover, but who, through the author-activity, comes to actualize himself as such.

We can now see that our model is precisely that, a mere model, a set of terms and categories meant to provide some insight into the ideas and the processes of selfhood, love, and aesthetic creation, yet not a strict or exhaustive one. As in Kierkegaard's existence-spheres, each

²⁴³ Chapter 3, 64.

²⁴⁴ Kierkegaard, *The Point of View*, 12.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 70.

of the stages here represents an inconclusive task we must continually strive to maintain and thus any interpretation that would see the individual progressing through them linearly and completely would be misguided. We may slightly and yet radically modify Camus' final statement on his delineation of the absurd and say that "the point," ultimately, "is to [love]." ²⁴⁶

The Single Individual

Before we conclude, a small clarification is in order. Our discussion on the artist's and the martyr's self-renunciation, along with Kierkegaard's very presence in our study, may erroneously give credence to the popular conception of these figures as "tortured souls" whose contributions to society and history justify their alienation from others and even the exclusion of proper romantic love or marriage from their lives. After all, it is quite difficult, if not impossible, to discuss Kierkegaard without soon running into the more popular facts about his life, namely his broken engagement to Regine Olsen, a choice he is said to have made in order to focus on his tasks as author. ²⁴⁷ In *Both/And: Reading Kierkegaard From Irony to Edification*, Michael Strawser is quick to dismiss the importance attributed to the relationship — which is even more problematic and destructive than the aforementioned acceptance and importance of the existence-spheres — by citing an overlooked and particularly touching notation in Kierkegaard's journals: "If I had had faith, I would have stayed with Regine." ²⁴⁸

Further evidence can be found for the problems of this (tragic-romantic) misconception. Christopher A. P. Nelson includes the following journal entry in his insightful article on author-activity as neighborly love:

²⁴⁶ Camus, 65, slightly modified.

²⁴⁷ Strawser, , xxxvin10.

²⁴⁸ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, Trans. Howard V. Hong and Edna H. Hong (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 5:5664, quoted in Strawser, xxxvin10.

If, on the way home after a walk, during which I would meditate and gather ideas, overwhelmed with ideas ready to be written down and in a sense so weak that I could scarcely walk....if a poor man on the way spoke to me and in my enthusiasm over the ideas I had no time to speak with him — when I got home all the ideas would be gone, and I would sink into the most dreadful spiritual trial at the thought that God could do to me what I had done to that man. But if I took the time to talk to the poor man and listened to him, things never went that way. When I arrived at home everything was there and ready.²⁴⁹

We must look no further than our second chapter for confirmation of this assertion in Kierkegaard's and Camus' thought. A major aspect of our discussion of love and rebellion was the adamantly anti-eschatological element to be found in both *Works of Love* and *The Rebel*; the assertion that the artist's work justifies a neglectfulness towards others appears to be a clear violation of the "duty to love those we see." It is in fact the refusal to love those near us based on the supposed love for the abstract masses for whom the work of art is a service.

In talking more specifically about romantic love, we must remember our discussion on the needs of the lover²⁵⁰ and the commensuration of neighborly and preferential love.²⁵¹ In the latter discussion, we clarified that the complete exclusion of preferential love is misguided and problematic, for — just like the prioritization of preferential love — it represents a determination of whether and who to love based on preference, which must instead be deprioritized in relation

²⁴⁹ Kierkegaard, *Journals and Papers*, 6: 6259, quoted in Christopher A. P. Nelson, "Author-Activity as an Existential Expression of Neighbor-Love: Kierkegaard's Response to Plato," in *The Point of View (International Kierkegaard Commentary)*, ed. Robert L. Perkins (Macon: Mercer University Press, 2010), 198.

²⁵⁰ Chapter 2, 46.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 52.

to neighborly love. In the former discussion, we spoke about both the need to express one's love to those who deserve it and furthermore to admit of one's own need for love. It would be useful here to recall Jan's misguided notion of duty in *The Misunderstanding*: "I don't need them; but I realized they may need me,"²⁵² he says, which betrays a philosophy that is ultimately unable to save his family from the hatred and nihilism that had claimed their lives and that would ultimately claim his own.

We do not mean to propose the problematic assertion that we have a duty to engage in romantic love, let alone enter an engagement or a marriage. Instead, we are simply clarifying that our duty to love the neighbor and to love ourselves in the right way must prevent us from finding any justification for the view that the artist and the philosopher and any other individual must exclude themselves from loving those who surround them or from loving any single individual. We must ask with Kierkegaard (and perhaps *of* Kierkegaard) that "when a man in self-torment thinks to do God[/society] a service by martyring himself, what is his sin except not willing to love himself in the right way?"²⁵³

We discussed in detail the virtue and the possible necessity of self-renunciation, of the willingness to face humiliation and hatred in order to testify lovingly against deception, injustice, and hatred. Yet in the face of the loving and the beloved other, self-renunciation entails precisely the renunciation of the pride and the confusion that would lead us, like Jan, to let law and duty conceal our needs and desires, even our very selves. We must instead heed the words spoken by Maria when Jan wonders what he can do to make his family happy: "...there's only one way, and

²⁵² Camus, *The Misunderstanding*, 84.

²⁵³ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 39.

it's to do what any ordinary mortal would do — to say 'it's I' and to let the heart speak for itself.”²⁵⁴

The Opposites Build Up

Now that we have an image of the whole analysis and of the relationship between Kierkegaard and Camus based upon the philosophy of love, we must discuss their implications and their importance as a whole. Throughout our study, we continually found ourselves in front of seemingly insurmountable differences, only to find, within Kierkegaard's and Camus' own philosophies, the means to progress further without ignoring or succumbing to them. Rather than attributing this fact to weaknesses in their abilities as philosophers or strengths in our own, we must contextualize this phenomenon and find its possible significance in relation to the whole work.

A distinguishing aspect of Kierkegaard's discourse "Love Builds Up" is its focus on active observation rather than action itself. While other discourses in the book also focus on "inner" activities, such as our need to *believe*, *hope*, *forgive*, and *remember*, the discourse on upbuilding frames the individual as a third party who *observes* (loving) interactions between others. Kierkegaard's examples include an infant sleeping on his mother's breast and a large family cramped in a small room.²⁵⁵ While it is implied that we, too, must perform such loving activities or find ourselves in such loving situations, the encouraged action here is on the proper way to apprehend and interpret these situations, that is, by presupposing the love in them.

This realization provides us with a way to re-frame our discussion on aesthetic creation and philosophy, this time from the opposite side. Whereas focus was wholly placed on the loving

²⁵⁴ Camus, *The Misunderstanding*, 84.

²⁵⁵ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 203.

production of aesthetic creation, we may now speak of the loving reception thereof. As in the examples offered in the discourse, while we are encouraged to performing these actions lovingly, to apprehend them while presupposing love is itself a work of love. This also offers some insight into the cyclical nature of the proposed stages, for we have now found the way in which the work of art provides the occasion for upbuilding while still requiring the reader's own free choice to engage with the tasks of selfhood and love by presupposing the latter.

Thus far we have attempted to show that a concrete, upbuilding philosophy of love can be found in each of the two philosophies, but the discourse in question warrants a closer look. While reiterating the fact that any possible action or utterance can be made lovingly, and thus we must presuppose the presence of love at all times, Kierkegaard explains that “one man may do the very opposite of what another does; but if each one does the opposite out of love, the opposites build up.”²⁵⁶ Similarly Camus, writing in his notebooks about moderation — which we established in the first chapter as a major value to be found in the entirety of his authorship²⁵⁷ — writes that while “they consider it the resolution of contradiction...it cannot be anything other than the affirmation of contradiction and the heroic decision to stay with it and to survive it.”²⁵⁸ Here we find two perfect descriptions for the present analysis which suddenly reveal the possible significance not of each philosophy separately, but of the comparison itself.

While speaking about the presupposition of love, Kierkegaard admits of the difficulty involved in performing this task in all situations but insists that “the more perfectly the lover

²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 202.

²⁵⁷ Chapter 1, 20n30.

²⁵⁸ Camus, *Notebooks 1951 – 1959*, 21.

presupposes love to exist, the more perfect is the love which he loves forth.”²⁵⁹ Can this not refer to the concept of “opposites” presented above? After all, to encounter an opposition between utterances or actions is to be presented with the challenge to accept and maintain the opposition, and yet simultaneously to be forced to find the commonality between them in the love springing forth from both. In this sense, the opposition itself presents a challenge and a task to the lover. In this sense, we may speak of upbuilding oppositions.

Here we encounter philosophy — though we make the move from art to philosophy lightly, for we agree with Camus on the vagueness and possible arbitrariness in the difference. “There are no frontiers between the disciplines that man sets himself for understanding and loving,”²⁶⁰ he states. Is the task of the philosopher not, after all, to find and delineate oppositions where there was initially thought to be unity and vice-versa? Thus we see that the various impasses found throughout our analysis do not represent its limitations, but instead, like any contradiction or set of oppositions to be found in any philosophical study, it represents an occasion for upbuilding. These oppositions, in which language and reason are used to bring forth their own limitations, serve to upbuild its practitioners (and such a label encompasses both writer and reader) by providing a space in which judgment must be temporarily suspended and only the will and the power to presuppose love can reign freely. The practice of philosophy, then, is properly defined as a work of love.

Either/Or

Finally, we must acknowledge and bring into the forefront that which we have thus far done our best to suspend: the theological choice. We have described philosophy’s ability to

²⁵⁹ Kierkegaard, *Works of Love*, 207.

²⁶⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 97.

create a space in which such oppositions are discovered, engendered, and ameliorated, and in which such oppositions and relationships have an upbuilding character for both philosopher and reader. However, we do not reject the possibility, or perhaps even the need to make a choice;²⁶¹ Kierkegaard and Camus, after all, encouraged it. What are we to do then? Are we to side with Kierkegaard's radical, self-renunciatory Christianity, with its faith by virtue of the absurd, or with Camus' absurd revolt, which carries within it its own faith in life itself?

To present this situation as an "either/or" is too hasty, however. The question the present study brings up is precisely whether a choice must be made. *Either* there is an either/or, *or* there isn't, it appears. The present study will not — in fact, cannot — provide an answer. However, the complex nature of the issue might be revealed through a consideration of the opposing sets of advice offered in Kierkegaard's own *Either/Or*.

The need to make a choice gains great importance if we heed the ethical Judge Wilhelm's advice. If for Wilhelm deliberation leads the personality to atrophy and the self to be lost,²⁶² the case is even more urgent in our present situation, for it is our ability to love that will become atrophied by our suspension and deliberation, and it is the neighbor whom we must love that will

²⁶¹ In "Religion, Atheism, and Faith," Paul Ricoeur presents a vision of faith that takes Nietzsche's and Freud's hermeneutics of suspicion as its point of departure. Thus, it is a post-metaphysical faith based on the abandonment of the principal facets of religion and mythology that served as Nietzsche's and Freud's targets: guilt and consolation. In this vision of faith, the poet and the philosopher have the task of leading others to this post-religious faith while suspending, for themselves, the need to make a choice and thus to maintain and explore the space between nihilism (traditional religion) and faith. This presents us with a reasonable extension of our view of philosophy as love and would serve to bestow upon the roles of poet and the philosopher a specific and exclusive meaning. This is precisely the main objection to such a view, however. For Kierkegaard and Camus, the artist's and the philosopher's responsibility does not go far enough to exclude them from the universal values they themselves reveal and establish. Such a conception of these roles would be in contradiction with the concept of equality — central to both philosophers — as manifested in the neighbor. Paul Ricoeur, "Religion, Atheism, and Faith," in *The Conflict of Interpretations: Essays in Hermeneutics*, edited by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

²⁶² Kierkegaard, *Either/Or II*, 163.

be lost. Yet paradoxically, the choice loses its grounding, is deflated once again, when we follow the esthete A's advice, lovingly reformulated as follows: Suspend the theological or do not suspend the theological, find the unity or find the difference, whether *you* suspend the theological or *you* do not suspend the theological, whether *you* find the unity or *you* find the difference: *You shall love either way.*²⁶³

²⁶³ Kierkegaard, *Either/Or I*, 38, slightly modified.

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