

“The feeling of absurdity...bursts from the comparison between a bare fact and a certain reality.” A man with a sword charging against a group of people armed with machine guns. A man continuing to pour water into a full glass and expecting the amount to increase. I recall Wittgenstein’s metaphor here (his prowess in finding the right imagery remains unparalleled in modern philosophy). He says of the man trying to describe reality using language: “A teacup will only hold a teacup full of water and if I were to pour out a gallon over it.”

Perhaps it is still too early to make this judgement, but here is the impression I am receiving. Both Camus and Nietzsche, existentialists that they are, are grappling with the ultimate unreason embedded in reality. But while Nietzsche writes with a violent, almost angry and aggressive passion, and Camus writes with a more gently lyrical understanding, their underlying attitudes catapults them across each other. Camus heralds a fiery revolution: he calls us to revolt against this absurdity; whereas Nietzsche, on the other hand, tells us to embrace, to accept, and to love this ultimate nature of reality as it being life itself.

In this sense, Camus opposes the spirit of not only Nietzsche but also Merleau-Ponty. For Merleau-Ponty sees us as always essentially engaged with and one with the true, real nature of things, and merely suffering from a temporary delusion, *maya*, induced by a mode of functioning of our body; and the silent hope of his philosophical project is to sketch out a path by which we may restore this engagement and essential world-body-mind oneness without the intervention of the illusion any more. Camus, on the other hand, sees the human being as fundamentally divorced from the world it is forced to face; an unsurpassable valley between myself and everything around me, this valley being the valley of absurdity, to use his word. Welded together in a hateful marriage.

To him, only the human being ends up opposing their consciousness to the world. Cats (say) never cease to—in Heideggerian terms—to fall, are always absorbed in the world.

Three ‘conclusions’ drawn:

- i) In the face of the absurd, *revolt* is what restores meaning to life
- ii) Abandoning all that cannot be known with certainty, the canonical conception of *freedom*—that we give our own lives direction; eternal, metaphysical freedom—must be replaced by a more *concrete* notion of freedom of action, the one we know firsthand. No stratified ideals: A Nietzschean motif.
- iii) To believe in the absurd entails also a maximization of the heterogeneity (and so, embrace ‘ugly’ ones as well) of one’s experiences and a deepening of the *passion*, the lucidity with which we live life.

With this reframing of freedom, and the idea that the absurd takes away our ability to choose the certainty of God, one may imagine that it binds; but to the contrary, it liberates us to grab the present moment free of any baggage. (This notion of something which appears to bind but actually liberates vaguely reminded me of DFW saying that absolute freedom of choice is really a slavery of sorts, slavery to one’s impulses...a remark applicable to both sides: One enslaved to the impulse of leaning on a God, and another to the hedonism of his baggage-less present’s pleasures.)

Something which struck me while I was in the train: Camus’ call to maximize experiences has a hedonistic, lustful tinge to it. I find more appealing the idea due to Merleau-Ponty (and Heidegger, in *Gelassenheit*) that each experience *is* miraculous and enchanting, and has merely lost its originality over a gradual erosion and normalization by language and the like. For one who believes this, the natural commandment would be not to maximize different experiences, but, rather, to deepen one’s perception of each experience (minimal as they may be), and restore in it its miracle.

“Describing—that is the last ambition of an absurd thought.” Description over explanation, then; a common refrain in phenomenological thought, as well.