PARADOX AND FREEDOM

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ABSTRACT

The search for meaning in the human condition is a fundamental question that has been asked and answered in many ways in the course of human history. Many, if not all, of the answers have been subjected to valid criticism. This thesis provides research into the works of Albert Camus and examines the philosophical underpinnings of his skepticism toward modern attempts to find meaning in the human condition. Camus narrates how modern epistemological studies result in paradox and undertakes a post-modern phenomenological approach in the study of humanities. Camus examines how the conscious experience of innocent human suffering fundamentally alters the value of knowledge and offers freedom as the highest good.

This study of Camus explores how our encounter with human suffering gives us an opportunity to understand how our experiences shape our existence. I examine how modernity defends Neo-Platonism by developing theodicies that offer explanations to the Problem of Evil and how modern ethics asserts the pursuit of knowledge as the highest good. Camus studies how fundamentally the nature of the human condition is a search for freedom rather than of meaning. However, an approach that examines the limits of knowledge from the perspective of the works of Albert Camus alone is too narrow. This thesis also expands on some of the works offered by Elie Wiesel and Hannah Arendt to derive more aspects associated with freedom, nihilism and totalitarianism. These attributes allow us to more fully examine the nature of freedom and its central role in the study of the human condition.
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CHAPTER 1

AT THE CROSSROADS OF MODERNITY AND POST-MODERNISM

Somewhere around 1937 and 1947 man’s eternal struggle in its search for meaning was disrupted by one man’s narrative of his encounters with evil. Significantly less than a century ago, Albert Camus gave us a reason to pause and reflect on how we interact with our human experience. Although many great names are remembered for their contributions to humanity, Camus shares with us his experiences and records how modernity found itself at the crossroads of nihilism and totalitarianism. It is in Albert Camus’ narrative that we might just find a less travelled path that does require us to choose either meaninglessness or absolutism; rather, Camus offers us a glimpse of our freedom and how we must respond to our circumstances.

We give testimony to the numerous philosophical, scientific and theological perspectives which provide the basis for finding meaning in the human condition. History also narrates many skeptical and even critical observations of these perspectives. One of these skeptics was Camus and central in his narrative is the significance of human experience and its relationship to how meaning is formed. I will approach my study to the meaning of the human condition from both epistemological and phenomenological perspectives developed separately and over time by Camus’ exploration of how the existence of innocent human suffering, the Problem of Evil, is related to each. My approach will show that modern epistemological attempts to find meaning in evil result in nihilism while a post-modern phenomenological approach
gives us the capacity to participate outside the totalitarian condition that is the nature of paradox. My approach is derived mostly by research, analysis and subsequent synthesis of how I and others interpret some of the significant works by Albert Camus.

Specifically, this thesis derives how Camus asserts that knowledge is limited while agreeing with Soren Kierkegaard and differing with Frederick Nietzsche. The development of existentialism may be observed from three aspects – if the approach is subjective, whether knowledge is limited and whether the perspective is social or not. Kierkegaard’s approach is a subjective acceptance of unbounded knowledge (in the form of God) and that the human condition is individualistic. Nietzsche’s approach is a subjective acceptance that knowledge is limited and that the human condition is individualistic. Camus offers us a subjective approach that accepts the limits of knowledge as an underlying assumption and that the human condition is social.

Fundamentally, Camus offers us an alternative to Nietzsche as he observes that we can experience the unknown while in solidarity with each other and not alone as Nietzsche suggests.

Rationalism and empiricism offer different views on the problem of evil that result in a state of paradox while a phenomenological approach provides insight to understanding quite different qualities of the nature of evil. Both methods were examined by Albert Camus as he applied them to his interpretation of classical and modern attempts to find meaning to the human condition in response to the problem of evil. It is in his allegorical application in *The Stranger* and *The Plague* that he describes his experience with the human condition and offers us a unique perspective
that man lives in paradox with a sense of purpose. My study suggests that Camus offers epistemological resistance as an ethical value against the forces of nihilism and metaphysical rebellion as a moral virtue against the forces of totalitarianism. This thesis explores how our responses to encounters with evil illuminate our search for freedom while leaving us in paradox to its meaning. This thesis provides a significant perspective which asserts that our will to freedom resists nihilism and rebels against absolutism.

This study begins by reviewing how some of the major works by Albert Camus from 1935 to 1947 provide a basis of study for the human condition. The thesis then examines the nature of paradox, nihilism and totalitarianism in comparison with the ethics of resistance and the virtue of rebellion to develop a notion of freedom for the post-modern world. The approach begins by introducing some of the major works by Albert Camus as a basis of understanding the human condition and continues by interpreting *The Plague* as an allegory in order to understand how Camus approached the problem of evil as a means to derive how freedom exists even in our frail existence. Camus left us with a simple framework -- it is not why we exist rather how we exist that gives us our human dignity. Perhaps the time has arrived for us to explore the human condition beyond the constraints imposed by the existentialists. Now is time for us to take responsibility and have the courage to resist nihilism and the passion to rebel against absolutism. It is in our very freedom that we find this courage and passion. It is in our very tissue that we exist as a collective consciousness and exert our will to freedom.
CHAPTER 2
THE WORKS BY ALBERT CAMUS AS A BASIS FOR
THE STUDY OF THE HUMAN CONDITION

Camus published his thesis in 1935 at 22 years old, Christian Metaphysics and Neo-Platonism, and provides us a reference point upon which to better understand his notions on the nature of the human condition. Camus studies how Plato and Augustine provided the foundation for mankind to ponder the meaning of its existence while beginning his exploration of meaninglessness and nothingness at a periphery. He focuses on academic approaches to describe his interpretations of classical and modern applications in the study of humanities while at times describing his attempts to include existing philosophical works such as those by Husserl and Heidegger.

His later works published before World War II, in 1937 when he was 24 years old, narrates a second person perspective of the existence of innocent human suffering. It’s almost as if Camus is narrating his experiences with his own mother and grandmother. In these short essays, Camus describes benign suffering at the hands of time and distance, aging and family separation. We can imagine his own conversations in these narratives as he remembers how he was “conscious of her suffering”\(^1\) when he wrote *Between Yes and No*. Perhaps Camus remembers how the intelligent mind decides to move from its beginnings while the emotional conscious aches for its fellow beings.

*The Stranger*, published in 1942 when he was 29 years old, narrates a first person epistemological encounter with personal suffering. In Mersault we see how Camus begins to describe the conscious resistance to the paradox of understanding the very nature of innocent human suffering. Camus applies allegory in *The Stranger* to convey to his reader that human experience is full of skepticism especially when trying to understand why we suffer. In *The Stranger* Camus asserts that the nature of the human condition is unknowable and man exists in a state of paradox.

In his *Letters to a German Friend* written in 1944 and 1945 when he was about 32 years old, Camus provides us with a personal first person view on his experiences with the malignant nature of innocent human suffering. These journal entries were written as a direct response to his personal commitment to actively enter the French Resistance against the Nazi occupation of France during World War II. These journal entries begin a transformational shift back to his thesis, *Christian Metaphysics and Neo-Platonism*. In these journals we find how Camus departs narrating his experience of man’s futile search for the meaning of the Problem of Evil and narrates his more fully conscious experience with innocent human suffering. Although some obligatory references are made to how we understand the rise of Nazism and its totalitarian nature, Camus narrates his experience of totalitarianism and his decision to revolt against it.

In *The Plague*, published in 1947 when he was 34 years old, Camus dramatically narrates his notion that the human condition is a metaphysical rebellion
against the forces of totalitarianism. Camus quite elegantly describes qualities of nihilism -- such as indifference, despair and apathy -- as phenomena his characters experience. *The Plague* is a modern allegorical approach to the study of the Problem of Evil. He expands the work in his thesis by synthesizing “*The Principle of Participation*” and asserts that man metaphysically co-exists with evil. *The Plague* describes how the fullness of life can be found in the conscious co-existence with meaninglessness of one’s circumstances, nihilism, without having to withdraw back to a totalitarian framework of logic.

Most importantly, *The Plague* reminds us that our ethical and moral response to nihilism gives us an authentic purpose. With Dr. Rieux, Camus shows us that an ethical response to nihilism is resistance to the very nature of how we understand our existence. Although historical accounts of past experiences with the mass spread of infectious disease resulted in complete annihilation, Rieux continues to search for a cure. With Jean Tarrou, Camus points us in the direction of a moral response against the backdrop of totalitarianism. It is not until Tarrou and Rieux meet that the reader more fully understands how Camus has transitioned from an epistemological to a phenomenological response to evil. The cure was not found in reversing the disease, rather preventing it from infecting the healthy. The cleansing fires stopped the spread of the plague and gave the citizens of Oran another day. It is in this response to death and the dying that Camus suggests how humanity can develop a moral compass.

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Although at birth we begin to die, all that separates our experiences in Oran and Auschwitz is respect for human dignity.

By more fully reflecting on Camus’ insight, we have the gift of a moment to pause and decide that perhaps the Problem of Evil is not a question that has an epistemological reply but rather a phenomenological response. Camus reminds us to consciously experience the fullness of the human condition even in its most paradoxical state. Camus offers us images of epistemological resistance and metaphysical rebellion as inspirations to participate more fully in our human experience. Most importantly, Camus offers us the vision that even in the midst of great innocent human suffering “there are more things to admire in men than to despise.”

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CHAPTER 3
DECONSTRUCTING PARADOX

Many attempts to find meaning in the human condition can be found in our universities and libraries. One such modern attempt asserts Rationalism and The Age of Enlightenment as progressive and reformative of western civilization. Some skeptics suggest otherwise; Voltaire (1694-1778) and Camus (1913-1960) approached the value of rationalism in deriving meaning for the human condition with stunning skepticism. Inspired by Candide (1759), The Plague (1947) offers a glimpse of the human condition as a modern criticism of existing epistemological systems. Camus' skeptical tone resonates throughout his novel as he observes, "plague would seem to them the very tissue of their existence"\(^1\) and asserts the fundamental significance of human suffering as the very nature of human existence. Skeptical of rationalism, religion and existentialism to derive meaning for the human condition, Camus offers an approach to the paradoxical nature of these epistemological systems by considering other human behaviors observable in the midst of great tragedy. Camus suggests a method that considers a phenomenological approach to mitigate the paradox of finding meaning in innocent human suffering. Camus asserts a paradigm in which both suffering and struggle co-exist. This approach asserts both passive and active characteristics of the human condition and fundamentally the quality of humanity. An empirical response that asserts the existence of trust, courage and responsibility balances any attempt to find the meaning of suffering which has the effect of isolation

\(^1\) Camus, The Plague, 85.
and meaninglessness. Rationalism, religion and existentialism accept innocent human suffering in the human condition. Camus explores struggle as a way of suffering, not as victim but as a conscious participant.

The works by Camus explore the limits of reason; specifically in *The Stranger* and in *The Plague*, we observe how isolation and meaninglessness are experiences that we share in suffering. Camus also asserts in *The Plague* how connection is significant and also characterizes our experience with suffering. These experiences paradoxically pull at us and expose our limits of reason as an insufficient basis for finding meaning in our condition. Camus begins his paradigm as he "emphasizes the finality of reason"\(^2\) as his starting point. His phenomenological approach for the study of the human condition asserts the significance of the individual conscious exposed to the human experience of innocent human suffering which encounters limitations of reason to associate meaning. Camus observes that attempts to find meaning in this condition have existential outcomes that leave us isolated and possibly in a state of meaninglessness. Camus' treatment of nihilism as a degenerative effect of applying the experience of innocent human suffering to epistemological frameworks suggests an opportunity to derive insights that resolve ambiguities in these epistemological systems by actively participating more consciously to our circumstances. Camus offers authentic and significant human values in response to the void left by rationalism and empirical analysis. His phenomenological approach to the existential nature of the human condition in a state of nihilism is remarkable for its creativity.

Camus examines existential aspects as the protagonists encounter The Plague as a revelation "of one's responsibility for one's own being."³ They encounter suffering as a "boundary experience [which instigates a] massive shift in [their] perspective . . . [in which] freedom helps [them] . . . understand responsibility assumption . . . [while] isolation illuminates the role of relationship . . . [that extends the concept of] meaningfulness . . . to the principle of engagement."⁴ This boundary experience or paradox of reason is the human condition of freedom in which we experience finite understanding of our existence and yet choose to stay connected. This engagement with paradox offers a means to encounter the finite nature of reason with an understanding that we are responsible for how we live. Although innocent human suffering has no meaning, which leaves us with a sense of nothingness, we still have the freedom to assume responsibility for our existence and decide to resist indifference and rebel against apathy. In as much as we despair we also aspire. We can choose to live in ennui or struggle with our nature. The significance of Camus to the study for meaning of the human condition is his approach that reveals paradox and offers a new paradigm. In man's attempt to find meaning in the experience of innocent human suffering, the unintended consequence of nihilism is possible. Seen from this perspective, Camus judges that many if not most societies might crumble from this degenerative aspect. Camus experienced the effects of World War II where human suffering was a global condition not just isolated to some remnants of society. The


⁴Ibid., 213.
puzzling aspect was how humanity could endure and rebuild. Camus' approach was to accept the limits of reason as a beginning and not an endpoint. This perspective mitigates nihilistic conditions by accepting the premise that reason is limited and meaning for the human condition is ephemeral. By accepting universal suffering as our nature, then individual struggle has significance. In the struggle and not the meaning is how we find everlasting values.

Classic, modern and post-modern attempts offer modalities for the study of the human condition. Classical investigations into the application of geometrical characteristics suggest a broader aspect in epistemological studies that offer an approach to how paradox and meaning are resolvable. The concept of a line describes numerous valuable attributes. One characteristic is to examine lines as either vertical or horizontal. Lines can then mathematically describe characteristics of the natural world of hills and valleys. Vertical and horizontal lines can also describe manmade objects such as ladders and platforms. We can visualize knowledge systems in the same manner. All epistemological systems have assumptions. The significance of human experience in our assumptions to any worldview is critical and results in either a vertical or a horizontal approach to constructing an epistemological system with varying consequences. Linkages form the fundamental ontological basis for epistemological systems between underlying assumptions and their predictive intelligence systems. Understanding and interpreting the human condition is a critical function of the relationship to these assumptions. By having an unconditional confidence that fundamental assumptions are true, the resulting knowledge framework
may become too rigid. These assumptions are the fundamental critiques of those skeptical that the meaning of the human condition can be resolved. Camus offers us a critical and candid skepticism of these underlying assumptions. Most significantly, that innocent human suffering has meaning.

Camus studies the human condition from a perspective of "horizontal humanism . . . in clear contradiction with the traditional, vertical humanism." By assuming that suffering is "the very tissue of their existence," Camus offers a horizontal basis upon which to reflect and discuss the human condition. Camus' empirical study, existential treatment and phenomenological approach to the existence of innocent human suffering assert more than one human value in contrast to classical studies. By offering multiple assumptions concerning the nature of the human condition other than just reason, Camus eliminates the rigid aspects of contemporary epistemological systems. As damaging as the human condition is, Camus inspires us to accept our frailties with dignity and subscribe to a worldview that values the human experience in which trust, courage and responsibility are as significant as reason. Camus offers the modern age a new allegory. While Plato valued reason as the highest good, Camus values trust, courage and responsibility as much as reason. Camus' horizontal approach to asserting fundamental values in the human condition offers a new paradigm for the post-modern world.

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5 Patrick Henry, *Voltaire and Camus: The Limits of Reason and the Awareness of Absurdity* (Banbury, Oxfordshire: Cheney and Sons LTD, 1975), 81.

Camus begins his novel The Plague with an "ordinariness . . . [in which] everyone is bored"\textsuperscript{7} and ends with a "never ending fight."\textsuperscript{8} In between, he asserts that knowledge is a limited and offers us a basis for further study that combines aspects of rationalism, religion and existentialism. Camus emphasizes how each confronts the limits of knowledge and develops a more encompassing worldview. Camus provides a background for the study of the human condition by describing their inner reflections and narrating their dialogue. Camus depicts the human condition as bound by modern epistemological paradigms and tested by the existence of innocent human suffering. Each of these paradigms forms aspects of a nuanced approach to the study of the human condition.

Three characters most clearly represent Camus' skepticism for established epistemological frameworks and each contributes their experiences to a more sophisticated paradigm of understanding the nature of the human condition. Camus asserts his doubts of rationalism, religion and existentialism by his character development of Doctor Rieux, Father Paneloux and Mister Tarrou. Camus deconstructs their epistemological perspectives as the characters dialogue with each other. In this dialogue, they expose their cynicism for each of the other's paradigms within the context that the existence of innocent human suffering is a paradox. The Plague offers an extreme condition that is incomprehensible by any approach. As they face this meaninglessness, they plummet into various degrees of indifference and

\textsuperscript{7} Ibid., 3-4.

\textsuperscript{8} Ibid., 278.
apathy. However, they also experience periods of connection and significance. Camus closely examines all of these emotions as phenomena experienced in the shadows of suffering.

Camus carefully shifts our perspective and asks us to determine values in our existence instead of determining value for our existence. Camus develops his characters in such a way that describes the limitations of all epistemological systems to answer why innocent human suffering exists. By accepting that knowledge has limits as our fundamental assumption, Camus develops a post-modern study for the meaning of the human condition and asks us to answer what we can do in the shadow of suffering.

Camus develops Doctor Rieux in order to prove that rationalism has epistemological boundaries. When Rieux asserts that "we know next to nothing," Camus establishes a starting point for his examination of the human condition. Rieux offers us the opportunity to study the extreme nature of the human condition as "a feeling in which all . . . words . . . lost all effective meaning" and results in a "conscious of . . . bleak indifference . . . on a different plane." This notion that human conscious exists in dissimilar epistemological frameworks can be further examined by applying aspects of existential psychology which offers that Rieux had "a

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*Camus, The Plague, 53.*

*Ibid., 61-62.*

*Ibid., 79-84.*
boundary experience [which instigated a] massive shift in [his] perspective." This massive shift of conscious is brought upon as Rieux echoes Nietzsche's eternal recurrence\(^\text{13}\) that "plague must mean . . . a never ending defeat."\(^\text{14}\) Patrick Henry assesses that for Camus "reason is unable to encompass the complexity of human existence . . . [it] can describe the world but it cannot explain it."\(^\text{15}\)

Camus suggests that a different paradigm other then rationalism offers meaning for the human condition to Rieux. The dialogue amongst Rieux, Rambert and Tarrou evokes "the discovery that human reality is interpersonal" and Camus asserts "the basis for a new ethics of human responsibility, parallel to the development of a new metaphysics at whose core is the discovery of a common reality [in which] individuals do not seek meaning in a speculative contemplation but in action, in shared responsibility, and in a struggle for a better world."\(^\text{16}\) While Camus declares that "suffering is individual", he also offers the perspective that "suffering . . . [is] a collective experience"\(^\text{17}\) and answers the philosophical void opened by Nietzsche and widened by Sartre which examines subjective suffering alone. Although Camus' circular epistemology applied to the individual likens Nietzsche's eternal recurrence,


\(^{14}\) Camus, *The Plague*, 118.

\(^{15}\) Henry, *Voltaire and Camus: The Limits of Reason and the Awareness of Absurdity*, 64-65.

\(^{16}\) Sagi, *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*, 46.

his assertion that "mankind [has] lost the capacity for love"\textsuperscript{18} considers the social aspects in the study of the human condition. For Camus, the subjective meaning of existence may be limited; however, the social context of existence has empirical significance as the phenomena of connection develop in the midst of innocent human suffering. Camus asserts that a connected self finds significance in the human condition.

Camus develops Father Paneloux in order to prove that religion also has epistemological boundaries. The study of the spiritual aspects of the human condition is limited by the existence of innocent human suffering - evil. Camus exposes these limitations in the dialogue between Rieux, Tarrou and Paneloux and their approach to understanding the existence of evil. Both deconstruct religion as a basis for understanding why suffering exists as they assert that Paneloux' attempt to explain the origin of suffering is inconsistent.

In the first speech, Paneloux attempts to derive meaning for \textit{The Plague} by asking that we examine it from the viewpoint that "the hour has struck to bend [our] thoughts to first and last things" and establishes a framework that appeals to reason. He asserts that a "divine compassion" causes human suffering as punishment. Paneloux ends his sermon with an appeal for prayer of love to God.\textsuperscript{19} Rather than offering meaning, Paneloux evokes a dilemma as he asks his listeners to love the cause of suffering. Paneloux derives meaning from this causality perspective and asks for a

\textsuperscript{18} Camus, \textit{The Plague}, 149.

\textsuperscript{19} Camus, \textit{The Plague}, 89-91.
passive response to suffering. Rieux denies this viewpoint as he asserts that "the evils in the world . . . helps men rise above themselves . . . [by not giving] in tamely." 20 Camus offers theodicy as a challenge that requires action. Rieux narrates his experience with evil and offers us a chance to consider both the "scholar . . . [and] country priest . . . [in order] to relieve human suffering before trying to point out its excellence." 21

The first speech attempts to answer the question of why innocent human suffering exists from a perspective rooted in rationalism. It is only when Paneloux experiences evil existentially does he have a boundary experience as his cry to "god, spare this child!" is left unanswered; however, Rieux responds afterwards. During their dialogue, Paneloux agrees with Rieux that suffering "is revolting because it passes our human understanding" and offers that we "should love what we cannot understand." Rieux "refuse[s] to love a scheme . . . in which children are put to torture." This dialogue instigates a massive shift in Paneloux' perspective. The discourse between Paneloux and Rieux fills a void as Rieux implores Paneloux to unite their salvation paradigms "beyond blasphemy and prayers . . . [as] allies, facing . . . and fighting [suffering] together." 22 While both paradigms assume responsibility to heal, Rieux illuminates aspects of religion that isolate it’s worshippers from the living. Camus offers in Rieux an epistemological framework that reaches out across the

20 Ibid., 115.
21 Ibid., 116.
22 Ibid., 195-197.
meaninglessness of evil and implores us to participate in the human condition by a principle of engagement. Camus’ narrative of the dialogue between the rationalist and the religious clarifies that both can co-exist in their causes of saving the body of the living and the soul of the dead.

Camus further examines religion tested by the meaninglessness of *The Plague* and foreshadows Paneloux' sacrificial death as he describes the background for the second sermon as a condition in which "superstition usurped the place of religion."\(^{23}\) In his second sermon, Paneloux asserts that "we must believe everything or deny everything . . . and . . . we must accept the dilemma and choose either to hate God or to love God . . . [which] demands total self-surrender."\(^{24}\) The first sermon originates from the paradox of a compassionate first cause and the subjective experience of the effects of innocent human suffering. The second sermon evolves to an irreconcilable subjective decision that requires us to surrender our subjectivity in order to remain faithful. The nature of a benevolent creator and the horrible creation is inconsistent within the boundaries of reason and religion asks its disciples to sacrifice human experience.

For Camus "reason fails . . . before the question of evil"\(^{25}\) and *The Plague* demonstrates a "crisis of reason"\(^{26}\) in finding meaning for innocent human suffering.

\(^{23}\) Ibid., 200.

\(^{24}\) Ibid., 202-206.


\(^{26}\) Ibid., 81.
Religion as symbolized by "Paneloux . . . accepts the ultimate sacrifice, that of the intellect." The conflict between Rieux and Paneloux is a struggle of two paradigms both limited by the existence of innocent human suffering. However, "Camus . . . refuses to abandon reason" even when confronted by this limitation and asserts that "God Himself can't part us now." Camus suggests that both reason and faith have significance in finding meaning to the nature of evil.

Modern history records the human experience of horrendous suffering. The Holocaust led some to explore the "incongruity of a liturgy that praised God and a reality that indicted Him." The Plague foreshadows Night, published in 1958 by Elie Wiesel, which offers another consequential work of literature that explores the modern problem of evil. When theodicists confront the paradox of an omnipotent God and man’s experience of evil, they “declare what is evil;” however, those that suffer, like Wiesel, “describe evil” in which he “sympathized with Job [and] did not deny God’s existence, but . . . doubted His absolute justice.” Wiesel's memory reveals a void formed by the reality of the suffering he witnesses. He describes his skepticism of faith during the solemn service of Rosh Hashanah when the faithful recite “blessed be

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27 Ibid., 102-103.
28 Ibid., 104-108.
29 Camus, The Plague, 197.
the name of the Eternal” while Wiesel asks “why should I bless Him?” Echoing Camus, Wiesel recalls how "in every fiber he rebelled."\textsuperscript{33} Wiesel resists faith and asserts that “man can find fulfillment [if not meaning] in confronting his fate with lucidity rather than denial.”\textsuperscript{34} Prayer offers no consolation for either Camus or Wiesel and both witness the phenomena of benevolence in mankind. Camus and Wiesel advocate a shift in perspective by "fighting against creation"\textsuperscript{35} and to “achieve what [God] began.”\textsuperscript{36}

If Camus is right and suffering is the very nature of the human condition then the metaphysical relationship between human consciousness and evil can be described. The religious describe theological suffering as a condition in which "the angels will go out and separate the wicked from the righteous and throw them into the fiery furnace, where there will be wailing and grinding of teeth"\textsuperscript{37} while some existentialists describe suffering as "\textit{the greatest weight}.” This subjective boundary experience with suffering invokes a response by Nietzsche to "throw yourself down and gnash your teeth, and curse the demon . . . or . . . answer . . . you are a god."\textsuperscript{38} The nature of innocent human

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{33} Ibid., 64.
\item \textsuperscript{34} Ibid., 114.
\item \textsuperscript{35} Camus, \textit{The Plague}, 116.
\item \textsuperscript{36} Wiesel, \textit{Night}, 63.
\item \textsuperscript{38} Nietzsche, \textit{The Gay Science}, Aphorisms 340 and 341.
\end{itemize}
suffering has both objective and subjective qualities. However, each by itself is limited. Camus further examines limitations of the subjective experience of suffering.

Camus develops Mister Tarrou in order to prove that existentialism is also limited in offering meaning for the human condition. Although Tarrou offers us "existentialism of action," he leaves us pondering if "one [can] be a saint without God." Tarrou's struggle with faith is critical in better understanding Camus' approach. At one point after Paneloux' second sermon, Tarrou asserts "that he'd known a priest who had lost his faith during the war, as a result of seeing a young man's face with both eyes destroyed" and recalls at another point that "when [he] was young [he] lived with the idea of [his] innocence . . . and [he] did not really wake up until . . . [he] realized . . . [that] the social order . . . was based on the death sentence." Tarrou’s experience with suffering suggests that the human condition is "a never ending tension of the mind . . . from which nothing remains to set us free except death." Tarrou denies the infinite nature of human suffering in death while Paneloux offers death as a prescription to a life of suffering. Both Paneloux and Tarrou are free from the human condition in death.

Rieux offers another approach in which we experience the human condition as a "conflict between plague and life" and denies Tarrou having lived "a life riddled with

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39 Sagri, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, 29.

40 Camus, The Plague, 229-230.

41 Ibid., 202-207.

42 Ibid., 229-230.
Camus approaches the human condition from a perspective which asserts that there are "limits of . . . consciousness, recognizing that [we live] in a world [we] will not understand." Camus doesn't completely abandon objective reason, faith or subjective meaning when confronted by innocent human suffering. All offer aspects that are significant in a broader perspective. The magnitude of Camus' perspective is evident when Rieux replies to Tarrou that he has "more fellowship with the defeated . . . [and] to become a saint, you need to . . . fight." Camus offers a perspective which extends across various epistemological frameworks and offers a paradigm that develops the notion that although suffering is the metaphysical nature of the human condition, we also experience the phenomena of an enduring shared struggle that has an ethical dimension. Camus asserts that human dignity coexists with suffering. Although we are epistemologically bound by the metaphysical nature of the human condition we still have an ethical responsibility to engage with our nature.

Camus broadens the study of the human condition. He offers a modality best described by images of "the horizon, where sea and sky merged" and "the dome of sky lit by the stars and moon." In both, Camus asserts geometrical characteristics of a horizontal worldview. This horizontal viewpoint is critical in better understanding how Camus resolves the paradox of the meaninglessness of evil. Although

43 Camus, The Plague, 262-263.
44 Sagi, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, 168.
45 Camus, The Plague, 231-255.
46 Ibid., 220-221.
47 Ibid., 232.
epistemological ambiguity is a fundamental assumption, Camus finds capacity in other values. Camus also approaches the study of the human condition from an ethical perspective. Camus forms linkages between the epistemological and ethical aspects he discovers and develops an ontological basis that eliminates rigid features of contemporary epistemological systems by applying a phenomenological approach that accepts the existence of innocent human suffering. By offering an ethical approach as a response to the limits of knowledge, Camus describes a worldview that values the human experience of trust, courage and responsibility as much as reason.

Like Camus, Soren Kierkegaard and Friedrich Nietzsche criticized existing epistemological frameworks with harsh skepticism. As modern critics of faith and reason, Kirkegaard and Nietzsche shared a common perspective as each examined the limits of epistemological paradigms from a subjective perspective. Camus studies Kirkegaard's leap of faith and Nietzsche's over man in his portrayals of Paneloux and Tarrou. As reflections of Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, Paneloux and Tarrou offer perspectives that highlight the similarities and differences between faith and reason. Each confront the limits of knowledge from an existential perspective and offer different paradigms that assert the value of meaning. Camus offers a paradigm that considers an existential approach that values more than meaning.

Epistemological frameworks vary depending on the underlying assumptions. Although Kierkegaard and Nietzsche examine whether knowledge is limited, Camus accepts limits of faith and reason as a human condition. These perspectives are critical in better understanding the consequences of each paradigm. Camus observes that the
consequences of modern religious and philosophical modalities rely on death in order to find knowledge of God's design or relieve meaninglessness in the human condition. Camus offers a post-modern approach that sees death as "the eternal world is forever lost." Camus clearly unifies the experience of life within his epistemological framework and revolts against any attempt by religion or philosophy to accept death as a transition to knowledge. Camus departs from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche as portrayed by the deaths of Paneloux and Tarrou while Rieux lives. Camus offers post-Platonic values that deny the necessity of the ultimate pursuit of knowledge.

By examining Rieux, Paneloux and Tarrou as expressions of Camus, Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, we can better understand how Camus develops the epistemological, ethical and metaphysical aspects of his worldview and how he applies it to the study of the human condition. His paradigm can be further examined by how Camus approaches the limits of faith. He describes a scene in which Rieux answers Tarrou that he does not believe in the meaning of God as Paneloux does. This scene occurs between Paneloux' sermons when Tarrou asks Rieux about faith while proposing a plan on how to engage with the disease that is killing the town. Tarrou includes an observation that there is a "gulf between Paneloux" and Rieux. This image seems to be borrowed as Nietzsche describes:

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Whoever fights monsters should see to it that in the process he does not become a monster. And when you look long into an abyss, the abyss also looks into you.\(^5^0\)

This abyss is an epistemological condition in which we encounter the limits of knowledge and is dated in antiquity as it was described thousands of years ago.

In the beginning, when God created the heavens and the earth, the earth was a formless wasteland, and darkness covered the abyss, while a mighty wind swept over the waters.\(^5^1\)

This image provides a powerful way to describe the unknown and allows our minds to engage it. This boundary experience with the abyss can result in deep despair most aptly experienced as we attempt to formulate a theodicy or an apologetic for evil or the existence of innocent human suffering. Camus responds elegantly to this confrontation with Tarrou's gulf as Rieux asserts that man and not God is responsible "to relieve human suffering . . . in fighting creation as he found it."\(^5^2\) Camus offers us no theodicy or an apology to the human condition as he clearly asserts that our approach to knowledge establishes truth. Camus approaches knowledge from perspectives offered by religion in order to draw out the most salient features to develop his own paradigm.

The relationship Camus establishes between knowledge and truth is critical to understanding how human experience is an epistemological necessity for determining


\(^5^1\) *Genesis 1:1-2*, *The New American Bible*.

values of the human condition. Camus asserts that “knowledge is not an experience”53 rather an outcome of the human condition. The similarity between Rieux and Paneloux is in approach. A subjective encounter with the limits of knowledge results in despair.

Camus observes that indifference and despair exist on each side of the perimeters of knowledge. Both Nietzsche and Kierkegaard offer us images of despair as demons and monsters. Nietzsche describes an eternal recurrence or greatest weight as a demon54 while Kierkegaard's despair appears as a demon too,

... in the coldness of despair ... [you] call God forth from his hidden depth, where, as it seemed to you, He sat calm and indifferent [and] a paradox enters ... by the virtue of the absurd ... to renounce ... that horrible demon ... at the last instant ... in a single glance toward that heaven55

Camus employs Kierkegaard’s notion of despair as he describes how "each of us had to be content to live only for the day, alone under the vast indifference of the sky” while departing from him and Nietzsche as he asserts that we “had not to face life alone ... as [our] despair [saves us] from panic.”56

53 Camus, Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism, 92.


56 Camus, The Plague, 68-70.
Camus describes Tarrou as Nietzsche's hero who confronts "plague through all those long years . . . [with] tremendous will-power."\textsuperscript{57} Much like Paneloux offering Kierkegaard’s approach to the study of the human condition, Tarrou offers Nietzsche’s approach. Both assert an existential perspective that describes the confrontation with the limits of knowledge from a subjective viewpoint. However, Tarrou’s experience develops differently. As in Nietzsche, Tarrou describes his will to live that derives power from the paradigm that knowledge is so subjective in its singularity that only death frees it from the meaninglessness. Although both experience limitations, each asserts the culmination of knowledge in stark contrast. Both “practice the greatest of all virtues: that of All or Nothing.”\textsuperscript{58} Camus manifests Kierkegaard in Paneloux as a “presence of the leap that makes the chasm infinitely wide”\textsuperscript{59} and exposes Nietzsche in Tarrou as the “man of the future . . . the great nausea . . . the will to nothingness, nihilism . . . this victor over God and nothingness.”\textsuperscript{60}

Camus asserts a different approach with Rieux. He offers a viewpoint somewhere between Paneloux and the all-ness of God and Tarrou and the nothingness of man. Camus demonstrates in Paneloux and Tarrou that knowledge is quintessential for Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In Rieux, Camus asserts his departure from existential applications to theology and philosophy and asserts his worldview that embraces limitations. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche fear an abyss which represents the

\textsuperscript{57} Ibid., 229-230.

\textsuperscript{58} Camus, \textit{The Plague}, 202.

\textsuperscript{59} Kierkegaard, \textit{A Kierkegaard Anthology: Postscript to the Philosophical Fragments}, 200.

\textsuperscript{60} Nietzsche, \textit{Basic Writings of Nietzsche: Genealogy of Morals}, 2nd Essay, Section 24.
antithesis of knowledge as the highest value. Camus does not face any demons or monsters across the boundaries of knowledge. Camus engages the despair that human knowledge is limited without panic as he rejects the Platonic notion that knowledge is the highest value. Camus does not construct an epistemological framework that requires one to climb from a singular and fundamental assumption that complete knowledge is attainable. Camus constructs a modality that accepts knowledge as confined and offers other values within the human experience. Within this paradigm, the confrontation with the limits of knowledge and its subsequent despair is just as much the human condition as is any other human experience.

Camus pivots his novel between the two sermons delivered by Paneloux which offer how modern philosophy applied to Christianity approaches innocent human suffering. Paneloux returns from his boundary experience with evil after the first sermon as Kierkegaard's Knight of Faith and delivers his second sermon from an existential perspective that offers meaning from a theological basis. Paneloux asserts that knowledge is attained “on that lofty plane . . . and truth . . . from the dark cloud of seeming injustice” by faith. Camus seems to offer these sermons as further reflection and dialogue by Rieux which expand his thesis, *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*. In this work, Camus describes in some detail how Christianity developed from Greek philosophical underpinnings. By understanding this historical development from Camus’ perspective, we can better determine how critical this approach was for Camus as he examined the nature of faith in *The Plague* and his

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overall approach to the study of the human condition. Camus doesn’t criticize faith on a subjective basis. Camus describes his skepticism that faith can provide a consistent epistemological framework. Camus observes that faith is as limited in as much as reason in offering an explanation for innocent human suffering. The question of evil is just as unanswered today as it was thousands of years ago. However, Camus asserts that this problem is fundamentally related to the nature of knowledge itself. In 1936 Camus experienced the search for knowledge quite differently than he did in 1947. When Christian Metaphysics was written as his thesis, Europe was between wars. The Plague was written after Camus experienced the effects of World War II subjectively, not from a textbook or a conversation. Camus asserts that Christianity remains “the only common hope . . . against the calamity of the Western world”\(^{62}\) in 1936. In 1947, Camus adds that faith forms its basis from the perspective that we “believe everything or deny everything”\(^{63}\) asserted by Paneloux in his second sermon. Camus reaffirms the experience we encounter when approaching the boundaries knowledge. Ether the boundary is infinite as described by faith or it is finite as described by philosophical inquiry. Modernity provides one of two choices. Camus challenges this notion. He observes that if knowledge is infinite then human turmoil expands and if knowledge is finite then nothing exists at its periphery. The choice is not one of faith or reason it is one of angst or nothingness. There must be a different reality that we can experience.

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\(^{62}\) Camus, *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*, 133.

Camus offers us the option to live in paradox and accept that knowledge is limited. When we cross into the boundary of the unknown, demons and monsters may be the phenomena we experience. However, we experience other phenomena in the unknown. We connect to each other. We find the courage to continue. We sense that we are responsible for some of our circumstances and how we treat each other. Our boundary experience with the unknown doesn’t necessarily require us to succumb to either the fullness of our experience with the unknown or our experience of its nothingness. We can step back into what is known and continue our struggle with the human condition. We can choose to find value in our commonness as much as others can choose the path Abraham or Zarathustra.
CHAPTER 4

THE ETHICS OF RESISTANCE AND THE VIRTUE OF REBELLION

Camus explores the limits of knowledge by considering how both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche approached epistemology. Both Kierkegaard and Nietzsche observe that human knowledge is limited and that nothingness awaits us past the periphery. However, Kierkegaard offers solace in the divine knowledge of God while Nietzsche suggests that the experience of an eternal recurrence is possible. Both assert that knowledge is limited and yet neither can yield it as the highest good of the human condition. These frameworks approach the study of the human condition vertically by assuming that knowledge has no bounds and result in contradiction. Kierkegaard offers us that this inconsistency is virtuous while Nietzsche offers us that this flaw can be overcome. Both deny the nature of knowledge that Camus embraces – knowledge has a finite characteristic which is neither in the domain of a Knight nor a Zarathustra to attain. Knowledge is one of many aspects to the human condition.

Camus departs modern epistemological frameworks constructed from the assumption that knowledge is the highest value. Camus examines both the redemptive and tragic qualities of these modalities during a “highly non-rationalist era (romanticism - surrealism - existentialism) and . . . sought a moderate position that lucidly viewed the excesses of rationalism and anti-rationalism”¹ while asserting his own observations of the contributions by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. In his study of the human condition, Camus claims that “what’s true of all evils in the world is . . . it

¹ Henry, Voltaire and Camus: The Limits of Reason and the Awareness of Absurdity, 19.
helps men rise above themselves”\textsuperscript{2} as a response to the failure of theodicy and modern philosophical apologetics. Camus chooses “to remain within the limits of reason and history”\textsuperscript{3} since neither belief in everything or the experience with nothing provides a deeper understanding of why innocent human suffering exists. Camus offers another choice than Kierkegaard’s leap or Nietzsche’s agony.

Camus formed his paradigm during one of the greatest upheavals in the 20th century. \textit{The Stranger}, published in 1942 and \textit{The Plague}, published in 1948, bookend his experience with World War II. However, Camus is consistent with some of his earlier work. In 1936, Camus declares that “the principle of participation”\textsuperscript{4} will resolve humanity’s great problems and during the war Camus directly joins history and shares leadership in the French resistance as editor of Combat. Throughout his life, Camus forms and asserts a consistent epistemological framework based on his subjective experience that remained skeptical of modern attempts to construct modalities of knowledge. Reasonably assured of historical context, Camus approaches the study of the human condition with the assumption that knowledge cannot provide a full answer. Comfortable in this position, Camus explores other perceptions he makes of the human condition. Camus more fully participates in his circumstances and provides a wider perspective. Camus observes that Kierkegaard’s and Nietzsche’s methodologies may result in nihilism since both only examine the consequences of

\textsuperscript{2} Camus, \textit{The Plague}, 115.

\textsuperscript{3} Henry, \textit{Voltaire and Camus: The Limits of Reason and the Awareness of Absurdity}, 77.

\textsuperscript{4} Camus, \textit{Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism}, 112.
confronting meaninglessness. Camus offers a broader approach by examining how the
fear of meaninglessness may result in absolutism and suggests that existing in a
condition of paradox or the absurd may be more ethical than existing in totalitarianism.

Camus demonstrates aspects postulated in the study of existential psychology. He
encounters the peripheries and limits of knowledge with a sense of “meaninglessness
[which turns his] attention to . . . engagement” and experiences freedom of
“responsibility assumption.”

Yalom’s study is critical in better understanding the
underpinnings of existential paradigms. A key aspect is how both the principle of
participation is noted by Camus in 1936 and the principle of engagement is asserted by
Yalom in 1980. This active component of paradigm development requires the ability
to expand our assumptions of the human condition by an interactive commitment to
become involved with our circumstances. Camus more clearly describes this principle
as he reflects that some “aspired beyond and above the human individual toward
something they could not even imagine” and offers us the opportunity to participate
with history.

Camus experienced his condition in much the same way we all do. Fundamentally,
some assert that the experience with extreme suffering offers no explanation of why it
exists. To some degree, the cause and effect can be observed and some amount of
reasoning can be applied to offer ways to avoid these circumstances in the future.
Notionally, the existence of evil results in despair. Historically, the Old Testament

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provides us a narrative in Job. This narrative is repeated throughout history and some find solace with Kierkegaard while others find a detour with Nietzsche. By examining Camus closer, we can more fully understand how he formed his paradigm and apply it more generally to the study of the human condition. This process may be criticized as being inductive; however, it provides a starting point for further study. By applying further observations in this horizontal approach we may begin to more fully appreciate each subjective perspective equally and examine inconsistent observations without disturbing underlying assumptions. In Camus, this starting point is that knowledge is one of many values of the human experience. Camus intersects existentialism in his approach as he undertakes his study with rigorous subjectivity. Camus also criticizes some existential aspects; such as the propensity for existentialism as well as any other epistemological doctrine to move beyond its limitations without panic in the face of nothingness. Camus recognized that nihilism was a product of both rationalists and existentialists and staunchly opposed their fears of existing in a state of meaninglessness.

Existential paradigms do offer certain values that can coexist with those offered by rationalism. Applying subjective reasoning can be more of a unifying paradigm than the resulting paradox discovered in rationalism. Some skeptics reject existentialism by offering the criticism that subjectivism has no absolutes. Existentialism offers new approaches when absolutes become contradictory to human experience. The most significant historical event that shook the mindset of absolutism was the Copernican revolution. Individual pursuit of knowledge overturned conventional wisdom and
offered a solid defense for independent study that should not be denied as a way to
develop new epistemological frameworks. Another approach in defense of
existentialism is a quick review of the origins of western philosophical inquiry. Both
Plato and Aristotle regarded knowledge as the highest value of the human condition;
however, each developed different viewpoints. Plato as a rationalist derived
knowledge by deductive reasoning while Aristotle as an empiricist derived knowledge
by inductive reasoning. Aristotle departed Platonic idealism and developed his
approach from an empirical perspective laying the foundation for modern
epistemological frameworks such as Copernicus. Although both Plato and Aristotle
developed early western philosophy, each approached the study differently. Plato
denies any possibility that knowledge is limited metaphysically, Aristotle’s empirical
method denies that knowledge is limited epistemologically. Both make the absurd
possible for the modern man.

Kierkegaard and Camus expand on the virtue of the absurd. This concept asserts
that human knowledge is limited and that certain conditions are paradoxical. For
some, the existence of evil denies the existence of God. Innocent human suffering
defies rationalism and affirms an absurd existence. Kierkegaard offers an existential
theodicy that asserts a subjective acceptance of an infinite absolute order. Camus
offers a differing viewpoint and asserts no apologetic for the human suffering. Camus
accepts the finitude of knowledge as a Platonic metaphysical necessity and an
Aristotelian epistemological assumption. Although Camus can be described as an
existentialist since he approaches the study of the human condition subjectively,
Camus quickly departs the existentialist camp by describing his experiences much differently than Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard asserts that God is the absolute value which provides a reference upon which any existential epistemological paradigm can be formed. Kierkegaard approaches the limits of rationalism posed by problem of evil from a subjective perspective and experiences it as a demon. Camus also approaches innocent suffering from a subjective perspective and describes the phenomena of indifference, apathy and despair; however, Camus doesn’t encounter panic. Camus reaches out subjectively and engages with others experiencing similar conditions and describes his experience as a shared struggle against the circumstances that engulf us. Camus reasserts the principle of participation as he describes the phenomena of solidarity. Kierkegaard’s subjectivity and rationalism isolate him while Camus’ subjectivity and empiricism find union with others. Camus offers us a different metaphysical condition than Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard’s man faces God alone, while Camus offers us a social being that struggles collectively with its condition.

Modernity finds another Plato in Nietzsche. Not inspired by the virtue of the absurd, Nietzsche offers us a paradigm that knowledge is finite with the possibility of a quintessential human condition. Nietzsche’s Zarathustra is Plato’s philosopher king. Nietzsche denies Kierkegaard’s subjective acceptance of an absolute and Plato’s search for knowledge as the highest value. Nietzsche advances the study of the human condition by subjectively examining the nature of knowledge as eternally fixed within its boundaries and explores outside its periphery. For Nietzsche, the experience with the unknown is terrifying as he asserts that only the strongest of all wills has the
capacity to shape their circumstances. Much like Kierkegaard before him, Nietzsche observes the complex nature of the human condition and develops a paradigm that is rigidly individualistic in outlook. While Nietzsche accepts that knowledge has some value, he denies the absolutism offered by Kierkegaard and the faithful before him.

While Camus was influenced by Aristotle and Plato in his earlier works that attempt to explore the value of meaning; he accepts some of Nietzsche’s skepticism that asserts the limitations of knowledge is limited in his later works. However, we should note how Camus differs with Nietzsche in their approaches to confronting meaninglessness and its subsequent nothingness. Camus offers us an alternative as he observes that we can experience the unknown connected in solidarity with each other. In his earlier works, Camus offers us the image of Mersault denying the priest in The Stranger as a way to better understand Nietzsche’s denial of Kierkegaard. Nietzsche develops a variant of Kierkegaard’s modern epistemological framework. The development of existentialism may be observed from three aspects – if the approach is subjective, whether knowledge is limited and whether the perspective is social or not. Kierkegaard’s approach is a subjective acceptance of unbounded knowledge (in the form of God) and that the human condition is individualistic. Nietzsche’s approach is a subjective acceptance that knowledge is limited and that the human condition is individualistic and its will to power offers significance in the human condition. Camus offers us a subjective approach that accepts the limits of knowledge as an underlying assumption while the nature of the human condition is social and not a herd as Nietzsche asserts.
Camus’ departure from Nietzsche and closeness to Kierkegaard is quite evident as he commends Christianity in both *Christian Metaphysics* (1936) and in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (1944):

Because if, moreover, we believe Nietzsche, and if we agree that the Greece of darkness . . . the pessimistic Greece, deaf and tragic, was the mark of a strong civilization, it is necessary to admit that Christianity in this regard is a rebirth in relation to Socraticism and its serenity . . . at the time of Saint Augustine’s death, Christianity was formed into a philosophy. It is now sufficiently armed to resist the tempest in which all will founder. During the long years, it remains the only common hope and the only shield against the calamity of the Western world.  

Don’t worry that I shall use against you the themes of an age-old propaganda; I shall not fall back on the Christian tradition. That is another problem. You have talked too much of it too, and posing as defenders of Rome, you were not afraid to give Christ the kind of publicity he began to be accustomed to the day he received the kiss that marked him for torture. But, after all, the Christian tradition is only one of the traditions that made this Europe, and I am not qualified to defend it against you.

In Christianity Camus observes the power against nihilism, a power that offers redemption if we approach the limits of knowledge in solidarity rather than step away from its periphery and face the demons of the unknown alone. Camus asserts that Christianity engages man with his condition and offers support against the sense of nothingness that engulfs us outside the boundaries of knowledge. Camus cautions us

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7 Camus, *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*, 132-133.

that modernity’s Plato is just a step away from the abyss and offers a paradigm that accepts Kierkegaard’s angst without Nietzsche’s despair. Although modern existential frameworks remain epistemologically fragmented, Camus offers us a more unified approach to study of the human condition from a phenomenological perspective.

His intersection with history provides insight formed during modernity’s greatest upheaval. His letters written in 1943 and 1944 seem clearer to understand if we approach them as Camus directly responding to Nietzsche. Combat appears written at three levels -- an editorial urging resistance against the Nazi occupation, possibly as an intelligence apparatus delivery system and as a dissertation against nihilism. Camus criticizes Nietzsche in his *Letters to a German Friend* as he describes “a world where everything has lost its meaning” setting a common tone between them. Camus asserts his thesis that he “had to give up . . . knowledge . . . for truth” in order to determine “the distinction between sacrifice and mysticism, between energy and violence, between strength and cruelty, for that even finer distinction between the true and the false, between the man of the future and the cowardly gods (Nietzsche) revere[s].”

Camus describes how in “facing the unknown . . . hopeless hope is what sustains . . . Western man’s struggle against the world, against the gods, against [man] himself . . . and that spiritual values could not be separated . . . between the sword and the spirit.” Camus asserts his awareness of a boundary experience that instigates a massive shift in

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10 Ibid., 8.
11 Ibid., 10.
12 Ibid., 15-25.
his perspective that is much different than Nietzsche’s. Camus describes how they “both thought that this world had no ultimate meaning and that consequently [they] were cheated.” While Nietzsche “deduced the idea that . . . good and evil could be defined according to one’s wishes . . . [and] readily accepted despair.” He, Camus, “never yielded to it . . . [and] merely wanted men to rediscover their solidarity in order to wage war against their revolting fate.” Camus continues his criticism of Nietzsche being “tired of fighting heaven . . . relaxed in that exhausting adventure . . . that this world has no ultimate meaning”. Camus asserts that “because [man] is the only creature to insist . . . [on] rebirth,”\(^{13}\) we have a will to freedom that is much more significant than Nietzsche’s will to power. Camus continues to describe his memory of the liberation of “Paris that is fighting . . . not for power, but for justice; not for politics, but for ethics; not for the domination of France, but for her grandeur . . . [with] the dreadful hope of men isolated with their fate . . . [of an] unspeakable struggle . . . with shame and . . . wrath . . . united in the same suffering . . . to be stronger than [their] condition.”\(^{14}\) Camus asserts a paradigm without Kierkegaard’s heaven or Nietzsche’s hell. Camus pits his cause of freedom against Nietzsche’s cause of power.

Knowledge is paradoxical at its limits. One such test of the paradoxical nature of knowledge is that innocent human suffering exists without meaning. Subjective experience is valuable in order to live in the paradox of a seeming meaningless existence. The virtue of being conscious of our existence provides significance in our


\(^{14}\) Ibid., 36-40.
lives. Humanity is the meaning of existence not our circumstances. Numerous accounts of paradox have been recorded throughout human history. Our critical examination of Camus and his authentic experience with evil provides us a paradigm upon which we can assert that our human condition is significant.

Camus determines that Kierkegaard and Nietzsche offer epistemological extremes which usurp our humanity as he observes that beyond the limits of knowledge exists a condition of nothingness and a supernatural presence – God the all-being or Zarathustra the self-being. Camus develops an approach between these extremes. Camus understands “the coldness of despair” can be the result of any subjective approach and balances it with the virtue of man’s pursuit for significance. Camus develops a conscious approach that actively participates with both the memories of his experiences and the circumstances of his existence. Camus demonstrates that an active participation with his memories implies that consciousness is malleable and knowledge fluid. His approach provides deeper insight into how paradigms develop when epistemological boundaries become rigid. He expands the value of subjectivity unlike similar existential approaches. Camus offers an alternative to Kierkegaard and Nietzsche in which subjective experience does not require a relationship with an infinite other or finite self. Camus appears much more at ease with the despair of solitude while Kierkegaard and Nietzsche seem to panic and find solace in a supernatural comfort with a prime being or as a prime being. Kierkegaard finds comfort from the isolating effects of pure subjectivity in the promise of God while Nietzsche asserts that the self can exert its will to become a god among men. Camus
moves away from these approaches and develops an authentic response that considers the epistemological limits of the human condition as a metaphysical state. Camus asserts that the human condition develops one’s consciousness of its existence within a social context and accepts harmony with the herd. Camus develops a paradigm which sets him apart from either Kierkegaard’s or Nietzsche’s approach.

An example of how Camus asserts his unique approach to the formation of a conscious which finds significance in its circumstances is his memories of his mother. Camus writes about the memories of his mother in many of his short stories and novels. Camus approaches these memories indirectly in *Lyrical Essays* while he is direct in *The Stranger* and *The Plague*. In 1937, at the age of twenty-four, Camus remembers and describes “an old woman . . . that . . . sat alone day after day . . . in her corner, like a dog . . . [that] didn’t want to be alone . . . confronted by the most atrocious suffering . . . left at home by people going to a cinema.”15 These memories describe a narrative of isolation that Camus observed in his mother. Camus offers us another perspective as he begins in 1942 with “Maman died today”16 and describes how Mersault, the lead character in *The Stranger*, comes to terms with his loss. Five years later, in 1947, Camus narrates more about the solitary condition of old age as he remembers through Rieux how "once [his mother’s] household tasks were over, she spent most of her time in [a] chair [with] her hands folded in her lap . . . waiting . . .

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[in] silent resignation . . . [and] seemed to light up with a sudden glow”\textsuperscript{17} when he was present with her. His readers can genuinely associate with these descriptions of isolation that Camus narrates. Camus discovers value in the human condition even in its isolating circumstances as he describes how "what [he] loved most in [his] mother was her self-effacement, her 'dimness,' . . . [and how] she only effaced herself a trifle more than usual [each day until] she was no longer there.”\textsuperscript{18} Camus observes a quality of his mother’s isolation that is significant. Camus offers us “dimness” as an image of a self that “shines” as an existence with its circumstances even if these seem meaningless. Camus observes that the virtue of the absurd is to find value in subjective experience. Camus explores how subjective experience is interwoven with human consciousness and any denial of one aspect limits our understanding of the human condition. Most importantly, Camus’s struggle for solidarity is a reflection of how the search for freedom is a social condition that cannot be denied by limits imposed by the search for meaning. Freedom is a human condition that implies no bounds while knowledge implies an end. Camus’ call of solidarity is his explicit assertion that while we live in a condition of absurdity, we also live in a condition of freedom.

The imagery of light is significant when Camus described the liberation of Paris in his war journals. Camus suggests a quite different view of existentialism as his use of light suggests that the human condition is not a subjective perception of an external

\textsuperscript{17} Camus, The Plague, 112.

\textsuperscript{18} Ibid., 248.
light shining on it but rather an energy that emanates out to the world. By this imagery, Camus asserts that the human condition has agency which consciously interacts with its external condition. These memories of his mother and his role during World War II demonstrate the value of subjective experience with various levels of suffering – from the isolation of aging to the consequences of war. More importantly, while Camus observes that the human condition is a “never ending” struggle he also asserts that it is also a fundamentally shared consciousness which communicates meaning from one generation to the next – from mother to son. Camus expands his paradigm to include multiple assumptions: knowledge is limited in the shadows of the paradox of evil; the human condition is an agency that struggles with its circumstances; and, we adapt to our circumstances by our collective consciousness.

Camus expands on the phenomenological aspects of his paradigm as he develops his characters in a Hegelian fashion. Camus asserts that “man is an idea”\(^1\) in which they “express themselves through their mode of action in the world . . . and [their] alienation [from the extreme nature of evil] is a beginning of a liberation process . . . [to] move from an initial existential situation as a closed and confined self to existence as a universal self.”\(^2\) Camus observes that “there [is no] individual destiny, only a collective destiny.”\(^3\) Camus describes how this universal self develops as he responds to Heidegger’s “two basic modes of existence: authenticity and alienation . . . [and]

\(^{1}\) Camus, *The Plague*, 149.


\(^{3}\) Camus, *The Plague*, 151.
assumes . . . that even if the world is strange . . . people can reshape their relationship with society through solidarity.”

Camus asserts that human reality is “interpersonal . . . [and] is the basis for a new ethics of human responsibility . . . [in which] individuals do not seek meaning in a speculative contemplation but in action, in shared responsibility, and in a struggle for a better world.”

Camus also expands from Nietzsche’s notion that "consciousness does not really belong to man's individual existence but rather to his social or herd nature . . . [while he significantly departs from his conclusion that] ultimately the growth of consciousness becomes a danger . . . even . . . a disease." For Camus, the disease is not our social consciousness, it is our circumstances. Camus observes the human condition and develops a paradigm which offers insight into its phenomenological nature while differing from modern existential approaches. Camus offers a post-modern framework in which the social context of human existence has empirical significance in its metaphysical suffering. Camus does not despair as he experiences meaningfulness. Camus bonds with the collective consciousness which asserts the significance of each person. Camus offers *The Plague* as an allegory of how our human connections can still thrive even in the midst of evil.

Camus also differs from previous phenomenological perspectives that subscribe to the theory that the consciousness is "the source of the rift between the individual and

\[\text{\textsuperscript{22}}\text{ Sagl, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, 20-23.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{23}}\text{ Ibid., 46.}\]

\[\text{\textsuperscript{24}}\text{ Nietzsche, The Gay Science, Aphorism 354.}\]
the world . . . they face”25 as an epistemological necessity which supports the value of knowledge above all others. Rieux’ experience is a "weariness [or] madness”26 and “revolt against the shades of vagueness ultimately threatening the very meaning of conscious life”27 that "men can't do without their fellow men."28 Camus values his subjective treatment of the virtues of wisdom and remains skeptical. Although Camus agrees that knowledge has significant impact on the formation of social and cultural consciousness, he also observes that significant consequences result in the formation of the underlying epistemological assumptions which influence socio-political development. Camus narrates how the western civilization developed both conditions that value knowledge and freedom. In his own development, we see how Camus departs from trying to find meaning in the human condition and its resulting paradox to a more fulfilling search for freedom. These observations become very clear as we study his war journals and Camus summarizes the development of Pan-European and German history. Camus clearly departs from an epistemological approach to a phenomenological perspective in these journals and in his subsequent works. This is a critical observation which underscores the shift in the modern world that valued knowledge to a post-modern worldview that values freedom.

History records many reasons for the onset of World War II; and, in hindsight, provides knowledge of how it could have been prevented. This war was just as much a

25 Sagi, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd 67-68

26 Camus, The Plague, 196.

27 Sagi, 67-68.

28 Camus, The Plague, 173.
social and cultural rift between an isolated Germany amidst its European neighbors as it was an economic condition. The circumstances that justified war for Germans were exacerbated by the same events that the rest of Europe faced. Economic circumstances caused hardship across Europe and further strengthened the union of some nations against others across political fault lines. These economic forces shaped Europe’s cultural circumstances and forced Germany further away from a common European union after the treaties of World War I. Nazism was a possibility for Germany because of its alienated national identity. European consciousness did not share in the same social experience as the German consciousness. Each developed quite differently as the alienated Germans liberated their individual circumstances from the economic shackles imposed by the Versailles Treaty to create a German universal self. This knowledge was only possible after the experience of World War II recorded the aggression of one society against the other on the flawed assumption that Europe had experienced the “war to end all wars” only decades earlier. Camus describes how “plagues and wars take people equally by surprise”29 as evidence that previous experience is not taken into consideration in developing epistemological frameworks. Camus offers a paradigm that explores the relationship between epistemological and phenomenological aspects within an existential framework.

His short essays, novels and historical accounts suggest that Nietzsche’s will to power is another manifestation of man’s determination to assert the dominance of the virtue of wisdom. Camus responds to this condition by expanding on Kierkegaard’s

29 Camus, The Plague, 34.
notion of the virtue of the absurd while remaining skeptical of his theodicy by asserting that "the fundamental human reaction to evil and injustice is revolt and solidarity." Camus offers revolt as a condition that is skeptical of any epistemological framework that contradicts human experience. He asserts a paradigm that values universal existential empiricism in the sense of a collective subjective experience that is responsible to itself to "create a just world instead of a world of divine grace." Camus also expands on the virtue of the absurd in which knowledge is a result of our collective experience passed from one generation to the next as that offers us solace in the human condition as we are reminded that “there are more things to admire in men than to despise . . . in the never ending fight against terror . . . by all who [are] unable to be saints but [refuse] to bow down to [evil].” Camus observes that we are redeemed by our nature to connect with each other and not by a supernatural effort. The common condition we share is our human bond to each other which at its least manifestation is more significant than Kierkegaard’s offer to leap across the boundaries of reason. By denying Kierkegaard’s theodicy, Camus also sets the conditions upon which to deny Nietzsche’s epistemological apologetics. Both struggle with resolving the existence of innocent human suffering while Camus accepts it as fundamental to the human condition rather than an exception. While Nietzsche panics before the "sea of evil [that] threatens to flood existence, [Camus accepts the despair at] the abyss without tumbling into it." Camus advances a paradigm in which "love, compassion,

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30 Sagi, Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd, 124.

31 Camus, The Plague, 278.
and empathy enable human beings to live while engaged in a struggle” with the paradox of evil. Camus explores the virtue of the absurd which offers how the search for freedom exhibits itself in trust, courage and responsibility while the search for knowledge offers only meaninglessness and even nothingness. Camus offers us a paradigm that values freedom in the human condition in spite of its circumstances.

Camus offers an example of a paradigm that approaches the subject of innocent human suffering by an existential perspective that accepts the feelings of despair while resisting its power. Camus, in the spirit of Kierkegaard before him, offers the virtue of epistemological resistance to the question of why evil exists but rather redirects us to ask how we should live in co-existence with evil. This paradigm develops in parallel with the Christian theology which offers the virtues of faith, hope and charity. By the virtue of the absurd in which humanity demands meaning for its existence its collective existential experience values trust, courage and responsibility as a redoubt against the human feelings of isolation, meaninglessness and nothingness. Camus asserts himself as an expert in the matters of the human condition and leaves the matters of the divine for others to struggle with. Camus offers a paradigm in which the absurd is a virtue and existentialism is a value for living within the limits of human knowledge without panic.

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32 Sagi, 174-177.
CHAPTER 5

NIHILISM AND TOTALITARIANISM

Our epistemological foundations are shaken when we face unresolvable encounters with our circumstances. Several outcomes result when we encounter these epistemological extremes. In early existentialist thought, at least two were offered - a personal relationship with the infinite body of knowledge outside human thought, God, or a subjective assimilation of all possible knowledge. These paradigms, asserted by Kierkegaard and Nietzsche, were criticized by Camus for their lack of consideration of how collective consciousness is shaped by empirically formed epistemological frameworks. Camus offers us his experiences to consider and asks us to reflect on our encounters with innocent human suffering. Camus agrees that an encounter with evil results in isolation, meaninglessness and nothingness. Camus also observes that while the experience of isolation is very real, human connection too is very real. Both experiences of isolation and connection exist in our collective consciousness. Camus also offers his experience with trust, courage and responsibility to consider in our collective consciousness. Even when our circumstances seem completely meaningless, we still shine outward in the abyss of nothingness. We are not extinguished by our despair; rather, we still assert dignity in our existence with each other. Camus observes how human dignity and the integrity of our collective consciousness are authentic responses to how we live with our circumstances.

In 1947, Camus employs the technique of narrating in streaming consciousness to connect his readers by developing Rieux as an image for the virtue of
epistemological resistance to meaninglessness. He recalls his experience of how although "we know next to nothing . . . he felt a need for friendly contacts, human warmth."¹ Rieux describes how "a gentle breeze wafted a murmur of voices, smells of roasting meat, a gay, perfumed tide of freedom sounding on its way, as the streets filled up with noisy young people released from shops and offices"² while he asserts that "men can't do without their fellow men."³ Camus develops his absurd hero within a paradigm that assumes epistemological frameworks are limited and man is metaphysically a social being. He values the attribute of subjectivism in existential thought while departing from developments in existentialism. Camus asserts that humanity is connected and experiences its existence collectively. In this collective experience, human knowledge develops.

Our condition is marked by the "collapse of . . . courage, will-power, and endurance . . . [in] the pit of despond . . . [when facing evil] . . . alone under the vast indifference of the sky."⁴ Camus observes that we actively participate with our existence and sometimes we disengage with our circumstances as they become overwhelming. Camus offers his observations with these overwhelming circumstances as he describes the Nazi occupation of France during World War II. The occupation was a powerful moment in time and seemed relentless in creating innocent human suffering. Its very nature reflected nihilism as any thought of opposition was

¹ Camus, The Plague, 53.
² Ibid., 54.
³ Ibid., 173.
⁴ Ibid., 66-68.
associated with suffering or death. This dark moment seemed to overwhelm all of human history. Courage seemed to form when occupied France accepted that evil "was among . . . [them and that] it really was . . . the concern of all . . . to make a stand." It wasn’t until the collective conscious of the resistance recognized that its condition of suffering was the core of its very nature that they asserted the courage to reconnect and stand against the isolation, meaninglessness and nothingness that evil brought about. Camus records how the social fabric of the human condition asserts its integrity and dignity by overcoming the totalitarian epistemological framework that envelops it and courageously moves beyond limitations set by knowledge to experience the fullness of existence.

Camus develops two other characters in *The Plague* that expand on this notion of the virtue of epistemological resistance and the value of metaphysical rebellion. When Camus describes Grand as an "insignificant and obscure hero who had to his credit only a little goodness of heart and a seemingly absurd ideal" and Rambert as “a stranger” that belongs with others, he asserts that the collective experience of human connection is responsible for its own integrity and dignity. We experience ourselves as social beings and are dependent to each other for maintaining our existence. Camus observes that many absurd heroes struggle together against the very nature of their

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5 Ibid., 121-123.
6 Ibid., 126.
7 Ibid., 188.
human condition. The coalition that forms resists the effects of despair caused by paradox and rebels against the seeming totality of its circumstances.

Modernity approaches the study of the human condition from an empirical perspective and subjective manner. Post-modern attempts to describe the nature of the human condition assert that while some existential paradigms can result in feelings of isolation, meaninglessness and even a sense of nothingness, authentic variations are also possible. In Camus we see that even while "thinking [that the human condition may] have or have not a meaning . . . there is one thing one can always yearn for and sometimes attain, it is human love . . . [and cautions us that] for those others who aspired beyond and above the human individual toward something they could not even imagine, there had been no answer." Camus describes his experiences of the human condition by recognizing the two truths of modernity and postmodernity -- man is alone together. Connected by our experiences, we are conscious of meaninglessness and yet we participate with our existence collectively. We live somewhere between the all-ness promised by knowledge and nothingness experienced by each.

Camus develops his paradigm empirically while remaining respectful of human dignity and criticizing any approaches that deny it. By examining the human condition from the perspective that innocent human suffering exists and accepting the despair that knowledge does not offer ultimate meaning from a classical sense, Camus still observes value in the human condition. Camus offers that our collective consciousness adds to our limited knowledge even when we experience paradox at its boundaries.

\[\text{\[\text{\cite{ibid, 270-271.}\]}}\]
Human consciousness develops horizontally across the sphere of humanity. Vertical approaches developed by subjective attempts of understanding only illuminate individual discovery and leave us alone at the heights of our own paradigms. While some may flourish at the peak, most humanity flourishes together in the valleys of knowledge. We must trust each other to have courage and engage responsibly for how we live within the circumstances of our existence.

Perhaps the greatest testament to Camus is how his work can be examined in light of some of the works by Hannah Arendt. In *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, first published in 1948, we see many similarities between Arendt’s and Camus’ experiences with nihilism and totalitarianism. Although Arendt provides us with an academic study of totalitarianism and touches on aspects of nihilism, Camus shares with his readers his experiences and insights for both at a much more personal level. At the crossroads with Arendt’s study of totalitarianism we observe how Camus explored the human condition and offers Cottard in *The Plague* as an image of a “philosophy of pessimism and delight in doom” as he asserts that “the plague suits me quite well.” Camus provides his readers with a glimpse of what extreme individualism appears like in contrast to the social responsibility espoused by Rieux and Tarrou. Cottard personifies the extent to which nihilism can destroy one’s soul. Remarkably, Rieux and Tarrou accept Cottard and continue to try and persuade him to come to their cause against the plague.

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In this interaction with Cottard, Camus describes his moral stand against nihilism. Camus suggests that we co-exist with evil and our best efforts can only serve to stop its spread rather than eliminate it completely. My study of Camus substantiates Patrick Henry’s assertion that "Camus was concerning himself with contemporary epistemological questions . . . [and] formulates no lasting metaphysical pattern . . . [in which] human reason can describe the world but it cannot explain it"\(^\text{11}\) in a narrow perspective. By examining some of Camus’ work, such as *The Plague*, we see how Camus employs Riex, Tarrou and Cottard as metaphors of rationalism, existentialism and nihilism to more fully describe that multiple epistemological perspectives co-exist on equal grounds. In *The Plague*, Camus asserts that human consciousness permits many epistemological assumptions and systems to contribute to its form. What is not so evident is why.

It is only in Camus’ observation that “there is only one really serious philosophical problem and that is suicide. Deciding whether or not life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question in philosophy. All other questions follow from that."\(^\text{12}\) For Camus, respect for human dignity is the fundamental notion that weaves across the fabric of the human condition. No other concept is as fundamental as this. Without respect, we tend to make objects of our fellow man and disintegrate the fabric that makes us whole. Without respect, we isolate ourselves and all our connections

\(^{11}\) Henry, *Voltaire and Camus: The Limits of Reason and the Awareness of Absurdity*, 64-65.

vanish, leaving us a mere shell of nothingness. In *The Plague*, Camus poignantly describes the lack of respect for human dignity by Cottard while he himself is respected.

In its allegorical treatment of the human condition, *The Plague* describes how the human condition reflects itself as images of rationalism and existentialism which find worth in the human condition while nihilism begins at suicide. Cottard as an image for nihilism is both a logical and consistent application of Camus’ treatment of both epistemological and metaphysical considerations in his study of the human condition. The narrative amongst the three characters, within the context of the unfolding drama, permits our collective consciousness to determine how each contributes their experiences with evil and develop a fuller understanding of the human condition. Henry’s analysis falls short of applying phenomenological discipline to Camus’ work. At the core of how Camus approaches the questions of being is a departure from epistemology and a tendency to phenomenology. Camus is a pre-postmodernist as his narrative gives us evidence that suggests a sense of meaninglessness does not necessarily describe nothingness as the nihilistic viewpoint asserts.

In Cottard we see how he creates his own totalitarian system of thought where participation in humanity is no longer a virtue. Fearful of the unknown, Cottard implodes within himself while Rieux and Tarrou stretch themselves across Oran to heal the suffering. Both Rieux and Tarrou resist their fears and cross the periphery of knowledge into the unknown without despair. Isolated at first and now forming
solidarity of intent, Rieux and Tarrou explore the fullness of their experiences outside the bounds of knowledge. Cottard, on the other hand, becomes subject to his limitations and his human drive for sustainment devours his fellow man.

In *The Plague* we can see how totalitarianism and its epistemological underpinnings are intertwined. Arendt’s observation that “the human condition and the limitations of the globe were a serious obstacle to process” can be applied to determine how conscious awareness of these limitations at the periphery of knowledge can “begin a series of destructive catastrophes once it had reached its limits.”

The unquenched yearn for knowledge turns upon itself at its limit and creates multiple vertical layers of assumptions which substantiate its original premise, that knowledge is the highest value in the human condition. From this perspective, nihilism is the foundation upon which totalitarianism thrives. Totalitarian systems do not acknowledge its limitations since the meaninglessness outside its boundary is relegated to the category of nothingness. Discovery of the unknown is not permitted while defense against skepticism of what is already known is most the highest virtue.

Camus gives us Fr. Paneloux to consider. In his image for theodicy in *The Plague*, Camus criticizes existing norms that place any epistemological construct as a higher worth than humanity. Camus asserts that man’s worth cannot be measured, only experienced. Fundamentally, Camus asserts that any religion limited to its doctrinal principles and wary of discovery is a totalitarian system causing egregious harm to its members. Camus suggests that in some ways rationalism and

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13 Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 144.
existentialism offer humanity reason rather than faith as a fundamental aspect of the human condition. So how can we reconcile this observation with his thesis that asserts “Christianity . . . is now sufficiently armed to resist the tempest in which we all will founder.”14

Camus approaches evil with both eyes open; one at its horror and the other at its manifestation. We see how in The Plague, both the terrible innocent human suffering co-exist with the greatness of humanity’s humble spirit and the capacity of humans to cherish each other. The Christian bible too records humanity’s suffering and humanity’s redemptive nature. Camus criticizes the theodicy of man to forgive God while forgetting to forgive each other. Dr. Rieux and Mr. Tarrou are connected with Fr. Paneloux horizontally permitting individualism while acknowledging human solidarity. It’s only when Paneloux asks them to climb to a higher order of existence - God - that they resist. Their resistance is epistemological in nature as they are asked to turn their knowledge systems inward to faith and not outward to experience. Camus asserts that this inwardness to faith is just another form of totalitarian behavior in the of nihilism. For Paneloux, meaninglessness suggests nothingness; while for Rieux and Tarrou meaninglessness must be resisted. Rieux and Tarrou rebel against a doctrine that exonermates innocent human suffering in order to maintain its integrity.

The redeeming nature of Christianity for Camus was noted by Augustine. Camus respects Augustine’s quest to understand the origins of evil and his “need of coherence . . . [and the realization that] the solution was not in knowledge . . . but

14 Camus, Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism, 133.
through a full awareness of . . . misery.”^{15} Camus’ skepticism of knowledge provides the basis for his value of resistance. Camus’ virtue is his respect for human dignity and rebellion against any threat to its full capacity. Camus observes that Augustinianism assert that “evil is a privation and not a true reality”^{16} and affirms the meaninglessness of the Problem of Evil from a modern perspective. Camus examines free will and Augustine’s Doctrine of Original Sin as “extremes . . . in his thinking” and suggests that Augustine presented a “great difficulty . . . [in which] grace is absolutely arbitrary . . . [and humanity’s] only freedom is . . . to do evil.”^{17} My exegesis of Camus’ thesis against the backdrop of the works examined throughout this study suggests that Camus’ respect for Augustine’s resistance to absolute knowledge systems is tempered with his criticism of Augustine’s ultimate submission. Camus asserts the primacy of experience and the contingency of knowledge. Camus has seen the outcome of this play before and saves his applause of Augustine. Camus asserts that Augustine’s promise of eternal happiness for the price of present suffering is not morality, it is submission. Camus offers his own moral response which is to heal present suffering with eternal happiness as a promise to our dignity.

I liken Camus’ criticism of Augustine’s despair when looking at the void outside the periphery of knowledge as similar to that narrated by Kirkegaard and Nietzsche and their encounters with the limitations human knowledge and its resulting

^{15} Ibid., 117.

^{16} Ibid., 119.

^{17} Ibid., 120.
paradox. Each, in their own way, experienced nihilism and came to terms with that experience with different outcomes. While acknowledging to a greater extent the value of experiencing the human condition to its fullest extent, ultimately, Kierkegaard defends Augustine and leaps to what Camus would refer to as his metaphysical death. In many ways, we see how Camus more closely aligns his philosophical disposition with Nietzsche. Both were highly critical of existing epistemological systems and modern morality. Both also looked to the Greeks to find a new perspective in which to approach the study of the human condition. Camus parts with Nietzsche on the value of solidarity in the human condition and does not relegate it to mere mob behavior as Nietzsche asserts. Possibly we would have seen a much different outcome in Camus’ novels if not for his experience with humanity as a fabric woven of social interaction. In many ways we see how *The Plague* is a direct result from his experiences during World War II and his witness of the evil that Nazisim brought. However, Camus seems to suggest that the best of man only appears in the worst of times as he observes at the conclusion that “we learn in a time of pestilence: that there are more things to admire in men than to despise.”\(^{18}\) My continuing reference to this thought is necessary in order to reinforce how Camus saw the human condition. For the most part it was a veil or illusion of existence. Camus begins *The Plague* by describing how the “habits [of the townspeople of Oran] are not peculiar”\(^{19}\) and concludes with his experience with the “time of pestilence.” Camus offers us his experiences in this fictional town as

\(^{18}\) Camus, *The Plague*, 278.

\(^{19}\) Ibid., 4.
a way of provoking our consciousness to a fuller acceptance of cognition than we most have. Camus asserts that it is not in the ordinariness of our lives that we experience the human condition but rather in its extremes. As paradoxical as these extremes are to our understanding of why it occurs, it is more relevant that we accept its existence and live morally with it.

In some respects, I liken Camus’ *The Plague* to Einstein’s theories of relativity. Camus wrote of his experiences and gave us more to reflect on our study of the human condition; while Einstein gave us more to reflect and apply in our study of physics. In both we see how we can apply their conclusions in relation to the extremes they observed and not our tendency to coherency. For the most part, classical Newtonian physics gives us a reasonable model upon which to predict the movements and orbits of celestial objects. However, not until those objects travel at the most extreme speeds do as Newtonian physics falter and Einstein’s equations become relevant. In the same way and for the most part Nietzsche’s observations of mob behavior and slave mentality appear reasonable; however, when the extremes of our human condition appear throughout history, we see how human connection changes the outcomes that an application of some of Nietzsche’s philosophy would have resulted. Perhaps Camus gives us a moral compass to apply at the extremes of the human condition.

Camus’ exploration of the constant tension between isolation and connection is a manifestation of a dual nature of existence and Nietzsche’s attempt to give us a more monistic framework is flawed. Perhaps a way to understand Nietzsche is to view human consciousness as whole subject to extremes that pull it apart. Modern attempts
to describe the human condition might apply only at its center and not at its periphery. Skepticism provides value only when paradox exist which only occurs when existing epistemological systems of understanding fail. Most importantly, we see how skepticism applies logic within a totalitarian system and the logic creates more inconsistencies than it resolves. The nature of skepticism seems to dissolve the layers of knowledge that totalitarian systems create and expose it to its real nature -- meaninglessness. Once we observe that the quest for meaning is unfulfilled we consign that system to the bookshelves as a mere reference than as a truth.

A more thorough synthesis of Camus with contemporary thought on totalitarianism may add more context as we reflect on the nature of nihilism. Arendt asserts that totalitarianism “grew out of the fragments of a highly atomized society whose competitive structure and concomitant loneliness of the individual had only been held in check through a membership in a class.”

Camus explores how The Plague has no class membership and applies to all. None in the city of Oran were spared from the threat of the plague. In this environment, Camus explores how the isolated still resisted and rebelled against the perceived inevitability of their circumstances. Remarkably Camus, Wiesel and Arendt all identify the same conditions in which we exist and are magnified in extreme circumstances.

Camus was subjected to the same forces as those experienced by Wiesel and Arendt across Europe. Each resisted in their manner and returned to narrate their experiences for our collective consciousness. My study of their narratives, especially

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by Camus in *The Plague*, suggests that each experienced both nihilism and totalitarianism simultaneously. Outside their epistemological self, each had to face unimagined fear and decide how to act. In their encounters with fear, absolute meaninglessness formed an experience with a void in their coherent conscious. Each had to permit themselves to live in this void until new experiences were witnessed. For Camus, it was the French Resistance while for Wiesel it was the music of a dying violin. These experiences of connection gave Camus and Wiesel a sense of their social self. No longer alone, Camus battled and Wiesel survived. Fortunately, each also wrote and recorded their experiences for us. Their narrative gives testament to the nature of man’s free will even in its encounters with horrific evil.

Totalitarian systems are a reflection of our experiences with freedom. If our experiences with the void of knowledge returns us to a condition marked with limitations, then we place limitations on our freedom. If we experience our limitations in an extreme set of circumstances, then we create totalitarian systems that provide coherence. This coherence is necessary in order for us to envision what tomorrow will look like. For Camus and Wiesel their tomorrows were today. Their future collapsed as they encountered nothingness and all that remained were their momentary experiences. It is at that moment when they lived in the present that their morality existed. For Camus, it was solidarity with the French Resistance and for Wiesel it was his solidarity with his father. The only difference was their outcomes; Camus “refusing to bow down”\(^{21}\) and Wiesel “a corpse [gazing] back at [its reflection].”\(^{22}\)

\(^{21}\) Camus, *The Plague*, 278.
My study of Camus’ works demonstrates how complex a treatment of juxtaposing the nature of free will and the nature of evil are. We see how he attempts to describe the human condition in these terms in his thesis and afterwards by his fuller narrative of short novels and war correspondence. Camus offers us a quite different path than that which attempts to satiate our yearning for coherence. Camus pivots away from a skeptical discourse on man’s search for meaning to a course which encourages us to encounter meaninglessness with our fullest intellect. Camus provides us with a map that illustrates how humanity and nihilism co-exist, not an epistemological framework which attempts to explain why evil exists or how it can be overcome. Camus observes that we must be fully aware of our co-existence with nihilism in order to prevent a slide to a totalitarian system of thinking. Camus observes that while man is both separated from his universe and yet subject to its forces, we are equal to it and must not surrender our will for the mere comfort of coherence. Camus asserts that we have freedom beyond that which limits us as we strive to exceed our circumstances.

Camus was not wholly critical of religion rather critical of religious attempts to provide meaning to the human condition while also seemingly critical of existential attempts to do the same. Both Paneloux and Tarrou die of the plague while Rieux survives. This suggests that "either reason, grounded in human experience, answered

the riddle of human destiny or nothing did.”\textsuperscript{23} It seems as though Paneloux and Tarrou struggled against each other for Rieux’s soul much as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche struggled for Camus’. Both failed and only Rieux remained. In much the same way we see how Camu’s novels still leave an impression on us as if he were speaking about us and not to us. Camus’ perspective is not original, only the most recent. Nihilism and totalitarianism develop at the fringes of our existence and as Camus observes, “we did what was necessary.”\textsuperscript{24}

\textsuperscript{23} Henry, \textit{Voltaire and Camus: The Limits of Reason and the Awareness of Absurdity}, 249.

\textsuperscript{24} Camus, \textit{Resistance, Rebellion, and Death}, 40.
CHAPTER 6

FREEDOM

Camus’ experience with the emotions of indifference, despair and apathy suggests that these exist as manifestations of a more fundamental state of consciousness. Over a span of two decades, Camus narrates how he engages with these sensations and develops his notion of the absurd or the sense of meaninglessness. However, I do not consider these manifestations as a direct epistemological response to the study of man’s search for meaning. My study of Camus’ experiences suggests that these emotions are a direct result of his encounters with emptiness of meaning. This emptiness of meaning suggests that meaning or lack of it is more of an outcome of the human consciousness and its relationship with knowledge. The forces of nihilism and totalitarianism are a collective result of how our consciousness senses and processes our limits of knowledge. However, knowledge is a collective memory of a shared experience. What we experience prior to forming our memory is the more fundamental condition.

This condition exists outside our knowledge systems and can be confused with being in meaninglessness. This state of nihilism is not in itself a condition; rather it is a transition from cognitive to an experiential point of view. By this I mean that the transition through meaninglessness without despair and rather by courage results in the awareness of the most fundamental state of the human condition -- freedom.

We sense the limits of freedom as void of meaning, nihilism, or absolutism, totalitarianism. Our awareness of freedom in this condition results in despair or
apathy. Camus describes the absurd as an ever present condition and he revolts against it. Camus describes his revolt against meaninglessness in both *The Stranger* and *The Plague* as he resists the feelings of despair and rebels against absolutism that results in apathy. Both are preceded by a sense of indifference to our circumstances. This indifference is the most dangerous and common condition we experience. It is in this condition of indifference that we become most vulnerable to the effects of a complacent consciousness that can easily lose its freedom. Camus poignantly examined this condition in his war journals. In many respects, the Nazi state and the holocaust were a result of Europe’s indifference. The rebellion was a result of a system which imposed absolute limitations of freedom.

Camus narrates how the resistance had to struggle with the meaninglessness of its circumstances before recognizing the horror of its condition. Once the search for meaning ended, the search for freedom began. Much as meaninglessness exists at the periphery of knowledge, freedom exists at the periphery of meaninglessness. This voyage to freedom is a one-way ticket; otherwise, it would traverse meaninglessness and return to absolutism. Most importantly, this journey begins every wakeful moment so as not to fall into an indifferent daze. We have a chance of freedom when we are openly aware of the meaninglessness that permeates our existence. Camus asserts that we must always engage our absurd condition.

This thesis briefly examined this void of meaninglessness which has been him narrated by Camus, Kirkegaard and Nietzsche. Camus’ narrative of his circumstances especially during the Second World War, are more enlightening especially when
examined with Elie Wiesel’s and Hannah Arendt’s experiences. By examining Camus in relationship with both of these existentialists and his peers, we have the opportunity to develop a broader perspective upon which to study modern approaches to the problems of the human condition. The void described by Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Camus and Wiesel must be examined in comparison with descriptions of totalitarian systems by Camus and Arendt. Most significantly for students of the human condition, Camus masterfully narrates his experiences with both nihilism and totalitarianism as he peels away feelings that only give illusions of our existence. Camus seems to reach a more conscious awareness of the broader context of his circumstances than his predecessors or contemporaries did.

No longer anchored by his feelings that result from his sense of meaninglessness or absolutism, Camus asserts an active response to his existence that manifests itself as trust, courage and responsibility. These expressions of resistance to nihilism and rebellion against totalitarianism are the outcome of Camus’ search for freedom. Camus’ narrative describes his spirit and most probably suggests why he was drawn to Augustine and the Doctrine of Free Will as a younger man. Camus observes and narrates for us his experiences at the crossroads of human civilization where we found our existence bounded by totalitarianism as a result of our search for meaning in an indifferent world. Camus gives us a chance to participate in our freedom that exists outside the periphery of human knowledge and is not a cause of fear rather an opportunity of fulfillment in all its mystery.
Camus’ narrative of freedom is a style borrowed from the classics for a modern audience. Camus places human tragedy on stage and humanity as its spectators. The main character is our indifferent universe before mankind. By reversing these roles, Camus offers us a chance to reflect who we are rather than why we are. We are no longer bound to offer ourselves as entertainment to the gods; rather, human existence is an occasion to discover the fullness of our freedom in all its circumstances. Our moral response to nihilism must be resistance, while to the condition of totalitarianism it must be rebellion with all of our spirit. Both are circumstances that reflect our limitations which we encounter in our search for freedom not in our zealot search for meaning.

Camus’ "boundary experience [with the unknown gives him the] . . . freedom”¹ to engage his circumstances vigorously. Camus narrates how we sense our freedom both with despair in its meaninglessness and trust in its existence. Our freedom allows us to develop a moral response to the emptiness we experience outside our epistemological frameworks. We can engage with our human condition in a more sensible approach. Camus narrates how the classical pursuit of knowledge leaves us tragically unfulfilled and offers humanity a more conscious approach as how to engage its circumstances. While Nietzsche shuddered at Socrates last words that “life is a disease,”² Camus gave us a new allegory in The Plague. Camus asserts that the pursuit of freedom is our highest good and reminds us how it appears before us as we wake

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¹ Yalom, Existential Psychotherapy, 213.

“with the stars in [our] face”³ or as we rest “on [our] back . . . gazing up at the dome of a sky lit by the stars and moon.”⁴

Perhaps we can better understand how Camus approached the nature of freedom by finding another character in The Plague that he employs as a symbol. We examined the roles of Rieux, Tarrou and Paneloux; however it is in “Rambert [savoring] that bitter sense of freedom”⁵ that we find closure with Camus. Camus develops his characters indirectly and much like Mersault was developed as a symbol of the absurd in The Stranger, Camus develops Rambert as a symbol of freedom in The Plague. Mersault was the sole protagonist and humanity its antagonist in The Stranger; while humanity is the protagonist and the human condition its antagonist in The Plague. By developing Rambert against the backdrop of the main characters, Camus narrates how subtle our consciousness of freedom is. Throughout the novel, Camus provides Rambert for the reader to associate with while the pillars of reason, existentialism and theology debate the meaning of the human condition.

The defining scene begins with Rambert commenting that he is weary of having to start over again in his pursuit of escaping Oran to his fiancé. Rambert confronts Rieux as he asserts that the plague is Nietzsche’s eternal recurrence while exchanging existential greetings with Tarrou as they recognize similar music, St. James Infirmary. Rambert observes that morality itself is at play during his confrontation

³ Camus, The Stranger, 122.
⁴ Camus, The Plague, 232.
⁵ Ibid., 101.
with Rieux. Camus seems to borrow from *Casablanca* as he depicts Rambert much like Rick; both who picked “the losing side” in the Spanish Civil War. Camus interweaves his war journals within this scene as he reminds us that both courage and passion are necessary components in winning a war. Rambert shares how perhaps his courage during the war was not sufficient enough to overcome his lack of passion. Rambert challenges Rieux as an idealist ready to die for a cause. Rieux humbly denies that he is motivated by heroism rather duty is his call to arms. Rambert denies Rieux’s stoicism and affirms love as his highest value. This clash seems paradoxical to Tarrou as he claims that both Rambert and Rieux are “on the side of the angels.”

The novel changes tone when Tarrou points out to Rambert that Rieux’s wife is dying in a hospital away from Oran. Rambert’s subjectivism yields to the collective consciousness of the rebellion. It is at precisely this point in the novel that Camus unfolds before his reader how we contrive “to fancy [ourselves] as free men [with] . . . the power of choice.”

Camus offers quite a distinction between freedom and free will. For Camus, free will has no power to choose its circumstances, only how we participate in them. Freedom cannot be understood, only experienced. It exists outside knowledge and beyond the periphery of our limitations. We must cross the ocean of meaninglessness to the shores of freedom without despair. Camus offers our collective experiences as necessary in determining the value of the human condition. Accepting the paradoxical

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6 Ibid., 150
7 Ibid., 151.
nature of our existence is possible when we approach it together not alone. Humanity is horizontally connected in its spirit and not vertically isolated in its intellect. We are responsible to heal each other from suffering whether we understand its origins or not.

A brief pass through *The Origins of Totalitarianism* provides us a glimpse at how in the “nihilistic principle . . . everything is permitted.” By recalling the images at the onset of beginnings of Nazism we see how burning flesh was permissible after books that did not directly support the onslaught were burned. The meaninglessness of Germany’s circumstances allowed a supreme body of intellect the license of horror. At the root of Nazism was nihilism; its resulting totalitarian system of thought turned inward upon its limitations and destroyed itself and everything in its reach. It was “odious freedom” across the chasm of meaninglessness that gave courage and passion to the desperate weary, among them Camus. Many crossed and many died; however, totalitarianism was denied until another time. Perhaps, most importantly, Camus narrates to us how freedom is life’s redemption of our circumstances.

We each have another day before us, a new beginning. For some of us, we are each Adam and Christ alike. Freedom is the very tissue of our existence and redemption its blood. Our will to freedom is much subtler than the will to power. While Nietzsche narrates,

> We have left the land and have embarked. We have burned our bridges behind us -- indeed, we have gone

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8 *Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism*, 440.

9 *Camus, The Plague*, 168.
farther and destroyed the land behind us. Now little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean . . .

Camus remembers,

He drew a deep breath. Then he heard a sound of beaten water, louder and louder, amazingly clear in the hollow silence of the night.”

The will to freedom is within our collective consciousness and not a subjective notion such as the nature of free will. Freedom is a passion only fulfilled when we fully immerse in its existence and not sail across its waves. Camus is swept over the waters into Nietzsche’s ocean not by wind of faith but by the influence of trust. This nuance between faith and trust asserts that we “must pay attention to what unites us rather than to what separates us.” The meaninglessness of our suffering is as universal as any bond that unites us. Perhaps our healing also connects us both on and off the stage of life.

Camus continued his work after concluding his thesis and left us with his concept of freedom that he further expanded in his war journals and more fully examined in The Plague. At its core, Camus asks us to be open to the experience of mystery. His narrative resembles in many ways the notion of mystery within the narratives of suffering in the Christian bible. Perhaps a post-modern approach to theodicy can be balanced with Camus’ spirit that implores us to discover the grace of

12 Camus, Resistance, Rebellion, and Death, pg 73.
life. As long as we resist the tempest of despair and venture into the unknown with the same grace as those before us, we too will find ourselves redeemed from our circumstances. How human consciousness fully engages with the history of divine revelation is yet to be more fully discussed, perhaps in another thesis at another time.

This study examines how the human intellect thrives in its need for coherence while its spirit participates in the phenomena of paradox. Our response to our circumstances gives us more fulfillment than a simple epistemological exercise which offers momentary periods of illusory satisfaction in our search for meaning. It is in our courage and passion for freedom that we participate in the human condition. The will to freedom resists paradox and denies absolutism.

The first figure illustrates how Camus progressed in his written works in relationship to a more conscious awareness of nihilism and totalitarianism in the modern world. Not until he experienced the malignant nature of human suffering during the Nazi occupation of France did Camus begin to fully engage his conscious experience. It was his very act to rebel with the underground French Resistance that gave Camus a fuller experience than isolating himself behind the illusory safety of his intellect. By offering his journals indirectly\(^\text{13}\) as a way to record his thoughts during the rebellion against the Nazi occupation, we see how Camus moves away from an epistemological approach and towards a phenomenological study of the human condition. In many ways, such the use of nuclear weapons during the end of the Second World War, this time period marked a fundamental shift in human history.

\(^\text{13}\) Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death*, 19. Camus’ intention was to inspire the members of the French Resistance, such as when he asserts that “hopeless hope is what sustains us”.
Camus’ narrative gives us an early perspective into post-modern thought. Camus clearly departs from the classical and modern search for meaning to a phenomenological discovery of the human consciousness and its condition.

The second figure illustrates how freedom, nihilism and totalitarianism are inter-related. Camus asserts that we must not fear the unknown. Although meaningfulness surrounds our body of knowledge, we must still have the courage to enter its sphere in order to more fully experience our human condition. We must resist the fear of the meaningless and rebel against the totalitarian body of knowledge that only nothingness exists outside the boundaries of knowledge. Camus offers us *The Plague* as a modern adaptation to Plato’s *Allegory of the Cave.*
APPENDIX

Camus at the Crossroads of Modernity and Post-Modernism

Camus’ journey from the modern period to post-modernism was characterized by an awareness of the limits of knowledge and his fuller participation with his will to freedom.

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<thead>
<tr>
<th>Epistemological Approach</th>
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<tr>
<td>1947</td>
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<td>1944</td>
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Freedom

as an epistemological resistance of nihilism and a metaphysical rebellion against absolutism.
There is a logical consideration in the illustration of the relationship between freedom, nihilism/mystery and absolutism.

- Presume that knowledge is a means of controlling our circumstances of the human condition; our will to power.
  
  o Knowledge = Power
  
  o Knowledge/Power = 1 (Nietzsche’s Übermensch)
  
  o Knowledge and Power are reciprocal to each other.
    
    ▪ If knowledge is unlimited, then power is limited.
    
    ▪ If knowledge is limited, then control is unlimited.

- Totalitarianism is at its greatest zenith when knowledge approaches its limits; such as in our attempts to understanding the Problem of Evil.

By resisting nihilism, we limit the effects of totalitarianism.

Freedom > Knowledge (Power)
BIBLIOGRAPHY


