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Farewell to Teleology: Reflections on Camus and a Rebellious Cosmopolitanism without Hope

Patrick Hayden

School of International Relations, University of St Andrews, St Andrews, United Kingdom
jph10@st-andrews.ac.uk

Abstract: This article reconstructs Albert Camus’s notion of the absurd in order to elucidate his critique of historical teleology. In his life and work, Camus endeavoured to develop a fallibilist historical sensibility suitable to a cosmos shorn of meaning, which led him to reject ideas of progress and their traces of messianism when elaborating his treatment of rebellion. By making use of Camus’s ideas about the absurd and rebellion, I suggest that these two themes productively unsettle contemporary cosmopolitanism as a teleological orthodoxy of human progress and fruitfully if paradoxically lie at the heart of a concept of cosmopolitanism “without hope”.

Keywords: absurd; Camus; cosmopolitanism; friendship; hope; love; progress; rebellion; solidarity; teleology

Introduction

The recent revitalization of cosmopolitanism appears to be motivated largely by the wish to make sense of and respond to intensifying global interdependence and its (dis)integrative effects, including transformations of sovereignty, cultural hybridity, complex patterns of identity and attachment, and multiple scales of economies.¹ Despite differences of interpretation and normative emphasis, cosmopolitan discourses share a common sense of belonging to the world as a whole, a distinctive “way of being in the world”² underscored by the traditional cosmopolitan notion of the *polites* of the *kosmos*. In what follows, I argue that the thought of Albert Camus can serve as a compelling source for a certain “rebellious” notion of cosmopolitanism that runs against the grain of recent accounts of cosmopolitan ethics and politics. In particular, I contend that Camus’s ideas about the absurd and rebellion

¹ S. Vertovec and R. Cohen (eds), *Conceiving Cosmopolitanism* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2002), 4; R. Fine, *Cosmopolitanism* (London: Routledge, 2007), 1-6.

² J. Waldron, “What is Cosmopolitanism?”, *The Journal of Political Philosophy* 8, no. 2 (2000), 227.

bring a provocative, but nonetheless cosmopolitan perspective to bear on our understanding of an indifferent world. I also explore the ways that Camus's radical critique of historical teleology unsettles contemporary cosmopolitanism as an orthodoxy of human progress, and propose revising the cosmopolitan outlook by putting aside the teleological temptation and delineating a Camusian cosmopolitanism "without hope". I conclude by examining several dispositional characteristics involved in cultivating an attitude or ethos of rebellious cosmopolitanism.

The Absurd and the Teleological Temptation

In a series of articles entitled "Neither Victims nor Executioners" published in November 1946, Camus averred that "the new world order that we are seeking cannot be merely national or even continental, much less Western or Eastern. It has to be universal".³ Camus was deeply distraught by the violence, fear and poverty that were quickly entrenched in the aftermath of the Second World War and exacerbated by the ensuing global conflict between the twin ideological camps of communism and capitalism. Camus warned against modernist ideologies that foster polarized views of the world and a generalized distrust of humanity, divided into allies and adversaries. Like many internationalist or cosmopolitan thinkers at the time, he objects to the anachronistic mentality of "being asked to love or to hate one or another country or people",⁴ and he presents the reshaping of democratic justice and freedom as the key to uniting people within and across borders. He appealed to an awareness that "there are no more islands and . . . borders are meaningless", such "that the nations of the world share a common destiny".⁵

At the same time, Camus found deeply unpalatable the teleologically driven metaphysics of historical progress inscribed within the dominant ethico-political doctrines of modernity. In his analysis of the absurd, he deals with how philosophical, moral and political systems sustain or legitimate their claim to authority by reference to the course of historical processes. In his view, the absurd poignantly denotes the relational dissonance between the human longing for rational certitude and the unyielding muteness of the cosmos. As he puts it in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "It happens that the stage set collapses . . . in a universe suddenly divested of illusions and lights, man feels an alien, a stranger. His exile is without remedy, since he is deprived of the memory of a lost home or the hope of a promised land. This divorce between man and his life, the actor and his setting, is properly the feeling of absurdity".⁶ The sense of the absurd, that human living is emptied of all non-contingent meaning, engenders a profound disorientation by rupturing worldviews that ground human purpose in an immutable, higher outcome. With this dislocation of transcendent sources of value and axiomatic starting points in metaphysical and moral truths, nihilism becomes widely ingrained in the fabric of modern socio-political life. According to Camus, the logic of nihilism amounts to believing that the world's absurd injustices and suffering require renouncing the world itself; nihilism, in other words, is bitter scorn of the world as it is. In contrast, Camus proposes that since the absurd cannot be overcome, it must serve as a "point of departure" that stimulates our efforts to humanize the world without resorting to rationalist models of teleological action that reintroduce "absolute and consolatory myths" about the

³ A. Camus, *Camus at Combat: Writings 1944-1947*, J. Lévi-Valensi (ed.) (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006a), 267.

⁴ Camus, *Camus at Combat*, 272.

⁵ Camus, *Camus at Combat*, 266, 146.

⁶ A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1991), 6.

future to come.⁷ To thus affirm, rather than negate, the absurdity of the human condition, Camus discerns the necessity for “a confrontation and an unceasing struggle”,⁸ meaning that the refusal to *negate* the absurd is complemented by a need to be *reconciled* to it as the limit or finitude of the human condition. On the one hand, accepting the absurd as defining the human condition involves transforming consciousness away from viewing history as amenable to rational manipulation, while, on the other hand, refusing any conception of politics as justified by teleological aspirations prevents the sense of the absurd from leading to either nihilist or rationalist heroism. Just as the absurd nourishes resistance, resistance nurtures a chastened attachment to the world’s limitations. Simultaneously with and against the absurd, lucid thinking and acting must rebel against servility to a *telos* without either hoping finally to overcome the incompleteness of the human condition or despairing that this boundedness cannot be transcended completely. For Camus, the freedom to rebel is thus made meaningful by the absurd world “in all its splendour and diversity”.⁹

The Myth of Sisyphus is, then, more than Camus’s attempt to explain the absurd; it is the background against which he defined his mode of historical understanding. Wanting to avoid the absolutism of both nihilism and rationalism, he concludes that the shared values of integrity, dignity and rebellion are socially fashioned, but are neither merely arbitrary nor underpinned by transcendent guarantees of objectivity. Human beings require meaning in order to make sense of the world, and Camus argues that the meaning that we derive from and ascribe to our experience is constructed. Yet he holds that this does not make meaning arbitrary because we find ourselves always already situated within and conditioned by historically-formed constellations of meaning. These “given” meanings provide our fundamental bearings in the absurd world and help sustain us in that world, but at the same time, Camus maintains, we must accept that they are contingent and therefore amenable to contestation and transformation. For Camus, this worldly fabric of meanings provides the creative materials for iterative practices of interpretation of our moral and political claims, and exhibits a conditioned freedom that both shapes and limits ethical and political potentials. In maintaining this moderate or fallibilist historical understanding, he insists there can be no appeal to a *telos* to ground our sense of history and search for meaning, no endpoint that justifies everything (or indeed anything). He suggests that the modern temptation to view history as the totality of progress associated with strictly objective “laws” – of historical, economic, or developmental necessity – is a kind of “secularization of the ideal” which all dominant political forces of the twentieth century, whether of the Left or the Right, championed in their desire to claim “the direction of the future of the human race”.¹⁰ Here Camus comes remarkably close to Walter Benjamin’s description of “messianic time” as a progressivist model of history developing into a final meaning, which then provides a transcendent meta-causal reference by which to legitimate events in the past and ethico-political choices in the present.¹¹

Framed in this manner, I suggest, Camus’s sense of the absurd has great resonance for contemporary cosmopolitanism. Camus alerts us to the implicit or explicit teleologies that

⁷ J. C. Isaac, *Arendt, Camus, and Modern Rebellion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1992), 92-4.

⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 31.

⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 65.

¹⁰ A. Camus, *The Rebel* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 77-8.

¹¹ W. Benjamin, “Theses on the Philosophy of History”, in *Illuminations* (London: Pimlico, 1999), 245-55. As Hannah Arendt notes, Camus was committed to a mode of thinking marked by the rejection of any “historical system”. Arendt, “Concern with Politics in Recent European Philosophical Thought”, *Essays in Understanding* (New York: Schocken Books, 1994), 438.

lurk within modern political doctrines that propound narratives of the progress of world history toward the fulfillment of the latent promise of humanity, and which have a direct bearing on the normative character of interpersonal and political relations. And the cosmopolitan vision is no stranger to this lure of teleology. Most notably, in “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose”,¹² Immanuel Kant takes up the task of reconceptualizing history as the actualization of the *telos* of human freedom in the form of a cosmopolitan world-republic. Kant’s account portrays the process of human history as the gradual manifestation of universal reason in concrete legal, economic and political institutions, such as a federation of republican nations and human rights, which progressively encompass the globe as a geospatial totality. Throughout his writings on cosmopolitanism, Kant speculates about how this teleology might be at work in society and history – as expressions of “a plan of nature aimed at a perfect civil union of mankind”¹³ – to assist in bringing about perpetual peace. While he admits that we can only reflectively impute such teleological development to be at work, he is clear that the ultimate goal of cosmopolitan right should be regarded heuristically as the purposive unity of nature that gradually drives historical progress, and in the end will prevail.¹⁴ This assumption strongly reflects the modern drive to ascertain stable, unambiguous epistemological foundations and ethical standards, and a corresponding inability to conceive of absurdity as an inherent aspect of the ethical moment.

Kant’s teleological legacy became further entrenched in the modernist cosmopolitan imaginary through the work of numerous influential figures. Hegel’s cosmopolitanism, for instance, coincides with a philosophy of world history as the progressive movement of states towards ever higher stages of freedom, culminating in the rule of Reason circumscribing the totality of the world and, with it, the end of history.¹⁵ Similarly, Marx and Engels envisioned communism as a materialist, dialectical and emancipatory project of cosmopolitan collective subject-formation arising alongside the borderless expansion of capital “over the whole surface of the earth”, which thereby ensures the “impossibility” of all “national one-sidedness and narrow-mindedness”.¹⁶

More recently, Jürgen Habermas has taken up Kant’s argument that a developmental trend to strengthen the republican constitutions of states internally will gradually limit hostility within and between nations.¹⁷ Of course, Habermas is aware that the consolidation of a cosmopolitan public right of and for humanity poses numerous complex issues beyond the regulation of conflict, but he foregrounds his assumption that a cosmopolitanism anchored in a universal core of democracy and rights constitutes a condition of possibility for

¹² I. Kant, “Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Purpose” and “Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch”, in *Kant: Political Writings*, H. B. Nisbet (trans.), H. Reiss (ed.), 41-53, 93, 130 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991).

¹³ Kant, “Idea for a Universal History”, 51.

¹⁴ See A. W. Wood, “Kant’s Philosophy of History”, in *Toward Perpetual Peace and Other Writings on Politics, Peace and History*, P. Kleingeld (ed.), 243-62 (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), 245; G. W. Brown, *Grounding Cosmopolitanism: From Kant to the Idea of a Cosmopolitan Constitution* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2009), 37-44.

¹⁵ See G. W. F. Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History*, H. B. Nisbet (trans.) (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975); Fine, *Cosmopolitanism*, 29-38.

¹⁶ K. Marx and F. Engels, “The Manifesto of the Communist Party”, in *The Marx-Engels Reader*, R. C. Tucker (ed.), 473-91 (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979), 476-7.

¹⁷ J. Habermas, “Kant’s Idea of Perpetual Peace, with the Benefit of Two Hundred Years’ Hindsight”, in *Perpetual Peace: Essays on Kant’s Cosmopolitan Ideal*, J. Bohman and M. Lutz-Bachmann (eds), 113-54 (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1997).

the progressive development of humankind. Other contemporary cosmopolitans, such as Andrew Linklater, while eschewing any crude historical causality, nevertheless remain willing to ascribe a progressive developmental course to human history as a whole. Increasing global interconnectedness and a concomitant universal consciousness of humanity's capacity to harm and be harmed, Linklater claims, are part of a "scaling up" of human organization indicative of a world historical evolution that is "almost certain to continue" to a cosmopolitan endpoint.¹⁸

Camus sought to undermine such understandings of history as a developmental process towards a universalist end amenable to rational control. Modern approaches to politics, he argues, share a particular teleological form, combining belief in the efficacy of instrumental rationality with faith in the ability to lead humanity to its singular historical destiny. From world communism to global capitalism, from pan-nationalism to "new" cosmopolitanism, hope in the future ultimately presupposes the flow of a historical process towards a privileged endpoint. For Camus, both feeding into and sprouting from such doctrines is a desperation to endow the cosmos with absolute meaning, which can only be disappointed. It is striking that even Kant concludes, near the end of "Idea for a Universal History", that it "is admittedly a strange and at first sight *absurd* proposition to write a *history* according to an idea of how world events must develop if they are to conform to certain rational ends; it would seem that only a *novel* could result from such premises".¹⁹ Kant and his cosmopolitan descendants have largely turned their backs on this inkling of the absurd.

Cosmopolitanism without Hope

I have suggested above that modern and contemporary cosmopolitan theories presuppose an explicit or tacit teleology, as if all historical events are somehow heading for the arrival of a rationally integrated system of global cosmopolitanism and universal humanity. As Richard Falk opines, the "idea about making the world better through a set of proposals", prevalent within modern cosmopolitanism, "implies a utopian confidence in the human capacity to exceed realistic horizons".²⁰ This is an uneasy yet worthwhile observation, insofar as many (though certainly not all) cosmopolitan theorists pronounce their vision to be unproblematically "progressive" in both descriptive and normative senses. Yet in constituting cosmopolitanism in historically progressivist terms, the actuality of multiple forms of cosmopolitanism in the present becomes subordinated to the possibility of a singular form of cosmopolitanism in the future. The belief in the historical progression of cosmopolitanism towards ever more rational, justifiable and efficient forms sets the tone for a discourse that ends up portraying cosmopolitanism as a normative ideal circumscribed by an inevitable *telos*. Placing our hopes in bringing about a cosmopolitan global order by means of rationalist efficacy conceals an escapist "leap of faith",²¹ which inevitably carries the burden of a deterministic teleology. The teleological imperative displaces the ambivalences and ambiguities of what it may mean to "be" cosmopolitan onto an agenda of problem-solving

¹⁸ A. Linklater, "Moral Progress and World History: Ethics and Global Interconnectedness", in *Questioning Cosmopolitanism*, S. van Hooft and W. Vandekerckhove (eds), 21-35 (Dordrecht: Springer, 2010), 27.

¹⁹ Kant, "Idea for a Universal History", 51-2 (first emphasis mine).

²⁰ R. Falk, "The Making of Global Citizenship", in *The Condition of Citizenship*, B. van Steenberg (ed.), 127-40 (London: SAGE, 1994), 140.

²¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 35.

projects, and thereby treats the present merely as a vehicle for implementing the future.²² It is not my (or Camus's) purpose simply to condemn these projects or the positive accomplishments of, for instance, movements for human rights and social justice. But it is crucial to note the dangerous slippage within modernist versions of cosmopolitanism from the aspiration of global political success to the temptation to formulate teleologically-weighted policy prescriptions and rationally efficient outcomes. In its drive to prove its "practical worth" by focusing on policy and "problem solving" as legitimating its ethical and political value, the "value" of cosmopolitanism becomes tainted by the modernist imperative to intervene in socio-political existence for purposes of creating ever more certain futures.²³

Can one detach cosmopolitanism from a *telos* of historical ontology, from its deeply ingrained teleological idea of progress? Given his wariness of rational systems of thought, Camus often interpreted the human condition and the tensions between a moderate historical sensibility of limits and a teleological messianism of boundlessness, through figures and myths of classical antiquity. Ancient myth resonates with Camus because, he claims, "Greek thought is not historical".²⁴ Prometheus, for example, figures prominently in his work. On the one hand, by stealing fire from the gods and giving it to humankind, Prometheus rebelled against Zeus in the name of human empowerment and the "noble promise" of human emancipation.²⁵ On the other hand, by exalting human mastery over the earth and by worshipping a vision of messianic transcendence – thus delivering "mortals" from the weaknesses of finitude and instilling the "blind hopes" of certainty into their hearts and minds – Prometheus undermines the idea of balance. For Camus, however, the myth of Prometheus does not express a simple Manichaean dichotomy between good and evil; rather, Prometheus evokes the inherent ambiguity of humanism and humanistic politics. The Promethean aspirations of humanism embody both the promise of cures for present and future ills, and the menace of the dark sides of progress. In the modern world, Camus suggests, the Promethean empowerment of humans for their own sake can always nurture friendship and solidarity as well as unleash ideologies that produce intellectual, economic and political servitude as the price of "development".²⁶ In a word, Prometheus "is both just and unjust".²⁷

Other myths, notably those of Sisyphus and Nemesis, supplement the Promethean one for Camus. Nemesis contributes the notions of moderation and limit,²⁸ and Sisyphus symbolizes the refusal of utility and achievement in the face of the common human condition of the absurd. Camus concludes that we "must imagine Sisyphus happy".²⁹ This is because

²² Catriona McKinnon offers the following gloss on what she refers to as the "duty" of cosmopolitan hope: "The cosmopolitan objective exists in the future, and is believed to be good and possible by cosmopolitans who desire it in virtue of their belief that it is good, and yields a disposition in them to act so as to make the realization of the cosmopolitan objective more likely, all else being equal". See C. McKinnon, "Cosmopolitan Hope", in *The Political Philosophy of Cosmopolitanism*, G. Brock and H. Brighouse (eds), 234-49 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), 240.

²³ See D. Held, *Cosmopolitanism: Ideals and Realities* (Cambridge: Polity, 2010), where this prescriptive imperative is expressed clearly. Further examples are Christian Barry and Thomas W. Pogge (eds), *Global Institutions and Responsibilities: Achieving Global Justice* (Malden, MA and Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2005), and Paul G. Harris (ed.), *Ethics and Global Environmental Policy: Cosmopolitan Conceptions of Climate Change* (Cheltenham: Edward Elgar, 2011).

²⁴ A. Camus, *American Journals* (New York: Paragon House, 1987), 49.

²⁵ Camus, *The Rebel*, 22.

²⁶ Camus, *The Rebel*, 245. Also A. Camus, "Prometheus in the Underworld", in *Lyrical and Critical Essays* (New York: Vintage Books, 1970), 138-42.

²⁷ A. Camus, "On the Future of Tragedy", in *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 310.

²⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 187.

²⁹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 123.

Sisyphus powerfully portrays reconciliation with the absurd, and thus embodies a non-pessimistic judgement of human existence that goes “nowhere”, as well as non-reconciliation with teleological doctrines that aspire to escape the absurd, and hence enacts a liberation from the worship of history as something instrumentally directed towards a hopeful end.

Sisyphus’s activity is not divine: it leads nowhere, it perfects nothing, it produces neither linear development nor ultimate redemption. And yet it refuses the negative judgement of that state of affairs as futile, it assumes responsibility for an absurd existence rather than attempting to step out of it by forcing it to fit into a historical process, and it affirms the present without relying on the anticipatory hope of a future better world. The most sweeping yet significant implication for cosmopolitanism of Camus’s reading of Sisyphus is that we must make a choice about which vision is to be given primacy: a teleological cosmopolitanism of hope, or an a-teleological cosmopolitanism without hope.

Camus offers a way of thinking about existence that preserves a cosmopolitan sense of ethical and political resistance to domination and inequality while illuminating contingent moments in the present where cosmopolitan attitudes and practices can be enacted, without totalizing them into a teleological metaphysics of progressive reason. Such a cosmopolitan disposition is cultivated, I suggest, through the appropriation of the image of Sisyphusian “hopelessness” which, Camus stresses, “has nothing to do with despair”³⁰: live for the world today without any consolatory faith in transcendent ontologies of history. The notion of relinquishing “hope” – which is an idea that suggests the value of the present is fulfilled only by the realization of a potential in the future, and which therefore becomes endlessly deferred to “tomorrow” – needs to be emphasized in cosmopolitan thinking. Throughout his *Notebooks*, Camus writes that the postulate of freedom becomes illusory when it is justified with a view to achieving predefined “future goals”, and is conferred meaning solely by the functional transformation of the present into a future grandeur. From this point of view, the present is reduced to nothing. Consequently, to refuse the subordination of freedom and affirm the present is to adopt a posture of living “without tomorrows [*sans lendemains*]”.³¹ It is pertinent to ask whether cosmopolitans fully consider how awareness of the absurd limit of finitude may derail our taking responsibility in the present, when so much emphasis is placed on the eventual arrival of a better tomorrow. “Hope” in the future is not a brute fact, and it may in fact appear in consciousness as the *inability* to answer to the present from the secure vantage point of an aspirational future. If the concept of “progress” is a disease of reason, then the idea of “hope” is the irrational contagion. We may push this Camusian line of thinking to argue that only a coherent absurdist sensibility occasions a genuinely cosmopolitan sense of responsibility, because it demands unwavering fidelity to the world as it is while constantly discriminating between decisions and actions that either humanize or dehumanize the world in the present. Put in a different way, cosmopolitan responsibility to the “here and now” eschews justificatory logics of “hope” where the present can always be redeemed in the limitless certainty of the “next world”.

If cosmopolitanism is to “abolish hope”³² and thereby shed the tyranny of *telos*, then its choices, commitments and actions can rest only on the fleeting moments of time no longer conceived under the unifying arc of world history. Where some theorists like Martha Nussbaum think of cosmopolitanism as a rationalist tradition whose universalist and impartial

³⁰ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 31. Cf. Camus, *Lyrical and Critical Essays*, 92: “For hope, contrary to popular belief, is tantamount to resignation”.

³¹ A. Camus, *Notebooks: 1942-1951* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1965), 86.

³² A. Camus, *Notebooks: 1935-1942* (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1963), 105.

duties are premised on the primacy of reason inherent in every human being,³³ Camus suggests instead that a cosmopolitan outlook issues from a mad love of the world as it is in spite of the absurdly tragic character of its many injustices. Ethically and politically, love of the world limned by the absurd is the first step towards refusing to accept all that degrades liberty and justice in present circumstances – which is a conviction that cannot be dictated by “formal virtue”. Rebellion, Camus goes on to say, “cannot exist without a strange form of love. Those who find no rest in God or in history are condemned to live for those who, like themselves, cannot live: in fact, for the humiliated”.³⁴

Rebellion and the Cosmopolitan Disposition

Such a Camus-inspired view has deep consequences for cosmopolitanism because, with its normative vision unsettled, one can claim that existence ought not to be assimilated into an abstract universal *telos*, but should open itself up to “the fixed and radiant point of the present”³⁵ shared in common by the humiliated and the humiliators, the oppressed and the oppressors. Contrary to viewing rebellion as the inevitable unfolding of history’s underlying processes, Camus suggests that we see it as an expression of generalized refusal in response to specific situations of oppression and suffering, and thus as an action that is initiated anew in the face of every situationally-unique injustice. Although Camus does not reject the aim of achieving greater freedom and justice,³⁶ he refuses the notion of the “implacable reign of necessity” as the motivation for political action.³⁷ Rather than the goal of attaining an “end” with reference to the course of history, it is the reality of suffering in current contexts that motivates rebellions in the present. Rebellion, as Camus envisions it, seizes the chances for justice in the here and now rather than deferring justice to a future to which judgement and action are subjugated “in order to obey history”.³⁸ In effect, Camus calls for permanent rebellion as delimited confrontations with specific attempts to deny human freedom and dignity. Consequently, Camus’s account of rebellion is best understood as post-teleological insofar as it endorses the conditional character of human judgements and actions which, for that reason, can never be absolute or final. Rebellion, for Camus, contains an inherent measure limiting what can be done in the pursuit of freedom and justice. It does not disallow political projects but renders them provisional, partial and always contestable, subject to an ethical and political imperative of resisting any attempt to project the grand concept of “progress” onto worldly political commitments. Rebellion thus has its own specific reasons and outcomes, relative to the irreducibly plural spectrum of contexts and periods of time.³⁹

Starting out from the experience of the absurd, Camus proposes a decidedly non-teleological mode of ethical and political action in terms of the phenomenology of rebellion. He captures this quality by describing what he takes to be our actual experience of being violated and degraded. In *The Rebel*, he charts a course between nihilism and historicism by

³³ M. Nussbaum, “Patriotism and Cosmopolitanism”, in *For Love of Country: Debating the Limits of Patriotism*, J. Cohen (ed.), 3-17 (Boston: Beacon Press, 1996), 4.

³⁴ Camus, *The Rebel*, 304.

³⁵ Camus, *The Rebel*, 305.

³⁶ See A. Camus, “Bread and Freedom”, in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death* (New York: Vintage Books, 1960), 87-97, and M. Crowley, “Camus and Social Justice”, in *The Cambridge Companion to Camus*, E. J. Hughes (ed.), 93-105 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

³⁷ Camus, *The Rebel*, 80.

³⁸ Camus, *The Rebel*, 79.

³⁹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 19.

beginning with rebellion as a sensible phenomenon which bespeaks a context of human coexistence as a result of our situatedness in the world. Through a critical appropriation of Hegelian thought that sheds its dialectical pretensions, Camus maintains that the master-slave relationship brings to light that in daring to defy the oppression of the master, the rebel urgently “affirms the existence of a borderline” or experiential limit between the tolerable and the intolerable.⁴⁰ The rebel both asserts the value of some aspect of his or her being – prior to any theoretical formulation of morality – and condemns any assault on this aspect of self beyond the limit of the tolerable; the rebel thus “says yes and no simultaneously”.⁴¹ More importantly, however, the rebel’s simultaneous affirmation and rejection is directed not only at being a slave individually, but at “the condition of slavery” more generally.⁴² Every act of rebellion thus contains within it a relative judgement of a particular situation that directs upon it a concretely universal concern of love for others’ freedom, equality and reciprocity. It thus affirms the basic goodness of life for all and ascribes to others a right to rebel in rejecting the injustices of the world without, however, condemning the world itself. From this Camus concludes that through rebellion the tyranny of the “either/or” in the master-slave relationship is reconstituted as an emancipatory “neither/nor”, neither master nor slave, which can serve as a basis for judging the limits that action must establish for itself. This concurrent expression of both refusal and assent, both “yes” and “no”, constitutes a balance or tension – what Camus calls “measure” and portrays by the figure of Nemesis⁴³ – that animates the continual interrogation of quotidian ethics and politics. Camus argues that the joint experience of the limit between the tolerable and intolerable, keyed to our physical integrity and recognition of our autonomous status, constitutes the socially fashioned minimum of a broadly shared meaning of what makes for a properly human existence. Yet the condition of the absurd always shrouds such meaning in ambiguity, leaving it open to plural and sometimes clashing interpretations. This view therefore sets aside any assertions of transcendent law, nature and history, but it does provide the existential ground for dialogue, debate and critique about the meaning of the human condition, capable of fostering both differing views and some minimal shared beliefs about ethical and political matters across diverse communities.

To capture further the attitude or ethos of rebellion, I will conclude by tracing some aspects of Camus’s thought which speak to the dispositional characteristics that can be harnessed by a cosmopolitanism without hope, focussing on the features that make for contextually-grounded choices and actions in a Camusian cosmopolitanism. What must be underscored is that these characteristics are not to be conceived as means to the larger end of advancing history, insofar as they find their rightful place in human relationships in the world as it is now. The first of these is an acknowledgement of difference and the experience of strangeness as resisting the reduction of human plurality to uniformity. Camus introduces this theme when he writes, “Forever I shall be a stranger to myself”.⁴⁴ For him, strangeness is inherent to identity, indicating an existential quality of “foreignness” that dislocates us from ourselves, a difference that, while always singular, is a universal existential trait.⁴⁵ Throughout his interest in strangeness – *The Stranger* and *The Plague*, for example, explore both the vulnerability of the outsider and the capacity to resist forced separation – Camus

⁴⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 13.

⁴¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 13.

⁴² Camus, *The Rebel*, 14.

⁴³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 187.

⁴⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 19.

⁴⁵ As Camus observes, “this feeling of strangeness is shared with all men”. *The Rebel*, 22.

proposes what can be regarded as a compellingly cosmopolitan notion of belonging and relating to others that transforms experienced contradictions into narratives of our paradoxical condition. In order to live with “strangers” without fearing or erasing their existential difference, Camus suggests, we must acknowledge the stranger within ourselves and the strangeness that is exposed by the absurdity of the human condition.⁴⁶ The point here is to both accept and refuse the status of “stranger” as a heightened sensibility of cosmopolitanism. The cosmopolitan is attentive to the ways that we traverse the fine line between critical distance and exclusion, between a belonging with others that respects difference and a separation from others that debases plurality. This disposition is needed for a coexistence sensitive to the divisions, exclusions, and deprivations of a world of strangeness.⁴⁷

The second feature of a Camusian cosmopolitanism is devoted to solidarity as well as the deepening and widening of hospitality. Solidarity means, according to Camus, acting to support others when threatened by injustice and coercively imposed inequality. It is a kind of mutual responsibility motivated by the desire “to serve justice *so as not to add to the injustice of the human condition*”.⁴⁸ Solidarity is, moreover, an expression of justice as a form of love and not merely an abstract ideal: “if justice has any meaning in this world”, Camus says, “it means nothing but the recognition of that solidarity; it cannot, by its very essence, divorce itself from compassion . . . [the] awareness of a common suffering”.⁴⁹ Compassion is a component of solidarity in that it motivates the move from simple acknowledgement of and sympathy for another’s suffering to the choice to take a stand and suffer with others, even if those others are strangers. It is a kind of “insane generosity . . . which unhesitatingly gives the strength of its love and without a moment’s delay *refuses* injustice”.⁵⁰ Inasmuch as it reflects an a-teleological relinquishing of hope, the move to solidarity means “laying claim to a human situation in which all the answers are human”.⁵¹ Thus solidarity is a sign of the cosmopolitan’s critical, judging recognition that the world is shared with others and that one is able selectively to put oneself in the “stranger’s” place. The imaginative capacity to put oneself in another time and place, when linked with solidaristic concern for the suffering and humiliation of others, reinforces the compassionate bonds needed to strengthen hospitality as an existential affect, rather than simply a formal rule or principle. This is because the conjunction of strangeness and solidarity points to a process of inversion between the roles of guest and host; self and other are shaped by their exchange of different perspectives which then recasts their relationship as a form of mutual giving and receiving – a welcoming of the strange. As explored in Camus’s haunting short story, “The Guest [*L’Hôte*]”, the convergence of different horizons of experience unsettles the neat separation between “native” host and “foreign” guest, even as hospitality cannot escape from the dilemmas confronting every concrete space of encounter.⁵² The cosmopolitan thus remains a stranger in search of transitory refuge and hospitality in an even stranger yet perplexingly familiar world.

⁴⁶ For a nuanced treatment of Camus’s complex French-Algerian identity, see D. Carroll, *Albert Camus the Algerian: Colonialism, Terrorism, Justice* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007).

⁴⁷ For a different approach to this issue, see K. A. Appiah, *Cosmopolitanism: Ethics in a World of Strangers* (New York: W. W. Norton, 2007).

⁴⁸ Camus, *The Rebel*, 285.

⁴⁹ A. Camus, “Reflections on the Guillotine”, in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, 217.

⁵⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 304.

⁵¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 21.

⁵² A. Camus, *Exile and the Kingdom* (London: Penguin Books, 2006b), 43-55.

A third aspect of a Camusian cosmopolitanism is expressive of his commitment to an aesthetic or artistic, rather than strictly philosophical, method. Camus considers the act of contemplating experience to be a fundamentally aesthetic encounter with the absurdity of existence, as well as a creative process of interpreting and translating the interplay between (inter)subjective experience and the world as a carrier of differences.⁵³ Hence, cosmopolitan dispositions can be viewed not just as formal moral imperatives, but as complex everyday aesthetic interactions that witness, imagine and stimulate our critical attention towards and awareness of others and our varied places in the world without furnishing unified answers. Moreover, this way of framing our encounters with the world prompts attention to the crucial role of communication and dialogue. For Camus, the prospect of avoiding unnecessary suffering always rests on the possibility, fragile though it is, of dialogue. The dialogical exchange of positions and perspectives helps avoid distorting others' experiences and imposing solutions that undermine the freedom of interlocutors. Dialogue offers a way out of the impasse between a privileged access to rational truth and a fundamentalist incommensurability of conflicting ideologies. Both positions, for Camus, foster totalizing visions of the world and its perfectibility. In contrast, he suggests that we must understand ourselves as existing constantly in the midst of uninterrupted dialogue, an attitude that reflects the acknowledgment of fallibility that comes from embracing the absurd. Camus adds that dialogue is a "perpetually renewed" opening to the different and the imperfect at the limits of our existing forms of thinking and acting with others.⁵⁴ Dialogue can open up spaces for questioning and change without postulating transcendent values to which our thinking and acting must conform. There can be no guarantee that dialogue will deepen solidarity within and across borders. Yet cosmopolitanism, if it abandons its teleological hopes, will invite "untrammelled dialogue through which we come to recognize our similarity" as partners living in a common world without pursuing a determinate endpoint.⁵⁵

A final feature to mention here is that solidarity, compassion, hospitality and dialogue open the pathway to friendship as a material manifestation of the cosmopolitan disposition. Against the assumption that friendship signals a bond subsisting upon homogeneity,⁵⁶ Camus's understanding points to the fact that friendship is always a relationship and negotiation of differences that subverts any sense of unconditional identity purified of the strange or foreign.⁵⁷ Camus invites us to envisage friendship as an encounter between self and other(s) that offers an alternative to the rule-bound and institutionalized practices of formal politics; to befriend another is to enter into the familiarity of strangeness. To turn to friendship as a place of cosmopolitan encounter thus serves as a point of resistance against the teleological problem-solving model of political efficacy according to which contemporary normative cosmopolitanism has increasingly defined itself. Friendship is not a given, but is a product of moral choice exercised in the midst of uncertainty and ambiguity, which thus avoids the extremes of "natural" enmity for other peoples and "natural" chauvinism for one's own.⁵⁸ As the examples of his "Letters to a German Friend" and his endeavour to negotiate a

⁵³ A. Camus, "Create Dangerously", in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, 249-72.

⁵⁴ Camus, "Create Dangerously", 264.

⁵⁵ Camus, *The Rebel*, 283.

⁵⁶ See A. C. Grayling, *Friendship* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2013).

⁵⁷ Friendship may be regarded as the central theme of *The Plague*, where the prospect of the forced loss "not of love only but even of friendship", provokes "living for the moment only" and thus "without hope". In the end, resisting the plague is done "for friendship's sake". A. Camus, *The Plague* (New York: Vintage Books, 1948), 182, 255.

⁵⁸ Camus, *The Rebel*, 161-2.

“civilian truce” during the Algerian conflict attest,⁵⁹ Camus believes that friendship is coextensive with the juxtaposition of mutual dependency and deep plurality that is constitutive of social coexistence – even if that coexistence takes threatening turns. Friendship is thus an integral element of a cosmopolitan sensibility that remains “faithful to the world”.⁶⁰ In other words, friendship preserves the world as the only common ground that is shareable by the whole of humanity even as it is saturated by the absurd.

Conclusion

Contemporary cosmopolitanism makes a valiant attempt to rescue the individual from the vicissitudes of global injustice and inequality. But there is something awry in a philosophical-political enterprise that construes itself as engaged in the Promethean realization of a new, preconceived humanity. In treating humanity as a technical problem to be solved, it amounts to “an accusation of earthly things and man” and hence is “without love” for the world as such.⁶¹ For Camus, by contrast, the lucid acceptance of the absurd predicament of the human condition is entwined with a refusal of any idea of progress that promises to evade the absurd with the mastery offered by millenarian political projects.⁶² “Real generosity toward the future”, Camus declares, “lies in giving all to the present”.⁶³ It is only once we acknowledge that there is no conclusive basis for hoping that a global cosmopolitan society will be achieved at the end of an unbroken chain of “tomorrows” that an a-teleological cosmopolitan disposition “free of all messianic elements and devoid of any nostalgia for an earthly paradise” comes into its own.⁶⁴ To validate an absurd love of the world and dislocate the authority of a calculated future, then, let us reclaim Camus’s Sisyphean understanding of the cosmos and bid farewell to teleology.

Patrick Hayden is Professor of Political Theory and International Relations at the University of St Andrews. His research focuses on the implications of the work of critical theorists and existentialists for issues in global politics. His books include *Hannah Arendt: Key Concepts* (Routledge, 2014), *Political Evil in a Global Age: Hannah Arendt and International Theory* (Routledge, 2009), and, with Chamsy el-Ojeili, *Critical Theories of Globalization* (Palgrave Macmillan, 2006).

⁵⁹ A. Camus, “Letters to a German Friend”, in *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, 3-32; A. Camus, “Call for a Civilian Truce in Algeria”, in *Algerian Chronicles*, A. Goldhammer (trans.), A. Kaplan (ed.), 149-59 (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2013).

⁶⁰ Camus, “Letters to a German Friend”, 28.

⁶¹ Camus, *American Journals*, 53.

⁶² Camus, *The Rebel*, 306.

⁶³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 304.

⁶⁴ Camus, *Camus at Combat*, 261.

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