

From his Doctoral Thesis to *The Fall*: Evil through Albert Camus's Eyes

Doktora Tezinden *Düşüş*'e kadar Albert Camus'nün Gözünden Kötülük Kavramı

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Abstract

The purpose of this essay is to examine from Albert Camus's point of view, the problem of evil, as it keeps evolving throughout his works. First appearing in his doctoral thesis entitled Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism, and reaching its culmination in his last complete novel, *The Fall*, evil remains as an ever-disturbing problem for Camus. The essay touches on several of Camus's works on the problem of evil, but it keeps its focus on the two of his works mentioned above, namely, *The Fall* and his doctoral thesis. Camus scrutinizes evil by questioning its sources. When he considers the sources, he thinks it is almost impossible to posit the idea with the benevolent Christian God. What is more, being an atheist, he does not believe that God exists. These make him turn to other possible sources, and the second concept within which he searches for evil is the absurd. However, it does not take him long to place the absurd among values and not consider it as evil. The reason is that despite the fact that the absurd appears, at first glance, to be sheer meaninglessness, and thus, a kind of end, Camus can see that it is in fact a new beginning. It provides man with new energy and enthusiasm to start over and to furnish life with meaning and values of his own. What, then, generates evil? Camus states that evil comes from two sources: death and man. These two sources are closely related and should be considered together. He claims that death is a constant source of horror for man since it is unavoidable. It steals from man his future, makes life look futile and leaves no room for hope. Man, the second source, harbours evil in his heart. His fear of death may make him use any kind of malignancy in order to fight against it—a case we see in Clamence, the main character in *The Fall*. In addition to searching for its sources, Camus discusses whether man can evade evil or whether he is doomed to be subjugated by it. He also looks for ways of overcoming it—if there happens to be any. The essay attempts both to call attention to Camus's approach to evil and bring to light and give due emphasis to his doctoral thesis, which, so far, has remained almost untouched.

Keywords: Evil, fall, judge-penitent, justice, guilt

Öz

Bu yazının amacı, Albert Camus'nün yapıtlarında sürekli yer alan ve giderek gelişen 'kötülük' kavramını Camus'nün bakış açısından incelemektir. Camus kötülükten hep rahatsızlık duymuş, konuyu Hıristiyan Metafizigi ve Yeniplatonculuk başlıklı doktora tezinde ele almaya başlamış ve tamamlanmış son romanı *Düşüş*'te bu konudaki görüşlerini en derin biçimiyle okuyucuya sunmuştur. Bu yazıda Camus'nün farklı yapıtlarına da değinilmekle birlikte, doktora tezi ve *Düşüş*'e odaklanılmıştır. Camus öncelikle kötülüğün kaynağını bulmak ister. Konuyu dinsel yönden düşündüğünde kötülüğün Tanrı'dan gelemeceğini belirtir çünkü merhametli bir tanrıda kötülüğün

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de bulunması bir çelişki yaratmaktadır. Zaten Camus de bir ateist olarak Tanrı'ya inanmadığı için kaynağı başka yerlerde aramayı uygun bulur ve bu kez 'uyumsuz'un kötülüğe neden olup olamayacağını düşünür. Ancak, bu düşünceden kısa sürede vazgeçer çünkü uyumsuzun bir değer olduğunu, baştan yaşamı amaçsız ve boş kılan bir sonmuş gibi görünse de, temelde yaşama anlam katan, insanın kendi değerlerini kendisinin bulmasını sağlayan yeni bir başlangıç olduğunu belirtir. O halde, kötülük nereden gelmektedir? Camus'ye göre, kötülüğün iki kaynağı vardır: Ölüm ve insan. Bu iki kaynak birbiriyle iç içe geçmiş olduğundan, bir arada değerlendirilmelidir. Ölüm, kaçınılmaz oluşu nedeniyle, aslında bir korku ve dehşet kaynağıdır. İnsandan geleceğini çalar, onu umutsuzluk içinde bırakır. Kötülüğün ikinci kaynağı ise insandır; kötülüğü yüreğinde gizler ve ölümün saldırdığı dehşete karşı koyabilmek için her türlüşünü ortaya çıkarıp kullanmakta tereddüt etmez. Düşüş'ün kahramanı Clamence buna iyi bir örnektir. Bu yazı, Camus'nün kötülük kaynaklarının neler olduğunu incelemenin yanısıra, Camus'ye göre insanın kötülükten kaçıp kaçamayacağını, kötülüğe boyun eğmek zorunda olup olmadığını ve—varsa—kötülüğü yenmenin yollarının neler olabileceğini de işlemekte, bir yandan Camus'nün yapıtlarındaki kötülük kavramının niteliğine ışık tutmayı, diğer yandan da, Camus'nün günümüze dek neredeyse hiç el atılmamış olan doktora tezine dikkatleri çekmeyi istemektedir.

Anahtar sözcükler: Kötülük, düşüş, yargıç-tövbekâr, adalet, suç

The problem of evil has a permanent occupation in man's mind. Theistic philosophers and thinkers have been confronted with the classical questions of how and why the world is full of evil despite the existence of a God that is both benevolent and omnipotent. While they struggle in vain to find an answer to these questions, atheistic and existentialist philosophers employ a different approach to the issue. They keep searching for answers to questions such as "What is the meaning of life?", "Why is there death?" or "Where does evil come from?" As an existentialist, Albert Camus is also naturally interested in the answers to these questions. In his novel, *The Fall*, he delves into the heart of evil, in an effort to find its source and to reveal its relationship to man. In this paper, evil will be handled from Albert Camus's viewpoint, especially as he sees it in *The Fall*, with references to his doctoral thesis, *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*, which presents ideas and views, some of which seem to be the source for those he defends or refutes in *The Fall*, and still some others ironically supportive of what he discloses in the character of Clamence. The theses that Camus puts forth are interesting for the reader to ponder.

In order to scrutinize how Camus approaches evil, one needs first to consider his views on religion and the absurd. Being an atheist and an existentialist—despite the fact that he rejects the latter title—Camus has no religious faith. He firmly believes that life can be lived without the conventional divine power or powers to guide it. Neither is there life after death, he thinks. He remarks that death does not open up a new life but it is like a closed door.¹ But the problem is that man, so far, has gotten so used to the domination of religion and God that he does not know how to behave without the guidance they provide him with. Men of religion always believe that there needs to be a divine power that they can turn to for refuge, salvation or self-confidence. Aware of the situation, Camus tries to show how man can still be creative, content and spiritually sound even if he does not believe in God. Arnaud Corbic explains Camus's approach to the matter. He states that Camus rejects the kind of religious logic of consolation that advocates reaching out for God to conceal one's fears or impotence, to justify one's incapability of dealing with life, or to hide one's refusal to accept reality—or the absurd—or, [that,] as a last resort, [advocates] reaching out for a God for whom one does not feel

1 Corbic, 2007, p. 139. "Il ne me plaît pas de croire que la mort ouvre sur une autre vie. Elle est pour moi une porte fermée."

that one needs when everything goes well.² Camus's argument is, in fact, that man should be able to survive even if things go badly.

Camus has his reasons for rejecting God. One reason is that he contends that man can see and comprehend solely what is within his grasp—and that happens to be the world he lives in. As he cannot know anything further, man has a hard time reconciling the values and concepts that belong to this world with a transcendental authority. Secondly, Camus finds it difficult, or almost impossible, to reconcile the concept of a benevolent God with the presence of evil. Nor can he agree with the view that one reason for God's existence is to punish the wrongdoers. As he mentions in *The Fall*, man by himself is sufficient to create guilt and to punish one another so that no God is necessary to that end. Besides, he argues that man's desire to become God does not go with his craving for the presence of a God to rely on.

Camus makes various entries in his diaries reflecting his opinion of Christianity. He writes in one of them, "Behind the cross, the devil. Leave them together. Your empty altar is elsewhere."³ He is against Christianity because it is dogmatic and restrictive. His advice, therefore, is to turn away from Christianity, together with its preachings and principles, towards an empty altar, to furnish it the way one chooses in one's freedom.

In fact, Camus has faith in man rather than in God. He thinks that the Christian God is not benevolent and if one is to believe in God, one also ought to admit that God is despotic and that He is the cause of pain and death.

Another point that bothers Camus about God is that God symbolizes power, but then, whoever has power tends to be unjust. Camus calls attention to the link between power and justice arguing that the two concepts are inseparable, and even when it is used well, "Good power is the healthy and careful administration of injustice."⁴ So he is afraid that God may be inclined to act unjustly, too. Besides, according to existentialism, it should be man who ought to be occupying the primary place so God might as well be declared dead. And that is what Camus does.

While Camus rejects religion and the existence of God, he strongly states the existence of 'the absurd'. The notion of the absurd, which is dominant in Camus's works, emerges earlier in the history of philosophy. According to Herbert Hochberg, in his article "Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity", Camus's notion of the absurd might be understood by studying Plotinus' concept of "the One", representing the Absolute. The One stands for the first and basic principle on which everything else depends. Plotinus claims that everything is in need of something else in order to be explained. Therefore, all the explanatory principles need a higher-level and absolutely simple principle which can provide answers, or explanations, for all the rest. This is possible to attain with the One because the One is a kind of deity that includes everything in itself. However, not all difficulties are resolved by comprehending the One. Now the question is, how does it happen that the One can be a source of

2 Ibid., p.150. «Or, Bonhoeffer comme théologien chrétien, et Camus comme penseur non religieux, se refusent ... une logique de la faiblesse et de la consolation religieuse qui, dans le cas précis de "Dieu", en appelle à Lui comme masque de nos peurs, comme *alibi* pour justifier notre incapacité à la vie, notre impuissance, ou notre refus d'accepter la réalité, l'absurde, ou qui en dernier ressort, en appelle à un "Dieu" dont on n'a pas "besoin" quand tout va bien.»

3 Camus, 2008, p. 256.

4 Ibid., p. 201.

evil, too? Such a conflict leads to a rise in the absurd as well as an emergence of a problem of personal freedom. Hochberg maintains that Camus wants to construct an ethic around the absurd and freedom by pursuing the same line of reasoning with that of Plotinus. This attitude on Camus's side is prominent particularly in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, in which Camus discusses the absurdity of man's condition and the problem of suicide that man is dragged into due to the absurd. All the same, Camus differs from Plotinus in certain respects. For Plotinus the One is a kind of God and people turn to it to flee the ordinary world. Camus, however, is not in search of a spiritual world. The meaning he looks for is supposed to be found—if ever—in the empirical world. Another difference is that while Plotinus explains the presence of evil in the One as non-being or the absence of goodness, evil according to Camus *does* exist in the empirical world. Thus, it cannot be called non-being.

Considering his emphasis on the absurd, it might initially be thought that Camus regards the absurd as the source of evil. Olivier Todd states in *Albert Camus: A Life* that Camus uses the word “absurd” in different senses such as “contradictory”, “incomprehensible” or “impossible”. Indeed, Camus defines or explains it in various manners and points to its source, especially in *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he says,

The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world.⁵

and

The absurd is not in man ... nor in the world, but in their presence together. ... it is the only bond uniting them.⁶

Such discord is unexpected because man and the world seem, or are thought out of habit, to exist in agreement. But in fact, they contradict each other and Camus explicitly states this. “The absurd is, in itself, contradiction. It is contradictory in its content because, in wanting to uphold life, it excludes all value judgements, when to live is, in itself, a value judgement.”⁷

Camus, therefore, claims that the absurd is a grave threat to life and his aim is to point to the ways of fighting it. He criticizes those who find refuge in escaping the absurd instead of defying it. He is of the opinion that the absurd man refuses to escape. Camus advises man to admit the existence of the absurd and get used to living with it. Brian Masters writes in *Camus: a study* that Camus's purpose in writing *The Myth of Sisyphus* is to exclude the popular idea that it is reason—as opposed to the absurd—that explains the world. Camus's thesis is that if one starts out with a philosophy which claims that the world lacks meaning, one may eventually end up finding meaning and profundity in it.⁸

Maurice Weyembergh has a similar line of thought when he states that Camus's concept of “philosophical suicide” aims at portraying the powerlessness of reason in its failure to explain and justify religious faith, which itself is irrational.⁹

5 Camus, 1955, p. 21.

6 Ibid., p.21.

7 Camus, 1967, p. 8.

8 Masters, 1975, p. 38.

9 Weyembergh, 2009, pp. 7-10. «C'est ce que Camus montre lorsqu'il analyse dans *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* ce qu'il appelle le « suicide philosophique » : décrire l'impuissance de la raison à expliquer et trouver dans

What is significant to notice now is that, despite finding the absurd threatening and tiresome, Camus does not regard it as the source of evil. Camus considers the absurd in a rather positive light. He believes that the absurd is not an end but the starting point of everything else to come. Facing the absurd opens up a new path before man instead of confining him and this is the path to revolt. It is struggling against one's absurd situation by maintaining high spirits, making the most out of one's life and retaining one's dignity at the same time. The absurd serves as a guide for those who know how to benefit from gaining awareness of it.

Thus I draw from the absurd three consequences, which are my revolt, my freedom and my passion. By the mere activity of consciousness I transform into a rule of life what was an invitation to death—and I refuse suicide.¹⁰

If the absurd is not the source of evil, what generates evil according to Camus? Since he is not a believer, he cannot be expected to relate the presence of evil to God in any way. Camus seems to argue that there are two sources of evil, which are, in fact, interrelated and inseparable: man and death.

Throughout his life, Camus witnesses the injustice and cruelty human beings inflict on one another and he observes that evil is intentionally committed by man. In *The Fall*, he abandons the idea of social or political good that he fervently defended earlier and he directs his attention to evil, which he believes to be found in man's heart. For Camus, the two existentialist concepts, namely existence and essence, go hand in hand and man creates evil during the process of creating his essence.

Death, the second source of evil, is even worse for the reason that it is unavoidable. It steals from man his future and makes life look so futile that man may get caught in a vicious cycle and wish to commit suicide, thinking that he cannot bear the idea of death lying in ambush to definitely catch him at some unpredictable time. However, according to Camus, committing suicide must not even be considered. It is most unwise to embrace evil if one is horrified by it. What Camus suggests in the face of death is rebellion. His argument is, despite the fact that there is death at the end of life, it is worthwhile to keep on living. Clamence's fear of death in *The Fall* and his passion for leading a pleasurable life is just one case in point. Clamence is perhaps one of Camus's most evil characters. His fear of death discloses malignancies of different sorts lying slyly in wait in his heart; contempt, hypocrisy, vanity, greed and hate, all of which he lets out very stealthily and as he finds suitable.

While studying the works of St. Augustine for his doctoral dissertation, Camus notices that St. Augustine, whose ideas he identifies with Christianity, is troubled by the notions of evil and death, too. Camus comments on it by making quotations from *Confessions*:

But at the same time the problem of evil obsessed him: "I continued to seek the source of evil, but there was no way out." (Augustine, Bk VII, 5) And he was plagued by the thought of death. "Such thoughts I turned over within my wretched breast, which was overburdened with the most biting concern about the fear of death and [my] failure to discover truth." (Ibid.) ... Consequently, it seemed to him above all that the solution was not to be found in knowledge, that the resolution of his doubts and of his distaste for the flesh did not lie in the intellectual escape but in the total acknowledgement of his depravity and wretchedness. Grace would again raise him above the love of those possessions which were responsible for the extent of his corruption.¹¹

l'échec de l'explication rationnelle la justification de la foi dans ce qui est irrationnel. »

10 Camus, 1955, p. 47.

11 McBride, 1992, p. 142.

Camus expects no rewards from Grace. In fact, there is no God to interfere with man's deeds and to bestow rewards or punishments on him. Hence, Camus claims that it is man that is evil, and that he bears no innocence. The title of the work, *The Fall*, brings to mind religious connotations, taking the reader to the original sin. Adam and Eve are not only banished from the Garden of Eden as a result of their disobedience to God's commandment, but they also lose their immortality, signifying their 'fall' from God's grace, and their becoming 'imperfect' at the same time. The Biblical fall refers to the fall of man from Eden but for Camus, the fall of man is of a secular kind.

Camus observes that St. Augustine claims that evil has entered the universe via the culpable behaviour of angels and human beings. The source of evil is their misuse of the freedom they have. Here, the key word is 'freedom' for the reason that Camus would not follow this religious point of view, but he would firmly be on the side of human freedom. The fall of Clamence is a fall that takes place while he is after his personal independence and it is an indication of his breach from God.

In his dissertation, Camus discusses the relationship between Hellenism and Christianity and the question that he attempts to resolve is, how the two traditions, which appear to adopt contrary views about the universe, ever managed to blend into one. In *The Fall*, he emphasizes that man should free himself from such a fusion. He declares that man should leave aside Christianity and follow his own Hellenism. This is what Clamence does when he locks up the painting *The Just Judges* in his cupboard and thus believes to separate religion and innocence.

Camus is interested in the way St. Augustine talks about evil. St. Augustine discusses natural and moral evils but he places greater stress on moral evil.

Moral evil is, for Augustine, a greater problem than natural evil, but for all that it is one which he does not shrink. Sin, he insists, is imputable to all men and is the result of a primeval fall. Original Sin, moreover, has destroyed man's freedom to do good and left him only the power to do evil and to trust in the grace of God, which, though gratuitous, is always necessary for salvation.¹²

St. Augustine's claim that sin is imputable to all men may have had an inspirational effect on Camus and that may be why Clamence wants to share all guilt with others. As opposed to the sins St. Augustine is concerned with, however, Clamence's 'sins' and the judgement that he receives are this worldly, and so is the evil in his heart. Camus describes *The Fall* and Clamence as follows:

The narrator in *La Chute* makes a calculated confession. ... A refugee in Amsterdam, a city of canals and cold light, where he pretends to be a hermit and a prophet, this former lawyer is waiting for sympathetic listeners in a sleazy (sic.) bar. He has a modern heart, which is to say that he cannot bear being judged, and therefore he hastens to prosecute himself, but only in order to better judge other people. He looks at himself in a mirror, but finally pushes it towards others. Where does he stop confessing and start accusing others? ... There is only one truth in this game of mirrors: pain, and all that it promises.¹³

And to bear the pain, Clamence states frankly,

Hence I had to find another means of extending judgement to everybody in order to make it weigh less heavily on my own shoulders.¹⁴

12 Ibid., p.27.

13 Todd, 1999, p.342.

14 Camus, 1976, p.100.

At first glance, Clamence seems to live in harmony with society but, in fact, he simply *pretends* to belong to it. His value judgements are in conflict with those of society, as a result of which, he has difficulty in complying with its rules. Indeed, Clamence is a vain man who is extremely self-contented and who is overcome with a groundless feeling of superiority but he knows that he has to appear as though he fits in; or else, he is very likely to get crushed by society due to being different. Therefore, he always behaves scrupulously towards everyone, including even those people he happens to meet in the street. He treats people in a most gentle and impeccable manner solely to receive their admiration and feel even more self-satisfied. Hypocrisy and selfishness are just two of the evil feelings that he keeps concealed in his heart. In reality, he despises every single person and enjoys a feeling of haughtiness.

To tell the truth, just being so fully and simply a man, I looked upon myself as something of a superman.

I was of respectable but humble birth (my father was an officer), and yet, on certain mornings, let me confess it humbly, I felt like a king's son, or a burning bush. It was not a matter, mind you, of the certainty I had of being more intelligent than everyone else. Besides, such certainty is of no consequence because so many imbeciles share it. No, as a result of being showered with blessings, I felt, I hesitate to admit, marked out.¹⁵

Consciously or not, he can take his disdainfulness to such extremes that he starts to believe that he must always be in literally high places.

Yes, I have never felt comfortable except in lofty surroundings. Even in the details of daily life, I needed to feel *above*. I preferred the bus to the underground, open carriages to taxis, terraces to being indoors.¹⁶

And the higher he imagines himself to be, the greater his feeling of contempt for people grows.

A natural balcony fifteen hundred feet above a sea still visible bathed in sunlight was, on the other hand, the place where I could breathe most freely, especially if I were alone, well above the human ants.¹⁷

Even when he thinks back on the court scenes that he took part in when he worked as a lawyer, he imagines that he enjoyed almost a feeling of divine holiness.

The judges punished and the defendants expiated, while I, free of any duty, shielded equally from judgement as from penalty, I freely held sway bathed in a light as of Eden.¹⁸

Clamence's mention of Eden is ironic and even paradoxical as it contrasts sharply with his evil thoughts and judgements regarding humanity in general. What is more, and quite ironically again, he is soon to realise that he is, in fact, anywhere but in Eden. One evening, he hears some laughter on the banks of the river Seine in Paris.

I had gone up on to the Pont des Arts, deserted at that hour ... Facing the statue of the Vert-Galant, I dominated the island. I felt rising within me a vast feeling of power and—I don't know how

15 Ibid., p.23.

16 Ibid., p.19.

17 Ibid., p.20.

18 Ibid., p.22.

to express it—of completion, which cheered my heart. I straightened up and was about to light a cigarette, the cigarette of satisfaction, when, at that very moment, a laugh burst out behind me. Taken by surprise, I suddenly wheeled round; there was no one there. I stepped to the railing; no barge or boat. I turned back towards the island and, again, heard the laughter behind me, a little farther off as if it were going downstream. I stood there motionless. The sound of the laughter was decreasing, but I could still hear it distinctly behind me, coming from nowhere unless from the water. At the same time, I was aware of the rapid beating of my heart. Please don't misunderstand me; there was nothing mysterious about the laugh; it was a good, hearty, almost friendly laugh, which put everything properly in its place.¹⁹

But when everything is put in its proper place, Clamence is no more the same person. Very unexpectedly, he has encountered the absurd: the laughter. On hearing it, his vanity shatters and he finds it hard to face the absurd. As a first reaction, he tries to laugh it away. A few days after he hears the laughter, however, he witnesses a woman commit suicide by throwing herself into the Seine. He is totally unable to help her.

I was trembling, I believe from cold and shock. I told myself that I had to be quick and I felt an irresistible weakness steal over me. I have forgotten what I thought then. "Too late, too far..." or something of the sort. ... That woman? Oh, I don't know. Really I don't know. The next day and the days following, I didn't read the papers.²⁰

His meeting the absurd brings forth more than one consequence. He gains awareness of his human condition, that is, his mortality—despite his vanity and arrogance, he realizes evil has its roots both in death and man and he experiences a 'fall'. In his dissertation, Camus writes that according to St. Augustine, "Adam was immortal. In so far as he had the 'ability not to sin', and was already the recipient of a sort of divine grace, he was free. When original sin occurred it destroyed this happy state."²¹ Adam falls due to the original sin. Clamence's fall, on the other hand, starts when he encounters the absurd.

Camus states St. Augustine's idea of evil and makes quotations from his *The Free Choice of the Will* and *On John*, respectively.

But we must again distinguish two kinds of evil: natural evil (wretchedness of our condition, tragedy of man's destiny), and moral evil, that is, Sin. The first is explained in the way in which dark patches are justified on a painting. It contributes to the harmony of the universe. The second presents a more difficult problem. How could God have given us free will, that is, a will that is capable of choosing evil: "Because he exists as he does, man is not good now and does not have it in his power to become good, either because he does not see what kind of man he ought to be, or, though seeing this, is unable to become what he sees he ought to be." Sin, which results from original sin, can be blamed on us. God has permitted us the free will of Adam, but our will has acquired the desire to make bad use of it. And we have fallen so far that the proper exercise of free will is invariably to be traced to God alone. Left to himself, man would properly speaking, be merely wicked, deceitful and sinful. "Man's sole possession is deceit and sin."²²

19 Ibid., p 30.

20 Ibid., pp.52-53.

21 McBride 1992, p.146.

22 Camus, 1976, p.144.

As regards Clamence, he suffers from both the natural and the moral evil, and it is the absurd that guides him in his strife with both. Thus, although he wants to escape from the absurd at the very beginning, by and by he realizes that, despite his initial feeling that gaining awareness of the absurd was an end, it is, in fact, a beginning—a view that Camus advocates in many of his works.

Starting with Clamence's stance against death, the natural evil, it can be observed that it is not always a firm stance because death is a kind of evil that leads to care. Death takes man down to becoming nothing. Kierkegaard says in his *Concept of Anxiety*, "But what effect does nothing have? It begets anxiety."²³ The notion of death makes man conscious of his condition in the world and pulls him into a state that Heidegger would call "authenticity". He is reminded of his mortal state so he begins to hold on faster to life. Clamence speaks frankly on this account: "I love life—that's my real weakness. I love it so much that I am incapable of imagining what is not life. ... One dies if necessary, one breaks rather than bending. But I bend, because I continue to love myself."²⁴ This is also true when someone else dies. Then people attend the funerals, pay visits to the deceased person's family and try to console them. Yet, Clamence thinks that when people are kind to others, it is in fact, for their own satisfaction and happiness. Such happiness helps them forget about death and continue living among the others, just like the others. This is how Clamence behaves, too.

I likewise buried an old fellow-member of the Bar Association. ... It so happened that I knew my presence would be noticed and favourably commented on. Hence, you see, not even the snow that was falling that day made me withdraw.²⁵

All this is due to the anxiety that the idea of being condemned to loneliness and nothingness causes. Man fights a losing battle against them. And Camus can't help but mention it in the dissertation by quoting Pascal. " 'We like,' says Pascal, 'to relax in the company of those who are like us: wretched like us, powerless like us, they will not help us: we will die alone.' "²⁶

Camus claims in his dissertation that both the first Christians and the Christians of later times considered death to be evil, too. In the section entitled *The Themes of Evangelical Christianity*, he puts it explicitly, including a quotation from The Book of Job:

Facts blind them and weigh them down. So too does death. ... This idea of imminent death, linked closely to the parousia of Christ, obsessed the first generation of Christians in its entirety. ... In the world of our experience, to realize this idea of death amounts to bestowing a new meaning upon our lives. It implies, in fact, the triumph of the flesh, the terror that the body feels at this revolting conclusion. Is it surprising then that Christians should have felt such a poignant sense of humiliation and of bodily affliction, and that these notions could have played a crucial role in the elaboration of Christian metaphysics? 'My flesh is clothed with worms and dirt, my skin hardens, then breaks out afresh. My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle, and come to their end without hope.' It is clear that the Old Testament was already setting the tone with Job and Ecclesiastes.

...

23 Kierkegaard, 1980, p. 41.

24 Camus 1976, pp. 56-57.

25 Kierkegaard, p.28.

26 McBride 1992, p.100.

But the Gospels placed this sense of death at the centre of their devotion. It is not sufficiently recognized, in fact, that Christianity is built around the person of Christ and his death. ... Since Jesus was a man, the whole emphasis was placed upon his death. Scarcely anything more physically terrible can be imagined.²⁷

If it is so full of terror, Clamence may be trying to escape 'the Christian death'. That may be what makes him shudder. His fear of death even leads to further concerns and Clamence reflects on the matter:

Then it was that the thought of death burst into my daily life. I would measure the years separating me from my end. I would look for examples of men of my age who were already dead. ... A ridiculous fear pursued me, in fact: one could not die without having confessed all one's lies. Not to God or to one of his representatives; I was above that, as you well imagine. No, it was a matter of confessing to men, to a friend, to a beloved woman, for example. Otherwise, even if there were only one lie hidden in a life, death made it definitive.²⁸

Clamence is conscious that regardless of its being Christian or not, and regardless of the concerns it brings in its wake, death is impossible to avoid. This makes him completely upset for a while but then he finds a way out of his depression and it enables him to gain a firm stance against the second type of evil, which is the moral evil, or Sin. He has the heart to rebel due to his strong will to power, and his revolt is such that, in the end, he can cope with both the notion of death, the uneasiness—not to call it a 'pang' in Clamence's case—of conscience caused by his 'sins' and his resulting fear of becoming subject to judgement.

Clamence always has a fear of being objectified and judged, which is intermingled with his fear of the fall since they are all associated with losing power and falling into disgrace. All his kindness, generosity and helpfulness stems from his fear of becoming subjugated. "Just between ourselves, slavery, preferably smiling, is therefore inevitable. But we must not admit it. Isn't it better that whoever cannot do without having slaves should call them free men?"²⁹ Together with the awareness of the absurd, these fears, which have been in his subconscious, surface. Now even the slightest judgement disturbs him and he feels that, after all, maybe he is not as admirable as he believes himself to be and he realizes that he has enemies, too. He is afraid that society may crush him. Consequently, he focuses more on his own ego and his feeling of superiority grows to compensate for his fears.

I am not hard-hearted: far from it—full of pity, on the contrary, and with a ready tear to boot. Only, my emotional impulses always turn towards me, my feelings of pity concern me. It is not true, after all, that I never loved. I conceived at least one great love in my life, of which I was always the object. From that point of view, after the inevitable hardships of youth, I had settled down early on: sensuality alone dominated my love-life. I looked merely for objects of pleasure and conquest.³⁰

On his encounter with the absurd, his initial feeling is deep anxiety because so far he has committed many evil deeds and perhaps the most disturbing of them all is that he has done nothing to

27 Ibid., p.99.

28 Camus, 1976, p. 66.

29 Camus 1976, p.36.

30 Ibid.,p. 44.

rescue the woman who committed suicide by jumping into the river. He also knows that there is always the possibility for him to continue in the same manner because he is free to choose to do so. Kierkegaard seems to have explained Clamence's state of mind almost a century ago by saying, "No matter how deep an individual has sunk, he can sink still deeper, and this 'can' is the object of anxiety,"³¹ and "The relation of freedom to guilt is anxiety, because freedom and guilt are still only possibilities."³² Soon, however, Clamence manages to stand upright again by putting himself in place of God—but not surprisingly, the God of evil.

How intoxicating to feel like God the Father and to hand out definitive testimonials of bad character and habits. I sit enthroned among my bad angels at the summit of the Dutch heaven and I watch ascending towards me, as they issue from the fogs and the water, the multitude of the Last Judgement.³³

Such is the way Camus makes Clamence cope with the burden of freedom and his fears. Camus can see St. Augustine's view that man is naturally made for God but he does not reprove him for it. He seems to interpret the idea differently, which is quite in line with his philosophy. If, for St. Augustine, happiness lies in finding God, for Clamence, it lies in becoming God. It seems that, according to Camus, "man is made for God" means that man wants God's throne, and not that man needs God.

A significant advantage of becoming God is getting absolved of sins because as long as man remains as man, he is bound to commit sins. In his thesis, Camus discusses the problem of sin.

Sin is universal. But few of the important texts of the New Testament are as rich in meaning and as revealing as this passage of the Epistle to the Romans:

I do not understand my own actions. For I do not the good I want, but the evil I do not want is what I do. Now if I do what I do not want, it is no longer I who do it, but sin which dwells within me. So I find it to be a law that when I want to do right, evil lies close at hand. I delight in the law of God in my inmost self, but I see in my members another law at war with the law of my mind and making me captive to the law of sin which dwells in my members.³⁴

Camus continues elaborating on the universality of sin in his thesis, in the section entitled "The Themes of the Gnostic Solution."

... Basilides is forcibly struck by the fate of the martyrs. Suffering, he says, cannot be futile. And all suffering demands a sin which precedes it and legitimizes it. The inevitable conclusion is that the martyrs have sinned. ... But who is the greatest of the martyrs but Jesus himself? "If I am forced to do so, I will say that a man *by whatever name*, is still man, while God is just. For no one, as they say, is without sin." ... Christ does not escape the universal law of sin.³⁵

And Clamence explains what sin Jesus committed:

Say, do you know why he was crucified—the one you are perhaps thinking of at this moment? ... There are always reasons for murdering a man. ... But besides the reasons that have been very well

31 Kierkegaard 1980, p.113.

32 Ibid., p.109.

33 Camus, 1976, pp.104-105

34 McBride, 1992, p. 100.

35 Ibid., p.113.

explained to us for the past two thousand years, there was a major one for that terrible agony, and I don't know why it has been so carefully hidden. The real reason is that *he* knew he was not altogether innocent. If he did not bear the weight of the crime he was accused of, he had committed others—even though he didn't know which ones. Did he really not know them? He was at the source, after all; he must have heard of a certain slaughter of the innocents. The children of Judea massacred while his parents were taking him to a safe place—why did they die if not because of him? ... And as for that sadness that can be felt in his every act, wasn't it the incurable melancholy of a man who heard night after night the voice of Rachel weeping for her children and refusing all comfort?³⁶

So, even Jesus has sins and Clamence is well aware that sinners are judged and condemned. Moreover, acting as God as Clamence does, does not absolve one from being judged because one *cannot* become God. Yet, one *can* become a judge penitent, Clamence finds out, and it proves to be a brilliant solution for him at a time when he strives to be over and above all judgement. He declares himself a judge penitent, who cunningly takes over control while pretending to obey the conventions and the life style of the society he lives in. His new beginning is sharing guilt with everyone and, thus, feeling relieved:

When we are all guilty, that will be democracy. Not to mention the fact, *cher ami*, that we must take revenge for having to die alone. Death is solitary, whereas slavery is collective. The others get theirs too, and at the same time as we—that's what counts.³⁷

Thus, Clamence spreads the guilt on everyone. He speaks to people as though he were pointing out his own mistakes, shortcomings and repentance but he gradually apportions these among everyone. By acting as a penitent, Clamence, in fact, becomes the judge—and for everybody!

Hence I had to find another means of extending judgement to everybody in order to make it weigh less heavily on my own shoulders. I found the means. ... How to get everyone involved in order to have the right to sit calmly on the outside myself? Should I climb up to the pulpit, like many of my illustrious contemporaries, and curse humanity? Very dangerous, that is! One day, or one night, laughter bursts out without a warning. The judgement you are passing on others eventually snaps back in your face, causing some damage. ... Inasmuch as one couldn't condemn others without immediately judging oneself, one had to overwhelm oneself to have the right to judge others. Inasmuch as every judge some day ends up as a penitent, one had to travel the road in the opposite direction and practise the profession of penitent to be able to end up as a judge.³⁸

Now he feels he is the sovereign again. This attitude also enables him to get away with evil since he is unwilling to turn to modesty. He is not disturbed anymore by the feeling of guilt that he experienced when he heard the laughter. As a kind of proof of it, he keeps in his cupboard the panel *The Just Judges*, stolen from a cathedral. The panel shows some judges who are on their way to express their adoration to the Lamb, or Christ, the symbol of innocence. Clamence, however, thinks that justice, which the judges symbolize, and innocence are two separate concepts. The reason is that innocence is on the cross. And he himself has locked up justice in the cupboard. This makes him believe that he is still powerful and commanding and can 'interfere with' the way the world is ruled by keeping

36 Camus, 1976, pp.82-83.

37 Ibid., p.100.

38 Ibid., pp.100-101.

judgement under control. “I permit myself everything all over again, and without the laughter this time. ... I dominate at last, but for ever. Once more I have found a height to which I am the only one to climb and from which I can judge everybody.”³⁹

Saint Ignatius, who Camus mentions in his thesis, “insists that no one can be, at the same time, both a believer and a sinner.”⁴⁰ Clamence cannot, either. It is a fact that on hearing the laughter he goes through a change and gains awareness of the absurd. He revolts as a result—a natural reaction, according to Camus, when one is confronted with the absurd. Camus asserts that

The rebel does not ask for life, but for reasons for living. He rejects the consequences implied by death. If nothing lasts, then nothing is justified; everything that dies is deprived of meaning. To fight against death amounts to claiming that life has a meaning, to fighting for order and for unity.⁴¹

However, Clamence does not appear to have changed. The reason is that his fight against the absurd involves ways and means peculiar to himself. His outlook on life changes but his methods of struggle remain the same. ‘Order and unity’ means order and unity not for the good of all, but solely for his own life, his own satisfaction and happiness. In fact, he precisely fits the description of the hero that Camus quotes at the very beginning of *The Fall*, from Lermontov’s novel *A Hero of Our Time*. “*A Hero of Our Time*, gentlemen, is in fact a portrait but not of an individual; it is the aggregate of the vices of our whole generation in their fullest expression.” (Camus 1976, 3) If Lermontov’s hero in his novel written in 1839 matches Clamence so well in the 1950s, and if Clamence retains the validity of his character in the 21st. century, Camus has succeeded in conveying his message that evil is universal and that nobody should be surprised to encounter a Clamence in one’s own heart. After all, it is a commonplace experience.

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39 Ibid., p.104.

40 McBride, 1992, p.81.

41 Camus, 1967, p.101.