Int J Philos Relig (2013) 73:137–150
DOI 10.1007/s11153-013-9400-y

ARTICLE

Kierkegaard and Camus: either/or?

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Received: 29 December 2012 / Accepted: 5 February 2013 / Published online: 21 February 2013

Abstract The philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus have typically been considered as inverted images of each other. Kierkegaard turns to faith in God as a path of redemption from meaninglessness while Camus rejects faith as a form of intellectual suicide and cowardice. I argue that an analysis of key terms of contest—faith and lucidity, revolt and suicide, Abraham and Sisyphus, despair and its overcoming—serves to blur the lines of contrast, making Kierkegaard and Camus much closer in their views of what sort of life we should live in face of the forsakenness of our condition than they seem at first glance.

Keywords Kierkegaard · Camus · Faith · Atheism · Forsakenness

> Despair is sin before God (Kierkegaard 1974b, p. 208).
> Despair … is sin without God (Camus 1955, p. 30).

Introduction: secret sharers

The philosophies of Søren Kierkegaard and Albert Camus have typically been considered as inverted images of each other.[1] And it is not hard to see why. It is true that they start from a shared perception of the forlornness of the human situation, what Camus refers to as the incommensurability between the longing for meaning and the "irrational silence of the world" (1955, p. 21) and what Kierkegaard describes as "the

[1] See, for example Jacob Golomb (1995, p. 196), Marcia Mercede Logozzi (2007, pp. 374–375), Sheela Pawar (1988, pp. 151–153, 156), Bruce Reichenbach (1976); Jon Stewart (2009, p. 142), and James Wood (1999). Two notable exceptions to the presentation of Kierkegaard and Camus as stark opposites are Roger Poole (1998) and Avi Sagi (1994, 2000).

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bottomless void that … under[lies] everything" (1974a, p. 30). Yet Kierkegaard turns to faith in God as a path of redemption from meaninglessness while Camus rejects faith as a form of intellectual suicide and cowardice. This is no doubt a significant difference. Despair, the state of hopelessness and capitulation when confronted with the evident meaninglessness of the human situation, is, as the mottos for this essay attest, for Kierkegaard "sin before God" and for Camus "sin without God," and one might well suppose that there is little to find in common between these two positions.

But in both cases despair is "sin," a state of lack in need of reparation by the struggle for a way of life that can resist it and redeem us. Thus the question remains whether the prepositional difference between "before God" and "without God" is enough to establish an unqualified "either/or" between Kierkegaard and Camus. Just how different are the sorts of life the two propose as a result of their responses to the absurd? Is Kierkegaard's faith[2] really the sort of escapism and cowardly abandonment of intellectual honesty that Camus portrays it as? Is the "majesty" (1955, p. 40) really so different from the redemptive reappropriation of the world Kierkegaard sees as being made possible by faith? I will argue that lines of difference separating Kierkegaard and Camus are continually blurred, and that as a result, the prospects for a genuine dialogue between the believer and the non-believer emerges from beneath the incompatibilist discourse of a rigid either/or.

The temptation to assert an absolute difference between Kierkegaard and Camus is made all the stronger by Camus's own construction of his relationship to Kierkegaard. Kierkegaard makes his appearance in Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus* in the context of the discussion of "the absurd," which Camus defines as "the divorce between man and his life," between our "wild longing for clarity" on the one hand and the "irrational" character of the world on the other (1955, pp. 5, 16). It is important to note that Kierkegaard uses the term "absurd" in a quite different and specifically religious sense,[3] and that Camus is employing his own more general sense of absurdity in addressing Kierkegaard in *Sisyphus.* Still, Camus is right that Kierkegaard is also very much concerned with this more general characterization of the profound anxiety that haunts the between-space of our longing for meaning and the void that mocks that longing. The encounter with the void is indeed at the heart of Kierkegaard's many depictions of the experience of human suffering and despair. In *Sisyphus,* Camus portrays Kierkegaard as the man he simultaneously respects more than any other for his attunement to absurdity (in Camus's sense) and as the writer who most disappoints him. Thus while Kierkegaard "does more than discover the absurd, he lives it; … he refuses consolations, ethics, reliable principles, … [and] is careful not to quiet [his] pain" (p. 19), finally he can not bear his pain and seeks a cure through the leap of faith in God. To be cured becomes his "frenzied wish" and "the entire effort of his intellect

[2] Readers of Kierkegaard know that there is no such thing as "Kierkegaard's idea of faith." His writing about faith is vast, complex, and wonderfully inconsistent. Thus the idea of faith I have chosen to focus on in this essay, while a recurring one, is certainly not without conflicting evidence in Kierkegaard's writings. I have chosen to emphasize it both because it is the one I find most compelling and because it allows for the most interesting and productive engagement with Camus.

[3] "The absurd" for Kierkegaard is the fact that "with God all things are possible, even the impossible" (1974a, p. 157).

is to escape the antinomy of the human condition" (p. 29). There is in Camus's portrait of Kierkegaard a sense of mourning over an act of betrayal by a kindred spirit.

Interestingly, if Kierkegaard is condemned by Camus for his intellectual suicide and "intentional [self-] mutilation" (1955, p. 31), nearly a century earlier Kierkegaard had diagnosed someone very much like Camus as "demonic" in his exposition of "the despair of defiance" in *The Sickness Unto Death.* Kierkegaard (or rather Anticlimacus, Kierkegaard's one Christian pseudonym) classifies defiance as both the most intense and the rarest form of despair. The defiantly despairing self has the greatest awareness of the forsakenness of the human condition and the most lucid recognition of our most fundamental choice, either "to dispose of itself or to create itself" (p. 201), precisely the choice between suicide or revolt that Camus poses. If such an individual is able to resist suicide, which Anticlimacus sees as "the danger nearest to him," he will "revolt against the whole of existence" and refuse to be undone by suffering or to seek help of any sort beyond his own resources (pp. 200, 207).

Indeed the demonic despairer entirely accepts his suffering and torment as a matter of pride, and refuses to hope that his "distress … might be removed" (Kierkegaard 1974b, p. 204), just as Camus insists that defiance is "devoid of hope" (1955, p. 40). "For to hope in the possibility of help," Anticlimacus says of this defiant self, "that he will not do; … rather than seek help he would prefer to be himself—-with all the tortures of hell, if so it must be, … even if … God in heaven and all his angels were to offer to help him out of it." Rather, the demonic insists on making "the self its own lord and master," indeed the "author" of itself (1974b, pp. 105, 203, 207). As Camus says of Sisyphus, in "negating the gods," he "makes of fate a human matter" and "knows himself to be the master of his days" (1955, p. 91). But for Anticlimacus, the demonic author can produce only a forlorn and desperate text, a text without hope of coherence: without God, the true Author, the self is condemned to remain forever broken and without the power to heal itself. Such an author can produce only a wholly contingent, fleeting, self-consuming text, like the fire that continually consumes itself (Kierkegaard 1974b, p. 151).

Two things are quite interesting in these portraits. The first is that it is not at all clear that either Kierkegaard or Camus would reject them. Certainly Camus would have no serious objection to finding his place in Anticlimacus' typology of despair as the defiant demon. Camus might even accept the diagnosis of sickness, the "sickness unto death" that is the fate of every human being without faith to be always incomplete, incapable of unifying itself or giving itself any ultimate meaning, insofar as he also sees the defiant self as preferring to "live with his ailments" rather than seeking a cure (1955, p. 29). As for Kierkegaard, he would certainly reject the idea that his faith is a suicide of lucidity, since the leap is precisely grounded in a fidelity to the perception of the meaninglessness of our condition. And yet there is a sense in which he also calls the leap a suicide, or a "dying to the world" (1974b, 1: 538), a revocation of our trust in reason to save us and a dying away to the lure of seeking comfort in the quotidian reality of "the finite."

Yet more interesting, though, is another feature of Kierkegaard's and Camus's portraits of their other: both suggest their utter closeness to the one they finally reject. Camus's "Kierkegaard" is his secret sharer, his closest companion in the recognition of the hopelessness of the human situation, and Kierkegaard's "Camus" (the demonic

despairer) is described as existing on the "the most dialectical borderline" between despair and faith (1974b, p. 208). In what follows, I will trace out ways in which this closeness appears through an analysis of key terms of contest between Kierkegaard and Camus: faith and lucidity, revolt and suicide, majesty and salvation, despair and its overcoming. I will argue that while there is indeed (a rather obvious) either/or between Kierkegaard and Camus, the slash-mark of separation, the '/,' marks a boundary that is fundamentally obscure and uncertain. In the space of this obscure site of difference lies the possibility of a less contentious encounter between Kierkegaard and Camus, between the believer and the atheist.

From shared ground to a parting of the ways

Immanuel Kant famously opens his *Critique of Pure Reason* by speaking of the "peculiar fate" of human reason, that "it is burdened by questions which, as prescribed by the very nature of reason itself, it is not able to ignore, but which, as transcending all its powers, it is also not able to answer" (Kant 1965, p. Avii). This "peculiar fate" is at the heart of what Camus refers to as "the absurd" and Kierkegaard as the "forsaken" character of the human condition, the sense of the dissonance between the human yearning to know and the impossibility of comprehension. Kierkegaard's pseudonym Johannes Climacus writes in his *Philosophical Fragments* of the "absolute paradox of thought: to want to discover something that thought itself cannot think" (p. 37). And while this paradox leaves Kierkegaard "weary of everything," yet, he says, "I hunger" (1971, 1: 25). Camus too speaks of how the understanding founders when faced with an "indescribable universe where contradiction, antinomy, anguish, [and] impotence reigns," and defines the absurd as the "confrontation of this irrational [world] and the wild longing for clarity"—Kierkegaard's "hunger"—"whose call echoes in the human heart" (1955, pp. 18, 16).

For both Kierkegaard and Camus, the experience of hunger in the face of incomprehension leads to a fundamental anxiety and sense of distress: "All existence makes me anxious," Kierkegaard writes in his journal, and "the whole thing is inexplicable to me, I myself most of all … My distress is enormous, boundless" (1967b, 2: 5383). Similarly, Camus speaks of his "years of real despair" (1968g, p. 13) and of how the encounter with the "unintelligible universe," surrounded by "a horde of irrationals," has left him "a stranger to myself and to the world" (1955, p. 15), precisely as Kierkegaard speaks of being "a stranger and an alien" (1968a, p. 263).

Moreover, both Kierkegaard's and Camus's authorships involve the preliminary project of bringing their readers into a lucid encounter with their own situation as strangers in a world "divested of illusions and lights" (1955, p. 5). They both write so as to dislocate their readers, ruthlessly tearing away the common facades of meaning, or what Camus refers to as the "stage sets" of the everyday that give us a sense of feeling at home in the world (1955, p. 10). As Kierkegaard writes in his journal, he "must first fetch" his readers from their complacency, "call to them, turn their comfortable way of thinking topsy-turvy" (1967b, 1: 641). This is the merciless character of their texts, that they demand of the reader the courage to become an alien and stranger to their world and to experience the distress of anxiety.

But this project of disorientation and beckoning the reader to distress is only preliminary. Both Kierkegaard and Camus are convinced that courage in face of anxiety is possible. They explore ways of life, Kierkegaard through his myriad pseudonyms and the whole cast of characters the pseudonyms themselves create, and Camus through his novels and plays and short stories, that contest the sense of despair that haunts our "peculiar fate." As Camus says, "the realization that life is absurd cannot be an end, but only a beginning" (1968b, p. 201).

Finally, though, their explorations end in seemingly opposing responses to meaninglessness: for Kierkegaard, it is faith in God that allows for a way of living with grace and purpose in face of "the negativity that pervades existence" (1968b, p. 75), while Camus rejects faith as "suicide," an abandonment of lucidity, a retreat from the only thing that is given us as certain, the absurd itself. Camus closes his reading of Kierkegaard in *Sisyphus* by quoting an early passage from *Fear and Trembling* that we have already alluded to: "If at the bottom of everything, there were merely a wild, seething force producing everything, … if the bottomless void that nothing can fill underlay all things, what would life be but despair?" (Kierkegaard 1974a, p. 30; Camus 1955, p. 30). For all the eloquence and effort Kierkegaard expends in evoking the void, for Camus he is finally horrified by his own insight and seeks to fill the abyss with a divine meaning that can save us from despair. Camus comments that Kierkegaard's

> cry is not likely to stop the absurd man. Seeking what is true is not seeking what is desirable. If in order to elude the anxious question: "What would life be?" one must … feed on the roses of illusion, then the absurd mind, rather than resigning itself to falsehood, prefers to adopt fearlessly Kierkegaard's reply: "despair." Everything considered, a determined soul will always manage (1955, pp. 30–31).

If all that can be lived without falsehood, without appeal to a mythological Author, is the absurd itself, then so be it. If for Camus despair is "sin without God," his demonic authorship is precisely this sinful text, transgressing against the nostalgic yearning for the absolute, for any essential meaning or explanation of what cannot (short of lying) be given meaning or explained. Nostalgia expresses the death drive, a longing to recover a magical state of peace and consolation. Camus, the demon, seeks a very different death, the death of nostalgia itself.

Here then we have our either/or: either faith or lucidity, either escape into a hope for salvation from our condition or a defiance of that condition, a "permanent revolution" against meaninglessness that, however, never denies that meaninglessness. Revolt "is a constant confrontation between man and his own obscurity … It challenges the world anew every second, … [and yet] it is not aspiration, for it is devoid of hope; … it is the certainty of a crushing fate, without the resignation that ought to accompany it" (Camus 1955, p. 40).

And yet! Or, as Kierkegaard's pseudonym Anticlimacus puts it in *Training in Christianity:* "Halt!" Anticlimacus inserts his "Halt!" just after presenting a picture of faith that seems irresistible: for all who suffer—which is to say, all of us—Christ invites us to come unto Him and He will give us peace. It is just here that we must halt, Anticlimacus insists, for things are not as simple as they seem (1967a, p. 25). And it is

just now, when we have our seemingly straightforward either/or between Camus and Kierkegaard, that we must halt, for things are more complicated than they appear.

Ambiguities

Faith and lucidity

Camus situates his perception of the world within an uncompromising refusal of all extra-terrestrial mythologies, of any "nostalgia for unity" or "appetite for the absolute" (1955, p. 13). "Between this sky and the faces turned toward it," he writes in the "Summer in Algiers" essay of *Nuptials* (*Noces*), "there is nothing on which to hang … a religion, … no eternity outside the curve of days" (1968c, p. 90). Religion is a "mutilation of the soul" (1955, p. 29) and a form of suicide (1955, pp. 21–31), an attempt to escape the apparently hopeless character of our mortal condition by a leap into a magical realm of wish-fulfillment. But "what can a meaning outside my [finite] condition mean to me? I can understand only in human terms … What other truth can I admit without lying, without bringing in a hope … that means nothing within the limits of my [finitude]?" (1955, p. 38).

Lucidity, for Camus, is this refusal to lie. "I do not want to found anything on the incomprehensible. I want to know whether I can live with what I know and with that alone" (1955, p. 40). Kierkegaard's Anticlimacus speaks of faith as the "cure" of depair, indeed as its "complete eradication" (1974b, pp. 147-148). But for Camus, lucidity requires that we "die unreconciled." As we have noted, for Camus what is important "is not to be cured," but to seek a way "to live with one's ailments" (1955, pp. 41, 29).

Camus's reading of Kierkegaard certainly seems to have strong support. The sacrifice of lucidity seems evident in Anticlimacus's claim that to have faith "is precisely to lose one's understanding in order to win God" (1974b, p. 171). There are indeed scores of passages throughout Kierkegaard's works that speak of the incompatibility of faith and reason: "the obedience of faith," for example, "is "believing against reason" (1967b, 2: 1154); "faith requires a man to give up his reason" (1968b, p. 337); and "faith begins precisely where thinking leaves off" (1974a, p. 64). Kierkegaard's "suicide," what we have seen Camus to call his "frenzied wish" to "escape the antinomy of the human condition" (1955, p. 29), seems clear in his ideal of "dying to the world in order to be able to love God" (1967b, 1: 538, 1006; and see 1967a, p. 152). Indeed in *Fear and Trembling,* the pseudonym Johannes de Silento describes the necessary "first movement" of faith to be the "renunciation" of the finite world (pp. 51–62). For Camus, though, there is only the finite world, and no escape, short of self-deception, from the horror of the wild, seething force of the void.

Our project of complicating Camus's portrait of "Kierkegaard" can begin by noting that Kierkegaard no less than Camus warns against the temptation to suicide in face of anxiety and despair (1997, p. 49, 1974b, pp. 177, 200). He too calls for courage, the courage to refuse to "get rid of the self" and to resist the will to "become nothing" (1974b, pp. 151–153). Crucially, Kierkegaard's claim that faith requires us to "give up" reason is emphatically not a call to abandon lucidity. His reservations about reason are

in fact very close to those of Camus. Camus writes in *Sisyphus* that "Reason may well claim that all is clear," but the idea of a "universal reason … [with its] categories that explain everything … [is] enough to make a decent man laugh" (p. 16). Kierkegaard too questions the claims of reason and "speculative philosophy" to provide objective knowledge (e.g., 1968b, pp. 178, 190–191), but he is as adamant as Camus that we never turn away from the effort to gain "complete clarity about oneself," an acute "consciousness" and "awareness" of our forsaken condition (1974b, pp. 180, 159).

Indeed, being "unconscious" of our despair is the most common human attitude, and represents a desire to "hide," to live in "delusion," and to evade the "cross … [of] suffering" (1974b, pp. 159, 160, 176, 204). Anticlimacus expresses his utmost respect for the demonic despairer, the one who sees most clearly, and his greatest impatience is for those who seek "to make one's life easy and comfortable" by a flight into "fantasy"—very much including those "Christians … [who are] tranquilized by the parson's … [talk of] salvation" (1974b, pp. 163, 167, 191). Kierkegaard's frequent refrain of "dying to the world" and "renouncing the finite," so far from Camus's depiction of it as the frenzied wish to escape the antinomy of the human condition, is rather a demand that we renounce and "die to" the complacent and tranquilizing suppression of despair that characterizes what is for him the most common human response (and unfortunately the most common attitude in "Christendom") to the anguish of life.

It is noteworthy that Kierkegaard actually exactly anticipates Camus's construction of the flight from lucidity as involving the twin myths of "hope" and "nostalgia" (1955, pp. 13, 40). In the *Sickness Unto Death,* Anticlimacus writes that "people overlook the fact that illusion has essentially two forms: that of hope and that of recollection" (p. 191). For Kierkegaard as for Camus, hope is a form of "weakness" in which we evade our responsibility to make our despair "conscious of itself as a deed," and he describes recollection (or nostalgia) as the desire for "youth," the mythological scene of harmony prior to despair (1974b, pp. 201, 192).

Given the tenuousness of Camus's judgment of Kierkegaard's "evasion of lucidity," his reading of the passage from *Fear and Trembling* in which Kierkegaard (or rather, his pseudonym Johannes de Silentio) speaks of the horror of the void deserves a closer look. This is the very the passage Camus uses to support his verdict on Kierkegaard as someone who prefers the roses of illusion to the fearless (if defiant) acceptance of despair, and yet what is truly interesting is something that Camus never mentions, namely that the author of this text, Johannes de Silentio, is precisely someone who does *not* make the leap of faith. The "knight of faith" is "incomprehensible to him." Indeed, he is "repelled" and "affronted" and "horrified" by the demands of faith: the knight of faith "appalls my soul" (1974a, pp. 36–47). Johannes has just the "courage" (pp. 46, 52) Camus finds lacking in the passage, the courage to "drain the cup of life's profound sadness" and to accept and live with his "pain" and "sorrow" (pp. 51, 54, 56).

Thus Camus's use of this passage to pronounce judgment on "Kierkegaard" is profoundly ironic, insofar as Kierkegaard (without quotes) chooses to write as "Johannes de Silentio," Camus's soul mate in the choice of despair over faith. In misidentifying the author of *Fear and Trembling,* Camus misses not only the opportunity to explore the implications of the fact that Kierkegaard had chosen to create an author with such close affinities to Camus himself, but, even more importantly, to pose the question of

the relation between Kierkegaard and Johannes de Silentio. I will argue shortly that the line of separation between Kierkegaard and Johannes (and thus Camus) is a thin one, so thin at times that it threatens to disappear.

Suffering and consolation

Camus finds in Kierkegaard a man who was unable to live with his pain and who sought to do everything to find a way out, a way to console himself through faith. Yet this is a picture of faith that Kierkegaard himself utterly rejects. As Rosanna Picascia argues, "there is no reconciliation of the divorce between man and his world" in Kierkegaard; "anguish is not calmed," and "the absurd condition … is not suppressed, but lived with; not escaped, but constantly confronted" (2007, p. 2). Kierkegaard often speaks of the pain, the anguish, and the "trial of dread" entailed by faith (e.g., 1974a, pp. 53, 76). And in his journal, he refers to Abraham's departure from his homeland as his path into "exile," so that he would "be an alien, … precisely the characteristic suffering of the religious man" (1967b, 4: 4650)—and, we should add, precisely the characteristic of all the "strangers" and "aliens" who populate Camus's novels.

On the first of September, 1848, Kierkegaard gave a "discourse," or sermon, at the Frue Kirke in Copenhagen on the day of Holy Communion. The whole discourse, and the setting of its delivery, dramatically exposes the problematic nature of Camus's representation of Kierkegaard's notion of faith. The text for the sermon comes from the words of Christ in Matthew (11:28): "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Behind the altar, close to where Kierkegaard was speaking, the first three words of this very passage from Matthew were inscribed under a statue of Christ. The statue was the work of the great Danish sculptor Bertel Thorvaldsen, who chose to surround Christ with statues of the twelve apostles, each holding the instrument of his martyrdom—the crosses of their crucifixions, the axes and saws and knives and swords that tortured and dismembered them (see Poole 1993, pp. 22–23, 240–246).[4] Kierkegaard thus spoke the words from Matthew where Christ promises solace to those who suffer in the very shadow of Thorvaldsen's tableau, in the shadow of the cross and the axe, precisely to contest the tranquilizing voice of the parson who silences the hard truth of the "rest" Christ offers, the truth of exile and suffering. As Timothy Dalrymple puts it, for Kierkegaard "Christ was not nailed to the cross, the martyrs not put to death, so that their inheritors might … 'enjoy life in luxury, in splendor, and in magnificence' … The same sufferings are required [of us all]" (2009, p. 189).

Not only does Kierkegaard insist, against Camus's depiction, on the necessity of suffering for genuine faith—indeed, suffering "very simply is what it means to be a Christian" (1967b, 3: 276)—but he lives this suffering. In a journal entry of 1846, at the age of 33, he writes that "I am in the profoundest sense an unhappy individuality which from its earliest years has been nailed fast to some suffering or other, bordering upon

[4] Kierkegaard's sermon was later published in 1851 along with another as *Two Discourses at the Communion on Fridays*. The *Two Discourses* are included in Walter Lowrie's edition of *Training in Christianity* (1967a). The passage from Matthew also serves as the "Invitation" which opens *Training*.

madness" (1938, p. 600). Two years later, in his autobiographical *Point of View for My Work as an Author* (published posthumously in 1859), he writes that that "from a child I was under the sway of a prodigious melancholy," and describes himself as a man "alone, in anguish unto death, alone in the face of the meaninglessness of existence" (pp. 76, 71). In these confessions, Camus's "Kierkegaard" is utterly absent.

Faith and poetry

In a journal entry titled "The Difficulty of Christianity," written in 1850 shortly after publication of *The Sickness Unto Death,* Kierkegaard states the centrality of the experience of despair in no uncertain terms: "The difficulty is not, when feeling absolutely one's wretchedness, to grasp the consolation of Christianity; …no, the difficulty is to become wretched in this way, to want to risk discovering one's wretchedness. To be made well with the aid of Christianity is not the difficulty; the difficulty is in becoming sick to some purpose" (1967b, 2: 1137). There are two striking ironies here. The first is Kierkegaard's closeness to Camus's idea (the very idea we have seen to announce Camus's declaration of decisive difference with Kierkegaard) that "the point is not to be cured but to live with one's ailments" (1955, p.29). Yet for Kierkegaard too, it seems that the point is not to be cured but to "become sick to some purpose," to seek a way of life in which we may find meaning in the midst of our afflictions. The second irony is that Kierkegaard has evidently managed to achieve in his own life the "difficult" challenge—to feel absolutely his wretchedness—while not managing to attain what is described in this passage as the easier goal, "to grasp the consolation." Kierkegaard's life echoes the haunting sentiment of Anticlimacus that "happiness is not a characteristic of spirit; in the remote depths, in the most inward parts, in the hidden recesses of happiness, there dwells also the anxious dread which is despair" (1974b, p. 158).

It is just here, where Kierkegaard expresses his allegiance to wretchedness and sickness and his distance from consolation and happiness, that the line separating him from his pseudonym Johannes de Silentio (and from Camus) becomes so thin. There is a very real sense in which faith remains an *ideal* for Kierkegaard, the ideal of a "cure" of despair which is always already foreclosed, leaving him (like Johannes, like Camus) seeking a way amid the ruins. The *life* of faith (as opposed to its mere idea) is not for Kierkegaard the actual achievement of a cure, but a "task for a whole lifetime" (1974a, p. 23), a constant search and hence a constant falling short. Any faith which does not require "perpetual striving" is "a dead faith" (1967b, 2: 1139, 1140).

As the time to take the manuscript of *The Sickness Unto Death* to the publisher arrived—the manuscript in which faith is described as the "complete eradication" of despair—Kierkegaard, who had originally decided to sign his own name as author, became increasingly uncomfortable about leading his readers to confuse himself with the "demands of ideality" which were "presented at their maximum" in the book (1967b, 6: 6446). "Anticlimacus" became the author instead, since he, unlike Kierkegaard himself, represented the ideal. Yet more interestingly, Kierkegaard remarks in a journal entry (1967b, 6: 6437) written at the time he was debating authorship of the work that he himself actually appears (in disguise) in the text of *Sickness* as

the "unhappy poet," existing at "the most dialectical borderline" of despair and faith, who "may have a very deep religious need, …and yet he loves the torment" of his suffering and despair, and "will not let it go" (1974b, pp. 208–209).

Kierkegaard presents himself here (although in secret, in his diary) as being in just the position of the "demonic" despairer we have seen Anticlimacus to describe as refusing to hope that his distress might be removed, for "rather than seek help [from God] he would prefer to be himself—with all the tortures of hell" (1974b, p. 205). And this is also the position of Johannes de Silentio, who describes himself as "the poet" of Abraham (1974a, pp. 24, 30-31), singing the praises of this legendary knight of faith but unable to join him. While there are places in Kierkegaard's authorship where he hints at a possible reconciliation of poetry and faith (see, e.g, Walsh 1994), for the most part he emphasizes their incompatibility (see Rasmussen 2005, pp. 57–58; Rae 1997, pp. 37–38). This incompatibility is a central theme, for example, of both *Fear and Trembling* and the work Kierkegaard published on the same day, *Repetition*. Yet in a journal entry just after finishing the *Point of View For My Work as an Author* (1848) he acknowledges that "I am essentially a poet" (1967b, 6: 6383), with the poet's fundamentally troubled relation to faith. The poet needs language to express himself, but faith is beyond language (1974a, pp. 91–129): the linguistic is the domain of the universal, but faith is the domain of the utterly private. Hence in faith I "*cannot* speak"; I am "unable to make myself intelligible" (1974a, p. 122).

Kierkegaard describes his authorship as being the result of "an irresistible inward impulse" to write (1962a, p. 7). In a journal entry he confides that "Only when I write do I feel well. If I stop [writing] for a few days, right away I become ill … So powerful an urge, so ample, so inexhaustible [is my need to write], …subsist[ing] day after day for … years" (1938, p. 674). His need to write, his inability to let go of language, assures the perpetual deferral of his desire to enter into the rapturous silence of faith. Kierkegaard is the poet he describes in *Either/Or,* the "unhappy person who conceals profound anguish in his heart but whose lips are so formed that as sighs and cries pass over them they sound like beautiful music" (1971, 1: 19). The full passage makes it clear that Kierkegaard is referring to the infamous bronze bull of the Sicilian tyrant Phalaris (mid-sixth century BCE), who used the hollow bull to roast his enemies. The bull was constructed, as legends have it, so that the complex system of pipes in the bull's head would act as a musical instrument and convert the victims' screams into song.[5] This is the fate of the poet, never to be able to achieve peace but rather to live in solidarity with those who seek to make their way in anguish … and to sing, to sing not the song of cure— except as the lover sings of the one he can never attain—but the song of suffering and perpetual striving. As such, Kierkegaard's faith was a troubled faith, a faith in question, a faith hovering between the need for total commitment and a poetic hesitation—the furthest possible state from the frenzied adherence Camus describes.

[5] See Timothy Dalrymple (2009) for an excellent discussion of the theme of the bull of Phalaris in Kierkegaard.

Awakening: faith and revolt

Both Kierkegaard and Camus insist on lucidity in face of anguish, and accept the despair that this lucid perception entails. They are both poets of suffering, seeking a language to explore the possibility of a way of life that points beyond the meaninglessness of our situation. Kierkegaard names this possibility the life of faith, and Camus, the life of revolt, and both devote their authorships to the project of provoking and awakening their readers to these possibilities. Kierkegaard writes in his journal that his authorial purpose is "not so much [to] mollify [or] reassure, as [to] awaken and provoke men" (1967b, 1: 641). Camus too sees the evocation of the absurd in his works as a project of "awaken[ing] consciousness" and of "provok[ing] what follows," a "definite awakening" to the possibility of revolt (1955, p. 10).

One of the most initially surprising things about Kierkegaard and Camus, given the unremittingly bleak pictures they draw of the human predicament, is that their authorships point to the possibility of a sort of splendor within the very bleakness of a world divested of illusions and lights. "If there is a sin against life," Camus writes in "Summer in Algiers," "it consists perhaps not so much in despairing of life as in hoping for another life and in eluding the implacable grandeur of this life" (1955, p. 113). And in an interview with the journalist Gabriel d'Aubarède, Camus responds to d'Aubarède's comment that he is "often thought of as riddled with anguish" and "seen as a pessimistic writer" by saying that "When I do happen to look for what is most fundamental in me, what I find is a taste for happiness" (d'Aubarède 1968, p. 349). D'Aubarède himself introduces the interview by sharing some of his personal impressions of Camus and notes that "There is … a discreet smile on his tormented face, … a discreet but frequent smile" (p. 349).

A smile on a tormented face—not unlike the beautiful music that comes from Kierkegaard's lips from out of the anguish of his life. But what is the meaning of this smile, this beautiful music, given its origin in the experience of suffering? Kierkegaard sees in the life of faith, and Camus in revolt, a means of inhabiting a transformed world, a world of majesty and grandeur inexplicably situated in the precise space of our suffering.

For Camus, revolt accepts the absurd, without evasion, yet he insists that "man can draw from the nihilistic world a strength," a dignity and sense of splendor, through the courage to defy one's fate and to affirm one's freedom. As such, "revolt restores majesty to life" (1955, pp. 44, 40). In his essay "Intelligence and the Scaffold," Camus speaks of revolt as creating a "style of life" that actually reshapes our way of inhabiting the world. This style, he says, is all about achieving "a particular [form] of strength, what might be called elegance" in the midst of a world without elegance or grace (1968a, p. 212).

Camus, we have seen, regards revolt to be the perfect antithesis of faith, and for him the life of faith rests upon an abandonment of this graceless world we find ourselves in and a leap towards an "other world," a heavenly world where we are saved from suffering through the grace of God. But Kierkegaard actually shows very little interest in such a world. Faith is *not* a yearning "for a future life" but "for *this* life," and indeed faith in a future life "really … is not faith" at all. The life of faith "belongs entirely to the [finite] world," and "no heavenly glance … betrays" the person of faith (1974a,

pp. 34, 35, 50). As Avi Sagi argues, Kierkegaard's notion of faith "does not offer escape from the world," but is a "return" to the finite where the world is utterly "different from [its] original givenness" (1994, pp. 70, 27). Just as Camus sees revolt to allow for a recovery of a transformed world, Kierkegaard writes that "the whole earthly form" of faith "exhibits a new creation," a "transforming" of life where we are able "to live joyfully … every instant" in the very space that is the source of our suffering (1974a, pp. 51, 61). The life of faith, like Camus's life of revolt, is one of grace: the person of faith is the "dancer" whose movements through life "express the sublime in the pedestrian" (1974a, p. 52).

Conclusion: the world with and without God

Kierkegaard and Camus do, of course, represent an either/or. Kierkegaard's path is one of perpetual striving to live in the face of God, as though he were "contemporaneous" with Christ (1967a, pp. 29–30), living as best he can as Christ did, with love and grace in the shadow of the cross of suffering. For Camus, to live in the face of God is to become faceless, to admit that we cannot live on our own and cannot transform that suffering into a life worth living through our own efforts. I have tried to complicate this opposition by showing that Kierkegaard's notion of faith rejects the very attributes Camus ascribes to it—the suicide of lucidity, the yearning for comfort and consolation, and the abandonment of this world in hopes of being delivered into a heavenly other world.

Indeed, the very terms of difference between Kierkegaard and Camus, "faith" and "revolt," become unstable. We can certainly see Kierkegaard's faith as itself an act of revolt: faith is a defiance of the darkness and despair and sense of impotence of the stranger in a strange world, and an insistence on our capacity to live here and now, not in some sacred space beyond the void, with grace. And perhaps we can even see Camus's revolt as a form of leap,[6] insofar as his "absurd reasoning," like the Kierkegaardian leap of faith, makes the impossible possible by virtue of the absurd: Sisyphus is condemned by the gods to roll his rock up the mountain for an eternity—the symbol of the destiny of each of us who are condemned to live in a world without evident meaning—and yet, paradoxically, he is free, because of the way he chooses to live.

Hence even at the site of Kierkegaard's and Camus's major difference, the either/or of faith or its refusal, there is more in common than one might suppose. The world with God and the world without God are equally worlds in which we face the daunting task of seeking grace and splendor through both revolt and belief: revolt against the fatal capitulation to meaninglessness, and belief in our capacity to transform our forsakenness into a life worth living. That God enters into the equation for Kierkegaard, and remains a necessary absence for Camus, is no doubt the occasion for debate, but does not diminish the extensively shared ground in which the debate must take place.

[6] For the argument that Camus makes the very leap he attributes to Kierkegaard (see Cruickshank 1960, p. 63; Hochberg 1965, p. 92).

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