SMPLCTY

Ecological Civilisation and the Will to Art

SAMUEL ALEXANDER

Essays on the Aesthetics of Existence

Camus on Art and Revolt: Overcoming Nihilism in an Absurd Universe

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‘The demands of rebellion are really, in part, aesthetic demands.’

‘I *rebel* – therefore we *exist*.’

– ***Albert Camus***

Camus on Art and Revolt: Overcoming Nihilism in an Absurd Universe

Samuel Alexander

In the last two essays I addressed the problem of suffering face to face, exploring the prospect of justifying existence as an aesthetic phenomenon. I did this by engaging the philosophies of Arthur Schopenhauer and Friedrich Nietzsche. Even if an aesthetic justification were deemed plausible, however, one might still object that the case offered so far remains very incomplete. The problem of suffering may have been mitigated through the Nietzschean strategy of 'revaluation', but the spectre of nihilism remains – preliminarily defined as the threat of meaninglessness. This problem emerges in the void left by an absent God and in epistemological conditions where 'reason' is unable to provide any objective or transcendental purpose to our lives.

Here we see another aspect of philosophical pessimism that calls into question any affirmation of life. Schopenhauer framed this in terms of the 'blind striving' and 'purposelessness' of the Will, but in previous essays this point was passed over rather too quickly, as I focussed on the problem of insatiable desire and the pain this brings. To suffer is bad enough; to suffer incessantly is worse; but to suffer without meaning or purpose presents us with a spiritual or existential burden that threatens to be unbearable.

In this essay I will grapple with these issues by drawing on the writings of Algerian-born, French philosopher, Albert Camus. I begin by exploring how Camus formulated the problem of nihilism (drawing on Nietzsche), and how he suggested we could respond to our 'absurd' condition with an aesthetics of revolt.[1] After laying these foundations, I examine how Camus developed the themes of absurdity, rebellion, and solidarity in his novel *The Plague* (1947). We will see that Camus, like Nietzsche, concluded that the human condition was something that could *only* be justified as an aesthetic phenomenon. Nevertheless, Camus developed Nietzsche's position in unique and insightful ways, most notably by highlighting an aesthetic justification for human solidarity. This communitarian ethic was, of course, rather starkly absent (or at least very obscure) in Nietzsche.

Nihilism and the death of God

First stated in his book *The Gay Science,* Nietzsche's proclamation that 'God is dead'[2] was voiced through the character of a 'madman', an outsider to polite society who was brave enough to say what most people were not even prepared to think. God is dead and we have killed him – or rather, Nietzsche found God dead in the hearts and minds of his contemporaries. People were suffering from this lost faith, from a spiritual malady the nature of which was difficult to grasp. For those of us today who are living in the cultures shaped by the Christian tradition, it is fair to wonder whether this metaphysical rupture has still not been fully understood. It represents a Copernican revolution in Western culture, with theological implications that are increasingly hard to deny but which seem so difficult for many people to

accept. Even when a post-religious perspective on the human situation is embraced, it can leave one disoriented in a universe that is now empty of transcendental value.

Nietzsche saw this fundamental shift in the spiritual orientation of Europeans as something that was both 'terrible'[3] but also 'hopeful'.[4] Secularisation was a shift that he declared would unfold over coming centuries, as Western civilisation came to discover or accept that it no longer found religious belief credible. This cataclysmic change meant that the moral and cultural foundations of European society were undercut, such that the norms, values, and constitutive myths which had maintained the fabric of society for two thousand years started unravelling. Because of this, Nietzsche saw that the edifice of Western civilisation lay on the precipice of a degeneration into nihilism.

Managing this civilisational trauma involved trying to come to terms with the loss of a meaningful cosmological narrative to structure human existence. This induced a spiritual malaise that Nietzsche diagnosed so bluntly, and which still presents modernity with a problem in need of a response. As frightful as this problem may have been, I noted that Nietzsche also found it 'hopeful'. Rather than living our lives in the shadow of a non-existent Christian 'after world' – a situation Nietzsche found life-negating – he saw the death of God as an opportunity to reorientate our finite selves toward the world in which we actually find ourselves living. According to Nietzsche, this was part of what any genuine affirmation of life required, a complete commitment to living well in *this* life, in *this* world.

In the wake of God's death, however, Camus claimed that we find ourselves in a universe that is 'absurd'. Or rather, our *condition* is absurd, in the sense that we demand a meaning or purpose to our lives but find the universe wholly indifferent to this demand. Unsure of how to live, it is tempting to seek metaphysical guidance 'out there', beyond ourselves. This represents an inarticulate yearning for some external or transcendent justification that would validate our lives and give them significance and order. In Camus' play *Caligula,* the character Cherea expresses this spiritual need in the following terms:

> To lose one's life is no great matter; when the time comes I'll have the courage to lose mine. But what's intolerable is to see one's life being drained of meaning, to be told there's no reason for existing. A man can't live without some reason for living... all I wish is to regain some peace of mind in a world that has regained a meaning. What spurs me on is not ambition but fear, my very reasonable fear of that inhuman vision in which my life means no more than a speck of dust.[5]

As the existentialists of the twentieth century were fond of highlighting, this threat of meaninglessness can be experienced as a dread. It can be all the more terrible because, as dread settles upon the human consciousness, one worries that the desolate mood will never pass. It is quite understandable that, in the face of death, humans seek some explanation for their existence – some theodicy to justify lives that so often are full of suffering. Historically our species has turned to religion in an attempt to deal with this existential problem, and with respect to Europe, this strategy now has two thousand years of Judeo-Christian legacy. In the affluent West today, faith in God continues to fade, even as socio-religious practices remain. But questions about death, suffering, and the meaning of life re-emerge ever more acutely. We want our lives to make sense in the face of death and suffering, but Camus' point was that they do not make sense.

How are we to live, then, in a universe that seems to be fundamentally indifferent to our very existence? Camus maintained that '[t]he absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need [for meaning, happiness, understanding] and the unreasonable silence of the world.'[6] We find ourselves in a universe without purpose or inherent meaning, of brute 'facticity' to use Martin Heidegger's term, from which the existentialist philosophers inferred that the world-in-itself is irredeemably pointless. If there is to be a purpose to our lives, we should not expect the world to provide it.

This realisation provokes the question of how, or even whether, to keep on living in a world without any transcendental value. Like Sisyphus in Ancient Greek myth, every day human beings are condemned to roll the rock up the hill, only to see it roll down the other side, whereupon our meaningless labours and struggles must begin again. We don't know why we have been cursed with a life governed by accident, chance, and finitude. Our situation is absurd, and we suffer because of it. Despair looms on the horizon. Indeed, if the spiritual condition of modernity could be summarised in a sentence, one might say that we moderns have come to a lucid sense of desolation, of being abandoned by a God that was never there in the first place. In the words of cultural anthropologist Ernest Becker, human beings must feel like 'a locus of value in a world of meaning'[7] or suffer the most profound despair.

In the twentieth century, this existential angst was expressed powerfully in the works of writers like Sartre, Beckett, and Kafka. Camus made his own contributions to this literature, especially in his landmark essay *The Myth of Sisyphus* (1942), addressing what he considered philosophy's most serious problem: the problem of suicide.[8] Is a life without transcendental appeal even worth living? Note how this question can be raised irrespective of the answer given to the problem of suffering discussed in the last two essays. We might be able to 'revalue' the place of suffering in our lives, and affirm life despite or even because of that suffering, only to find that the problem of meaning – or meaninglessness – remains.

Of course, many people still go through the motions, engaging themselves in the mundane rituals of daily life as if their lives had some cosmic, religious significance. The implausibility of religion can be too much to bear, too threatening to one's self-image as a child of God. Some people simply deny the death of God or look away in metaphysical hope. Others are driven to make a 'leap of faith', remaining in the ruts of religious belief in fear of breaking free. They live in accordance with some religious code that was invented by other people, in a different time. In this way the individual responsibility for *choosing* how to live is deferred or abandoned. One might certainly recognise the *appeal* of metaphysical comfort – to see religious guidance and justification as *desirable*. But Camus maintained that this was ultimately a dishonest orientation toward life. There is an unbridgeable gulf between our desires for transcendent values and the universe as it is.

Nevertheless, even as Christianity in the West continues its fall, there remains a temptation to leap into some new faith, some surrogate form of transcendence. Camus saw humanity being easily seduced by dogmatic forms of rationalism, which he considered 'the most widespread spiritual attitude of our enlightened age.'[9] Industrial capitalism can be understood as the economics of rationalism, and perhaps it is no surprise that the materialistic search for meaning through consumption and accumulation coincided with the emergence of the

nihilistic threat that began crawling across Europe from around 1800. The Newtonian universe of matter governed by physical laws had become the dominant worldview, and Darwin would explain why human beings were not creatures of God but descendants of the great apes, distinguished from other animals by our ability to be aware of and imagine our own death. In a post-Darwinian cosmological order, there was no longer any need for a religious hypothesis, given that science and reason were providing some of the answers that humans were seeking.

But Camus considered the metaphysical faith in reason, like religious faith, to be a form of 'philosophical suicide'.[10] He wrote: 'During the last century, man cast off the fetters of religion', but 'hardly was he free… when he created new and utterly intolerable chains.'[11] In Camus' view, to have faith in rationality – faith in the ability of reason to answer life's most pressing questions – was little more than religiosity in a new guise. This was not in any way an 'irrationalist' position that rejected argument, logic, and evidence. It was simply an acknowledgement that Reason – with a capital R – was unable to provide objective truths about the human condition or guidance on how to live. Camus believed that to suggest otherwise was either deceitful or deluded – or both.

So what if someone were to give up *all* hope in metaphysical comfort? This was the unsettling question Camus explored throughout his life with unusual eloquence and insight. By giving up any hope for an objective justification for our lives and the promise of some future, 'other-worldly' redemption, Camus believed that we are returned to the eternally present, here and now, and yet we now find ourselves transcendentally homeless and alone:

> A world that can be defended even with bad reasons is a familiar world… On the other hand, in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity.[12]

Living without absolute values

In a world without God or objective truth, it follows that there are no 'absolute values' – at least, none that are rationally knowable or demonstrable to human beings. Upon that premise, Fyodor Dostoyevsky's character Ivan, in *The Brothers Karamazov* (1880), notoriously inferred that 'everything is permitted' and that nothing really matters. Conversely, French psychoanalyst Jacques Lacan would suggest a counter-thesis, that 'nothing is permitted', given that there is no external authority to grant such permission.[13] This is the problem of nihilism concisely defined. Nietzsche foresaw that humanity would not deal well with becoming unmoored from traditional moralities grounded in religion or metaphysics. For people had not yet come to terms with the abyss of nothingness that seemed to have been left in the wake of God's death and reason's demise. But in the absence of any orientating metanarrative, people had become so free, metaphysically speaking, that they were at risk disintegrating. The modern soul was at risk of being torn apart. Thus European culture began its descent into nihilism. This was the frightful warning Nietzsche offered. He saw it as a spiritual reorientation that modern civilisation would have to pass through, although he was uncertain how the transition would play out.

In the time Camus was writing – the mid twentieth century – these themes had to be grappled with in the shadows of Nazism and Stalinism. If excessive reason had led to the 'reign of terror' after the French Revolution, in the twentieth century the same dogmatic faith led to the murder of millions of people, justified by absolutist ideologies across the political spectrum. Camus highlighted how the vanity and hubris of reason or religion could end up justifying the violence one might have assumed reason or religion ought to have condemned. He clashed with Sartre over the way the Communist Party in Russia was justifying death as a means of advancing the march of freedom, something regrettable but permissible. Under Stalin, murder became rational, disguised as the handmaiden of human emancipation. 'One can kill for all sorts of motives,' notes philosopher and literary theorist Terry Eagleton, 'but killing on a spectacular scale is almost always the consequence of ideas.'[14] Having lost faith in God, Western culture turned to finding salvation either in ecocidal capitalist consumption or socialist revolution.

Camus explored the problem of holding absolute values in his play *The Just*.[15] One of the lead characters, Stephan, places his reasoned faith in revolution above all else, whereby 'nothing that can serve our cause should be ruled out'. He castigates his revolutionary colleagues for 'sentimentalizing' about not killing children. 'I do not love life,' he says, 'I love something higher than mere life… I love justice.'[16] Camus' concern was that when you have transcendent belief in your cause – whether rational or religious – the end can be used to justify the means, any means, however violent and deadly. 'You begin by wanting justice, and in the end you set up a police force.'[17] Perhaps what is needed is what philosopher Richard Rorty called the 'liberal ironist'. This is a citizen who recognises that there is no way reason can present a deductive proof of political ideologies, meaning that one's deepest values should always be held 'ironically,' in the sense of maintaining a certain degree of doubt about them and always being open to dialogue and revision. Camus, it seems, was a sort of liberal ironist before the term was invented.

To maintain these doubts about human rationality, however, raises problems with which we are now familiar. Life is cruel and full of arbitrary suffering, it always has been, but in an increasingly post-metaphysical age, there seems to be no transcendent standard by which to condemn this situation. In a state of spiritual exhaustion, we abide, we permit, we wait for Godot who never arrives. The spectre of nihilism has never been so present. Do we have an answer to the murderous Caligula, who, having transcended morality in order to live without any ethical constraints, sought meaning and pleasure in oppression and murder? In a post-metaphysical age, do we have a way to object to the Holocaust and the gulags?

Of course, people might *want* to be able to provide an objective argument for condemning unfathomable violence and cruelty, whether we base such a response on reason or religion. So committed are human beings to finding an answer that we easily make a leap of faith into rationality or religion simply to have an answer – any answer. This is quite understandable, for some might suggest that it is better to hold on to an implausible 'faith' if that meant avoiding what might seem to be the greater problem: having no answer to Caligula, Stalin, or the Nazis.

Serious though this problem obviously is, Camus refused to base his moral outlook upon anything outside ourselves, whether that be objective reason or God. For him, the need to find and sustain meaning in life is humanity's deepest existential source of action. 'This is civilisation's problem,' Camus asserted. 'We must know if man, solely by himself, can create his own values, without the help of rationalist thought or of the eternal.'[18] As Camus-scholar David Sprintzen writes: 'death is the only limit; beyond that all else is possibility.'[19] This places a creative burden on humankind. In an indifferent universe, there is no meaning to 'discover', no transcendent values 'out there'. We are, as Sartre famously declared, 'condemned to be free.'[20]

The language of condemnation is appropriate here. It is intended to convey the heaviness of our task, the responsibility of living on our own terms without metaphysical guidance. It is a call to accept the absolute indifference of the universe, the inevitability of death, the absence of transcendent values, and the lack of hope in any chance of redemption in some after life. These are the characteristics of life with absurd freedom after the death of God. Camus called on us to look at these facts of our condition squarely in the face and to accept the implications of this metaphysical situation. 'The important thing… is not to be cured, but to live with one's ailments.'[21]

But the problem remains: we find ourselves without external or metaphysical guidance. In a so-called postmodern age, humans are dislocated and disorientated, having lost the map and compass provided by religion and rationalism. How to decide what to do or how to live? Has not absurd reasoning cast us into a maelstrom where we are necessarily lost? If we have no reason to die, have we any reason to live? Are values, hopes, and dreams always arbitrary? This is the aesthetic moment which both Nietzsche and Camus isolate so lucidly. In the absence of something external to rely on, what's left? Their answer: our own imaginations and creativity; our aesthetic capacities; our art. Ultimately, they argued, there are no 'philosophical' or 'religious' justifications that can guide our lives. But still, we must live, somehow. This is our aesthetic burden, the burden of living in the face of the absurd – of living in creative revolt, of deciding our own fate, of finding a way to affirm it, perhaps even love it, despite everything.

Camus recognised, therefore, that the absurdity of life is not an end but a beginning.[22] It is an opportunity to take personal responsibility for ourselves without deferring to self-imposed metaphysical constraints. There may be no meaning *of* life, but meaning can be created *in* life. This, in essence, was Camus' strategy for avoiding the nihilistic conclusion that everything is meaningless and that nothing really matters. Our first act of revolt, according to Camus, is simply to continue living, to choose not to commit suicide, for suicide would merely be a Schopenhauerian renunciation or negation of life.[23] This might seem like a very small step, but it was enough for Camus to develop a more comprehensive theory of existential revolt and rebellion.

Metaphysical rebellion is a refusal to submit to the temptations of religion, metaphysics, or nihilism, while also refusing to submit to unjust living conditions or accept the degradation of human life. Camus wanted to face existence on its own terms and to explore the possibility of a meaningful life, even in an absurd condition. He explored for himself, and offered for us, 'a

lucid invitation to live and to create, in the very midst of the desert.'[24] In the absence of external sources of meaning, Camus insisted that we find ourselves at a crossroads: nihilism – or the creation of values.

We are not, therefore, locked into nihilism. We are faced with choices – choices about where and how to *invest* reality with a sense of meaning. Camus found within the problem of nihilism a means of going beyond it, of finding solidarity amongst humankind on account of the absurd existence we share. And in this shared absurdity Camus posits a dignity of the individual which leads to a dignity of the species. This creates an aesthetic universe where values can be found not in religion or metaphysics 'out there' but in recognition of our shared condition. It is an absurd situation, in which we should embrace a self-imposed duty to create, not alone, but together. In his essay 'Art and Revolt' Camus quotes Van Gogh, who once wrote: 'I can very well, in life and in painting also, do without God. But I cannot, suffering creature that I am, do without something greater than myself, something that is my life, the power to create.'[25]

To accept this is to accept there is a threshold beyond which the violation of human dignity demands rebellion, revolt. The rebel 'affirms that there are limits and also that he suspects – and wishes to preserve – the existence of certain things beyond those limits'[26] – things such as human dignity and the liberty to create. We are all burdened with the task of creating as an aesthetic project the meaning of our own lives, but we must undertake this task in a world of other life-artists, and just as we expect freedom and dignity ourselves, it is only a small step to grant that same liberty to others. 'In absurdist experience,' Camus wrote:

> suffering is individual. But from the moment when a movement of rebellion begins, suffering is seen as a collective experience – as the experience of everyone. Therefore the first progressive step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realise that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men and that the entire human race suffers from the division between itself and the rest of the world... this clue lures the individual from his solitude. Rebellion is the common ground on which every man bases his first values. I *rebel* – therefore we *exist*.[27]

Camus saw that the dominant political ideologies of his time were denying people their dignity by repressing their capacities to create. This denial of dignity was especially present in Nazism and Stalinism, but also, in different ways, in the decaying bourgeois cultures of post-Christian capitalism. Indeed, he saw that the world was dominated by humanity's equally powerful capacity to destroy. Camus claimed that a reinvigorated drive to create, to be artful in life, to search for the beauty amongst the destruction, was the only antidote to the nihilism of contemporary society. Our dignity as creators, as artists, needed to be restored, and through art and aesthetics our dignity could be restored. 'Beauty,' Camus maintained, 'cannot serve any party; it cannot serve, in the long or the short run, anything but men's liberty.'[28] Moreover, 'there is not a single true work of art that has not in the end added to the inner freedom of each person who has known and loved it.' Like Nietzsche, Camus evaluates the worth of 'art' according to its capacity to enrich and energise 'life', and certain hope resides in the fact that the human story is forever unfinished, always in the process of recreating itself.

We see, then, that art justifies itself not for its own sake but as something that can present a vision of human dignity in a world full of suffering and oppression. Through that art, which rejects the world that is, a vision can arise of a world that could yet be. Art, Camus asserts,

'rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is.'[29] It is therefore an aesthetics of commitment, solidarity, and resistance, and it can be read both from the perspective of the artist creator and with respect to the effects of art on the audience or spectator. In accepting his Noble prize in 1957, Camus said:

> I cannot live without my art. And yet I have never set that art above everything else. It is essential to me, on the contrary, because it excludes no one and allows me to live, just as I am, on a footing with all. To me, art is not a solitary delight. It is a means of stirring the greatest number of [human beings] by providing them with a privileged image of our common joys and woes.[30]

What is important to note is that Camus' response to our absurd situation was neither rationalist nor religious. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he offered no 'demonstration' of humanity's ability to affirm our absurd condition, because, like Nietzsche, he felt that reason was not up to the task. However, Camus would argue that while lucid awareness of our situation 'implies a total absence of hope'[31] in any metaphysical salvation, he insisted that this 'has nothing to do with despair'.[32] In a curious and ambiguous phrase, he claimed that the absurd emerges in 'that odd state of the soul in which the void becomes eloquent.'[33]

This is not a rational or religious claim, but an aesthetic one, grounded in feeling and sensual connection with others. 'When you have once seen the glow of happiness on the face of a beloved person,' Camus explained, 'you know that man can have no vocation but to awaken the light on the faces surrounding him.' In another well-known passage, Camus wrote: 'In the depth of the winter, I finally learned that within me there lay an invincible summer.'[34] His position was that we do not so much need to transform our thoughts as our sensibilities. This can be understood as an aesthetic challenge requiring aesthetic means, even if he felt that a certain shift in thinking must precede or coincide with that shift in sensibility. 'Having started from an anguished awareness of the inhuman, the meditation on the absurd returns at the end of its itinerary to the very heart of the passionate flames of human revolt.'[35]

Like Nietzsche, Camus saw an aesthetic justification of existence as primarily about inducing, in the life that we must lead, a positive, affective evaluation of life. As seen in an earlier essay, an aesthetic justification is not a proposition of truth about the objective value of life, but is instead, as philosopher Daniel Came argues, 'epistemologically neutral.'[36] The success or failure of an aesthetic justification thus depends not on whether it can be shown to be based on objective philosophical foundations but whether it can induce a subjective affirmation of life in ways that religious and metaphysical justifications, which are no longer credible for post-Nietzscheans, cannot.

This metaphysical rebellion has its origins in outrage, but it does not confine itself to outrage. Camus held the horrors of life in dialectical tension with the possibilities of joy in life. Even in joy, he advised, one can rebel. The existentialists (broadly defined to include Camus who rejected the label), are often, with good cause, accused of focussing exclusively on the dark side of life. Central themes reoccur, related to human angst, dread, anxiety, nausea, and so forth. But this myopia simply does not apply to Camus, who celebrated the joys of life, however fleeting and tenuous they may be. 'This heart within me I can feel, and I judge that it exists. This world I can touch, and I likewise judge that it exists. There ends all my knowledge, and

the rest is construction.'[37] He could just as well have said, the rest is creation – art. 'The absurd joy *par excellence,*' Camus wrote, 'is creation.'[38]

Thus creation of art 'constitutes an *ascesis*',[39] a term that begins to point toward the spiritual character of aesthetic practices of self-creation (an issue to be explored in a forthcoming essay).[40] 'To create is… to give a shape to one's fate.'[41] It is a yearning from within for creative expression and upon which Camus was able to construct a case for the dignity of human existence. He claimed that these are the grounds of a liberating transformation of consciousness and sensibility through personal revolt and defiant acts of creative solidarity. Camus saw *solidarity* as being the outcome of *creativity* because it was something to be achieved rather than a value-base that is somehow discovered or exists independently of human thought and action. From this perspective, it is through art that we are most able to develop a sense of solidarity, without which human community cannot maintain dignity. An artist, Camus maintained, '…if he can tell himself that finally, as a result of his long effort, he has eased or decreased the various forms of bondage weighing upon men, then in a sense he is justified…'[42] This reflects Nietzsche's point that 'the profound Greek, so uniquely susceptible to the subtlest and deepest sufferings… was saved by art, and through art life reclaimed him…'[43] The aim of art, according to Camus, and the aim of life, 'can only be to increase the sum of freedom and responsibility to be found in every [human being] and in the world.'[44] Art is not for art's sake, therefore, but for life's sake.

To exalt certain aspects of the world is precisely the task of giving aesthetic form to content of existence. That is a task both for the artist as conventionally understood as well as the artists of life – all of us – who are tasked with creating meaning in an objectively meaningless universe. Art is an inherently creative process that gives rise to something – a connection, a feeling, a negation, or affirmation – that was absent before. 'Rebellion, from this point of view, is a fabricator of universes. This also defines art. The demands of rebellion are really, in part, aesthetic demands.'[45]

Accordingly, Camus argued that it is the role of the artist to give form to this world in ways that leaves room for or demands an affirmation too: 'revolt is creative.'[46] 'No form of art,' he insisted, 'can survive on total denial alone… To create beauty, [the artist] must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain aspects of it. Art disputes reality but does not hide from it.'[47] Given that art was Camus' primary method of communication, it makes sense to give due regard to that aesthetic method by trying to understand his outlook on the human condition via his art. In that spirit, I now turn to consider his great novel *The Plague*, one with strikingly pertinent overtones in the era of COVID-19.[48]

Absurdity, revolt, and solidarity in 'The Plague'

The story begins at a time 'before plague'. The city of Oran is described by the narrator as a large French port on the Algerian coast, a colonial settlement distinguished only by its ordinariness. So ordinary, in fact, that everyone agreed that the extraordinary events that took place there seemed, as it were, out of place. It could be any city of industry and trade around the world, increasingly without birds, gardens, or even the rustle of leaves. In short, Oran was an ugly, thoroughly negative place. Disenchantment came naturally within its gates.

We are told that the citizens work hard, 'but solely with the object of getting rich.' Their chief interest is in commerce, and their chief aim in life is, as they call it, 'doing business.' With a modest qualification the narrator admits that the people of Oran 'don't eschew such simpler pleasures as love-making, sea-bathing, and going to the pictures.' But we are told they reserve these pastimes for the weekend, and employ the rest of the week 'in making money, as much of it as possible.'

These pursuits, practised with a feverish yet casual air, are not peculiar to the city of Oran, of course. It could be any contemporary industrial settlement. In other words, the city was 'completely modern', and after a while, the narrator warns, 'you go complacently to sleep there.' In the rush for material riches and accumulation, one gets the sense that the forces of capitalist dehumanisation had crept into the town well before the plague arrived. It is little wonder that the city itself is sometimes described as one of the book's central characters, along with the narrator and the plague itself.

We know that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world, yet the narrator accurately notes that 'somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from a blue sky.' They always take people by surprise. And so the story begins. Dr Bernard Rieux, a central figure in *The Plague*, stepped out of his surgery only to discover a dead rat underfoot in the middle of the landing. Without giving it further thought he kicked it to one side, but as he was leaving the building the doctor mentioned the incident to the door-porter and kindly asked that he see to the rat's removal. 'There weren't no rats here', the door-porter replied.

In vain Dr Rieux assured the door-porter that there *was* a rat, presumably dead, but the man's conviction wasn't to be shaken. 'There weren't no rats here', the door-porter repeated, with a closed mind. But if there was a rat, he added, it was brought in from the outside. Sadly, the reader soon discovers that the door-porter is the first person to die of the plague, despite there being no rats.

What began with one dead rat soon became a disturbing nuisance as numbers multiplied by the day, gutters and dustbins full of them, blood spurting from their mouths. The rats became a great topic of conversation, and 'wild rumours' of the cause and meaning of the phenomenon abounded. People began to die, especially the poor, in tortuous ways and in growing numbers. In usual classist fashion, when people who were *not* poor also began to get ill and die, it was then that fear truly set in. 'A wave of something like panic swept the town,' and after the disease was named 'there was a demand for drastic measures' and 'the authorities were accused of slackness.'

As the infection rate and death count both rose in 'geometrical progression', emergency measures were contemplated. The townspeople were advised to 'practice extreme cleanliness' and 'households were ordered to promptly report any fever diagnosed by their doctors and to permit the isolation of sick members of their families in special wards.' Furthermore, all those who had been in contact with patients 'were advised to consult the sanitary inspector and strictly follow advice.' The people of Oran didn't have the technological capacity to develop surveillance apps, but they did their best to monitor the 'strange malady' – the danger of which still seemed 'fantastically unreal.'

Such efforts, however, were unable to stem the flow of infections and there was no vaccine. Medical supplies became scarce and often insufficient. Before long the hospital wards reached capacity, then the cemeteries, and even the crematoriums were struggling to keep up with the influx of plague-ridden bodies. The formalities at funerals were whittled down and of necessity conducted at lightning speeds, often without families present, to minimise risk. At first this was a cause of social outrage, but in time, as more pressing needs for survival emerged, 'people had no time to think of the manner in which others were dying around them.'

Dr Rieux, who was a prime adviser to the government on medical questions, became conscious that 'the slightly dazed feeling which came over him when he thought about the plague was growing more pronounced.' Finally he realised what he meant: 'simply that he was afraid.' The doctor worked extremely long hours combating the disease, distancing himself emotionally from the pain and suffering of its victims so he could continue his work. 'There's not a question of heroism in all this,' he tells his friend. 'It's a matter of common decency.' That's an idea which he thinks might make some people smile or scoff, but it's the only thing he believes can combat the plague: common decency; helping each other out; doing what one can, even or especially if one is facing a 'never-ending defeat.'

Occasionally there were days when only a few deaths were reported and people began to wonder whether perhaps the spread of infection was beginning to wane. But then the death count shot up vertically. Finally, the authorities got alarmed and jolted into action. An official telegram read: '*Proclaim a state of plague Stop close the town.'* Suddenly citizens woke to discover that the city was in lockdown. The borders were closed and 'commercial activity ceased abruptly' and 'no vehicle had entered since the gates closed.' Traffic thinned out progressively until few vehicles were on the roads or in the air; most shops were closed, and others began to put up '*Sold out'* notices while crowds of buyers stood waiting at their door. Naturally, the epidemic 'spelt the ruin of the tourist trade,' and more generally everyone testified that commerce itself 'had died of the plague.' All this will sound rather familiar to contemporary readers who lived through the COVID-19 pandemic, and the similarities do not end there.

The authorities soon became anxious about food supply, and profiteers were offering, at enormous prices, various essential foodstuffs and products not found in the shops. The result was that 'poor families were in great straits, while the rich were short of practically nothing.' That said, 'the plague was no respecter of persons and under its despotic rule everyone, from the Governor down to the humblest delinquent, was under sentence and, perhaps for the first time, impartial justice reigned in the prison.' There was a story of a grocer who had laid by masses of tinned provisions 'with the idea of selling them later on at a big profit.' When the ambulance arrived to take him to the morgue, several dozen tins of meat were found under his bed. A rather unpoetic justice. In a similar vein, peppermint lozenges had vanished from the chemists' shops, 'because there was a popular belief that when sucking them you were proof against contagion.' Better still, as the citizens of Oran would try to show: 'The best protection against infection is a good bottle of wine, which confirmed an already prevalent opinion that alcohol is a safeguard against infectious disease.'

One of the principal themes of *The Plague* – both Camus' story and its contemporary retelling in the Coronaverse – is the torment of human separation. Dr. Rieux's wife had left the city for (unrelated) health reasons only days before the city gates were shut, keeping them apart during the epidemic. Similarly, a journalist called Raymond Rambert had been visiting Oran to gather information for a story just as the city went into quarantine. He was now desperate to find a way out to reunite with his love, although his repeated pleas to the authorities proved ineffective. Such separations might feel like a 'special case', he was told, but they rarely are, and the authorities politely but firmly advised that no exceptions were to be made. Rambert, for the time being, was stuck in Oran's sick bubble.

The citizens of Oran were all 'prisoners of the plague' and in exile, but an 'exile in one's own home.' People came to see so many of life's simplest and richest of pleasures had been taken for granted. As one citizen of Oran was to admit: 'We'll all be nuts before long, unless I'm much mistaken.' Burdensome though the disruption was for the citizens of Oran, in this separation people were not alone. Or, if they were alone, they were alone, *together*. The narrator notes: 'a feeling normally as individual as the ache of separation from those one loves suddenly became a feeling in which all shared alike and – together with fear – the greatest affliction of the long period of exile that lay ahead.'

The world may be cruel and repugnant, but we should live in solidarity with those who suffer in it. That, fundamentally, was Camus' ethic. His most famous existentialist novel, *The Outsider*,[49] did not uphold such an ethic, and so *The Plague* represents an evolution in the direction of solidarity and participation. Whether it is the plague or COVID-19, a common tragedy makes our collective predicament evident to all, thereby establishing, in the words of one commentator, 'the minimal conditions for bringing humans together in a collective effort.' We see this in how several characters responded to the ambiguous challenge of the plague. The journalist Rambert, after losing his battle with the authorities to gain permission to leave, is introduced to some smugglers who organise for his escape (at a hefty fee). But on the evening when the escape was supposed to take place, Rambert goes to Dr Rieux and explains that he cannot leave. 'I always thought that I was a stranger in this town and that I had nothing to do with you. But now that I have seen what I have seen I know that I belong in this place whether I like it or not. This business concerns us all.'

The doctor asks about Rambert's need to reunite with his lover and the journalist responds that he'd feel ashamed if he left. Dr Rieux counters saying that there is nothing wrong with pursuing happiness – at least, he has no arguments against it. 'Certainly,' Rambert says, 'but it may be shameful to be happy by oneself.' Here we see one of the most powerful symbolic moments in the book, where a person chooses meaning and struggle over personal happiness, only to discover – promisingly – that a life of meaning and purpose can make one happy, albeit in a different sort of way.

Inspiring but also challenging in a different way is the character of Jean Tarrou, a good-natured man who arrived in Oran some weeks before the plague and who became a close friend of Dr Rieux. One of Tarrou's central contributions to the novel is to organise a grassroots assistance (resistance) movement, working with Dr Rieux to combat the spread of the infection and help communities in need. We come to understand Tarrou's driving force later in the book

when we learn that his father was a prosecuting attorney who tried death penalty cases. After attending one of those trials as a boy, the young Tarrou recognised in himself an innate disgust for the death penalty, which he regarded as state-sponsored murder. Ever since then his moral orientation in the world involved fighting against unnecessary suffering and killing. 'There is something lacking in my mental make-up', he says, 'and its lack prevents me from being a rational murderer.' He even gave up revolutionary activism when he saw the same urge to violence amongst his fellow political agitators. He interprets the plague metaphorically, as much a spiritual disease as a physical one.

'I've drawn up a plan for voluntary groups of helpers,' Tarrou tells the doctor. 'Get me empowered to try out my plan, and then let's sidetrack officialdom. In any case, the authorities have their hands full already.' In this engaged spirit, Tarrou forms what come to be called 'sanitary squads', which can be understood as small self-organising activist communities that did what needed to be done to help minimise suffering amidst the crisis. They proved to be effective, necessary even, especially given an overwhelmed bureaucracy.

Tarrou accuses the authorities of a lack of imagination in their response to the plague. 'Officialdom can never cope with something really catastrophic.' Fiercely moralistic, Tarrou says he is seeking peace by trying to become a 'saint without God.' Less ambitious but equally committed is Dr Rieux, who works tirelessly to reduce suffering where he can, just because it is the decent thing to do.

Neither Tarrou nor the doctor subscribe to the Christian response to the health crisis, which involved organising a 'Week of Prayer'. Father Paneloux is a well-respected Jesuit priest, known for giving powerful and chastising lectures. In his first sermon after the plague arrives he berates his congregation for their laxity and declares that the plague is a just punishment. 'Calamity has come on you, my brethren, and you deserved it.'

Later in the book Father Paneloux delivers a second sermon, but by this time his message has shifted. The priest had been present at the death of a small child who suffered violently before dying, and this suffering of an innocent child casts his faith into question. He no longer sees the plague as punishment. But rather than give up his faith he only embraces it more fervently, insisting that, while the child's suffering has no rational explanation, that simply means people need to throw themselves unquestioningly into their faith. This is despite the apparent contradiction of a loving God allowing the suffering of innocents to occur. Soon after this sermon, Father Paneloux develops a condition that, without quite being the plague, shares many of its symptoms. Consistent with his own conception of faith, the priest refuses medical treatment and dies.

Perhaps the simplest and most inspiring expression of solidarity in the novel comes from the old government clerk, Joseph Grand. When a neighbour, Cottard, attempts to commit suicide, Dr Rieux looks around for someone to keep an eye on him. Without thinking twice, Grand is there to lend a hand. 'I can't really say I know him, but one's got to help a neighbour, hasn't one?' If citizens in crisis begin with that ethic of mutual aid, then the community will survive a plague, no matter how bad it gets. The suicidal Cottard represents the opposite sort of character. Before the plague he was ready to kill himself, but he is somehow uplifted by the

onset of the plague and the suffering it causes others. He is happier during the epidemic, because it has made him feel part of the group.

Grand's significance in the novel, however, goes deeper still, beyond his noble assumption of mutual obligation and care. Despite needing to earn his livelihood as a poorly paid government clerk, and being of old age, he eagerly commits with 'quiet courage' to assist in the fight against the plague at every opportunity. Given work commitments, he tells Tarrou he can assist from six till eight every evening. Beyond his activism, this humble bureaucrat spends any spare time and energy he has working on a novel. As it turns out, he is also a literary perfectionist (but one without much ability), and for a long time he has merely been writing and endlessly re-writing the first sentence, unwilling to move on until he is sure he has sufficiently polished the opening line. This process is absurd, but upliftingly absurd, for it is clear that life, for Grand, is enchanted. He is animated to participate in a troubled world. He does not seek meaning 'out there'. He creates it by living it into existence, here and now, refusing to be dominated by the plague's dehumanising power.

Contrast this with Dr Rieux's elderly asthma patient, who is convinced that life has no meaning, and so decides the best way to live is to do as little as possible. He chooses to spend his time in bed, mindlessly transferring dried peas from one pot to another, a mechanical activity which happens to tell him when it's time to eat. It is the bare minimum needed to survive. This fellow is also absurd, but decidedly in a less uplifting sort of way. It would be better to call this form of life silly, shallow, or even cowardly. Life in a universe without metaphysical foundations is inherently absurd, according to Camus. What matters then is what we do with our absurd existence.

One afternoon Tarrou and Rieux go swimming together. Even this can be read as an act of rebellion, in the midst of struggle – a means of seeking regeneration in sensuous experience as a path on which the struggle can be continued. Friends swimming together in the ocean allowed for happiness, however momentary, even during the grim struggle against the disease. 'For some minutes they swam side by side, with the same zest, in the same rhythm, isolated from the world, at last free of the town and of the plague… They dressed and started back. Neither had said a word, but they were conscious of being perfectly at one, and that the memory of this night would be cherished by them both.'

At a superficial level, *The Plague* is simply a well-crafted and aesthetically satisfying story. But such literal interpretations are rarely what an author intends. Beneath the surface Camus is also pointing to the plague as a symbol for the Nazi occupation of Paris during the war – he began writing the book in the early 1940s. In some regards this is a problematic storytelling metaphor, for by 'naturalising' the Nazis into a disease, the manifestation of fascism became the workings of nature rather than deliberate human choices. It also sidesteps a central theme in Camus' work: the philosophical problem of whether it is ever justified to use violence to resist evil. Given that nobody has an ethical problem with killing viruses, this metaphor doesn't entirely work.

This problem is highlighted in Dr Rieux's own words: 'What is natural is the microbe. All the rest, health, integrity, purity, if you like, is an act of will.' There are various ways to respond to crisis situations, whether those crises be health, environmental, financial, political, or spiritual. Human societies may not always be able to avoid diseases and natural disasters. It follows that the social and political challenge is to manage those crises with compassion and solidarity when they arrive, knowing that 'no longer [are there] individual destinies, only a collective destiny.' This is the solidarity that flows, or ought to flow, from separation under lockdown.

In true existentialist fashion, Camus also makes it clear that he is commenting more broadly on the human condition, summed up best perhaps in the words of Tarrou: 'I had plague already, long before I came to this town and encountered it here. Which is tantamount to saying I'm like everybody else.' As the novel concludes we learn that Dr Rieux's wife has died from her illness outside the city walls. Just as tragically, Tarrou is one of the last people to die from the plague, although he doesn't leave the world without a heroic fight. These deaths are Camus' way of saying that, even after beating the plague, suffering is part of the human condition and will ever remain so.

Nevertheless, what makes Camus' work so edifying and surprisingly uplifting is that one closes the book somehow more cognisant of the simple joys of ordinary existence – joys like swimming in the sea or having dinner with friends. And one becomes more cognisant of the sublime responsibility of personal freedom, heavy though it weighs on us in an absurd universe. After reading *The Plague* – or living in the Coronaverse – one is less likely to take such things for granted. The simple things, the human connections, are the fabric of life and give it meaning. And they are worth fighting for – together.

As to be expected, the plague eventually passes, and the gates of Oran are reopened. The city bursts into festivities and celebration. People discover, however, that 'destruction is an easier, speedier process than reconstruction,' but this task was made easier to the extent people were enchanted by 'an inkling of something different.' And even though the fight for a new world probably meant a 'never-ending defeat', Dr Rieux insisted that this is 'no reason for giving up the struggle.'

Why did Dr Rieux (who is finally revealed as the narrator) continue to struggle? 'So as not to be one of those who are silent, so as to testify in favour of these victims of the plague, so as to leave at least a memory of the injustice and the violence which was done to them and so as to tell simply what one learns amongst scourges, that there are in men more things to be admired than despised.' Resistance was offered not because people had expectations of succeeding but because the plague was robbing people of their dignity and life. Camus concludes: '[r]evolt gives life its value.'[50]

The Plague ends, however, with a warning: the bacillus of the plague can lie dormant for years 'in furniture and linen-chests' and may again one day awaken its rats and 'send them to die in a happy city.' It follows that overcoming the plague can never be one of final victory. It merely points to what might need to be done again 'in the never ending fight against terror and its

relentless onslaughts… by all who, while unable to be saints but refusing to bow down to pestilences, strive their utmost to be healers.'

Conclusion

In this essay I have considered Camus' framing of the human condition and outlined how he responded with an aesthetics of revolt. He described the human condition as 'absurd' on the basis that we seem to have an innate urge for meaning in our lives, and yet upon philosophical reflection, we find the universe wholly indifferent to this demand. No objective or rationally demonstrable meaning can be discerned from the world, and to make a 'leap of faith' into religion is to deny one's own freedom by deferring to a foundationless code of living that lies outside of oneself.

Modern, secular humanity thus finds itself at a crossroads – nihilism or the creation of values. Camus' life project – which ended in a tragic car accident in 1960 when he was only 46 – was to see if it were possible for human beings to live only by their own values. This remains an open question, especially in an age when nihilism seems to be threatening to overwhelm the dominant culture of global capitalist society as never before. But Camus held that human solidarity could emerge from our shared absurd condition. This recognition was not grounded in reason, as such, but in our affective capacity to feel pain, suffering, and humiliation, and to recognise that there is a limit beyond which the loss of dignity in life demands revolt. Through rebellion solidarity is born: 'I *rebel* – therefore we *exist*.' Nevertheless, this is not a truth to be discovered but rather an orientation of values that must be created and *felt*. As we have seen, Camus highlighted the role of art and aesthetics in rebellion, showing how the task of choosing one's values makes aesthetic demands on us, and moreover, how art and creativity can help expose the injustices of the world and evoke images of a better, more humane, and liberated world.

I wish to close this essay by briefly anticipating a point of criticism about this strategy of holding up art and the aesthetic as viable substitutes for religious or metaphysical faith. In his book *Culture and the Death of God* (2015),[51] Terry Eagleton provides an erudite examination of this strategy, critically reviewing the historical attempts to place art and culture in the void created by the death of God and the loss of faith in pure reason. Despite acknowledging the power of the critiques provided by Nietzsche and others in the diverse post-religious and post-metaphysical traditions, Eagleton argues that the various attempts to find a substitute for religion have, to date, largely failed. Even the Enlightenment philosophers, Eagleton writes:

> paid too little heed to the fact that local customs, pieties and affections are the places where power must embed itself if it is to flourish. Otherwise, it will appear too abstract and remote to be assured of its subjects' allegiance. There can be no effective sovereignty without a foundation in lived experience, which is one reason why Reason feels the need for a kind of supplement or prosthesis known as the aesthetic. For the most part, Enlightenment Reason lacked a corporeal presence, which the German Idealists and Romantics would seek to restore.[52]

Nevertheless, in his critical assessment of the German Idealists and Romantics, Eagleton saw that they essentially made the same error as the rationalists who sought to find answers in 'reason' rather than 'faith'. The case for art and culture, Eagleton maintains, has always been

'too cerebral',[53] at most a plausible substitute in the eyes of some philosophers and elite practitioners of the fine arts, but something unable to replace the daily practices, experiences, and rituals that are required to bind a community together. It is precisely those daily practices, experiences, and rituals that have made religion so hard to replace from a social perspective, even in so-called secular societies.

As I mulled over Eagleton's thesis, I found myself drawn to the aesthetics and politics of William Morris (a thinker to which Eagleton only makes passing reference in his analysis). In ways I will explore in detail in a later essay, Morris brings art into 'the everyday' in ways that I believe sidesteps the critique Eagleton made of the German Idealists and Romantics. For post-Nietzscheans who have lost faith in religious and rational sources of guidance in life, art and culture can present themselves as coherent and compelling alternatives, and yet, as Eagleton highlights, the aesthetic can easily remain too cerebral and abstract to be translated into everyday social practices. That critique simply does not apply to William Morris, who sought to blur the distinction between artist and artisan, by defining art as the expression of pleasure (and I would add meaning) in creative labour.[54] Eagleton is surely correct to state that '[n]o symbolic force in history has matched religion's ability to link the most exalted of truths to the daily existence of countless men and woman.'[55] That may be so historically, but I will argue, drawing on Morris, that the past has not exhausted the range of options available. If a society were able to bring art into the practices and rituals of everyday living, then there is no reason that the aesthetic could not bind a community together in ways that to date only religion has been able to do. I plant the seed of this argument presently, but there is still a fair way to go before I am ready to develop or reconstruct Morris' aesthetic politics in more detail. In the next essay I address a different criticism of aestheticism, one that emerges in relation to the tradition of Dandyism.

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[1] I will draw mainly from Camus' two major philosophical works. See Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (London: Penguin, 2000); and Albert Camus*, The Rebel* (London: Penguin, 2000).
[2] Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage Books, 1974). p. 108.
[3] Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (New York: Vintage Books, 1969), Essay III, 27.
[4] Ibid.
[5] Albert Camus, *Caligula,* in Albert Camus, *The Collected Plays of Albert Camus* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965), p. 21.
[6] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, pp. 31-2.
[7] Quoted in David Sprintzen, *Camus: A Critical Examination* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1988), p. 17.
[8] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, p. 11.
[9] Ibid, p. 43.
[10] Ibid, p. 32.
[11] Camus, *Rebel*, note 1, p. 243.
[12] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, p. 13.
[13] See Jacques Lacan, *The Ego in Freud's Theory and in the Technique of Psychoanalysis* (New York: Norton, 1998), p. 128.
[14] Terry Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2015) p. 32.
[15] Albert Camus, *The Just,* in Albert Camus, *The Collected Plays of Albert Camus* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1965).

[16] Ibid, p. 130.
[17] Ibid, p.160.
[18] Quoted in Sprintzen, *Camus,* note 7, p. 17.
[19] Ibid, p. 20.
[20] Jean-Paul Sartre, *Existentialism and Humanism* (London: Methuen and Co, 1970), p. 34.
[21] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, pp. 40-1.
[22] See Sprintzen, *Camus,* note 7, p. 47.
[23] Camus, *Rebel*, note 1, p. 19.
[24] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, p. 7.
[25] Albert Camus, 'Art and Revolt' (1952) *Partisan Review* 29:3: p. 272.
[26] Camus, *Rebel*, note 1, p. 19.
[27] Ibid, p. 28.
[28] Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York: Knopf, 1961), p. 267.
[29] Camus, *Rebel*, note 1, p. 219.
[30] Albert Camus, 'Nobel Prize Speech' (1957). Available at:
https://www.nobelprize.org/prizes/literature/1957/camus/speech/ (accessed 18 April 2023).
[31] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, p. 34.
[32] Ibid.
[33] Ibid, p 19.
[34] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, p. 7. Minor amendment to translation to accord with the better-known version.
[35] Ibid, p. 62.
[36] Daniel Came (ed.), *Nietzsche on Art and Life* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014) p. 42 (emphasis removed).
[37] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, p. 24.
[38] Ibid, p. 86.
[39] Ibid, p. 104.
[40] Camus wrote: 'Thus we make these lives into works of art. In an elementary fashion we turn them into novels. In this sense, everyone tries to make his life into a work of art.' Camus, *Rebel*, note 1, p. 227.
[41] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, p. 106.
[42] Quoted in Sprintzen, *Camus,* note 7, p. 240.
[43] Fredrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, trans. Walter Kaufmann (New York: Vintage, 1967), Sect. 7.
[44] Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion, and Death* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), p. 240.
[45] Camus, *Rebel*, note 1, p. 221.
[46] Camus, 'Art and Revolt', note 25, p. 281.
[47] Camus, *Rebel*, note 1, p. 223-4.
[48] The following review draws on Samuel Alexander and Brendan Gleeson, *Urban Awakenings: Disturbance and Enchantment in the Industrial City* (Singapore: Palgrave, 2021), Ch. 17. Given the large number of quotations drawn from *The Plague*, I will not reference each one, so as not to clutter the text. Unless otherwise referenced, they are all from Albert Camus, *The Plague*. In Stuart Gilbert (ed., trans.) *The Collected Fiction of Albert Camus* (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1960).
[49] Albert Camus, 1960. *The Outsider*, In Camus, *The Collected Fiction*, note 48.
[50] Camus, *Myth*, note 1, p. 54.
[51] Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, note 14.
[52] Ibid, pp. 32-3.
[53] Ibid, p. 56.
[54] See William Morris, 'Preface to the Nature of Gothic' in William Morris, *News from Nowhere and Other Writings* (London, Penguin, 2004), p. 367 ('the lesson which Ruskin here teaches us is that art is the expression of man's pleasure in labour').
[55] Eagleton, *Culture and the Death of God*, note 14, p. 122.