The Plague (1947), Albert Camus Translated from French by Stuart Gilbert

In The Plague Camus substitutes this problem for that of a strange form of martyrdom, a kind of religious of happiness through atheistic sanctity- Murchland, CCE, 62.

Albert Camus was born in a working-class family in Algeria on 7th November 1913 in Mondovi, a small village near the seaport city of Bone (present day Annaba) in the northeast region of French Algeria. He was the second child of Lucien Auguste Camus, a military Veteran and wine-shipping clerk, and of Catherine Marie Cardona, a house-keeper and part-time factory worker. After the death of his father in World War II, his mother and older brother moved to Algiers where they lived with his maternal uncle and grandmother in a cramped second-floor apartment in the working-class district of Belcourt. Camus’ mother being illiterate, partially deaf, and afflicted with a speech pathology, worked in an ammunition factory and cleaned homes to help support her family.

Camus attended elementary school at the local Ecole Communale, and it was there that he encountered the first in the series of teacher-mentors who recognized and nurtured the young boy’s lively intelligence. These father figures introduced him to a new world of history and imagination and to literary landscapes far beyond the dusty streets of Belcourt and working-class poverty. Though stigmatized as a pupille de la nation (that is, a war veteran’s child dependent on public welfare) and hampered by recurrent health issues, Camus distinguished himself as a student and was eventually awarded a scholarship to attend high school at the Grand Lycee. It was during his school years that he became an avid reader, learnt Latin and English, and developed a lifelong interest in literature, art, theater, and films. He also loved playing soccer. It was during this period that Camus suffered his first serious attack of
tuberculosis, a disease that was to afflict him, on and off, throughout his career.

Camus was contributing articles in the *Tosud*, a monthly literary even before he had completed his baccalaureate degree and was looking forward to a career in journalism. The next four years he studied and worked at various jobs-in the weather bureau, in an automobile-accessory firm, in a shipping company, so that he could support his education. He married his first wife Simone Hie, divorced her, briefly joined the Communist party and effectively began his professional theatrical and writing career.

His provocative report on the unhappy state of the Muslims of the Kabylie region stirred up the Algerian government to action and brought him public notice. In 1933 Camus enrolled at the University of Algiers to pursue his diploma d’etudes superieures, specializing in philosophy and gaining certificates in sociology and psychology. From 1935 to 1938 he ran the Theatre du Travail a theatrical company that produced plays by Malraux, Gide, Synge, Dostoevski, and others.

In the coming years Camus further established himself as an emerging author, journalist, and theatre professional. After his expulsion from the Communist party, he reorganized his dramatic company and renamed it Theatre de l’Equipe. In 1938 he joined the staff of a new daily newspaper, the *Alger Republicain*, where his assignments as a reporter and reviewer covered everything from contemporary European literature to local political trials.

The 1940’s witnessed Camus’ gradual ascendance to the rank of world class literary intellectual. He started the decade as a locally acclaimed author and playwright, but a figure virtually unknown outside the city of Algiers. He ended it as an internationally recognized novelist, dramatist, journalist, philosophical essayist, and champion of freedom. This period of his life
began inauspiciously – war in Europe, the occupation of France, official censorship, and a widening crackdown on left-wing journals. Camus was still without stable employment when he departed to Lyons, after marrying his second wife, Francine Faure, in December of 1940. In Lyons he worked as a journalist and returned to Algeria thereafter. To help make ends meet, he taught part-time at a private school in Oran. His first novel The Stranger was published in 1942 which propelled him into immediate literary renown. Camus returned to France in 1942 and a year later began working for the clandestine newspaper Combat, the journalistic arm and voice of the French Resistance movement. During this period, while contending with recurrent bouts of tuberculosis, he published Le Mythe de Sisyphe and joined Gallimard Publishing as an editor, a position he held until his death.

After the Liberation, Camus continued as editor of Combat, oversaw the production and publication of plays and assumed a leading role in Parisian intellectual society in the company of Sartre and Simone de Beauvoir among others. His growing reputation as a writer was enlarged by the publication of The Plague, (Le Peste) an allegorical novel and fictional parable of the Nazi occupation and the duty of revolt and by lecture tours to the United States and South America. In 1951 he published L’Homme Revolt, a controversial work, which led to his eventual falling out with Sartre. In 1956 he published The Fall, confessional novel. At this time Algeria was facing a political turmoil and he was still afflicted by tuberculosis. He still hoped that the native Muslim population and the French pied noir minority would live together peacefully in a new de-colonized and largely integrated, if not fully independent, nation. Camus published Exile and the Kingdom in 1957, a collection of short stories; he was awarded the Nobel Prize for literature in the same year.
Camus was always very active in the theater, and several of his plays have been published and produced. His fiction including *The Stranger*, *The Plague*, *The Fall*, and *The First Man, A Happy Death*; his philosophical essays, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Rebel*; and his plays have assured his preeminent position in modern French letters. His sudden death on 4th January 1960 cut short the career of one of the most important literary figures of the western world, when he was at the very summit of his powers.

From Sartre’s perceptive, Camus was a less of a novelist than a writer of philosophical tales and parables. He himself believed that his fictional works were not true novels but a combination of philosophical and psychological insights. Perhaps Camus himself best defined his own particular status as a philosophical writer when he wrote:

> The great novelists are philosophical novelists”, that is, writers eschew systematic explanation and create their discourse using “images instead of arguments (The Myth of Sisyphus).

So it can be said that he is a philosophical novelist and a novelist of ideas. He conceived his own distinctive and original world-view and sort to convey that view mainly through images, fictional characters and events, and dramatic presentations rather than through critical analysis and direct discourse.

*The Plague* written shortly after the World War II is essentially an allegory for the situation in France and other parts of Europe during the time of the German occupation. Camus uses the Algerian town of Oran as the setting for this novel. He reduces this immense tragedy down to artistically manageable proportions, isolating the town from the rest of the world when the gates are closed after the discovery of an outbreak of bubonic plague. Through a relatively small cast of characters, Camus expresses his idea of steadfastness against violence and commitment to the plight of others with a level of moral
insight. It is unconceivable from this work of Camus that his characters and their contribution to the work to a large extent is the real life experiences of the author himself and the attempt to write such a novel is in the strong belief that society as a whole will survive but conclusive conclusions cannot be drawn to the behavior of humans as individuals.

*The plague (La Peste 1947)* is set in the coastal town of Oran and deals with the outbreak of plague, traced from its subtle, insidious, unheeded beginnings through its horrible, all encompassing, and seemingly inescapable dominion to its eventual climax and decline. The story is told from the viewpoint of one of the survivors. Camus has made no effort to conceal the fact that his novel could be interpreted as an allegory of the rise of Nazism and the nightmare of the occupation. The plague as a metaphor signifies absurd in general as well as any calamity or disaster that tests the mettle of human beings, their endurance, solidarity, sense of responsibility, and will. In the end the plague finally retreats and the narrator reflects that a time of pestilence teaches “*that there is more to admire in men than to despise*”. But he also knows “*that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good*, that “*the day would come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again*” and sends them forth once more to spread death and contagion into a happy and unsuspecting city.

*The Plague* is written in five parts. The first part introduces the character of Dr. Rieux, as he and his fellow townspeople deal with the sudden infestation of dead rats, which he soon realizes is due to an outbreak of plague. Part two begins with the closing of the town of Oran, blocking parted friends from each other and imprisoning those inside. One such victim is the journalist Rambert, who is prevented from returning to his wife in France. The local priest, Father Paneloux brings in religious interpretation that plague is an instrument of divine justice. Jean Tarrou, a visitor to Oran, decides to start a
sanitation squad in an effort to help curb the spread of the disease. The third part describes the height of the plague’s devastation, including the burial rituals which slowly diminish in formality until bodies are heaped upon one another in ditches. The longest and most dramatic section of the novel, part four, begins with Rambert’s attempt to escape and return to his wife, but repeatedly fails and ultimately decides to stay back and help. Father Paneloux, after witnessing the death of a child infected by plague, delivers another sermon, much more sympathetic than the previous. Tarrou explains his aspiration “to become a saint without God” to Rieux. In the final part, Tarrou is claimed as one of the plague’s last victims. When the infestation is over, the rats return, the town is opened, Rambert is reunited with his wife, and Rieux reveals that he is the narrator.

Camus tells the story through Dr. Rieux. However, Rieux is not the first-person narrator. Rather he disguises himself, referring to himself in the third person and only at the end of the novel he reveals who he is. While reading the novel one feels that the story is told by an unnamed narrator, who gathers information from what he has personally seen and heard regarding the epidemic, as well as the diary of another character, Tarrou, who makes observations of the events he witnesses. The reason Rieux is not declared as the narrator earlier because Camus wants to give an objective account of the events in Oran. Rieux is deliberately made to adopt the tone of an impartial observer. Rieux is like a witness who exercises restraint when called to testify about a crime; he describes what the characters said and did, without speculating about their thoughts and feelings, although he does offer generalized assessment of the shifting moods of the town as a whole. Rieux avoids subjectivity by sticking to the facts and sees himself as an historian referring to the story as a chronicle. The style of The Plague gives the
impression of distance and detachment. Rarely does the reader get drawn directly into the emotions of the characters or the drama of the scenes.

Camus’ writing style is concise and specific. He doesn’t use excessive amounts of figurative language but, instead, bluntly expresses his characters views. The brilliance of Camus’s writing is his ability to adapt his style to reflect the unique personality of the narrator and the specific themes of the novel, with a focus of showing his characters’ detachment.

In The Plague Camus uses greater complexity in thought and sentence structure, though detached in another way. While the anonymous narrator clearly expresses his impression and account of the disease, his commentary is intricate and interesting. The events in the story do not fit a cause and effect sequence; rather it shows them as they happened without attempting to frame them with the concept of causality.

Rieux is of the opinion that in the given situation the extremes that one can go to is either he can stand and fight or run away from the situation, or else one has to be insane to be able to ignore and still be around.

Camus uses the novel as a platform, from which he can explore and explain his philosophical viewpoints, in this case the absurd, humanism and existentialism. Little portion of each of these philosophies are ingrained in this novel: the existentialist concern over time and consciousness, the absurd claim that the world is both irrational and indifferent, and the humanist belief that man is more good than bad and worth fighting for - even against deadly infections. The novel can be judged as a Novel of Ideas, as it clearly focuses on ideas, not on plot, which exists only to support those very ideas? The larger part of the novel is a thoughtful exposition or intense argumentative dialogues.
The Plague can be interpreted, on at least one level, as an allegory in which humanity must be preserved from the fatal pestilence of mass culture, which converts formerly free, autonomous, independent minded, human beings into a soulless new species.

Camus preferred The Plague to be perceived as a chronicle and not as a traditional novel. It did not follow the form and style normally adapted by conventional novels. Camus focuses the hopeless helplessness of the contemporary society and its apparent development; the form is just a medium to provoke their ideas. As far as the thoughts of this mundane, decadent society are concerned Camus is very modernistic in nature.

Camus points out the Oranian’s attempts to change the prevailing situation by tackling the awful intellectual sterility through an intense debate of issues that they consider being of major importance than actually working towards fighting the plague itself.

Camus here has used the narrative form which is not rigid, is flexible enabling a change, modification, and allowing adjustments to be made whenever needed. It can assume a point of difference of mood and intonation. He has adopted this technique to fulfill the objectives of introducing a strong social criticism and thereby putting an emphasis on the content or the idea he has portrayed and thus promoting an enlightened but yet creative and literate society which is able to integrate the asset of the three main cultural fields of science, religion, and art.

Dr. Bernard Rieux is a medical doctor, who is described by the author, and one of his good friends, Tarrou, as to not resemble a medical practitioner but more like a Sicilian peasant, since his hands did not resemble that of a surgeon but were broad, deeply tanned and hairy. Dr. Rieux is of moderate height, broad shoulders, has dark steady eyes, a big well molded nose and
thick tight set lips. His black hair is clipped very close. In spite of these features he sustains a knowledgeable look and has a respectable influence amongst the citizens of Oran. As his profession stands for compassion and humanism so does he. The actions of humanism represented by Camus through Rieux are duty, love and death. Rieux is always ready to admit his ignorance which is one of his major vices. He repeatedly suffers from an inability to comprehend reality. As a person is an extreme hard worker, compassionate, to all around him, he is not indifferent towards the happenings around him like the others in Oran. He holds his ability to fight death and disease for which he has been trained, as his first priority towards mankind. He perceives these as the only two evils; death and man’s ignorance of it.

In this respect our townsfolk were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves, in other words they were humanists; they disbelieved in pestilence. (pg. 37)

He is part of the small group, whom Tarrou calls ‘true healers’. Rieux initially saw his profession as an idea and not as a concrete reality.

“I haven’t a notion, Tarrou; I assure you I haven’t a notion. When I entered this profession, I did it ‘abstractedly’, so to speak; because I had a desire for it, because it meant a career like another, one that often young men aspire to”(pg. 127)

His dedication to the cause can be derived from the fact that professionally he understood about the impact of the plague and the consequence of the ignorance around him, and still he choose to remain in Oran and fight the plague with all his talent. In one of the replies to Father Paneloux he mentions that,

Salvation’s much too big a word for me. I don’t aim so high. I’m concerned with man’s health; and for me his health comes first. (pg. 219)
Rieux condemns religious men, not for being religious men but for speaking in abstractions from a lack of experience, but this does not prevent Rieux from acknowledging the common cause that they both pursue. He is a representative of silent and discrete suffering and makes an unconditional commitment to fight the plague. Rieux chooses to serve the citizens of Oran over the suffering of his wife, and thus chooses the abstract over the concrete. Even though there was still time for him to leave and join his sick wife at the sanatorium.

The calamity would remind us that we can neither count on time to be reasonable nor control it in any way. Rieux, perhaps, fell victim to one or both of these errors of thought. He realized near the end about the threat that he was exposed to probable death due to infection, which others otherwise took as a passing phase.

Camus has portrayed Dr. Rieux as the intellectual perception and the limitations of the intellectual to influence the society during the plague - suffering and death - the theme of the novel.

Oh, I know it’s an absurd situation, but we’re all involved in it, and we’ve got to accept it as it is (pg. 86)

Dr. Rieux an atheist is of the opinion that if God is not around to help the plague victims then someone has to take his place. Dr. Rieux believes in fighting the crisis on hand without trying to escape the responsibility, self imposed unlike some of the others in his own fraternity. The term Plague plays an important role for Rieux, initially he thinks that things have to be called by their name but then he is reluctant to use the word Plague. He realizes that action matters not words, he believes that the terminology is irrelevant as it is always subjective, still he spends crucial time discussing
with the authorities regarding the name of the disease. Rieux describes the plague as an individual case of suffering that cannot be described by language in a general format.

Rieux is confused whether he should use abstraction to fight the plague or is abstraction itself the enemy. It seems abstraction is a tool for Rieux, he detaches himself from the misery of the victim’s kin and does what needs to be done as it gives him strength to do is work in extreme conditions, although he does admit that his heart has been hardened to the suffering witnesses. On the other hand abstractions distract the issues at hand; in the case, tears and pleading of the kin mask the real problem – death. Interestingly it is the determination of man in his struggle against death that hits home for Rieux. He had learnt what others had not, towards others suffering.

Rieux does indeed change over the course of the novel; he becomes more indifferent to the horrors of the plague. Yet this goads him onwards, rather than rendering him passive or apathetic. During the plague’s later stages he regrets not giving more physical and vocal affection to the victims. He ponders the horrors of the plague which is beyond his comprehension. It reminds him of the suffering of the others which can be written off but can be realized only when it is upon oneself.

It is reveled near to the end of the novel that Dr. Rieux is the narrator, who chronicles and specifies that he has only told what was experienced by all and not made it into a highly personal and subjective confession. He chronicled it all down for he believed that the conquest of the plague was not the end but to help people again if it returned.

He knew that the tale he had to tell could not be one of final victory. It could be only the record of what had to be done, and what assuredly would have to be done again in the never ending fight against terror and its relentless onslaughts…. (pg. 308)
Rieux describes suffering as a teacher since he credits it as the main imputes for this narrative. His relationship with his mother and his wife were perceived by him as his misgivings that got consumed by his devotion to his profession and the apathy of his patients. Though he had high regards for his mother, a very strong minded lady, he always felt he did not do enough for her.

Yes, he’d make a fresh start, once the period of abstractions was over… (pg 288)

With his wife he felt that he could not do justice to their relationship and promised to start again afresh, once she returned from the sanatorium, where he looked forward to visiting her. But she died before the plague could subside and he could not visit her.

Dr. Rieux describes the town of Oran as ugly, maybe because of the unhealthy way the town is built and situated against the sea, the compromise with hygiene, habits, and gross ignorance of the crises that leads to the town’s suffering from a clinical perspective.

Dr. Rieux’s disagreement with the sermon of Father Paneloux, the Jesuit priest, about the plague being an act of God, to punish the sinners, is because of his understanding of the disease as a doctor and the human effort required for fighting and defending from it. Camus avoids characterizing Rieux as a doctor not knowing what he fears more the disease or the suffering of the patients. He could not hold back his conscience to become a bystander, with his experience of the extreme ignorance, makes him more compassionate and human towards his patients and the suffering. He also treats the asthma patient who also survives the plague but has not much relevance than of survival and passage of time. When he reflects upon the various relationships and interactions with other characters, his strength in being just reflects, when
he refuses to certify Rambert, declaring him uninflicted of the bacteria. Dr. Rieux’s relationship with Tarrou is of high regard for Tarrou’s achievements and organizational skills, in putting together a group of volunteers to help contain the plague. The swim in the sea with Tarrou gives them both the experience of a bond to work against the ignorance of Oran. Rieux’s appreciation of the efforts of Tarrou, pains him when Tarrou dies of plague.

Dr. Rieux appreciates Joseph Grand, the municipal clerk for being the real hero as he acknowledges Grand’s support in the volunteer group and his willingness to write a novel which does not go beyond its first sentence. Grand also appreciates the fact that Dr. Rieux is willing to consider his deprived status and is ready to treat him for free. He trusts the doctor so much that he confides in him about his broken marriage and literary pursuit.

Dr. Rieux’s humanitarian perception of the behavior and activities of Cottard prevents him from condemning Cottard. He tells the police to be considerate while dealing with him. On the other hand he is very sympathetic towards Raymond Rambert as he is separated from his wife and feeling lonely and isolated. But his principles do not permit him to certify Rambert being not inflicted with the disease and thus help him to flee from Oran and unite with his wife.

Dr. Rieux is a man of uncompromising principles. If he cannot get to the truth of a situation he will have nothing to do with it. His honesty and truthfulness makes Rambert call him “saint just” after the extremist Jacobean of the French Revolution. His integrity and uncompromising character lead others also to trust him undoubtedly. People relate easily to the kind and generous Rieux. Tarrou believes that a doctor is “more human” than most of the other people and forms a deep friendship with Rieux. Even Father Paneloux does not question Rieux’s good intention when he disagrees on the religious intervention, and the plague being a punishment for the sinners. Rieux’s
optimistic attitude and toil inspires the citizens of Oran to have faith in him. He is tireless in his efforts to convince the authorities of the town about the seriousness of the plague. He is also unrelenting in trying to stop the plague from spreading and helping those who are victims of the horror of the disease. His most touching goodness is seen in his interest in Grand’s literary work and the time he takes from his busy schedule to make Cottard feel important and worthwhile. But at the same time he has difficulty in expressing his own emotions. His confidence also breaks as the intensity of the plague increases and the element of fear creeps in him. He like Cottard craves for human warmth.

Rieux has enjoyed a close relationship with his mother, who inspires him to care for others. Even though he loves his wife deeply he has inability in communicating his emotions to her. It is only after that she has left for the sanatorium that he could articulate the pain of his separation. Eventually she passes away. Rieux even has trouble in expressing about what his friendship with Tarrou means.

Camus has used Rieux as a means to convey the idea of mental isolation in spite of the character’s direct involvement throughout the length of the novel. Rieux prefers to use only those facts that he could confirm in the narration and avoids using any form of imagination, with the intent of keeping the narration as close to reality as possible.

By chronicling the events he believes that man can never conquer death and the experience Oran has undergone should help others to be prepared to fight against such odds in every possible manner. This shows a genuine humanist concern. Camus has used Dr. Rieux’s character in multiple dimensions throughout the length of the novel, as Rieux is closely associated with the theme of the novel, an epidemic – death and suffering. Rieux is the most ideal to chronicle the novel due to his profession that directly associates with the
theme. Camus represents Dr. Rieux as a busy, hard working, selfless, and above all a humanist, serving the habitual victims against the ignorant social system. The epidemic fatal in nature represents chaos and contrary to that Rieux is calm and strong hearted, he is disturbed only with his thoughts on why plague attacked this town. He symbolizes hope in an otherwise hopeless helpless scenario. It is this characteristic of the doctor that Camus exploits to represent the intellect amongst the ignorant. Rieux tried to smile.

Salvation’s much too big a word for me. I don’t aim so high. I’m concerned with man’s health; and for me his health comes first (pg. 219)

His consistent hard work and compassion towards fellow human beings suffering becomes a means of inspiration and reconciliation for some of the other characters. Father Paneloux though delivering impassioned sermons, changes his perspective about plague, when he sees the gross reality and joins the volunteer group. Camus has thus placed service to mankind above service to God and depicted humanism as a religion followed by Dr. Rieux. In the end he does say that,

…what we learn in time of pestilence: that, there are more things to admire in men than to despise. (Pg.308)

Jean Tarrou is the son of an eminent lawyer, believing and committed to very strong ideas. Though his father is a dedicated and decent family man, Tarrou used his father’s ‘imposition of the death penalties’ as a strong reason for deserting him. His opposition to the death penalty in the penal system only shows his strong concern for human life. This reflects when he voices his opinion of having free men work as volunteers than prisoners as decided by the authorities, he fails to understand that death is inevitable be it for a criminal or otherwise.
Death in any form horrified Tarrou, to express the feeling he states the example of how as firing squad executes a death sentence which is horrifying, he argues that if we condemn men to death we should have the courage to look in the eyes and watch the result of our bloody decisions, he sees no nuanced shades of gray, but rather views the world in this stark picture of black and white, victim and pestilence. Tarrou also observes that law itself is subjective and prone to breaches, however effective or perfect it may appear to be. He resents the magistrate’s blind faith in the judicial system and ignorance of humanity of those men whom he would condemn.

Tarrou initially perceived the court of law as an abstract, just as Rieux’s initial concept of the medical practice. It was later that when both experience the reality that their perceptions change. Tarrou always sympathized with the victim (the recipient of the sentence) as the collective target of the judicial system and saw the judicial system as a mechanism of collective revenge, social satisfaction without remorse, which does not necessarily ensure the eradication of wrong doing. He also observes that the sentences handed out can be subjective. His remark about blind faith in the law questions its effectiveness, the moral right for one human being to condemn another to death.

Tarrou’s biased stance compels him to look upon the persons connected with the judicial system as criminals, while he sympathizes with the actual person on trial. His dislike for M. Othon, the police magistrate is noticeable, but despite the intensity of his emotions and high ethical values, he prefers to lie when consoling M. Othon about his son’s suffering. Tarrou is able to look beyond the role people play in society and sees them as real people with real emotion which enables him to lie to the human being, behind the magistrate which a magistrate is not capable of. But he is of the opinion that if a judge raises his own level of consciousness he can give meaning to his actions.
When Cottard confides to Tarrou, he admits that he was more afraid of getting caught by the authorities for an old crime than feeling guilty for the same crime. Tarrou does not sympathize with Cottard even though he has strong feelings for people facing criminal proceedings and his views on the death penalty. Tarrou clearly has a strict moral rubric, but refuses to force it upon others. But when Cottard refuses to help fight the plague Tarrou prefers to perceive him as pestilence, in his world of people verses pestilence.

Tarrou’s description of the world as a battle between two roles; victims and pestilence - to which he adds a third category - healers, is used to side with the criminal. He believes that the criminal and he are two living men and to kill another human would also make him pestilence.

Prior to arriving in Oran, he had devoted his life to fight against the death penalty. Torrou is also a humanitarian but unlike Rieux his actions stand for right to life of a human being. He considers his own ability to mobilize people and to organize them to fight evil as his biggest advantage. It is this advantage he utilizes to group together people to aid the medical community in their fight against plague.

Tarrou to his virtue is good humored and friendly. He never looks down upon a person and his approachability and openness with which he interacts inspires people to confide in him. An activist and philosopher by nature and a traveler Tarrou sets high standards for himself. Cottard also has no reservations in discussing his unclean moral conscience with Tarrou; which he otherwise finds difficult to do with Dr. Rieux. Dr. Rieux also trusts Tarrou entirely and develops a close friendship with him, so much so that he is devastated when Tarrou loses his life to plague.

Though a person with strong beliefs does not state a specific reason for his callous behavior of leaving his parents house, but often visits his mother.
Camus portrayed Tarrou as the humanist who fights for the dignity of human life, the inhuman act of imposing death penalty imposed legally or by social justification. Camus uses Tarrou to symbolize an individual’s struggle in civilized society to bring about change against strong political will. Torru’s strength lay in his strong belief and selfless regard for human life.

Camus entrusts the chronicling of the events of Oran upon Tarrou to be utilized later by Dr. Rieux as the narrator.

His notebooks comprise a sort of chronicle of those strange days we all live through. But an unusual type of chronicle, since the writer seems to make a point of understatement, and at first sight we might almost imagine that. Tarrou had a habit of observing event and people through the wrong end of the telescope. (pg. 24)

He was a keen observer and very objective in his writing, also gave his personal and moral accounts of the events. Rather than a simple impartial explanation he gave his opinions on matters, which shows his interest in unusual and eccentric activities. The only time he got subjective was when he expresses his feelings for the judge

Poor Monsieur Othon!” Tarrou murmured as the gate closed behind them. “One would like to do something to help him. But how can you help a judge? (pg. 242)

His observation of the absurdities, found in the Oranians can be seen in the journal, where he documents the incident about the old man, who regularly calls his cats and then spits on them and the musician who keeps on playing his trombone even though he has lung disease. He criticizes the people being creatures of habit and their concern for making money as sheer waste of time.

Tarrou’s preference of using the language is worth mentioning. He is of the opinion that language has to be used in a plain clear cut manner. If it is
complicated it strays from the fact so he prefers to use pestilence and its victims than the term Plague.

“Is he a saint?” Tarrou asked himself, and answered: “Yes, if saintliness is the aggregation of habits.” (pg. 118)

Tarrou’s statement seems ridiculous, as it is his observation that any term used can have various interpretations thus rendering the terms meaningless. Tarrou’s understanding of sainthood is secular he is of the opinion that to be a saint it is not necessary to follow religion but be moralistic.

Tarrou is the most complex character in the novel. Like Camus he is a chain smoker and enjoys swimming in the sea, which is also a pleasure of Rieux. He and Rieux do not essentially undergo any major change during the siege. It was important for Camus not to portray these two characters as general mass, as they were the carriers of the theme of the novel – fighting death and suffering in extreme circumstances. Tarrou however dies with a strange smiling courage and still like a strong ironic man.

“Out with it, Tarrou! What on earth prompted you to take a hand in this?”
“I don’t know. My code of morals, perhaps.”
“Your code of morals? What code?”
“Comprehension.” (pg. 130)

Tarrou lists comprehension of the situation as the motivation to his actions, as he sought inner peace by becoming his own moral sentry, so as to not bring harm to others, an innocence impossible to achieve. It may be also due to his self imposed mission to fight against death, a cause which he took up for himself to take a stand against the strong death penalty which his father advocated.
“And I, too, I’m no different. But what matter? Death means nothing to men like me. It is the event that proves them right.”

(pg. 121)

For Tarrou death is meaningless. He feels that death can be confirmed only by dying and a sense of victory cannot be felt by the person until and unless he experiences death himself.

The character of Tarrou is utilized by Camus as a non contradictory extension of the humanitarian services needed to contain and survive the epidemic. Tarrou does not believe in waiting for the administration to provide assistance in time to control the crises, as Dr. Rieux was also too preoccupied treating patients and could not devote enough time to organize and undertake activities executed by Tarrou’s volunteer group which helped achieve with an indifferent civic body. Camus eventually had to maintain only one version of the narration in ‘The Plague’ as a Novel of Ideas could not have similar characters, who would be of the same mind and have no contradiction. Camus portrayed Tarrou also as a humanist with concern for human lives, values and a willingness to work towards achieving them. It is noticeable that Tarrou had high regards for the doctor and their objectives were similar, but the only difference was that Tarrou was not a medical practitioner but his skills were of not less importance in the crises at hand. Camus used the character of Tarrou parallel to Dr. Rieux’s humanist approach and selfless service to the people of Oran, ensuring that both, Dr. Rieux and Tarrou shared a relationship of mutual agreement, admiration and hope. Thereby avoiding controversies and sustaining the relevance of other characters within the novel.

Joseph Grand a municipal clerk, earning a meager salary and having an insignificant content humble lifestyle. He wears clothes a size too large for
him. He is the most colorless character in the novel. In spite of all this he has a dream of writing a literary masterpiece, on which he diligently works in his spare time. In the novel each person speaks his own language and fails to communicate with others to some degree. Grand’s problem in life is that he can rarely find the correct words to express what he means.

‘And lastly---this was the real trouble---Joseph Grand couldn’t find his words.

This peculiarity, as Rieux had noticed, was really the key to the personality of our worthy fellow citizen. And this it was which always prevented him from writing the mildly protesting letter he had in mind, or taking the steps the situation called for.’ (pg. 45)

The narrator identifies Grand’s inability to communicate as the source of all the troubles in life---his poverty, his stagnant lifestyle, his wife having left him and his general passivity. Jeanne his wife had left him as she was a victim of isolation and dissatisfaction in a loveless relationship. Grand, realizing the futility of the language he uses, tries to justify it with his geographical origins.

Rieux had already noticed Grand’s trick of professing to quote some turn of speech from “his part of the world” (he hailed from Montelimar), and following up with some such hackneyed expression as “lost in dreams,” or “pretty as a picture.” (pg. 42)

His struggle with language proves that while language is in fact inadequate it is needed for functioning. But it is wrong to spend hours debating a conjunction. His obsession for the right word ironically proves there is no right word. An ironic statement made by him to Rieux is,

“You see, doctor, I’ve been told that a knowledge of Latin gives one better understanding of the real meanings of French words.” (pg.32)
He spends a lot of time in polishing the first sentence to create a perfect sounding sentence. When he contracts the disease he tells Rieux to burn his manuscript and so the masterpiece is destroyed before its completion, but after he recovers he vows to start anew. He refuses to let life frustrate him and is persistent in all that he does. His wife Jeanne left him because of the insignificant life of poverty lead by him and his pursuit to create a literary masterpiece left no time for her. He is not able to write a letter to her and grieves for the loss. He has failed to make a respectable income and also to hold together a marriage with a woman whom he is sure he loved deeply. Very few people of Oran knew about his existence as he lived for himself, an odd and eccentric life. So it is surprising that he goes to Cottard, his neighbor’s aid and also tries to cover up his suicide attempt to save him from the authorities. He was the first to join Tarrou’s troop of volunteers to fight against the plague. He works as general secretary, recording all the statistics. He sees duty the same way the other men do; not as something heroic or grand, but simply as part of being a man in the world. He contracts the diseases but recovers. Rieux had casually remarked about Grand that he is the insignificant type that often escapes such disasters. But the novel does not prove this as he survives the plague and not escapes it. During his period of trial he gains insight into his writing project and into the reasons why his marriage failed. The experiences he gains from plague helps him to grow from the insignificant life that he led. The idea that Camus has portrayed through Grand is that of indifference towards life, he exists in a temporary world. His inability to see any sort of distance into the future paralyzes him with inaction, so in the end when he recovers Rieux is completely baffled and considers this “resurrection” as irrational.

Grand though indifferent towards life had the courage to love even when others are afraid to express such feeling.
'He was one of those rare people, rare in our town as elsewhere, who have the courage of their good feelings. What little he told of his personal life vouched for acts of kindness and a capacity for affection that no one in our times dares to own to'. (pg. 46)

The idea for which Grand stands for---indifference towards life----supports the main idea; plague which stands for oppressive political regimes which curtail our freedom, illustrating range of human behavior under such circumstances, from its kindest forms to its most callous. Grand is quite different from Rieux and Tarrou who represent humanism with different intensities, and look at life in a larger perspective, whereas he has a boxed mind set about life which does not allow him to gather up sufficient views to help him with his struggle and break free from this containment and live a normal life. But after recovering from the diseases his attitude changes and acquires a new, positive and normal perspective towards life.

Raymond Rambert, a former football player, is a journalist working for the Paris newspaper. He has been sent to Oran to report on the living and sanitary conditions of the Arabs. Before he could finish his assignment the town is quarantined due to plague. Rambert is a determined and quick-tempered person and being young he is also restless. When he goes to Dr. Rieux to gather information regarding the living conditions of the Arabs, Rieux tells him that he will reveal the information only if Rambert promises to “publish an unqualified condemnation of the present state of things” but Rambert expresses his inability to do so. Then Rieux suggests that he work on a story about the increasing number of dead rats in town. But being restless in this situation the only thing he can think of is escape. He finds himself imprisoned and separated from his wife. He refuses to accept this situation which has befallen on him and is prepared to escape in any possible manner. “But confound it,” Rambert exclaimed, “I don’t belong here!” (pg. 85)
Rambert tries to maintain his individuality in the face of the crises by claiming that he is a stranger in the town. He does not realize that man is a stranger wherever he is. He uses all his ingenuity and resourcefulness to persuade the city bureaucracy to allow him to leave but he fails to convince them. He resorts to illegal means and contacts smugglers, who agree to help him to escape for a fee of ten thousand francs but there is a hitch in the arrangements, and by the time any other plans could be made he changes his idea of leaving Oran and decides to help the plague victims. The ironic reversal and the acceptance of commitment occurs when he realizes that he is needed in Oran and refuses his one chance of escape, he has grown up to realize that every human being must pull his weight in a human calamity and not seek solitary happiness for himself. He is rewarded by escaping the plague and being reunited with his wife.

Rambert portrays the idea of escapism, insensitivity towards society and wants to believe in concrete reality. He does not believe in God. He was too self-centered to think about others.

“No,” Rambert said bitterly, “You can’t understand. You’re using the language of reason, not of the heart; you live in a world of abstractions.” (pg. 87)

He accuses Rieux of making cold realities into grand ideas, suggesting that it is easier to deal with an abstract notion of “suffering” than it is to look at four movie theaters worth of dead bodies, of the people whom you knew, piled up on your doorstep. When you seek to protect “society” over the individual, Rambert argues, you sacrifice the real for the ideal. Rambert wants to be with his wife, a concrete and real goal. Abstractions or grand ideas for the society are hindrances and sees them as his enemy. He feels that abstraction is the penalty for losing love.
Man is an idea, and a precious small idea, once he turns his back on love. And that’s my point; we—mankind—have lost the capacity for love. (....) Let’s wait to acquire the capacity (....). Personally, I look no further. (pg. 162-163)

For him love is rooted in reality and is concrete without love everything is abstract. He is not ready to entertain any idea given by Rieux to fight against the plague. He even tries to convince Rieux that he was not brought into this world to write newspaper articles but to be with the woman he loved. But when he finds out from Tarrou that Rieux’s wife is in a Sanatorium, a hundred miles away he realizes his duty towards the society and joins the fight against plague.

Rambert is quite subjective in his outlook, he is ignorant towards the truth, which for him is idealistic but the idea of escapism, insensitivity towards the society which he embodies changes in the end, when he accepts the reality of life, to an objective, wider perspective. He is changed to such an extent that he wants to remain in Oran even after the gates are opened. Rieux explains to him that the conditions required to survive the plague are not the conditions needed to function in the regular world. Ultimately he returns to unite with his wife.

Camus has portrayed Father Paneloux as Christianity or for that matter religion, faith and hope. He is a learned, well-respected Jesuit priest. He is well known for having given a series of lectures in which he championed a pure form of Christian doctrine and chastised his audience about their laxity. During the initial stages of the plague outbreak, he preaches a sermon at the cathedral. He is a great orator and is successful in convincing the congregation that the plague is a scourge sent by God on those who have sinned and hardened their hearts against Him. On the other hand he also tells
them that God is present to offer succor and hope in this calamity. “Calamity has come to you, my brethren, and, my brethren, you deserve it.” (pg. 94).

He is reminding the congregation about the purpose of religion i.e. explaining senseless tragedy. He uses the technique of “all is for the best”. He makes use of only “you,” probably thinking him being not part of the calamity. His way of sermonizes proves that he is adamant and confuses an already puzzled, fearful populace. His blindness of faith is as absurd as the senselessness of a plague. Paneloux’s attitude towards the plague contrasts sharply with Rieux’s. Paneloux and Rieux are working towards the same goal; it’s just that Paneloux gives it an abstract term while Rieux views it concretely. In his first sermon, he preaches that plague is divine in origin and punitive in its purpose. He attempts to put aside his desires for a rational explanation and simply accepts God’s will. He tries to justify suffering----

It was wrong to say: “This I understand, but that I cannot accept”. We must go straight to the heart of that which is unacceptable, precisely because it is thus that we are constrained to make our choice. The sufferings of children were our bread of affliction, but without this bread our souls would die of spiritual hunger. (pg. 226)

Whereas in the world of The Plague there is no rationale for any events. His belief that there are no innocent victims is shaken as he watches a young boy, Jacques Othon, die of plague. The death is described in a long, painful and grotesque manner which forces Paneloux to rethink his ideas on religion.

when the spasms had passed, utterly exhausted, tensing his thin legs and arms, on which, within forty-eight hours, the flesh had wasted to the bones, the child lay flat, in a grotesque parody of crucifixion (pg. 215).
Paneloux tells Rieux that although the death of an innocent child in a world ruled by a loving God cannot be rationally explained, it should nonetheless be accepted. Paneloux defends Christianity but fails to generate any kind of hope. He joins the volunteers to fight against the plague where he comes in direct contact of the suffering endured by the victims. Now death and plague are no longer abstracts for him. Religion doesn’t really work that way in the plague. Prayers and religion don’t help in the world of indifferent suffering. Father Paneloux’s realization latter makes him declare that his church is an all or nothing deal.

For who would dare to assert that eternal happiness can compensate for a single moment of human suffering? (pg.224)

Father Paneloux isn’t going to get out of this one without struggling. He refuses to write off the child’s death and prepares himself to address the congregation once again. Defending religion without facing reality is blind faith. During his second sermon, a change is seen in Father Paneloux, where he preaches that death of the innocent child is a test of faith. Since God willed his death we as Christians should accept it.

‘This had a lesson for us all; we must convince ourselves that there is no island of escape in time of plague. No, there was no middle course. We must accept the dilemma and choose either to hate God or to love God. And who would dare to hate HIM?’ (pg. 228)

This gives the idea that religion was imposed or Father Paneloux had no way out of his present situation. He now uses the pronoun “we” instead of “you” and he has adopted a new policy in which he tells people to believe “all or nothing.” He as a Christian is faced with a decision: either he accepts that God is the ultimate ruler and brings goodness out of evil that afflicts men, or he sides with Rieux and denied God. He is criticized by men of his religion.
for what appears to be wavering faith in the face of the plague. A few days after preaching his sermon, Paneloux is taken ill, refuses a doctor as it is illogical for a priest to believe in a medical practitioner, trusting in God alone. His death is recorded as a doubtful case as the symptoms of his illness did not resemble those of the plague. Tarrou feels that Paneloux is indeed in a tough position where he has chosen to back God and not to renounce his faith. At least this is ostensibly Paneloux’s decision and from his death it has to be decided whether he was committed to faith or not.

Paneloux showed a little more animation and a sort of warmth came back to his eyes when he looked up at the doctor. Then, speaking with such difficulty that it was impossible to tell if there was sadness in his voice, he said: “Thanks. But priests can have no friends. They have given their all to God.” (pg. 233)

When Dr. Rieux comes to treat him he is willing to accept Rieux. This sudden change of heart reflects enlightenment, or simply fear of death and judgment. His doubtful death raises a crucial question on the nature of his faith and the religion.

Cottard is grand’s neighbor, jobless and has some private means for earning. He describes himself as a traveling salesman in wines and spirits. He is an eccentric figure, silent and secretive, who tries to hang himself in his room. His suicide attempt is remarkably timed. While the town begins to struggle against death with all its might, Cottard tries to walk straight into it. His secret grief is certainly one form of suffering, which is so intense that he has to attempt suicide. He lives in exile even before the plague. He cannot integrate into society as he is guilty and wishes to be alone and he does not like people taking interest in him. He is truly a man alone in this world, lacking the intimacy of normal human interaction. He is saved by Grand but
is reluctant to be interviewed by the police as he is aware that he has committed a crime and may get arrested for it.

He merely replied, without looking at the police officer, that “a secret grief” described it well enough. The inspector then asked him peremptorily if he intended to “have another go at it.” Showing more animation, Cottard said certainly not, his one wish was to be left in peace. (pg. 34)

As a citizen Cottard has failed in his duties and has become a criminal and is exiled in the normal world but a free man during the plague. After the outbreak of the plague there is a complete volte-face in his personality. Initially he was aloof and mistrustful but now he has become compatible and is trying hard to befriend others. He wants to break out of his isolation, but the rest of the world is unresponsive to his attempts to integrate into society. His separation from the society is clearly the source of his troubles. He is isolated by his actions, but nonetheless he shows himself to be a man of sympathy by trying to give others the friendship and affability he has been denied. Camus has portrayed Cottard as an opportunist. He can take benefit of any kind of adverse conditions.

“Look here, Monsieur Cottard, why don’t you join us?”

Picking up his derby hat, Cottard rose from his chair with an offended expression.

“It’s not my job,” he said. Then, with an air of bravado, he added: “What’s more, the plague suits me quite well and I see no reason why I should bother about trying to stop it.” (pg. 157-158)

He is the only person in Oran who relishes the plague and takes advantage of it by selling contraband cigarettes and inferior liquor. When the plague subsides out of fear his moods fluctuate; sometimes he gets sociable, at other
times he shuts himself in the room and thus loses his mental balance and shoots at randomly at the people on the street and gets arrested by the police.

“All允许 me to point out, my man,” the police officer rejoined with asperity, “That just now it’s you who’re troubling the peace of others.” (pg. 34)

Cottard’s suffering is causing suffering to others. The ideas portrayed through the minor character also help us to prove the novel by Camus as a novel of ideas. Characters like the asthma patient who is visited by Dr. Rieux regularly; he is a seventy-five year old Spaniard with a rugged face. He keeps a track of events through the radio and newspaper. He passes his life by counting out dried peas from one pan to another. This is meaningless and trivial action but he enjoys doing this. He is unfazed by the pestilence.

Only the Spaniard whom Dr. Rieux was treating for asthma went on rubbing his hands and chuckling: “They’re coming out, they’re coming out,” with senile glee. (pg. 16-17)

The element of fear is not there in him. He is completely indifferent towards the plague. He believes that religion has divided life into two parts, the first part of a man’s life is an upgrade; the second goes downhill. And the descending days cannot be claimed by him as they may be snatched away from him any time. He does not want to die, he is not afraid of death; it is only that he wants to die at an advanced age. And if death arrives earlier he will fight against it. He tells Tarrou that God did not exist, since otherwise there would be no need for priests. The Spaniard’s philosophy is derived from the charities collected house-to-house in his part of the town. He uses the religion to defend his lifestyle. In one of the conversations with Tarrou he tells him that;
“Ah, if only it had been a earthquake! A good bad shock, and there you are! You count the dead and the living, and that’s an end of it. But this here damned disease---even them who haven’t got it can’t think of anything else. (pg. 114-115)

The mental defeat caused by plague is worse than the physical defeat. Dr. Castel is one of Rieux’s medical colleagues, who is older to him and more experienced. He is the one to realize that the disease that is spreading is bubonic plague and its seriousness. He is the one who tries to put senses into the authorities, who are trying to avoid the word plague.

“The question,” old Castel cut in almost rudely, “is to know whether it’s plague or not.” (pg. 48)

Castel thinks that knowing the word would make the difference. He labors hard to make an anti-plague serum, but as the plague continues, he shows increasing sign of wear and tear.

M.Othon is the magistrate of Oran, tall and thin to look at. Tarrou in his journal has mentioned him as “his small, beady eyes, narrow nose, and, hard, straight mouth make him look like a well-brought-up owl.” He treats his wife and children unkindly, but after his son dies he softens. After he finishes his time at the isolation camp, where he is sent because his son is infected, he wants to return there, because this would make him feel closer to his lost son. But before he can do this, he contracts the plague and dies.

The Prefect initially thinks that the talk of plague is a false alarm. But he has to consider the medical association’s instructions and authorize measures to combat the disease, but the degree of seriousness is considerably less. While Rieux and his colleagues struggle to do their duty, the Prefect and other government authorities are lying down on the job. They are waiting for the
plague to wane off. When his measures fall short he tries to avoid responsibilities for tightening up the regulations relating to the plague and finally issues order to close the town.

Dr. Richard is the chairman of the Oran Medical Association. He is in the authoritative position but dwindles in suggesting any action to combat the plague as he does not want to arouse public alarm. He does not even want to recognize the disease as plague. He terms it as a “special kind of fever.”

The old man is the neighbor of Tarrou, who mentions him in his journal. He notes that this old man regularly calls his cats and then spits on them, and would be delighted if it struck them. The old man finds meaning in life only by performing a meaningless action. Tarrou is drawn to this old man because, although his actions are insignificant, he consciously chooses to do them and is therefore able to delight in what would otherwise be banal. If he did not find the cats he spat in emptiness. Spitting on emptiness seems the ultimate acceptance of the absurdity and triviality of life.

Mme. Rieux is Dr. Rieux’s mother, who comes to stay with him when his sick wife goes to the sanatorium. She is a serene woman who, after taking care of the housework, sits quietly in a chair. She believes that at her age there is nothing much left to fear. She makes the point that love is greater than suffering. Oran and its

“I’m so glad to be with you again, Bernard,” she added. “The rats can’t change that, anyhow” (pg. 14)

The town of Oran and its residents are portrayed by Camus as hopeless helpless. The narrator does not show any commitment to mince words about Oran. He terms it “ugly” and says it has a “smug, placid air.” The town has little evidence of nature, except for the sky above, as it is built with its back
against the sea that makes the town devoid of the natural sea breeze and vulnerable to unhygienic living conditions; above all the seasons are indistinguishable from one another. The irrationality of the weather represented the indifference of the universe to human suffering. The townsfolk are no more impressive, their work ethic is only driven by greed. The citizens all have cultivating habits, habits which are repeated daily, regardless of the surrounding environment or situation. The picture houses repeating the same program over again and again did not dwindle in their earnings showed how people wasted their lives in repetition. They all work hard, but not for ethical or moral reasons – just desperate to make money. They shun simple pleasures and often retire to card tables at night to bet with their money. Their unawareness of life’s riches and pleasures demonstrate their vulnerability to the plague. The town that refuses to let people die inside its walls fall victim to a plague and has its gates shut. They disconcert themselves with matters not involving money. Love is also not prevalent in their society. Couples either consume in the act of love or settle down to a mild habit of conjugal activity. Their working hours are so extensive, that little time, if any, is left for love. Most love occurs without knowing much about it. Their narrow views hurt their survival chances. The citizen’s self-centeredness persists almost till the end of the novel, impairing their ability to effectively fight the disease. When the rats die in the initial stages of the plague no one has any explanation about these fatalities or any serious concern regarding this incident. It is emotions and not reflections that spur the citizens to action. The hotel concierge refuses to acknowledge the dead rats as infestation and goes to the extent of arguing that it must be some children’s prank. The citizens deceive themselves to cope with plague instead of accepting it and fighting the pestilence they blind themselves with the false assurance that this will pass quickly. Even as the death toll increases, people do not admit to the reality of the unsanitary living conditions including the
health threat they pose and the possibility that the dead rats may be symptomatic of a bigger problem. It is not until some time passes and human deaths start occurring, that the doctors begin to realize the intensity of the matter. The indifference that characterize Oranians is not limited to the common man alone it extends to the doctors, authorities and even to those who are not affected by plague. The people are not concerned about death at all, even if they see persons who are acquainted but are unimportant to the society, such as the concierge, M. Michel or the band trombonist - death is addressed in a casual manner without any concern or interest. They are of the belief that those who suffer are not that important and that any kind of malady can strike them. Plague is dismissed by people as fictitious. Even Dr. Castel admits that, most are hard-pressed to believe that the plague could not have resurfaced as this illness has long since vanished or eradicated. They are proved wrong when plague takes over their lives. The plague affects everyone and not only the ones who are the victims. The fear of death is irrational as are the common reactions to that fear. Even false hopes became loud as a café puts up a sign saying that the best protection against infection is a bottle of good wine.

The way the city official’s deal with the epidemic also shows the idea of indifference running throughout the novel. The city official’s are slow to act and hesitate to call the plague by its name. One reason they do not take more immediate action is because they likely do not anticipate the consequences of their cautious, wait and watch attitude. They do not take decisive action until the plague becomes a large scale problem but even then nobody is ready to assume responsibilities. To assume responsibility means to be responsible and answerable and it is always safe to maintain a distance just like unresponsive citizen.
In the novel there are certain characters, who fight for a cause far greater than that of their own sustenance. The people of Oran grow concerned as they realize that the disease respects no boundaries, and it affects all groups of people. People gained their humanity when they lost their individuality. After maximum damage was inflicted by plague people came together. Even outsiders who are not native residents of Oran put in efforts to fight plague. Jean Tarrou, a vacationer habituated to writing a journal to maintain records about his surrounding, actively participates to fight plague and also encourages volunteers to join the sanitation squads. He does this even though he is aware of the risk to himself. His action shows the value of unity, morality and personal sacrifice and on the other hand how the indecisiveness and formalities of officials inhibit progress. The problem of dehumanization is also visible by the indifference of authorities, in not taking the decisions on time. The increased death rate leads to space problems in the cemeteries and the authorities are forced to dispose the bodies in the crematorium. The people realize that nature is not indifferent to man and rats when it comes to disease and suffering. Initially the people did raise their voice against the deceased not given the due respect but later when the priorities shifted from the ceremony of the dead to the survival of the living the attitudes changed. The only satisfaction was that they had different pits to dump the dead bodies of men and women separately. This is similar to the mass incineration of dead rats. The humans dead, face the same fate as of the dead rats, even the most basic memorial service is suppressed in the interest of time. After the plague declines and Oran returns to normal activities, few people bother to remember the dead or the ordeal that had afflicted them.

The one exception, indifferent to the plague is Dr. Rieux, who is the unnamed narrator. The story is chronicled by him to bear witness for the plague victims and to commemorate the injustice done to them. His thoughts reflect the
many issues brought up throughout the course of the novel. Rieux considers and has seen how the town was affected not only by the actual plague, but also by the social ills that consequently come to light, especially the attitude of denial and indifference, inadequate response of the authorities, and dehumanization of society. Rieux believes that plague also had its benefits, like people came together as a community, realized that such incidents are everybody’s concern, not just the problem of a few. One thing that the plague teaches them is that society should never forget those who endure injustice and tragedy. For that matter Tarrou fought for others and lost his own life. Rieux concludes that plague can remain dormant for ages and resurface again later - it cannot be defeated permanently, symbolic also of the attitude of the people of Oran who will soon forget all that has happened and will go back to the ways of life that they always lived before the calamity.

The plague is also personified with the qualities of a human being when the narrator repeatedly gives it the agency of action, as though it has the motives and strategy of an individual. The plague is perceived to be capable of changing plans that people make in their day today lives. And that this can happen as long as pestilence exists, this is Rieux’s honest opinion, but could also be Camus giving a warning that if man comes to his senses and lives with responsibility then he can also live without fear of pestilence.

The word plague represented fear itself and seemed to behave in a particular manner.

Everybody knows that pestilences have a way of recurring in the world; yet somehow we find it hard to believe in ones that crash down on our heads from blue sky. There have been as many plagues as wars in history; yet always plagues and wars take people equally by surprise (pg. 37)
Camus has put in much effort in describing the activities of the characters their past and their surroundings than detailed traditional description of the characters themselves. Much effort is visible in establishing general perspectives about the individual characters and has left it up to the reader to ruminate. From the beginning of the novel itself Camus has shown both the sides of the humanist, which is the major philosophy adopted by him in this novel.

In this respect the townsfolk were like everybody else, wrapped up in themselves; in other words they were humanists: they disbelieved in pestilences..... But it doesn’t always pass away, and from one bad dream to another, it is men who pass away, and the humanists first of all, because they haven’t taken their precautions. (pg. 37)

These are interesting lines which contradict the humanist philosophy. Camus has also associated characters from various diverse occupations like politics, science, philosophy, art, literature, economics, culture and controversies with the intention of provoking, in a manner so as to trigger the intellectual interpretations of the reader. But at times a frail attempt is also visible to contain or terminate the reader’s thoughts and perceptions. The characters are pulled in from different backgrounds, locations, professions, experience, passions, intellect and attitude, not excluding the abnormal.

The citizens of Oran are confused over father Paneloux’s sermon that they are being punished for their sins, and fail to understand what wrong they had done to deserve suffering the plague. The justification of suffering is debated. So is Rieux when he wonders if he had ignored his wife’s illness over sufferings of his patients by remaining more dedicated towards his patients.

Father Paneloux’s devotion to religion and its avocation is put to question when he witness the death of the young boy, Camus here questions the purpose of religion itself when towards the end the priest himself dies of an
unknown illness. Father Paneloux’s submission to fate gives margin to the
humanist in him due to which he could work alongside Rieux and the others.

The attitude of the authorities to ignore their responsibility by pursuing the
wrong priority like finding the right name for the pestilence is very far from
the actual suffering of the persons who are suffering from the infection. The
deliberate manner in which notices were put up in places where they would
be least noticed and the small reference in the newspapers added more to the
indifference towards actually helping the citizens over the political agenda.
The ones who returned from the quarantine behaved extremely by burning
their homes in an attempt to eradicate the pestilence, was this irrational
behavior due to the fear of death?

Camus has to a large extent depicted individual characters symbolic of a
particular thought pattern and by bringing them together at various levels of
interaction, triggered thought processes which the reader could indulge in. to
ensure that no one perspective dominates the length of the novel Camus has
held back the identity of the narrator till the very end. The provision to draw a
parallel between any disorder like war, crime or a natural calamity in the age
of industrialization, greed and dehumanization, is left open even after the end
of the novel.

Camus drafts the change of heart in Rambert towards the end of the novel by
temporarily delaying his plans to leave Oran as a question that every human
could ask oneself, when he has to reflect upon leaving fellow humans in a
condition of suffering.

‘and he recalled that some thirty or so great plagues known to
history had accounted for nearly a hundred million deaths. But what
are a hundred million deaths? When one has served in a war, one
hardly knows what a dead man is, after a while. And since a dead
man has no substance unless one has actually seen him dead, a
hundred million corpses broadcast throughout history are no more than a puff of smoke in the imagination’. (pg. 38)

Perhaps Camus here draws a parallel between plagues and wars both resulting in large number of deaths maybe due to the indifference of the humankind.

Communication through letters with the outside world was prevented as a precaution to prevent the spread of infection, but the fact was that Oran even before the plague was not much indulged in communication with the outside world, so what difference did it make since the source of the plague itself was not known.

The closing of the gates of Oran was done much before the official announcement of it; it was not the confinement but the knowledge of it that more disturbed its citizens, for whom it would have otherwise made no difference.

The manner of language that Camus preferred is of an individual preference and as the prominent characters of the novel were of varied background and profession their communication with each other and otherwise were limited by their approach and understanding, not keeping with the purpose of communication itself, due to which language failed to convey a specific idea and is eventually left to the reader to comprehend the thought.

Camus here points out that hope can be destructive as it prevents people from actually taking things into their hands and acting upon a situation.

Camus has ensured that each character depicted within, has a distinct profession, attitude, intelligence, philosophy and understanding of the human social existence.

An animated conversation was in progress and the woman behind the counter started airing her views about a murder case that had
created some stir in Algiers. A young commercial employee had killed an Algerian on a beach. (pg. 54)

Human life is most valued only by those affected otherwise it is considered irrelevant, this is an essential humanist problem: how to care about man when it is too easy to make him into an idea instead of a being, and even more difficult to care about death when individual identity is not known. The town of Oran is depicted as the stage where the drama of the plague is enacted. The characters indulge to challenge various levels of intellectual interpretation of established theories, understandings and the contemporary environment. Care is also taken to contain the thought process by shifting priorities, and by changing the intensity of the plague as it increases and eventually takes its toll before phasing out. The plague did not consume the only human lives but also disrupted the day to day activities and the commerce of the town.

When a war breaks out, people say: “It is too stupid; it can’t last long.” But though a war may well be “too stupid,” that doesn’t prevent its lasting. Stupidity has a knack of getting its way; as we should see if we were not always so wrapped up in ourselves. (pg. 37)

People prefer to take casual approach to a serious situation than the rational and logical understanding.

The people of Oran were skeptic of the actual purpose of a hospital they feared that the sick would become subjects of experiments, than survive the sickness, but Dr. Rieux’s thinks of it as a place where the suffering may eventually end due to the reality of death.

Thus week by week the prisoners of plague put up with what fight they could. Some, like Rambert, even contrived to fancy they were still behaving as free men and had the power of choice. (pg. 167)
The attitude of man to behave strongly is may be due to the varying lack of awareness of the risk he involved in.

In the early days, when they thought this epidemic was much like other epidemics, religion held its ground. But once these people realized their instant peril, they gave their thoughts to pleasure. (pg. 121)

The people of Oran were religious but the moment they realized the impact of the plague, they chose to make the best of their time and behaved like atheists. The characters changing their initial stance is the authors technique to contain the overall length of the novel but not compromising on the controversies and contradictions built both within the novel and outside in the readers mind.

Camus association with literature, journalism and publishing industry has its influence on the characters he has formed. Rambert the journalist, who arrives in Oran to report about the sanitary conditions of the Arab, is insensitive to the sufferings of the citizens in the earlier stages of plague, and also has his reservations on reporting on the actual living and sanitation conditions of the Arabs, is significant of the representation of partial truth in the journalist approach. Quiet opposite is the social activist, Tarrou who chronicles the slice of life in his journals which also contains his observations and opinions, with skills to motivate and convince people and talented enough to organize in chaotic situations, which is his passion. Camus during his experience with journalism may have come across works due to which he has portrayed these two characters with varying levels of passion and sincerity. Camus has placed the municipal clerk, Grand with his dull, monotonous, way of life, making his attempts to write his first novel which has to be perfect but does not go beyond the first sentence, symbolic of many such works he may have come across during his editorial experience by people who wish to reach perfection.
at the first attempt but otherwise cannot make any significant contribution to
literature or society. Father Paneloux’s strong first sermon, which he delivers
to justify the calamity as an act of God, and later his soft second sermon, after
he has witnessed the reality of plague through the death of an innocent child,
is Camus’s perspective on how religion however strongly delivered is not
above humanity. Cottard the criminal takes advantage of the calamity and
uses his skills to gain even when there is death all around, by selling
counterfeit cigarettes and alcohol, and his desire that the plague should not
come to end, is significant to the selfish philosophy of crime.

Dr. Rieux the narrator is retained by Camus as the most objective till the very
end. A surgeon and a medical practitioner by profession but narrates on the
calamity in Oran, other characters and along with his own fears and concerns
is placed as the most obvious character for the length of the novel.

*The Plague* as a novel is woven with threads from almost all the relevant
occupations of human coexistence.

The scientific inputs from the medical approach, all the way from the
unhygienic living conditions, the various techniques used to contain the
spreading of the plague, the research undertaken to develop a serum, and
eventually the limitations of scientific community to have total control over
the containment, prevention and the eradication of a disease.

The political and administrative approach, by the lackadaisical attitude in
acknowledging the presence of the disease and its enormity, the inability to
not do enough to effect change and the presumption that nothing is going to
change.

The understanding of the culture of Oran deals with the ignorance of
traditional values, like respect for hygiene, concern for and living in harmony
with nature, the city was built with its back against the sea, people have given
into greed, and adapted to short term gains and ignored the long term losses – sanitation and hygiene. The reporter’s detachment with the plague, the criminal’s caesura of the opportunity to make some fast money, an activist’s concern to bring about change, a priest’s pro religious sermon indifferent to the stark reality of the plague where religion is nothing more than an unsupportive philosophy. The diminishing concerns for fellow human beings and the attitude of ignorance of the plague by the people of Oran.

Camus penned this novel in the post modern era, when science, technology and innovations were playing major transformational and transitional roles in the ways of life of the human civilization. The reference to which starts with the occupations that the people of Oran, engaged in, trading and making wealth, with total disregard to social, community and other civic obligations. The total ignorance of collective responsibility towards civilization itself has its consequences. It would not be all true to say that epidemics and knowledge of it was unknown to the educated and the intelligent, as the presence of the press as a means of mass communication is acknowledged. Camus here has made a remarkable effort to highlight the new attitude of ignorance and indifference of the post modern man in a civilized world which results in hopeless helplessness. A deteriorating situation, even persons who could contribute with their knowledge and skill to make a difference are overshadowed by greed and selfishness. The disintegration of human values, priorities and the materialistic attitude for accumulating more for personal gain, ignorant of the ultimate fact death, is prime concern of the novel. Even the statistical information of the number of deaths per day does not help influence the people of Oran to comprehend the impact of the plague.

Camus has revealed the limitations of scientific developments in the medical area by referring to the failure of the serum and the death of Dr. Rieux’s wife in a medical sanatorium away from the plague and with better facilities. Dr.
Rieux is appreciative of the positive outcome of the plague that it did help bring the community together, but also remarks in his capacity as a medical practitioner that the plague will return, maybe because he experienced that no matter how much suffering and death had occurred the people of Oran will always go back to their unhealthy ways of life. Even Dr. Castle a person qualified enough is of the opinion that all forms of pestilence are the same, as their impact and the damage caused is common, they do not distinguish between their victims across the population in terms of their social standing, hierarchy, gender and other forms of distinguishing, he is philosophical in commenting that humans are also not dissimilar to the pestilence in this manner.

The novel is presumed to be written in post modernist era where science, technology, religion and politics had a major influence on the western society transforming their way of life, culture and philosophy. The manner in which people adapted and rejected change in the society also became a subject for evaluation and criticism. As scientific innovations and inventions happened initially in the west, its impact on the traditional influence of religion, social values, and respect to humanist traditions that sustained civilizations for centuries was also prominent there. Human sustenance in harmony with nature was compromised with greed and materialistic hunger, easier mechanized solutions were sought to make life easy, the onus to bring about change and resolve issues started shifting from self responsibility to other’s responsibility, the dependency on innovation, inventions and solutions increased resulting in the general class of people limiting their activity fully occupied to the area of doing fixed tasks to earn their living. Subsequent drift from traditional way of life to the new transformed way of human life, attitudes and its short and long term consequences is specifically pictured in *The Plague*. Camus has not been specifically critical of anything in particular
other than the hopeless helpless situation to which the people of Oran had reduced themselves, it was too early to draw conclusions in that era about the contemporary society, but he has not minced words in criticizing the way the western culture had taken to the new transformation with selfishness, greed, crime, ignorance and irresponsibility. The people of Oran took the plague initially as to how it would affect others and their ways of life than to consider how to take precaution to avoid getting infected a selfish indifferent approach. Camus also seems to acknowledge that certain degree of crime is now here to stay. The warning that if people did not take precaution then calamities will return is made very clear, may it be plague, war or any other threat. *The Plague* Chronicle is a reflection of the indifferent and insensitive commercial attitude towards suffering by publishing a newspaper with advertisements which otherwise was to keep the people up to date on the situation of Plague.

The confinement of Oran took its toll on the state of mind of its citizens as one was left to fend for himself and his needs, the frustration was obvious from the fact that not much cooperation was available from the fellow human being, creating a state of alienation, even among the civilized society.

Moreover, most people (…..) had replaced normal religious practice by more or less extravagant superstitions. Thus they were readier to wear prophylactic medals of St. Rock then go to Mass. (pg. 221)

A manner of behavior much similar to other forms of faith across the world; where man fears the unknown than the known.

**Conclusion**

Camus was a philosopher and a journalist, won the Nobel Prize in 1957, was influenced by the Andre Gide, was known as an existentialist writer but he
personally preferred to be known as a man and a thinker rather than as a member of a school or ideology, he preferred persons over ideas.

*The Plague* is an undeniable part of life, it is omnipresent. Camus questions the meaning of the moral concepts justifying humanity and human suffering within a religious framework. He believes that no mortal being can escape death. Plague is the facilitator of death; during plague people understand that individual suffering is meaningless, they become optimistic in the midst of hopelessness. The themes found in the novel are status of justice, politics, human existence as a civilized being in the contemporary modern society, man's relationship with God, the absurdity of social rituals.

Camus tells the story through Dr. Rieux. However, Rieux is not the first-person narrator. Rather he disguises himself, referring to himself in the third person and only at the end of the novel he reveals who he is. Maybe Camus wanted this work to be identified as fiction and not to be mistaken as a real life chronicle.

The narrative tone is quiet Kafkaesque where individual sentences have multiple meanings, the reduction of an immense tragedy down to artistically manageable proportions, isolating the town from the rest of the world when the gates are closed after the discovery of an outbreak of bubonic plague. Through a relatively small cast of characters, Camus expresses his idea of steadfastness against violence and commitment to the plight of others with a level of moral insight. It is unconceivable from this work of Camus that his characters and their contribution to the work to a large extent is the real life experiences of the author himself and the attempt to write such a novel is in the strong belief that society as a whole will survive, but stopping short of drawing conclusions on the behavior of humans as individuals.
Camus by this work does not intend to undermine the hope of the civilized man regarding survival of calamities but ends the novel with a note of warning that if man did not heed to making himself aware of the improper ways of life and work towards correcting them then disasters will resurface. The experience of confinement and the exile within quarantine leading to the people reacting in the extreme by burning their houses is Camus’s warning of the extent that man can go due to frustration in the modern age, where the hygienic ways of living, thinking and understanding is being compromised for the irresponsible and insensitive way of life. The reality of his warning stands true even today, the fear that Camus reveals in his work that if man did not take precaution then calamities will resurface from time to time.

The possibility to draw a parallel with ‘The Plague’ in the event of different collective calamities makes this novel qualify to be termed as a novel of ideas.

In chapter four of the thesis I will be analyzing the novel *The First Circle* by Alexander Solzhenitsyn, awarded the Noble Prize for Literature in 1970. Solzhenitsyn makes a desperate attempt in *The First Circle* to shed light on one of the darkest era of Russian history.