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LONGING FOR A GREATER JUSTICE

Two witnesses : Bertolt Brecht and Albert Camus

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Human life is aimed at something more than consumption and presumption. Lives which reached the greatest heights of human quality and meaning have been those lived for a cause.

But in order to direct our existence in this way, we need such examples and testimonies. The culture which now pervades tends to wipe those models from our memory and make us believe that our attention would be better employed if it were dedicated to retaining the colour or the price of the underwear which one or other celebrity wore with some outfit...

This booklet does not present myths, but something much more human and necessary for our world. Witnesses. Two lives which, amid the inevitable human limitations and defects, felt themselves called to the service of a noble cause.

We would like to repeat those examples in other future booklets (probably we will dedicate one to Dorothy Day).

INTRODUCTION

The common meaning which the concept "justice" incorporates into the framework of civil ethics, seems sufficient to maintain the peaceable coexistence of extensive communities of citizens, which, without resorting to its innermost moral or religious convictions, have accepted it as the basis of their democratic constitutions. But, precisely because this idea concerns ethics with the minimum of morals, it should not be a surprise that sometimes among those same citizens should grow the longing for a more ethically exacting concept of justice, rooted in an understanding of human life and social coexistence, much more integrative of personal moral and spiritual values. This other view of justice, then, comes to be categorised as a transcendent ideal, always difficult to obtain, as it turns out to be very superior to the game of the powerful people and to the tough adjustment of this game to a society like ours, always very jealous of its rights.

This disproportion between, on the one hand, the value of justice as an acceptable minimum, basically successful for everyone, and on the other hand, the value of justice as a desirable maximum, for which one must always fight, is something that continues to inspire the writings of some illustrious contemporary thinkers, from whom we now wish to cite two of the most famous writers of the 20th century, Bertolt Brecht and Albert Camus, whose work we are going to deal with in this booklet, analyzing it from precisely this viewpoint. Each writer gave us a very notable example of this moral unease, thanks to his constant zeal in seeking a justice that is always greater and always very human and humanitarian, just like his personal struggle, carried out almost exclusively through his literary work, against the great injustices of his time, not only the social and political ones but principally the existential.

However, the mentioned different levels of these two types of justice, that of positive or procedural laws, and that which also takes into account certain far more essential aspirations of human life, cannot fail to evoke in our soul the classic tension between positive laws and the deepest laws of nature, which was admirably formulated by Sophocles in *Antigone*, through the pitiful confrontation between a legislator king, who forbids the burial of the bodies of soldiers killed in assaults on the city, and a young princess who cannot allow the abandonment of the rites due to her brother's corpse. "Never had Justice", replies the princess to the king, "which has its seat / among the gods of the underworld / imposed such laws on men." (vv. 450 – 452). And it will be through loyalty to this law, so deeply rooted in her soul, that Antigone will not hesitate to risk her life, not to fail that sacred imperative. Certainly, in that classical example, the contraposition cannot be more extreme and tragic; but nonetheless the literary character of Antigone is always invoked to indicate the gravity of conflicts between two faiths or two concepts of justice, which is what we will also discover, in a sense, in these two authors of the twentieth century.

An approach somewhat similar to the previous one, but with a more historical significance, has already been proposed more recently by one of the philosophers of the Critical School of Frankfurt, Max Horkheimer, when, faced with the atrocities committed by twentieth-century political totalitarianism in the name of a partisan and arbitrary justice, he defends another type of justice, more transcendent and universal. This profound desire for a more substantially human justice —he explains— would not be something incidental and transient, as a mere sentimental longing, but would instead

be a question of impassioned impulse and obstinate will to do justice to victims and to condemn those dehumanising political systems. A longing, in short, that will prevent "history's executioners ever coming to triumph over their innocent victims[1]".

As we know Horkheimer's valiant proposal was rooted in the profound conviction, inspired by the Jewish tradition, of never losing the memory of the great suffering of the victims of the past, adopting for this reason an attitude of moral resistance and solidarity with those victims, as history has not yet brought to them the justice that they, silently, continue to demand. Moreover, the same author maintains that that insistent "longing (*Sehnsucht*) for justice to be full, universal and complete" would not only secure the momentous sense of human history, but would also explain the religious (eschatological) value of hope, and the high moral level of universal justice, to be offered "in historical solidarity" for all those victims who died without hope.

Both Bertolt Brecht and Albert Camus, then, contemporaries of each other and of the philosopher Horkheimer, although each one lived in quite a different situation, wrote in the same extremely harsh social circumstances and facing the same political scandals of the first half of the twentieth century, which caused a tremendous fissure between morality and justice. Fortunately, we can affirm that both Brecht and Camus developed their literary work as a permanent and admirable exercise of denunciation in the face of so many injustices, using one of the media, in those moments of struggle, more effective than weapons in favour of a justice always greater and authentically human. A task which both carried out with great lucidity and with an admirable creative and expressive capacity, the German author in a form perhaps more colourful and imaginative and the French in a way more sober and incisive.

And if, at the start, we wished to anticipate the mental orientation with which each one will verify this common objective, it could be said that in Bertolt Brecht the lucid comprehension of human fragility together with a great compassion for the victims of injustice, will determinate the behavior, even in militants of the cause of justice; while in Albert Camus, the moral proposals of the Stoic type will predominate, centred in a firm will of moral resistance, without ceasing to assume, in the face of concrete cases, massive and crushing, the very human attitudes of tolerance and commiseration.

1. THE YEARNING FOR A GREATER JUSTICE (BERTOLT BRECHT)

Born in Augsburg in 1898 and dying in Berlin in 1956, Bertolt Brecht was a great poet of the people and one of the most outstanding dramatic authors of the twentieth century. It is worthwhile to reclaim his work at a time like the present, when our artists seem to be dominated by an alarming moral skepticism, manifested in an abundant amount of works which are more or less brilliant, but nearly always deprived of stimulating messages for the spirit.

On the contrary Brecht never ceased to offer in his creations valiant testimonies of faith in men, especially in those who were then falling victim to public authorities; proposals which could sometimes be aesthetically shocking, but which always moved the spirit to favour a more just society.

Instructed from his very young days in the aesthetics of social realism, this author always tried to illuminate from within the historical situation in which his characters were living, as some great artists of the past, like Cervantes or Shakespeare, Tolstoy, Gorky or Thomas Mann had already eminently succeeded in doing. For his part Brecht, through his theatrical works which were direct and didactic but also very spectacular, called extensive audiences not only to know the very unjust secrets of the social reality in which they were living, but also to learn how to fight against them. And, although in some cases our author fell into a type of ideological, even propagandistic art, his main works became epitomes of the theatrical aesthetic and models of humanist and social ethics. Thus, it is precisely with that notable personal and humanitarian dimension of Bertolt Brecht that we now wish to deal, to show what diverse methods, nearly all of them original, this great dramatic poet made use of in the attempt to express a humanly transcendent ideal of justice, for which we are all called to fight.

Certainly was not an easy task, if we place it in the very lamentable situation in which the disinherited of the bourgeois regime were then living, the regime to which Brecht addressed himself in the first place, to refer years later to the victims of the wars or of the political repressions which stunned Europe.

Thus for example, in the famous *Threepenny Opera* (1928), so often still performed nowadays, by means of some shocking musical scenes in which people of the lowest depths of a great metropolis appear, the question posed by the author is: how is goodness possible amid so much misery? Well, Peachum, owner of a great clothes store, roguish and full of goodwill, asks himself this too, when his daughter falls in love with the leader of the group of gangsters, and when it seems that his honest attempts to help the poor of the district have failed. And thus he sings at the end of the first act: "Who would not want to be a good man / to give his fortune to the poor? / Who does not hope to be honest, / although circumstances prove us wrong? (...) / The world is miserable and one cannot be good!"

Indeed, this and some similar moral questions preoccupied Brecht throughout his life. How, for example, can honesty and decency be demanded from people who have nothing to eat? And who, then, will be guilty of the evil they may commit? In this

same work, the dancers will be the ones to face the rich spectators with their hypocritical behaviour, demanding decency today and abusing them tomorrow. And perhaps through that elemental feeling of moral tolerance towards the poor, the ray of hope which shines in this opera's chaotic finale could be explained. For when it seems that the leader of the gangsters is going to be executed, an unexpected pardon arrives, which moves the chorus to sing: "Do not be implacable with the criminal... / Think of the darkness and cold / which reign in this valley of tears!" Notice finally how, already in this earliest of works, Brecht is proposing a notable correction of the implacable machinery of justice, and, more directly still, of the death penalty, for this positive penal law seems inhuman to him. Thus our author is not only expressing a profound feeling of compassion and clemency towards that poor delinquent, the victim of social injustice, but also a great respect and compassion for every human creature, however perverse he or she may seem.

1.1. Can a just cause justify violence?

Without abandoning those most benevolent and respectful feelings for the human person, Brecht will suggest a new moral problem which should not cease to confront every fighter for justice. And this will be the basic plot of the next important work he produced, entitled *Saint Joan of the Stockyards* (1932). In order that the problem may be posed as honestly as possible, he will attempt to show it through the innocent and defenceless eyes of a young woman who, moved by very strong feelings of compassion, enlists in the religious-charitable movement of the Salvation Army (known in the work as "black straw hats"), which was very popular in both the United States of America and Great Britain, before the Second World War. And it is likely, besides, that with the ironic presence of this movement on stage, the author was criticising the ineffectiveness of the German Christian democracy of the time and maybe also that of social democracy, in the face of more radical and apparently more effective programmes like socialism and communism.

But the most important thing to note now is that this young woman Joan Dark — although presented here as a parody of the historical Joan of Arc— was the first of the very important female characters that Brecht was to create, wishing thus to express his hope in the role that the woman can play in the defence and protection of the socially excluded; desiring besides to underline that it is, above all, within the female heart that that necessary overcoming of stern and righteous justice (more aggressive and male) by mercy and charity, is best realised. In any case, the obvious intention of the work is to dismiss merely sentimental and paternalistic attitudes as insufficient and even counterproductive, as with these it will never be possible to dismantle the political and economic causes or structures which produce such great injustices. More, the author also seems to want to warn that it is not enough to look at social misery as though from a ringside seat; one must enter and directly share the full weight of poverty and humiliation, as the idealistic Joan will try to do in this work on discovering that this is the only truly effective strategy.

Brecht also advises through Joan that it is necessary to get to know from close up those people who have caused or are maintaining such unjust situations. These, in the theatrical plot, appear as the owners of the enormous cattle-meat stockyards installed in Chicago, the great businessmen of tinned meat and stock market finance companies,

very singularly represented here by the domineering Pierpoint Mauler. For, amid the 1929 economic crisis, not one of these will hesitate to act drastically against their workers and customers. They will close the factories, and the workers will be left in the street under the severest winter climates those latitudes can produce. And it is then that Joan, desperate in the face of so much suffering, decides to act on her own account and risk, alongside the trade unions, living with the most destitute, to the point of collaborating side by side with those who are preparing for a general strike. Finally and fundamentally she has understood that one must act with vigour in order to effectively shake the false "good conscience" of the businessmen. More, faced with the police's repressive violence, she also rethinks her earlier rejection of violence, concluding that there may be circumstances that oblige us to resort to force.

Really what this ingenuous and generous girl is reflecting upon is the eternal moral question of whether an ending as happy as urgent help for unjustly oppressed people may extend to justifying such intrinsically violent methods as the use of violence. A pressing question, which is once again left unanswered in this work, surely because Bertolt Brecht himself was no more in possession of a clear answer, submerged as he was in the dilemma between the moral and humanitarian humanism that he favoured and the insistent temptation to yield to the hatred and violent struggle between social classes; violence that up to then he had always rejected. And this same agonising ambiguity is what eventually takes its grip on the heart of poor Joan of the Stockyards, on finding herself misunderstood and betrayed even by those for whose sake she was fighting; a suffering so profound, for a person so delicate and already ill, that it could only end in her death.

Thus this poor girl totally devoted to others, now sacrificed at the stake of the cruellest passions and contradictions, although without having resolved the great dilemma between love and violence, will nonetheless be received by one or other party as a martyr of charity, and put forward to be honoured as a saint. "*Man, two souls live within your breast*", Goethe had written, and now in this work Brecht, as though expressing the unresolved uncertainty to which his determined fight for a greater justice subjects him, has sung at the end of the work the following lines: "Do not try to choose one of the two souls, you must maintain both. / Remain always in conflict with yourself..." This could be the lesson the author wished to communicate to us with this drama: that of learning to endure adversity with strength of mind but without falling into a violent struggle, so that the painful situation of doubt and ambiguity, generated by systems as unjust as those of extreme capitalism and totalitarian political parties, may thus disappear.

In relation to this same sacrifice of Joan, it seems timely to recall here another thought that never ceased to trouble Brecht's conscience, that of ideological heroism, or, if one wishes, the martyrdom of the one who agrees to die for his or her ideas. At times of persecution or political repression, it is logical that this should have been reflected upon by those who, like Brecht, were fighting for great ideas which they considered indisputable and never to be renounced.

This very preoccupation with heroism, in the next of his theatrical works, *The Life of Galileo Galilei* (written in 1938, but very much revised in 1946) would be transformed into the central argument of the drama. An argument, certainly, with sufficient historical foundation and one which has gone on, even to this day, to be a commonplace of any debate concerning the possible abdication of ideas that had been very seriously assumed, for fear of the threats of a powerful authority which condemns them

absolutely. Nonetheless the solution to that dilemma, created in such agonising situations, turns out not to be so simple; one might still wonder, then, if it is always the fear of punishment that can make us abdicate such ideas, or rather doubt, in the face of the absolute truth of the theses being defended, that can make us see that it is not worth our while to die for their sake... This was precisely the dramatic dilemma upon which Brecht was reflecting with regard to the case of Galileo, making very strong presences of his intellectual contemporaries, in a critical situation faced with political tribunals; and maybe that is why he does not venture to resolve this work tragically, but through a great charge of dramatic irony.

Thus, the character of Galileo will be treated in a somewhat comic manner, like the majority of other characters, civil or ecclesiastical, who appear in the play. And consequently it could not be said to be about an "organic" intellectual, very committed and fully convinced of his ideas, but rather an independent thinker, who attempts to carry out his own investigations, in the difficult times of an ideological dictatorship. Bertolt Brecht always felt like this himself in the face of the Communist Party, and knew that not a few other intellectuals and artists were living in this same situation.

That is why the story of Galileo now serves him to compose a new and sizeable artistic instrument in order to defend freedom of thought in the face of unjust tyranny of ideas. And maybe also that is why his Galileo appears as a benevolent and liberal being, who takes on relativist moral positions in the face of the dogmatism of the public authorities. That is why we should not be surprised that the author insists on portraying some of the most compromising scenes in a comic, almost carnivalesque, way, through which he dismantles all possible pretensions of heroism in the protagonist, who rather appears like one of the literary "anti-heroes" which began to be fashionable during those years. Thus the predominant message of the play is made clear: One must never cease to believe in the supreme values of justice and liberty; but not to the point of converting that faith and hope, so profoundly human, into a dogmatic system of absolute truths, which may be brought to the point of justifying the humiliation or death of any other person. And notice that with that proposal and other similar ones, disseminated throughout the drama, Brecht was very consciously situating himself alongside other 'hot' Marxist contemporaries of his, such as E. Bloch, H. Mayer, E. Ficher and the youngest thinkers of the Frankfurt school, E. Fromm, H. Marcuse, W. Benjamin and, certainly, the already-cited M. Horkheimer.

It is certain that the type of cosmological truths, surely so revolutionary, that Galileo defended with great conviction, belonged to a distinct plan less directly humanitarian than the new theoretical projects in favour of a more human and universal justice. That is precisely why Brecht makes sure to put this affirmation into the mouth of his famous protagonist: "I maintain that the objective of science is to relieve the misfortunes of humanity." And notice that this phrase was added by the author, years later in the United States of America, immediately after the two atomic bombs had exploded in Japan (August 1945).

As we were saying, then, it is logical that the resolution of the play should not offer any tragic gesture. On the contrary, Galileo, who had destroyed his writings in the public act of blind obedience, very soon afterwards and in secret writes them out again and entrusts them to Andreas, a young follower of his, so that he may take them out of Italy and spread them throughout Europe, advising him moreover never to cease to maintain

freedom of thought and to learn at the same time to doubt his own ideas and those of other people.

This liberal and humanist spirit of Bertolt Brecht, then, which earned him strong criticism from his co-religionists when the play was performed, will always be maintained by our author, without abdicating from his profound socialism for its sake, and maybe this moral attitude will be refined still more by the passing of the years, as will be manifest in the last and possibly the best of his literary creations, which are *The Good Person of Szechwan* (1943), *Mother Courage and her Children* (1941) and *The Caucasian Chalk Circle* (1944), all three written while still in exile, before his final return to Berlin. Let us move on, then, to comment briefly on these three masterpieces, showing how they reveal that incorruptible desire for justice not in a partial, closed and severe sense, but in the most human and universal sense possible.

1.2. Three works of artistic and humanitarian fullness

In the first of them, *The Good Person of Szechwan*, Brecht will pose a new moral problem, related to the intense and limitless practice of social justice. Taking into account that this social practice becomes more absorbent every time, for needs multiply, and that, consequently, we will never supply enough however hard we work at it, can the social militant justly make such demands upon himself, risking all his time, his health and his life in order to tend to those masses of poor people, who will never be completely satisfied? And if before, in other works of his, Brecht had wondered if the poor could be completely good, he now transfers this question to the generous fighters for justice. Will not this struggle, so altruistic and demanding, force them to harden themselves even to the point of reacting with violence in the face of those who may try attack their most pressing personal needs? Or to put it another way, would justice and goodness be at times incompatible within them? And if, as we have said, justice taken to extremes can become inhuman, must we not also think that limitless goodness can become unjust?

In this new work, so original but also so didactic and distanced, given that it is set in China, the author aims to investigate this problem by incarnating it in a totally disinterested and generous person. Where to discover this "good soul"? Again Brecht finds it in a young woman, Shen-Té, a poor marginalised prostitute, the only person disposed to welcome into her hut three unknown characters who have suddenly appeared in the town.

With the money that those three guests offer her, then, Shen-Té will open a shop with the generous intention of tending to the town's enormous needs. But the people, selfish and pitiless with her, seizing her goods and abusing her favours, impoverish her without mercy to the point of ruining her completely. Nor will they permit her to marry the youth she wants... And, in spite of so much abuse, she will not yield. She will set up another business, although now she employs a new and ingenuous strategy: in order to defend herself from the avalanche of importuners, she must harden herself, she will disguise herself as a man and act in a sharp, brusque way. "In order to be good, will we have to disguise ourselves as evil-doers?" she wonders. The fact is that only then do the people restrain themselves, although they miss the kind-hearted Shen-Té who has

mysteriously disappeared, and who will finally make herself known and be praised for her ingenious stratagem.

Many, nonetheless, are the questions the author leaves open, so that the spectator may reflect and decide: 1) In the business sphere (of a competitive, capitalist society) will integral goodness always prove to be suicide? 2) Will the most rigorous economic laws (as much capitalist as socialist) always turn out to be incompatible with honesty and generosity? 3) Would the practice of great virtues within such economic systems be reserved for only a few heroes or heroines? 4) In such circumstances, however, and although the people never cease to practice the small virtues of kindness, sincerity and decency, always overcoming their selfish instincts, it must be recognised that such virtues will always be insufficient to change social structures, etc., etc. Questions which are, in effect, very important, although the play leaves them floating. Perhaps because Brecht thought that, when one lives in concrete situations of extreme need, even the purest of consciences reach the point of desensitizing themselves morally.

See, for example, how Shen-Té, in her final lyric, seeks to excuse her ambiguous behaviour: "Compassion did me so much harm / that it transformed me into a furious she-wolf / at the mere sight of the unfortunate. / I felt that I was turning into another woman; / my teeth were changing into fangs... / And nonetheless, I liked to be the angel of the suburbs... / Condemn me, if you wish. All my crimes / I have committed for the sake of helping my neighbours, / for the love of my lover and / to save my son from misery... ." No, with this work Brecht is not directly inciting a head-on fight against unjust power structures; rather is he offering, as in many of his poems also written in those years, a benign and tolerant picture of people, although in no way conforming to the situation but in every case ingenious and astute —very much in the style of the spanish picaresque— in search of pragmatic solutions, absolutely without proposing tense attitudes of struggle against a monstrous and faceless enemy.

Leaving to the last the most popular of Brecht's works, which is *Mother Courage*, let us first make some brief reflections upon *The Caucasian Chalk Circle*. A play in which the importance of justice is also debated, against the background of struggle against the dominance of one aristocratic family in the Soviet Union; a struggle proclaimed from the prologue to a group of peasants against the owners of some land which they are now reclaiming with work, according to that criterion of social justice which states that "the land belongs to those who work on it".

However, this is a theatrical piece of obvious epic style, which possesses besides a notable lyric quality, thanks to the moral exemplarity of its protagonist, who again is a female character: Gruisha, the young servant of the duke and duchess. In effect, during the revolution she remains with the youngest child of this family, whom they had abandoned in fleeing from the burning of their home. Not only the duke's soldiers but also the revolutionaries pursue this woman in order to take the child from her; but she hides and protects him, always with great affection, even in the midst of great difficulties and dangers. "They are terrible" —she thinks— "the consequences of having done a merciful deed!". The little boy's natural mother, the duchess, will also finally reclaim her child before a judge; but Gruisha will know how to defend her new and heroic maternity in the face of the natural mother, with an enormous moral strength,

furthermore emerging victorious from the test of the chalk circle which the judge has imposed on them.

And this is the moving performance that the author offers to some supposedly socialist peasants, now completely set on the agricultural reform of the Caucasus, making them understand that, just as that child belongs to that new mother who has devoted herself to him day and night, so also will this land belong to those who now work it with such determination. It is admirable, then, to note once again how the basic and very popular humanism of Bertolt Brecht aims to offer, in a manner that is also very poetic, all these most serious lessons of social justice.

1.3. The atrocious injustice of war

A new theme, also of great magnitude, within the general area of human injustice, is that of war, for the atrocious consequences it brings about, caused by the ambition and pride of political and military powers. Consequences which are tragically unjust when they burst so cruelly upon masses of innocent people. A theme currently of great importance, moreover, which Brecht could not leave alone.

In fact, war will be the main plot of his most famous dramatic work, *Mother Courage*. The historical context chosen by him to frame the whole theatrical action will be that of the Thirty Years' War, a terrible conflict of religious origin, which originated in the centre of Europe through Protestant political forces (Swedish and German) against Catholic forces (mainly Polish).

The great miseries that this long war caused for the people, then, are admirably symbolised here by the extraordinary figure of one woman and her three children, a family group always present on the stage, dragging in a circle, with great effort but no purpose, a heavy cart, half military canteen and half junk shop, in order to be able to survive among the battle fronts. For in addition to the gravest material misfortunes, war causes the moral perversion of people: of those who have decided upon and maintain it and of the troops who carry it out, inflamed by hatred and rapacity. Without doubt, this universal moral degradation is the worst of the effects caused by war.

However, like a backdrop amid so much misery is the contrasting presence of the extraordinary, elemental and direct goodness of a mother hardened in the defence of her own life and that of her own, who tirelessly seeks nourishment and protection. The reasons why men are killing each other are not important to her, nor does she understand them. She will always fight for life. And it is not as though she presents herself as a model of integrity, as, for example, deep down she wishes that the conflict may never end, because it is thanks to this that her little business is beginning to do better than others... Once more the natural goodness of the human being proves compatible, according to Brecht, with small self-defensive failures.

In reality though, and despite its defensive anxieties, this miniscule group, itinerant, innocent and innocuous, is going to be harshly punished. Thus the tremendous injustice of war is theatrically patented. In effect, the two sons will be mobilised very soon and will die accidentally in actions they were carrying out with the intention of helping others. The mother has already warned them not to leave their good selves behind, for the great virtues are not viable in a world so morally corrupt ("This is the time of the

great capitulation...” she warns them). The daughter will also perish sadly at the end of the drama, trying to alert the people to the imminent presence of the enemy. Thus, these three young people signify the sad fate of innocents in time of war.

In obvious contrast to the heroic figure of the militant mother, which Maxim Gorky had created in his famous novel *The Mother* (1908), Bertolt Brecht now presents the figure of that new Mother Courage, never bellicose but affectionate and tolerant, full of compassion and always welcoming of all the needs surrounding her, whatever the side involved, anxious to give and protect life in the very fields that have been sown with blood. Within her is that charity which always shines, above the internal “justice” of war, which demands destruction and vengeance. And perhaps this goodness could be seen as the incarnation of a truly transcendent Charity which, together with that other idea of a greater and more universal Justice, could ultimately reach a point of harmony.

And the curious thing about this fundamental approach suggested by Brecht, is that it is not a question of an idealised mother figure, but that of a simple and ordinary being, nonetheless endowed with such a genuine love for her neighbours that she infects the spectator with hope, even when feeling discouraged in the face of so many situations of maximum injustice like those being performed for them. Here are some of the last words spoken by Mother Courage, before continuing to drag the cart, now without her children: “The poor man doesn’t always have to lose ... / he still goes on expecting some miracle: / We must go on and not weaken. / On your feet, Christians, for spring has come!”.

As we see, in this last striking staged proposal, Brecht does not seem to want to emphasise an unconditional necessity of struggle and still less that of any other type of violent and lethal action. This is because, according to him, the solution to world injustice should not be discovered in the forces of death, but in the power of love.

It is certain that a charity of simple beneficence is not enough; one must engage in moral combat, resisting and denouncing with great firmness the causes of social injustice; but understanding that the strongest force to overthrow egotism and pride —primary causes of all injustices— will continue to be the disinterested love of those who devote themselves without restraint to the most destitute.

Let us remember that in his early youth Bertolt Brecht had recognised in German communism the only effective movement in the favour of the oppressed, the victims of the bourgeois society in which he lived; however, years later, upon realising that the party was turning into an intransigent and totalitarian system, he separated himself from that movement, which declared itself to be defending justice, but was doing so through inhuman procedures. “Compassion —wrote Hannah Arendt— brought Bertolt Brecht back to reality.”

And so indeed it was, for he had always dreamt of a much more human justice, which included a clear understanding of human fragility and the contradictions of nature, such as forgiveness and compassion, together with all those other virtues, big or small, which ensure the unconditional value of liberty.

2. LONGING FOR A TRANSCENDENT JUSTICE (ALBERT CAMUS)

Though from very different personal approaches to those offered to us by the German Bertolt Brecht, the French writer Albert Camus nonetheless offers us a notable concurrence with this profound aspiration towards a more transcendent justice.

Following the great tradition of the French moralists, of the stature of Montaigne, Pascal or Rousseau, Camus (born in Mondovi, Algeria in 1913 and died near Paris in 1960), did not cease to search, throughout his short life, for some moral norms which might safeguard as faithfully as possible the supreme value of the dignity of the human person. Having known from his infancy the unjust situation of poverty and oppression in which most of his Algerian contemporaries found themselves, and moved by a responsible preoccupation with the flesh-and-blood victims he contemplated all around him, it can be said that he dedicated his whole writer's life to trying out the standards of an universal morality with humanist leanings, centring it always on the concept of justice. Certainly an undertaking in no way comfortable, which led to him going through phases of despair and frustration, together with other phases in which he felt much more secure and recognised, towards the end of his days, as a much-published intellectual master, in moments of great moral confusion which mainly originated from wars and political totalitarianism.

Camus knew, in fact, that "what constitutes the greatness of man is the struggle, inexplicable at first sight, against his *unjust* condition" (*Actuelles I*). And, from this moment, take into account that for Camus, as we have also seen with Brecht, the concept of justice was much richer and more integrative than might usually be understood from legal agreements or customary jurisprudence. The idea of justice, according to him, was very near to a metaphysical category of universal order, and he also understood it as a difficult dynamic equilibrium between great but clearly antagonistic principles, such as happiness and misfortune, God and History; a basically radical contradiction from which notable disorder in consciences and society could originate. It would be a question, then, of recognising that a permanent contradiction is found in the very bosom of existence, that the human being should never cease to overcome, trying to reach a certain equilibrium (= *existential* justice), or at least a type of "just method" of evident Aristotelian inspiration. The morality of justice, then, that Camus will endeavour to propose in all his writings, will be a morality of humanist moderation, very Hellenic, but at the same time a combative morality, of denunciation and rejection, inspired always by that other transcendent justice, possibly unattainable, for which he never ceased to feel a profound longing.

In consequence, according to him, all those who *adjust themselves* to the essential truth of being human, those who keep in harmony with themselves (in a situation of correctness or rectitude: *droiture*), can be understood as just, along with the things that make them feel in harmony with their physical environment, in a desirable and fervent union with nature, in a destiny of "marriages" between the climate, the countryside and the cosmos. Indeed, this concept of justice coincides almost wholly with that of happiness, this being a very difficult state to reach or maintain for much time, for evil and misfortunes (clearly unjust from this viewpoint) disturb those ecstasies when they have hardly begun.

This existential injustice would relentlessly pursue a man from his birth, and for this reason human life would prove to be basically absurd, contradictory and meaningless in itself. "They've swindled us" —exclaims the protagonist of *The Misunderstood*— "*to what end comes that great call to being?*". This existential injustice also seems to show itself —always according to Camus— in the limitations that the human mind encounters when it seeks to explain that basic contradiction or imbalance; an injustice which the author qualifies as cruel, through experiencing it fundamentally as an irritating "great indifference of the universe faced with the most anguished questions of man". As can be easily noticed, that double concept of cosmic or transcendent justice / injustice has a lot to do with the tragic vision which no few poets of Hellenic antiquity had maintained.

Lastly, this conception of injustice, so ample and superior, will begin to acquire connotations of social inequality, when the author indignantly contemplates the bad distribution of natural goods within the planet. He thinks, in effect, that it is not just for many human beings to be born in the most terrible misery, deprived of the most necessary things to survive, in absolutely inhuman places and climates, while others live in much more favourable physical conditions. This last thought already brings us towards the Camusian concept of *historical* injustice, more shocking if the previous one can be said to have originated not through a supposed Destiny but through the ill-will or idleness of men. Thus these great social disorders, caused in great measure by abuse of the ambition for power, which Camus himself had suffered in his own flesh and that of his contemporaries from childhood, are what will most affect him personally and what will be the primary objective of his implacable struggle as a writer. "This supreme injustice [...]. I discovered in the suburbs of great cities." (Preface to *The Underbelly and the Law*, 2nd edition) "History is unjust because it demands great sacrifices from man, to then attain only ridiculous results." (*Actuelles I*).

In the interesting speech that Camus made in Stockholm, in December 1957, on receiving the Nobel Prize for Literature, he publicly confessed that his whole life and all of his works had been directed by the desire for "a truly human and universal justice", since the sad circumstances in which humanity found itself on the planet obliged every literary person or thinker to carry out his or her work in favour of a greater justice: "The time of irresponsible artists has now passed", he repeated several times. Always taking into account this declaration of intentions, then, we are going to try to uncover it in some of his most significant works, with the hope of being able to recognise at the same time the evolution of his thought, along with the great variety of his moral proposals, always in relation to justice.

2.1. "The Myth of Sisyphus" and "The Stranger"

At the heart of these two well-known books, both published in 1942 in the middle of a world war, the starting point could be no other than that of proving the absurd (that is to say, the unjust) in human existence, without anyone or anything being able to explain it to us: in effect, that "*silence déraisonable devant l'appel humain*" turns out to be totally irrational: a silence so unreasoning —or unjust— in the face of the complaints —so just in themselves— of the human being.

Faced with this infuriating proof, then, the author of *The Myth of Sisyphus* will systematically re-examine some of the replies that have been given, wholly unsatisfactory for him, and for this reason he will reject one after the other. Since Camus was moved by a great love for life, he can in no way accept the nihilism that some existentialists propose, and still less the solutions that other less scrupulous writers have accepted, always offering some type of evasion, from a crass and unacceptable egotism. His own proposal, on the other hand, will neither be metaphysical nor aesthetic, but stoically moral.

In effect, faced with the tremendous injustice of the absurd in human life, he suggests that one should never acknowledge defeat, trying to resist, as splendidly as possible and with great firmness, that unjust reality which sets out to crush us. Camus ventures, then, to propose the example of Sisyphus, the Titan who —according to him— succeeded in recovering his dignity through carrying out the punishment of the gods, with free obstinacy and farsightedness, through the interminable repetition of the same task, thus showing a "higher fidelity", proper to his dignity as a person. And for that reason "one must assume Sisyphus to be fortunate".

Notice how already in this essay the moral behaviour which Camus is proposing as the most valid in the face of all injustice, is that of securing above all, even when one is subject to harsh punishments, the integrity of the human subject: which will consist of remaining always in command of one's own conscience and freedom.

But the author is not wholly satisfied with this first moral hypothesis, perhaps because he considers it excessively heroic and not attainable to most mortals. Consequently he will attempt to test other possible attitudes in the face of the absurd (that existential injustice) without falling into the already rejected nihilistic or aesthetic-vitalist postures. So in the audacious novel that is *The Stranger*, written very soon after *The Myth of Sisyphus*, he will try out a new hypothesis, which could be condensed into the following question: Can the human being live with dignity, keeping his liberty, having rejected all feeling of hope and all implication of affection for his neighbour?

Meursault, the strange protagonist of the tale, will be the incarnation of this hypothesis. A human subject with no other sign of identity but his continued indifference to all that surrounds him; a being, moreover, who says that he feels wholly innocent of the death of a man, for which he himself confesses to being accidentally responsible. Is such an existence probable, insensible to all human relationships and wholly indifferent in the face of any moral obligation? It proves difficult to admit that such an attitude may be valid, or even credible, as a possible way out of the absurdity of existence, although Camus does not seem to dismiss it completely, introducing at the end, perhaps somewhat arbitrarily, a fit of rebellion in his protagonist. In any case, he does not seem to have been content with a new model like that, having had to empty his man of all traces of moral conscience. He must, then, continue searching in another direction.

2.2. "The Plague" and "The Rebel"

The terrible desolation caused in Europe by the invasion of the Nazi forces in 1939 and 1940, which provoked a universal clamour of protest, was lived through very intensely by Camus in France, first in the underground movement and then in the resistance. Such deeds, so radically unjust, made him reorientate his ethical investigations, come down

from theory to practice, to the palpitating reality of contemporary history. That is why, from then on, in all his best-known writings and also in his innumerable newspaper articles, his voice will take on a firmer and more incisive tone and a clear will for political denunciation and combat, always in defence of historical justice.

Extraordinary literary creator that he was, he very soon conceived and, in 1947, published, the moving parable *The Plague*, in which he narrates the deadly effects of that terrible epidemic, that is to say the unjust and brutal military invasion, whose victims could not even defend themselves. Naturally, the author does not content himself with the description of such harmful effects, but incites the reader, through the moral example of some characters, to think and react against such unjust historical abuses. He quickly dismisses all passive or resigned attitudes, to insist on the value of the position which from then on will be his own most permanent conviction: that of *active rebellion.* Precisely, he thinks that it is in situations of extreme calamity that the conscience of oppressed people is awakened, thanks to which they decide to act with all their strength, and in solidarity, against the invasion of evil, even at the cost of their own lives, as indeed occurs with regard to some of the characters of this magnificent and exemplary novel.

Rebellion as a supreme moral obligation in the face of political injustice will consequently be the principal theme that Camus develops during those calamitous years, and which he will finally absorb, in quite a systematic way, in his famous philosophical-moral essay, *The Rebel* (1951). At that time a lot of things were weighing on his conscience, not only the military occupation, with its harshest of consequences in the form of political repression and deportations, but the numerous executions and purges, occurring also in France since the Allied victory, but which were still more cruel and widespread in the Stalinist Soviet Union.

In the face of so much moral depravity in the public authorities, and so many infringements of the most elemental rights of the person, then, Camus could not but endorse in that essay his moral proposal of rebellion. Faced with such atrocious injustices, it seems that the human being has no other moral way out but that of keeping himself or herself in a state of permanent rebellion: existential rebellion which, upon mobilising all the strengths of the human individual, is moreover transformed into a substantial definition of his or her condition as a person: *Je me révolte, donc je suis*; an affirmation which necessarily implies the attitude of solidarity with others, and that for this reason may be turned into the following: *Je me révolte, donc nous sommes*.

However, in order to justify this viewpoint Camus will not want to take into account those "metaphysical" rebellions (of Prometheus, Sade or Nietzche) which end, by the logic of history, in nihilism; neither will he consider adequate those other political revolutions (like those of Spartacus, Robespierre and Stalin) which degenerated into terrible and dehumanising repression. Still less will he be able to accept the moral sophism which sets out to justify a great political cause, legitimising cruel and bloody measures like torture. For that reason, against all those revolutions, normally corrupted by the longing for power, he will set moral rebellion, implacable in the face of abuses of power and lies. A rebellion, furthermore, clearly inspired by Mediterranean humanism (*la pensée du Midi*), which will not cease to recognise its own excesses, when they are present, always for the sake of a very human wisdom, in which neither faith in man nor hope in the human community will ever fail.

2.3. How to fight against injustice without becoming violent?

Starting from the correct principle that a happy ending can never justify perverse methods, Albert Camus continues to reflect upon questions of political morality, intent now upon the actuality of the struggle for independence in Algeria, and especially shaken by the frequent terrorist attacks which are carried out as much in Algeria as in Paris. Can terrorism be justified in any case? Otherwise, how to explain that noble and generous people should volunteer themselves to carry out such a deadly act of destruction? Burning questions —then as now— which neither for Camus nor for ourselves today have reached entirely convincing answers.

Without doubt, the articles Camus wrote on a question as pressing as this, for the newspaper *Combat* during those years, are worth retrieving. But it is above all in his theatrical work *The Just Assassins* (1949), directly inspired by Dostoyevsky's novel *Demons* (1872) that he will poignantly propose to us the discussion of this theme.

Moved by very noble ideals of liberating the people from the tyrant's yoke, a group of young Russians choose to sacrifice themselves in order to commit a terrorist attack against him. But how to overcome the dramatic dilemma between this noble act of liberation and its inexcusable effects of death, in themselves so inhuman? The Grand Duke, in effect, is also a human being like themselves, who has a wife and children...

Kaliayev, the most idealistic character in the group, dares to recognise with clarity that this terrible act would certainly be a murder if he were not also to die himself, in payment and atonement for having committed it. But is this convincing? Neither can he argue with himself by appealing that this is no more than the execution of a death sentence, for this would be to take public justice into the hands of a few individuals, and to accept without more ado the justification of capital punishment, against which Camus had spoken many times. (See his "Reflections upon the Guillotine" articles, 1957). Whereby, once again, the issue of terrorism was also left open, demonstrating at least that the inevitable struggle against injustice will have to be maintained through no few doubts and dilemmas. Although regarding the rejection of the death penalty, Camus entertained no doubts of any kind.

On the one hand, when he sets himself to reflect upon the morality of this most serious theme of war, the doubts will return to trouble him. On the other hand, the slaughter that armies carry out on the battlefield seems to him totally unjustifiable. Were they not perpetrating a monstrous, reciprocal and massive kind of terrorism? Was the international law of war enough to justify such horrendous crimes? But on the other hand, how to explain and excuse the long history of humanity, all of it founded on the basis of fighting between peoples?

All these issues, crucial and nonetheless never fully resolved, were throwing into crisis the concept of greater human justice for which Camus had until then been fighting. In the face of so much barbarism, he had categorically stated (in *Days of Wrath*, 1944) that "a utilitarian, circumstantial and pragmatic justice was in no way enough, and that one must aspire to an eternal and sacred justice." (*une justice le plus eternelle et sacrée*). "It is a mistaken passion" he had written to a German friend "to seek to love the fatherland above justice; if justice is not valued, it cannot be said that the fatherland is truly loved." (*Letters to a German Friend*, 1945, letter 4). But in the face of the brutal evidence of facts, that noble Utopia of his seemed to sway. In Paris he had found himself obliged to

enter into armed resistance, and at this stage he was feeling inclined to defend his rebel Algerian compatriots, although this time his defence was not going to be an armed one.

At the height of the ancient French colony's war of independence, Camus offered himself as mediator between the two sides. In the first place he wished to propose a truce not only military but civil as well, within which, before anything else, political prisoners would be liberated and those condemned to death would be reprieved, while a new constitution was being prepared that would recognise France and Algeria as two federated nations. Unfortunately, the peace-making voice of this prophet of justice was not recognised as a proposal of salvation, and his death in a car accident, at the beginning of 1960, did not allow him to continue in this field, nor even to contemplate the happy moment of Algeria's independence, which occurred two and a half years later.

Certainly, amid so many tasks, speeches and lectures, the metaphysically significant contradiction between Justice and Violence seemed to be gripping his soul more and more; the which, on the one hand, did not suppress the strong yearning for Utopian justice, which never left him, but also obliged him to moderate his particular realisation, introducing certain historical corrections. And in this difficult task of political moderation there could not fail to intervene some other factors, also very exacting and authentically human, which completed his recognised humanist concept of justice. Such as, for example, and only with reference to the war, the warning always to avoid the passions of hatred and vengeance in a war situation, to maintain a permanent attitude of solidarity with comrades, and to make the effort to feel a great compassion for those who suffer, for friends as much as enemies.

Undoubtedly this exacting moral attitude of Camus in the face of the barbarism of war and terrorism, proves exemplary, for the sake of what it holds: valiant equilibrium between, on the one hand, a transcendent vision of justice and, on the other, its profoundly human methods of application, never ceasing to maintain his firm position of a man rebelling against all injustice. An example which may still prove stimulating today, in this world of confusion and moral disarmament, precisely when situations of violence and barbarism, perhaps more horrible than ever, are reaching universal significance.

2.4. Sisyphus becomes human and recognizes his limits

In this final phase of his life, in which the most terrible and inhuman events were imposed upon Camus, obliging him to moderate his passion for a permanently greater justice to the point where he doubts his own fundamental attitude of rebellion, it is possible that he once again began to experience the senseless bitterness of existence, which he had felt so intensely at the age of twenty. Now, at 40, he again enters a very critical phase, when wearied by the exhausting bustle of life as a journalist and cultural promoter, participating in many public discussions which required continuous journeys between Paris and Algeria, and also somewhat weakened by tuberculosis, which had never been completely cured. Camus feels more desperate, misunderstood and weary than ever in his struggle against the injustice of the world. And, implacable critic that he had been in the face of all lies and abuses of power, he now feels that his conscience is calling upon him to justify himself.

Having understood better each time the great imperfections of human justice, he now feels inclined to conclude that this is the time in which the judges also should be judged. And since he himself had risen up so many times in the judgement of others, he also believes it is demanded of him that he justify himself. And it is then that the transcendental question arises: before who or what may the human being finally justify himself or herself?

All these reflections, together with a new and disquieting sense of culpability through which Camus's soul was working in the last years of his life, gave place to a new fictional creation, more brief but no less moving than the former ones, which he called *The Fall* (1956), although his present meditations were also to be collected in his last two works, *The Underbelly and the Law* (2nd edition, of 1957) and the extraordinary autobiographical account left unfinished by his death, which was to be entitled *The First Man* (and would not be published until 1994).

Let us focus only on *The Fall*. Here, in effect, the principal theme under discussion is, surprisingly, that of innocence, as we have also seen in Bertolt Brecht. Is innocence possible in such a perverse world? Who can keep himself or herself wholly just in social situations so contaminated by injustice? Not even Jesus was innocent of everything —says Clamence, the protagonist— upon feeling Himself responsible for the children who died for His cause! And for that reason, that Parisian judge, of great renown, upon recognising suddenly one day that he himself is neither justified in exercising justice nor in condemning anyone, abruptly abandons his career, family and fortune to take refuge in a tavern in Amsterdam, where he will confess his personal guilt to a stranger, always the victim of his own vanity and egotism in all he had done up to then.

Certainly Camus, in this last most critical phase of his existence, had humanised himself to unsuspected limits, and returned to the concept of the most elemental nature of man, from his birth (that of that "first man") as an odd subject, a mixture of ideals and weaknesses, responsible for virtuous acts but also of not a few failures of moral duty. Thus the vision of human existence, which he offers in this last novel, becomes much more comprehensive and compassionate than what he had created before, as a thinker and literary man, from very intransigent heroic assumptions. Maybe he was now throwing into doubt that categorical juvenile affirmation "The world is beautiful, and without it there is no salvation". And perhaps that is also why his former concept of justice was now becoming less rigorous and incisive, more comprehensive and elemental. This, in any case, seems to be the principal moral to be taken from *The Fall*.

And, nonetheless, in this last novel there can be seen some surprising symptoms, which the author ingeniously makes appear towards the end of the book, and which could be taken as an expression of his assiduous longing for a greater justice, and perhaps also as an anxiety for salvation, expressed from the same abyss of human misery. In this sense, events as unexpected as the following would be noted: the panel of 'inner judges' of Van Dyck's 'Mystical Lamb' triptych, or the gratuitous reference to "baptismal waters" or the incomprehensible clamour of the seagulls which the protagonist suspects are bringing him a message, or the final surprising snowfall in a seaport, which covers everything in white. "Look, it's snowing... These enormous snowflakes are surely doves: At last those friends decide to come down; they cover the waters and the roof-tiles (...) What an invasion! Let's hope they bring good news. All the world will be saved... And not only the chosen ones."

CONCLUSION

Here we finish this essay of moral reflection, about two great men of modern literature, obstinately determined to defend the cause of justice with their work. We have been able to see how each one tests this objective in a different way, from social and political positions that are also very diverse. Yet our intention in selecting them has not been simply to juxtapose two standpoints, interesting in themselves, but that the reader should compare them in order to examine in greater depth the fundamental convergence that appears between them, over and above their more accidental discrepancies. Convergences that could be centred on a double tension: that which is raised between, on one hand, the exigency that derives from a more transcendent vision of justice and, on the other, the practical realisation that it is not possible to cease to take into account the limitations of human nature, which must always be treated with compassion. And together with this the other tension, also very basic and not less ethically stimulating, which establishes itself between on one hand the inexcusable obligation to practise justice and, on the other, the never-easy justification of oneself, for which in many cases neither the court of one's own conscience nor any other purely human instant are enough.

Note, finally, how in our two authors a notable transition took place from a first Utopian vision of justice to a more personalised and relational acceptance of concrete and neighbourly solidarity: a vision which, not least for its idealism, is ceasing to be very demanding on a superior level, that of attaining a much fuller human, personal and communal fulfilment; that is to say, the realisation in this world of a greater Justice.

In short, what both Bertolt Brecht and Albert Camus have shown through these insoluble tensions and dilemmas is that the effects of this world's injustices are so serious that the human spirit, despite its fragility, will always resist against them, for one cannot cease to experience an unconquerable yearning and a permanent longing for that truly universal greater Justice.

4. TEXTS

A humanist approach to social justice, according to Brecht

"At the centre of Bertolt Brecht's attention is situated man, seen surely from a new historical-materialist viewpoint; but the man, and not the historical and political event, seen with its socio-economic implications, as occurred in Piscator [...] Man is placed, then, in the centre of Brecht's theatrical theory and praxis, not only as an object of investigation and performance, but also as the primary "end" of the political action of the theatre itself, with the object of transforming it.

From this there are derived some very specific consequences directly pertinent to theatrical practice. Brecht devotes great attention to the human instruments of the theatre, to the problem of the renewal of the actor and the invention of a recitation method to constitute in itself a form of Marxist consciousness and communication. In effect, from Marxism and its dialectic demands [...] Brecht derives a will to penetrate deeply into the intrinsic possibilities of the specific medium of theatre...

Brecht also speaks of the theatre as a place in which "contradictions" are tested. But what contradictions are revealed to us? And in what way do these contradictions appear to us? [...] The economic and social contradictions of a given time tend, according to Brecht, to reveal themselves as contradictions in the human behaviour of his characters. In this sense the character of Mother Courage, dealer and mother, who makes her living from war and loses her children in war, is illuminating: a great living contradiction which reproduces in her, in her incurable wounds, the contradictions of a time and economical system. Thus the socio-economic contradictions are projected in the microcosm of the individual, although they are not stifled because of this, but reserved and made more strident by such a human projection of themselves. [...] This Copernican revolution, this returning of man to his proper dimensions, is realised by Brecht always keeping attention centred on the human. [...]

In Brechtian theatre, the great forces of history reveal their presence and weight in the distortions they cause in man, the repeating of the contradiction between man as end and man as object.

[...] If Piscator was trying to illuminate and explain human events from socio-economic events in a cause-and-effect account, Brecht, on the contrary, illuminates the socio-economic contradictions through human contradictions and the incurable wounds of his characters; thus he makes structural contradictions take root in the hideous deformations they cause in man... from which arises a call for a resolutive praxis."

Ronald Gray, *Brecht the Dramatist*.

Camus and Bonhoeffer:
Beyond moral idealism and cynical realism

"In the final pages of *The Rebel,* Camus attempts to offer a solution to the problem of rebellion in history in order to rehabilitate it as "a founding value of humanity" (Ricoeur) against its deviations. By which means he is opening the way to ethics of a measure beyond moral idealism and cynical realism: "If rebellion could found a philosophy [...] it would be a philosophy of limits, of calculated ignorance and risk".

While carrying out a critical reading of the Hegelian dialectic on the master and slave, Camus thinks that a meditation on rebellion always implies the idea of limits. In the first place, because it puts a limit on oppression; but also because, in showing the dignity common to all men, it uncovers the limits of its own rebellion, recognizing the right of the other to rebel. Rebellion does not claim total liberty; on the contrary, it subjects total liberty, that of the master, to judgement. This, then, demonstrates the idea of the just limit: "The approximate thought is the only one that generates reality". Thus appears the profound logic of rebellion: a no to the tyrant and a yes to man. The "perpetual tension" between this yes and this no transcends rebellion, which would otherwise degenerate into the lethal abandonment of "anything goes" and would recognise evil only in order to increase it. It can, then, be stated that, for Camus, prudence is a rebellion in the second degree, a "rebellion of rebellion" (Ricoeur).

[...] And it is interesting to note that, from his faith in Revelations, Bonhoeffer rejects for the same reason as Camus all moral reasoning of the idealistic type along with, in the opposite sense, all cynical attitudes, basically recovering the ethical position of Camus, through different paths, including those of the Christian faith. [...]

Thus, in what would have been his *Ethics*, Bonhoeffer refuses to depart from moral principles and criticises idealism and fanaticism, in so far as they sacrifice reality to abstract principles, or idolise them at the expense of reality, while Camus was also affirming that "all morality needs a part of realism, for all pure virtue proves moral..."

Beyond these two antagonistic forms of idolatry, then (fanaticism and cynicism), Bonhoeffer also rejects the logic of all or nothing; although if Camus does so by virtue of the founding principle of rebellion and the mediating value of restraint, Bonhoeffer tests it by sharing in Christ, who is the original prince, not in order to deny good and evil, but because goodness as much as evil depend on Him in the present world, as it really exists here and now. [...] And it is because Christ, as the Word of God made man, is the "form" which informs reality *from within*, because the Christian, allowing himself or herself to be "formed" by Christ ... must create audacious ethical answers, beyond moral idealism and cynical realism.

Arnaud Corbic, *Camus et Bonhoeffer. Rencontre de deux humanismes.*
Labor et Fides, Geneva 2002, pp. 69-73

To those who are to be born later

“Truly, I live in sombre times!
They tell me: eat and drink! Be content with what you have!
But how can I eat and drink when
I take food from the starving man with what I eat
and the thirsty man is in need of my glass of water?
And nonetheless, I eat and drink.
I would also like to be wise.
In the ancient books it is said what it means to be wise:
To distance yourself from the world’s disputes, and to spend without fear
our brief time,
to know also how to behave yourself without violence,
to return good for evil.
Not to satisfy one’s desires but to forget them
also passes for a thing of wisdom.
But I can’t do any of that . . .
Truly, I live in sombre times!”

Bertolt Brecht, “To those born later” (1938).

The Plague

"After a silence, Dr Rieux straightened up a little and asked Tarrou if he had an idea what road he would have to choose in order to attain peace.

— Yes, compassion.

[…]

Now I could clearly hear the muffled breathing of the waves coming in to crash against the cliffs.

— In short, —said Tarrou simply— what interests me is how one may become a saint.

— But you don't believe in God.

— Precisely. One can become a saint without God; this is the only concrete problem I'll admit today."

Albert Camus, *The Plague*.

[1] Horkheimer, *Anhelo de justicia. Teoría crítica y religión*. Trotta, Madrid 2000, *passim.*