

# Camus and Adorno: The Struggle for Rebellion and Theory

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## Povzetek

Avtor v članku pokaže, da je mogoče Adorna in Camusa brati skupaj. To ne pomeni, da se njuni teoriji zvedeta na iste predpostavke, niti da imata isti cilj, temveč da se prepletata. V tem oziru avtor izpostavi koncepte upora, revolucije, solidarnosti ter etike pri Camusu in pa prakse, teorije in aktivizem (akcionizma) pri Adornu. Avtor upor, ki ima za razliko od revolucije svoje meje, vzporeja s problemom, s katerim se je soočal Adorno v šestdesetih letih 20. stoletja, namreč z zlomom teorije v novi revolucionarni misli. Praksa, ki zavrača ali odklanja teorijo, se ne more zavedati meja, saj se teorija izkaže za varuha svobode. Članek izpostavi ključno vlogo konceptov negativne dialektike in žargona, ki ju sooči s Camusovim pojmom etike solidarnosti. Pri slednjem je ključno razmerje z drugim. Članek postavi tudi sledeča vprašanja: Ali obstaja razmerje z drugim, če je teorija zasmehovana in zavržena v korist absolutne prakse? Ali obstaja solidarnost, ko je drugi zveden na sredstvo za doseg cilja? V kaj preraste absolutna praksa?

**Ključne besede:** Camus, Adorno, upor, teorija, praksa, solidarnost, aktivizem

## Summary

This paper shows that Adorno and Camus can be read together. This does not imply that their theories can be reduced to the same premises, nor that they share the same goal, but rather that they intertwine. In this regard, the author focuses on the concepts of rebellion, revolution, solidarity, and ethics in Camus, and of praxis, theory, and activism (actionism) in Adorno. Understanding rebellion as something that, unlike revolution, has limits, the

author draws parallels with the problem Adorno faced in the 1960s, namely the collapse of theory into new revolutionary thought. In other words, praxis that rejects theory or lynches it knows no limits, because theory turns out to be the guardian of freedom. In this respect, the article also highlights the key roles played by negative dialectics and the concept of jargon in Adorno's project, while contrasting it with Camus' proposal of an ethics of solidarity. Here, the relationship with the other is of essential importance. The paper goes on to raise the following questions: Does the relation with the other persist if theory is mocked and neglected in favor of absolute praxis? Does solidarity exist when the other is reduced to a means to an end? What does absolute praxis turn into?

**Keywords:** Camus, Adorno, rebellion, theory, praxis, solidarity, activism

In any case, our era forces us to take an interest in it.  
The writers of today know this. If they speak up,  
they are criticized and attacked.  
If they become modest and keep silent, they are vo-  
ciferously blamed for their silence.<sup>1</sup>

– Albert Camus

For Camus, rebellion is entirely differentiated from revolution. This insight demonstrates the essential importance of theory, even when action is what initially comes first. In short, the separation of praxis from theory is reflected in the separation of rebellion from revolution. Of course, Camus is not the only author who speaks of the importance of theory. Theodor W. Adorno explicitly places theory in the foreground. The importance of theory in relation to praxis, as well as the position of theory regarding liberation from the chains of authority, are some of the themes Adorno will touch upon. Despite the differences between Camus and Adorno, we aim to highlight their similar goals. Although one would likely criticize the other, it seems, at least in part, that they share a common goal in posing questions regarding limitless praxis and the revolution that knows no bounds: Who rebels? Why can rebellion be opposed to revolution? These are some of the key questions this article aims to uncover to demonstrate their enduring relevance.

We could speculate about the contextual differences found in Camus's thought in relation to Adorno's, or even in relation to our own time. When we speak of context, we mean the time, the epochs, in which these authors were active. However,

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1 Albert Camus, *Create Dangerously*, p. 1.

contextuality – though it certainly has its place, which in essence is also its meaning—remains open.<sup>2</sup>

Thinking rebellion means accepting the other, affirming the other, and refusing to let them be cast aside. But thinking rebellion also implies slowing down action while not bringing it to an end.

## *Je me révolte, donc nous sommes: Camus's Approach to Rebellion*

For Camus, being in a state of rebellion does not simply mean making a specific decision to defy someone or something. Being in a state of rebellion is part of human existence such that to be in rebellion is *to be*. In this sense, the given title is not a caricature of Cartesianism:

The unhappiness experienced by a single man becomes collective unhappiness. In our daily trials, rebellion plays the same role as does the “cogito” in the category of thought: it is the first clue. But this clue lures the individual from his solitude. Rebellion is the common ground on which every man bases his first values. *I rebel* – therefore we *exist*.<sup>3</sup>

Does this mean that people, prior to the “valorization of rebellion”, did not exist or were not truly human? No—one could just as well conclude the opposite. There has never been a time in which people did not rebel.<sup>4</sup>

Camus's concept of rebellion is truly unique. We have emphasized that it is different from that of revolution, but this difference is not based in a value judgment. The fact that rebellion differs from revolution does not mean that it is better or worse. Rather, we must recognize its true foundations: rebellion, above all, is *metaphysical rebellion*.

2 Derrida's notion of context directly anticipates his thesis that *there is nothing outside the text*. Context cannot be rigid and closed if we imply openness and do not lay claim to the author's intent within a given text. In other words, context is open. That does not mean that context is arbitrary, but rather that there is space for a “rupture” or “split” within language. Jacques Derrida, “Signature, Event, Context,” p. 310. Within the scope of this paper, this means that although certain concepts must be considered within the context in which Camus was writing, this does not mean that those same concepts cannot be *iterated* in different contexts and at different times, nor that their comparison and parallel interpretation is impossible.

3 Albert Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 28.

4 The question arises: *Is it we, the people, who rebel? Or is the people something constituted by the rebellion of an “I”?* One could say both. Here we enter the field of dialectics. People are indeed constituted by rebellion, but they are constituted by rebellion precisely through the act of rebelling. In other words, rebellion founds the human being precisely insofar as they rebel. The point is to accept different forms of rebellion. We could even speculate that the affirmation of the absurd is, in a way, a form of rebellion.

## *The Metaphysical Nature of Rebellion*

While it might seem intuitive to assume—especially after *The Myth of Sisyphus*—that metaphysical rebellion is directed against metaphysics, things are not quite that simple. It is indeed directed against metaphysics, but with distinct goals. If in *The Myth of Sisyphus* we witness a struggle and rebellion *against* metaphysics, here we are faced with a struggle and a rebellion *for* metaphysics.<sup>5</sup> However, it seems that the initial step of rebelling *against* metaphysics was necessary in order to bring forth the second step of rebelling *for* metaphysics. What we witness here is a transition from a rebellion against metaphysics to a metaphysical rebellion. How does rebellion itself become and remain metaphysical? And what makes it metaphysical to begin with?

The idea of metaphysical rebellion seems counterintuitive. Rebellion, by its very nature, serves to oppose oppression and the shortcomings of a given system, but also to illuminate its limits. I rebel because something is wrong, something irritates or oppresses me. To rebel in a state of perfection is impossible.<sup>6</sup> One might say that I can fantasize and then decide to rebel in accordance with that fantasy, but that still leaves room for the very possibility of rebellion.<sup>7</sup> In other words, there is no ideal, perfect system that could guarantee absolute well-being.<sup>8</sup> Metaphysics, viewed from this perspective, is the science of possibility. If rebellion is metaphysical, then there is no place in this world for stasis or invariability. To commit to rebellion means to accept imperfection. The idea of imperfection resonates with the idea of the other and the foreign. In other words, to accept imperfection—not of the self, but of the system—is to affirm the other as other; it is to acknowledge that the system is not necessarily perfect, and that the entire perspective is not exclusively mine. Others cannot be excluded from the picture. In this sense, metaphysical rebellion carries particular weight. It does not concern only *me*, but

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5    Avi Sagi, *Albert Camus and the Philosophy of the Absurd*, p. 112.

6    Rebellion, or so it would seem, does not go hand in hand with metaphysics. If rebellion is indeed a we-apon directed against the system, it can hardly respond to the affirmative question of metaphysics: *What is reality?* Even if we admit that rebellion may be a step toward establishing some kind of “new,” “better” system, it is not intuitive to imagine a rebellion riding on the wings of metaphysics. It may certainly serve as a clearing of the path for *a new ontology*, but the question remains as to what extent does it persist once the system has been established.

7    If we’ve concluded that rebellion is not possible within perfection, fantasizing still leaves room for rebellion. In other words, the impetus for rebellion doesn’t have to be grounded in empirical reality—it can be entirely fictional. However, if we hold to the idea that one cannot rebel in perfection, then even fantasizing opens a space for rebellion, which in turn directly shifts the focus onto imperfectability.

8    Since there has never been a single moment in which man did not rebel, and since rebellion is not possible within a perfect system, it clearly follows that no perfect system exists.

us. In other words, rebellion presupposes a collective experience, a space in which I exist in relation to others:

In absurdist experience, suffering is individual. But from the moment when a movement of rebellion begins, suffering is seen as a collective experience. Therefore the first progressive step for a mind overwhelmed by the strangeness of things is to realize that this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men and that human reality, in its entirety, suffers from the distance which separates it from the rest of the universe.<sup>9</sup>

Therefore, rebellion is the first step the spirit takes when it enters an absurdist experience. If I choose to go on living instead of committing suicide, then I must rebel. But against what? Against the entire reality that has pulled the ground from beneath my feet, i.e., against a history of violence. In its most elemental form, rebellion is paradoxical. It serves to strike against a fragmented world because it seeks unity, and it is precisely because of its demand for unity that rebellion is paradoxical:<sup>10</sup>

Metaphysical rebellion is the movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it contests the ends of man and of creation. The slave protests against the condition in which he finds himself within his state of slavery; the metaphysical rebel protests against the condition in which he finds himself as a man. [...] [T]he metaphysical rebel declares that he is frustrated by the universe.<sup>11</sup>

Metaphysical rebellion is not only an act, but also a decision. And not just any decision, but the decision to choose life over suicide, and then to make that life worth living. The only way to do that is through collectivity. Hence Camus's thesis: *I rebel, therefore we exist*. At the level of the slave's rebellion, this is relatively clear. The slave does not want to remain a slave; he wants to escape slavery. If he wants to exist as a free human being, he must rebel or else he does not truly exist. In the case of metaphysical rebellion, things are not that different—at least not formally. I rebel against the order that committed violence against me by imposing idols upon me, and then proceeded to abolish those very idols on which everything had once been built. I remain standing as a stranger in an absurd world no longer one with itself. I accept the absurd, and the absurd relation between myself and the world. But how do I move from myself to the others? This is where rebellion enters. I rebel against the established order not only for myself, but for

9 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 22.

10 *Ibid.*, pp. 23–24.

11 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

the sake of others. This is the moment of solidarity on which Camus insists. It is not mere compassion, but a being-with, i.e., a relational stance in which the other and I stand together as a “we”.

### *Rebellion and the Ethics of Solidarity*

“Metaphysical rebellion is a claim, motivated by the concept of a complete unity, against the suffering of life and death.”<sup>12</sup> To determine something as a demand whose essence lies in complete unity already implies speaking about metaphysics. It is therefore the concept of complete unity that concerns us here. To think complete unity means to rebel not only for the other(s) as specific individual(s), but on behalf of all of humanity. This moment of communication with all that is known and unknown (I do not know each individual, but I am aware that it is my duty to rebel for them and their rights) is a moment that does not assimilate, but rather affirms:

If a mass death sentence defines the human condition, then rebellion, in one sense, is its contemporary. At the same time that he rejects his mortality, the rebel refuses to recognize the power that compels him to live in this condition. The metaphysical rebel is therefore not definitely an atheist, as one might think him, but he is inevitably a blasphemer. Quite simply, he blasphemes primarily in the name of order, denouncing God as the father of death and as the supreme outrage.<sup>13</sup>

Blasphemy follows a slightly different path from atheism. Unlike atheism, blasphemy affirms God but opposes Him precisely as existing. This is not a choice; it is inscribed in rebellion itself. Camus illustrates this perfectly with the example of the slave. The slave who revolted against the master does not deny the master as a human being. In that relationship, the slave is not revolting against the mere existence of the master. Rather, the slave denies the master as master, i.e., as the one who claims the right to in turn deny the slave’s very being.<sup>14</sup> Blasphemy means that God is no longer called upon to rule over man. Man accepts this at the cost of his own downfall.<sup>15</sup> He must accept it because he sees the situation in which humanity finds itself. The moment of solidarity is precisely the moment of rebellion:

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12 *Ibid.*, p. 24.

13 *Ibid.*

14 *Ibid.*, p. 23.

15 The possibility of downfall is ever present—not every rebellion is successful. However, the rebel is willing to take the risk at any cost. In fact, rebellion inherently involves that risk. Similarly, the blasphemer accepts his groundlessness.

Man's solidarity is founded upon rebellion, and rebellion, in its turn, can only find its justification in this solidarity. We have, then, the right to say that any rebellion which claims the right to deny or destroy this solidarity loses simultaneously its right to be called rebellion and becomes in reality an acquiescence in murder.<sup>16</sup>

## The Fragility of Theory = The End of Praxis

Adorno's *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis* remains relevant today, despite having been written more than fifty years ago. The context of his study concerns various factors that affected our continent: student protests, the Cold War, the rise of extremist politics after World War II, among others. Where others see liberation, Adorno recognizes a particular kind of crisis. Where others see the realization of philosophy in action, Adorno sees its crisis.<sup>17</sup> Has the world so far only been interpreted, and is now the time to finally change it? This is one of the key questions running throughout this text.

What is the problem with Marx's particular standpoint? The problem lies in the simple dissection and distancing of the concept of theory from the concept of praxis. If we accept absolute change in a context where theory is neglected, we are effectively submitting to dominant ideology, thus sabotaging the possibility for true change. In other words, to set theory aside or discard it completely while embracing praxis means engaging directly in a struggle *against* emancipation:

The error of the primacy of praxis as it is exercised today appears clearly in the privilege accorded to tactics over everything else. The means have become autonomous to the extreme. Serving the ends without reflection, they have alienated themselves from them. Thus everywhere discussion is called for, certainly initially out of an anti-authoritarian impulse. But discussion, which by the way, like the public sphere, is an entirely bourgeois category, has been completely ruined by tactics.<sup>18</sup>

It seems of vital importance to grasp that Adorno, as a representative of Critical Theory, is not an opponent of praxis as such. For Adorno wants nothing more than to show that an approach which sees theory as pure contemplation, and a form of

16 Camus, *The Rebel*, p. 22.

17 "The hostility to theory in the spirit of the times, the by no means coincidental withering away of theory, its banishment by an impatience that wants to change the world without having to interpret it while so far it has been chapter and verse that philosophers have *merely* interpreted—such hostility becomes praxis's weakness." Theodor W. Adorno, *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*, p. 265.

18 *Ibid.*, pp. 268–269.

thinking which treats praxis as something detached from theory, are equally dogmatic. Theoretical thought cannot simply be extracted from the entirety of practical reality, but that does not mean that it merges fully with praxis either:

The dogma of the unity of theory and praxis, contrary to the doctrine on which it is based, is undialectical: it underhandedly appropriates simple identity where contradiction alone has the chance of becoming productive. Whereas theory cannot be extracted from the entire societal process, it also maintains an independence within this process; it is not only a means of the totality but also a moment of it; otherwise it could not resist to any degree the captivating spell of that totality.<sup>19</sup>

Theory in the formal sense resembles something like Hartmann's *novum*.<sup>20</sup> It cannot be separated from the whole, while maintaining a certain degree of independence in relation to it. This independent stance, which critically reflects on the whole, is that of *negative dialectics*. It seems that the best representation of negative dialectics is the image of the prism, as Adorno presents it in his work of that name. Negative thinking is prismatic thinking. A phenomenon is captured like light dispersing through a prism: scattered in all directions, negating one-dimensionality.<sup>21</sup> Accordingly, if our goal is to avoid one-dimensional thinking—or any kind of one-dimensionality—we can rely neither solely on praxis nor exclusively on theory as pure contemplation. In other words, one must not respond to violence with violence,<sup>22</sup> as that creates a *circulus vitiosus*. The praxis to be strived for is one aimed at overcoming barbarism and putting an end to violence. Although violence seems inevitable today, overcoming it must become and remain the goal

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19 *Ibid.*, p. 277.

20 Hartmann's idea of the *novum* represents a distinctive space within his ontology. However, the similarity we have observed lies precisely in the fact that the *novum*, as its very name suggests, always brings something new in relation to what came before. Moreover, although it is practically grounded in the layer beneath, it always contains a certain degree of autonomy. Cf. Nicolai Hartmann, *New Ways of Ontology*, pp. 73–83.

21 Theodor W. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, p. 57.

22 The concept of violence is chosen for neither random nor stylistic reasons. It is used in relation to Adorno's reaction to Western thought. The reason for introducing the prism as a metaphor for the kind of thinking that ought to be lies precisely in the idea that non-prismatic thinking is the kind that enacts violence upon reality. In other words, alongside factual violence—which Adorno certainly addresses—there is also violence directed at thought itself. This means that every form of striving toward totality constitutes a kind of violence precisely because the drive toward totality evades the critical moment that makes so-called negative thinking possible. For Adorno, theory is more than contemplation—it is the very path that leads to freedom. Absolute praxis, then, *a priori* represents a direct path paved toward violence, as it evades that freedom. Theoretical thinking plays the role of breaking the chains of totalizing systems. Turning away from it means disabling oneself from responding to the previously mentioned violence, and thereby sinking deeper into it—becoming, as we shall see in the continuation of this work, both its victim and its instrument.

of such praxis. Nevertheless, we must not forget that many today believe that violent means can be used to fight against the totality of violence.<sup>23</sup>

In this context, it becomes clear that the scale between theory and praxis must not lean entirely to one side. Praxis is important, but theory provides a kind of asylum of freedom: Adorno would say that unfounded action always tends toward oppression. What we need is a non-repressive praxis, which can only be achieved through theory. If theory is rejected, "then traits, such as a unilateral solidarity degenerating into terror, will become manifest."<sup>24</sup> To renounce theory is to renounce freedom and any form of critical engagement.

### *Adorno's Critique of Activism*

Adorno sees the renunciation of theory in various currents that have swept through Europe. One such moment were the student protests of the 1960s. The key concept confronted by Adorno during these protests is that of activism. For Adorno, *Aktionismus* (activism or actionism) represents a clear example of neglecting the theoretical and embracing a totalitarian, anti-liberating practical approach:

The majority of actionists are humorless in a way that is no less alarming than are those who laugh along with everyone. The lack of self-reflection derives not only from their psychology. It is the mark of a praxis that, having become its own fetish, becomes a barricade to its own goal. The dialectic is hopeless: that through praxis alone is it possible to escape the captivating spell praxis imposes on people, but that meanwhile as praxis it compulsively contributes to reinforcing the spell, obtuse, narrow-minded, at the farthest remove from spirit.<sup>25</sup>

Here we see the vicious circle already mentioned. Praxis fetishizes itself, and the result is the impossibility of choice, which amounts to a step backwards: I cannot choose not to act. Whatever value-laden or moralistic notions we might hold about those who are not inclined to act in times of crisis must now be bracketed. The condition for the possibility of that choice is threatened. The only way to exit praxis is through praxis itself.<sup>26</sup> The problem often does not lie in inaction itself, but rather in not acting in a specific, predetermined way, i.e., as way already

23 Adorno, *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*, p. 268.

24 *Ibid.*, p. 274. Also: "Theory speaks for what is not narrow-minded. Despite all of its unfreedom, theory is the guarantor of freedom in the midst of unfreedom." *Ibid.*, p. 263.

25 *Ibid.*, p. 262.

26 Praxis cannot be its own goal. It can only be a path; it must have its end: "The goal of real praxis would be its own abolition." *Ibid.*, p. 267.

established and imposed by a given position of power. The absence of theory becomes especially visible here. If I affirm the theoretical as something effective, I am put to shame precisely because I question the functioning of the established system, regardless of what that system claims to aim for. *Discussion*, as understood by Adorno, is one example of the collapse of absolute praxis:

Each of the hegemonic cliques has prepared in advance the results it desires. Discussion serves manipulation. Every argument, untroubled by the question of whether it is sound, is geared to a purpose. [...] The opponent in a discussion becomes a functional component of the current plan: reified by the reified consciousness malgré lui-même. [...] [P]seudo-activity can stay alive only through incessant self-advertisement. If the opponent does not concede, then he will be disqualified and accused of lacking the qualities presupposed by the discussion. The concept of discussion is cleverly twisted so that the opponent is supposed to let himself be convinced; this degrades the discussion into farce.<sup>27</sup>

Activism that casually dismisses theory is no activism at all. For Adorno, this type of action amounts to pseudo-activity that continually, be it consciously or unconsciously, tends toward totalitarianism.

At the end of the day, the example of discussion reveals another dark side: *the eclipse of the Other*. Treating the Other as a mere object for the fulfillment of one's own goal or "greater good" is already a well-known path to ideology.<sup>28</sup> If we were to push this point to the extreme, we could say that we are witnessing the sacrifice of the Other for the sake of the Whole. Whether that Other is assimilated or, like the „participant“ in the discussion, completely marginalized and merely used as a tool for establishing a particular structure, the Other no longer exists.<sup>29</sup> If none of that works, the Other must be entirely cast aside. Death is certainly not the primary option, especially as far as student protests of the 1960s are concerned, but vandalism and public lynching are:

When a student's room was smashed because he preferred to work rather than join in actions, on the wall was scrawled: "Whoever occupies himself

27 *Ibid.*, p. 269.

28 Adorno equates ontology with ideology, unmasking, for instance, Heidegger's fundamental ontology as a latent ideology. Every ontology has, in one way or another, been an ontology of violence precisely because it has not treated philosophy prismatically. Cf. Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, pp. 61–97.

29 It is important to highlight the distinction between the *other* and the *Other*. The *Other* with a capital "O" represents a concept or the idea of otherness itself. In short, otherness carries the notion of radical otherness—a position in which I do not assimilate others but maintain a permanent distance. Understood in this way, the *Other* operates at the level of concept. The *other*, on the other hand, refers to an individual, a concrete person whose *face* I can at. If one detects traces of Levinas's understanding here, one would not be mistaken.

with theory, without acting practically, is a traitor to socialism.” It is not only against him that praxis serves as an ideological pretext for exercising moral constraint. The thinking denigrated by actionists apparently demands of them too much undue effort: it requires too much work, is too practical. Whoever thinks, offers resistance; it is more comfortable to swim with the current, even when one declares oneself to be against the current.<sup>30</sup>

In other words, the refusal to embrace theory already means affirming the dominant ideology with everything that it entails. There is nothing revolutionary about this.

### **Instead of a Conclusion: Absolute Activism Becomes an Example of the Mass**

From the very beginning, actionism, or absolute action, is doomed to fail. Some of the reasons for this have already been mentioned. The problem of the lack of theory does not arise only in the rather obvious places pointed out thus far. A greater problem emerges within the Kafkaesque atmosphere of hidden chambers and hallways reminiscent of Nietzsche’s *ressentiment*. The issue, then, is not only that absolute praxis reveals itself as an inconsistent form of struggle, but, perhaps more importantly, that it wears the mask of actual struggle. A veil of jargon is spun around the concept of praxis or action, one that conceals itself from the world and thereby produces the phenomenon of *truthful untruth*. More precisely, the atmosphere created is one that presents itself as a real path of truth, behind which hides nothing—or nothing concrete. This does not mean that there is nothing along that path; the signs encountered along it are advertisements and billboards urging us to go deeper and further, exaggerating and ornamenting. What is important for us to understand, in addition to *negative dialectics*, is also the concept of *jargon*: “The jargon—objectively speaking, a system—uses disorganization as its principle of organization [...]”<sup>31</sup> Thus, jargon not only supports the appearance of truth, but simultaneously undermines any critique of that appearance. If we return to the concept of discussion, we see it exhibiting this duality. In the discussion, the other no longer functions as the Other but serves as a systemically harnessed tool that helps me continually reproduce the system.

Though deploying the term *truth*, while Adorno uses the term *authenticity*, the latter communicates with the concept of truth. Authenticity can be articulated

30 Adorno, *Marginalia to Theory and Praxis*, p. 263.

31 Theodor W. Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 7.

from the level of *meaning* all the way to the *truth* of being,<sup>32</sup> but it is transformative and highly dynamic. It is precisely on account of its indeterminacy and adaptability that the term is so important to Adorno:

[O]nce authenticity can no longer be either the empirical condition of mortality nor the subjective relating to it, then it turns into grace. It turns, as it were, into a racial quality of inwardness, which man, either has or does not have—a quality about which nothing further can be stated than that, tautologically, there is mere participation in it.<sup>33</sup>

The problem arises in the attempt to save the “old ontology”. What we mean here is the effort to preserve *Sein* at all costs, as well as the grounding of philosophy as a system—even when it presents itself as a struggle against that very system. Adorno suggests that we must apply to it a critical approach of *negative dialectics*. If we are not allowed to use that critical approach, then there is no talk of systemic change.

It seems that Camus found himself in a similar life situation. After the publication of *The Rebel*, he faced criticism from the French left. Because of foregrounding morality, he was accused of misunderstanding dialectics and of holding a completely passive stance toward politics. Neither Sartre<sup>34</sup> nor Jeanson<sup>35</sup> showed him any mercy, and they did not appreciate that Camus had criticized the USSR. However, Camus’s response focused precisely on his duty as a leftist to criticize any totalitarian system.<sup>36</sup> His answer did not satisfy the “critics,” and put an end to his friendship with Sartre.

This biographical detail regarding Camus’ relationship with the left is not random. From everything we have said about Camus, it appears that his emphasis on *rebellion* as opposed to *revolution* is crucial here. The thought Camus offers is precisely the idea that violence can never be the answer, nor can it ever be justified. In his correspondence with *Les Temps modernes*, we see that Camus consistently insists that the ends never justify the means.<sup>37</sup> It is essential to emphasize that Camus’ stance toward revolution is not *a priori* negative, but that the issue for him lies in the absence of boundaries—and this absence boundaries are often the gateway to violence. The connection between Camus and Adorno

32 In addition to referring to the range between Heidegger’s early and later thought, we also refer to the fact that “authentic” can mean anything from “meaningful” (or, better yet, “genuine”) to “true to oneself.”

33 Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 132.

34 Mangesh Kulkarni, “Nouveau regard sur le débat Camus – Sartre,” pp. 40–41.

35 *Ibid.*, p. 38.

36 *Ibid.*, pp. 39–40.

37 *Ibid.*, pp. 45 and 47.

becomes visible at precisely this point. Rebellion requires deliberate action, the recognition of limits, whereas revolution does not, or does not necessarily. Even fascism was an excuse wrapped in the packaging of revolution,<sup>38</sup> and Stalinism did little to illuminate the totalitarian element of revolution. This by no means suggests that all revolutions are a priori bad, but it does imply that revolutions, in certain situations, overstep their bounds. For example, the moment we say that violence breeds violence becomes illustrative. It suggests that violence pursued at all costs loses the capacity to recognize a boundary beyond which there is no return.

To be rebellious in Camus's sense means to occupy a socially unenviable position. Such a worldview does not leave the right indifferent, but neither does it please the left. Given the fact that we lack any metaphysical foundations to rely on — and having already mentioned that there is no ontology that is not also ideology — we can, almost by analogy, anticipate social or political alienation. In other words, Camus updates his initial stance and states: "To the 'I rebel, therefore we exist,' he [Man] adds, with prodigious plans in mind which even include the death of rebellion: 'And we are alone.'"<sup>39</sup> That solitude directly prevents integration into the masses, into that toxic "we" which approaches the world as a form of single-mindedness. What remains for us as a task is the search for that "we" which is not the speech of one in the name of all others, but a "we" that implies not being assimilated into the mass, yet retaining a kind of individuality, and in the end, its solitude.

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38 "Fascism was not simply a conspiracy—although it was that—but it was something that came to life in the course of a powerful social development." Adorno, *The Jargon of Authenticity*, p. 5.

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