The twentieth century was an age of despair, uncertainty and fragmentation, which caused man to feel estranged from the world around him and to lead a lonely existence. He became an outsider, who lived an uncommitted life, rejected his anterior connections, renounced all cultural norms and had an indifferent attitude towards other people. Man’s outsiderness was the result of his alienation, which is related to “an extraordinary variety of psychosocial disorders, including loss of self, anxiety states, anomie, despair, depersonalization, rootlessness, apathy, social disorganization, loneliness, atomization, powerlessness, meaninglessness, isolation, pessimism, and the loss of beliefs or values”.

It is therefore essential to explain the factors that were responsible for man’s outsiderness and alienation. There were mainly three historical and social determinants that urged man to live a detached life.

The first factor that brought about the individual’s alienation was industrialization. It was a process which altered the social structure of society. The increasing industrialization resulted in the creation of the factory system and the jobs that were offered attracted many people from rural areas. Therefore, large numbers of men migrated into cities, which paved the way for urbanization.
and a life in underdeveloped and unpleasant industrial slums. The transition from rural to urban life separated man from nature, where he once found relief and consolation. As Brian Tierney puts forth:

The new town was not a home where man could find beauty, happiness, leisure, learning, religion-the influences that civilize outlook and habit: but a bare and desolate place, without colour, air and laughter, where man, woman and child worked, ate and slept.²

Moreover, the industrial revolution separated man from his relatives and community. Before industrialization, the individual had a large family and close relationships with his relatives. Besides, he was the conveyor of the customs, traditions and skills of the community; but ever since he became the inhabitant of the city, he altered the structure of the family. Step by step, industrialization split the community and forced man to live an atomistic and individualistic life. Furthermore, the industrial epoch imposed rigid controls over human life and forced him to lead a robot-like existence. He lost his authority over the machine and became its servant.

In other words, man was denied to have voice and choice in his work as the machines made the decisions and ordered him “when to start working, when to stop, what to do and how to do it”.³ Gradually, man felt degraded and became alienated from his work. Charles Taylor emphasizes that;

In a mechanical and a depersonalized world man has an indefinable sense of loss; a sense that life...has become impoverished, that men are somehow “deracinate and disinherited, “that society and human nature alike have been atomized, and hence mutilated, above all that men have been separated from whatever might give meaning to their work and their lives.”⁴
Loss of self-importance and the sense of powerlessness destroyed man’s belief in his own humanity and arouse feelings of resentment and anger. Yet, man’s anger was not only restricted to the pointless and mechanical nature of the work he did. His hostility towards the machine engendered bitter feelings for his employer as well. The industrial epoch eliminated the notion of solidarity and made relationships rotate around material interests. This increased inequality in society.

As a result of such rigid and impersonal structures, man’s feeling of being “out of place” was inevitable. Industrialization, which accelerated technological innovations in weaponry, transportation and communication network also changed the balance of power among countries. In other words, European nations competed with one another for land, military strength and economic power, and the competition resulted in the First World War (1914-1918), which was another catastrophe that intensified man’s sense of estrangement.

The Great War, according to R. J. Overy, was grim, dirty, and brutalizing, a moral desert for those who lived through it. It was such a devastating event that after it man was in a sense of loss- of innocence, of moral certainty, of social values, of cultural confidence. The Europe which astonished the nineteenth century with its, “wealth, inventiveness and power was prey to growing self-doubt and fears for the future.”

Man was totally in a vacuum as the war caused him to question such concepts as honour, democracy and civilization, which he had previously believed in. Moreover, man suffered from a sense of displacement because after
the war, he found himself in a world, which was alien, impersonal and uninhabitable. In the face of the devastating loss of lives, destruction of cities, soaring poverty and misery, he lost his faith in God. He began to question God. With all the disappearance of ultimate certainties, man experienced a tremendous sense of loss. He was so confused that in order to alleviate his existential and psychological sufferings and find a sense of purpose and meaning in his life, he put himself in the hands of political doctrines and mass movements. Especially, Fascism, which was the result of post-war disillusionment, gained momentum in Italy, Germany and Spain in the 1920s and 1930s and its rise in power resulted in the Second World War (1938-1945).

The Second World War was the final blow that sharpened man’s feelings of helplessness, disorientation and estrangement. It was far more destructive than the First World War as it caused unprecedented devastation of life and property. It deprived man of his right to live in a just, free and happy place. Moreover, it left a world, which was cold, depressing and which guaranteed nothing. Death became a certainty as it was present everywhere. Therefore, man felt himself out of this world. As Camus explains:

…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.6

In such a pessimistic mood, the individual came to respond to the happenings around himself with silence. Edward Engelberg writes thus:

Modern solitude goes far beyond anxiety and nightmare: it not only annihilates motion, it retards and destroys emotion. When affect is arrested, when there is no root back to Society..., when
The ego is self-devouring, then we have reached a state of solitude beyond alienation - the state of silence.

The catastrophic social and historical events of the twentieth century and their devastating outcomes resulted in man’s silence, alienation and deracination. Ultimately, there appeared philosophers, writers, theoreticians and scientists who were not indifferent to man’s deracinated and helpless condition. They reflected his predicament in their works and at the same time they tried to find solutions that could reduce the alienating effects of the nightmarish events on man. Among these men of thought were Albert Camus, John Wain, Sigmund Freud and Yusuf Atılgan.

Under the influence of the existentialist and the absurd philosophies, Albert Camus wrote masterpieces such as The Outsider (1942) The Plague (1947) and The Fall (1956), in which he focused on the reactions of the characters, who confronted with the absurd. The concept of the absurd is discussed in The Myth of Sisyphus, which is a philosophical essay published immediately after The Outsider. The Outsider is a reaction against the devastating condition man finds himself in the universe; so, it is used as a framework for the absurd outsider, Meursault.

In The Myth Of Sisyphus it is stated that man, who previously lived with a sense of purpose in a meaningful universe, one day when he is around thirty, may be stricken with the sense of absurdity. He, then, becomes an absurd man, who believes that he lives in a universe in which time is hostile to him:

…a day comes when a man notices or says that he is thirty. Thus he asserts his youth. But simultaneously he situates himself in relation to time. He takes his place in it. He admits that he stands at
a certain point on a curve that he acknowledges having to travel to
its end. He belongs to time, and by the horror that seizes him, he
recognizes his worst enemy. Tomorrow, he was longing for
tomorrow, whereas everything in him ought to reject it. That revolt
of the flesh is the absurd.8

The absurd man, who is attached to the earthly life, revolts against any
philosophy that urges him to believe in abstract concepts, such as God, salvation
and devotion. For him these concepts are unknowable.

The absurd man demands of himself to live solely with what he
knows, to accommodate himself to what he is, and to bring in
nothing that is not certain. He is told that nothing is. But this at
least is a certainty. And it is with this that he is concerned: he
wants to find out if it is possible to live without appeal.9

Camus states that as revolt exempts man from any commitments and
attachments it brings forth “freedom”. Camus argues that before encountering
the absurd, man sets for himself goals and he unconsciously confines himself to
living towards his aims and ideals. At the same time, he creates for himself a
self-image and a certain role, which require him to behave in particular ways.
Ultimately, man attains his true freedom and lives without preconceptions,
prejudices, aspirations or hope.

In The Myth of Sisyphus a life without hope and aim demands the absurd
man to live the present moments of his life. The absurd man, who has dismissed
both the past and the future, has to enhance his present pleasures. Attachment to
present moments requires man to get the greatest quantity of experiences.

These are the characteristics of the absurd man as pointed out in The
Myth of Sisyphus. So, the best example of the absurd man is Sisyphus, who is a
hero in Greek mythology. The gods had condemned Sisyphus to permanently
rolling a rock to the top of a mountain, whence the stone would fall back to the valley and the task would begin again. For Camus, he is an admirable hero since he is fully aware of his hopeless situation but with dignity continues to struggle; he neither tries to evade his punishment nor does he anticipate any help from the gods. Through the example of Sisyphus, Camus contends that man similar to Sisyphus, should be aware of the senselessness of this world, yet without hope derive happiness from his experiences. Thus, like Sisyphus he will get his reward and he will be able to conclude that “all is well”. This is the condition of the absurd man, which is fictionalized in the novel, The Outsider.

Camus does not want us to think of Meursault as ‘the stranger who lives ‘outside' of his society' but of a man who is the stranger within his society. He was a member of his society – a society that wants meaning behind action and behaviour. In the second half of The Stranger, Camus depicts society's attempt to manufacture meaning behind Meursault's actions and behaviour. The trial is absurd in that the judge, prosecutors, lawyers and jury try to find meaning where none is to be found. Everyone, except Meursault, has their own ‘reason' why Meursault shot the Arab but none of them are correct. In life there are never shortages of opinion as to why this or that thing occurred. How close to any of them get to the meaning behind action? An interesting motif in The Stranger is that of watching or observation. Camus is writing a book about our endless search for meaning. We are all looking for a purpose in our lives. The characters of The Stranger all watch each other and the world around them. Meursault watches the world go by from his balcony. He later passively watches his own
trial. The world around him is a fascination to Meursault. He keenly observes the sun, the heat, the physical geography of his surroundings. The eyes of the other are also depicted by Camus. Antagonism behind the eyes of the Arabs, as they watch Meursault and his friends. The eyes of the jury witness at his trial. Finally, the idea of the watching crowd is representing the eyes of society. Meursault, a young Algerian, hears news of his mother's death. He receives this information with mild annoyance. He must now ask his boss for two days leave in order to attend the funeral. It is the custom, in his culture, for the bereaved to sit all night in vigil by the coffin of the departed loved one. At the vigil and during the funeral the following day he shows no grief, sadness or even regret. He only feels the physical inconvenience of sitting through the vigil and the heat of the sun during the funeral procession to the cemetery. At the funeral he makes mental notes of the physical objects that strike his eye; shining screws in the walnut coffin, the colors on the dresses of the nurses and the large bellies of the elderly mourners. The following day, back in Algiers, Meursault goes swimming in the sea and meets a girl, Marie, whom he knows vaguely. That evening they go to the cinema together to see a comedy; afterwards they go back to Meursault's apartment to have sex. A relationship, of sorts, develops during which Meursault shows no more feeling or affection towards Marie than he displayed at his mother's funeral.

He works in an office in Algiers, taking little interest in his career and receiving with disinterest the news of a prospective promotion and the transfer to Paris that accompanies the rise in position. He is more interested in the physical
sensations to be found at work such as enjoying the cool freshness of the hand-
towels at mid-day and comparing this feeling to the warm clamminess of the
same towels by the end of the day. At home, as well as his relationship with
Marie, he develops a relationship with his unsavory neighbor, Raymond Sintes, a
gangster who beats women. Meursault is as disinterested in the friendship with
Sintes and he is with his romance with Marie. One day, this friendship leads him
to a beach where he kills an Arab with five shots of Sintes’ revolver. The two
men had come across the Arab and his friends earlier in the day and a fight had
broken out, one of the Arabs had a knife. Later on Meursault is walking alone on
the beach and comes across one of the Arabs. Through chance Meursault has
Sintes’ gun. The sun on his head and the flash on that sun on the blade of the
Arab’s knife somehow results in Meursault killing the man with a single shot
and then firing four more bullets into the inert body.

The second half of *The Stranger* is concerned with Meursault's trial and
subsequent execution for the murder of the Arab. Throughout his trial and
imprisonment, until the day before his execution, Meursault maintains the same
detached indifference we saw in the first half of the book. He exhibits the same
preoccupation with his own physical sensations and the same reluctance to
pretend to have emotions he does not feel. Much to the chagrin of the lawyers,
he will not plead self-defense in the face of his murder charge. In the Algeria of
the time such a plea would probably see him escape punishment. Neither will he
express emotion or remorse for his victim. He is warned by his lawyer that the
prosecution will make use of his unusual behaviour at his mother's funeral but in
the same way Meursault refuses to express histrionic remorse over the Arab he won't make a show of weeping over his mother during the trial. The only explanation for killing the Arab Meursault will offer is because of the sun.

During the trial, Meursault shows the same disinterested attitude he has displayed throughout the book. His mind wanders; he drifts in and out of what the prosecution and his defense are saying. To him, although he is aware that he is the subject of conversation, it is like they are talking about someone else. He is more interested in the different colours of the fans used by the jury-members or the sunlight and noise coming through the court-room window. Once he has come to terms with his loss of freedom he learns to adapt to his environment. He develops his memory and spends his time mentally cataloguing the items of furniture in his former room. He realizes that even if a person were to live only for one day, he would amass enough memories to last in a hundred years in prison without getting bored. He thinks that even if he were made to live out his life in the base of a hollow tree-trunk with only the view of the sky above him for entertainment he could find enough to interest him in the flight-patterns of the birds and the shapes of the clouds above him. He would wait for these patterns in the same way that in his former lifer he waited for Saturday to take Marie into his arms.

After these reflections Meursault is ready to confront the prison Chaplain who attempts to take his confession and read him his rites. He throws the cleric out of his cell, stung by his promises of ‘another life’ after this one, and convinced that this life alone is certain and that the inevitability of death
removes all significance. After the Chaplain is gone, Meursault, for the first time, is filled with the tender indifference of the world. He now realizes that he has been happy in his life and would like to live it all over again. He hopes in order that all may be fulfilled that there will be many people attending his execution and that they all greet him with cries of hatred.

It has been disclosed how the outsiderness of man in the twentieth century was of universal significance among men of different, cultural, historical and intellectual backgrounds. In other words, Meursault, a Frenchman, is alienated from everyone and anyone in life because he is an absurd man.

**Uprootedness**

The protagonist, Meursault, can be defined as uprooted since they do not have any close relations, friends and they also have very loose ties with them. Their uprootedness is self-imposed. Meursault consciously and willingly chooses to break away from others and rejects any contact with them. Meursault has a mother but he does not live with her since he institutionalizes her because of a trivial reason. He says that he sent his mother away because he did not have enough money to have her looked after by a nurse; and he adds that he did not expect anything more of her (85). As his bond to his mother is tenuous, he rarely visits her and receives the news of her death calmly. In addition, he does not mourn for her and continues to live as if nothing has happened.

All these estranged men do not only separate themselves from their most close relatives, they at the same time sever themselves from their friends, acquaintances and society in general. Meursault, to begin with, rarely mingles
with people. He does not have any close friends or confidants with whom he can share his thoughts. When he speaks with anybody it is generally for the sake of convenience. For instance, when he is with Salamano or Raymond, it is not he who ignites the conversation; namely, either Raymond or Salamano talks to him about their problems. Similarly, he spends time with Marie because he is only physically attracted to her. Never does he experience any emotional intimacy with her. As Celeste puts it at the court, Meursault is a withdrawn man, who speaks only when he is asked a question.

**Uncommittedness**

Uncommittedness is the second characteristic that the alienated protagonist Meursault has. He does not feel committed towards achieving any goal since for the absurd mind life does not have any value and any meaning. Therefore, concepts such as advancement, progression and ambition seem to be trivial for him. He reflects his absurd worldview when he is offered a promotion by his boss. Meursault nonchalantly rejects such a gratifying proposition because he believes that there is not any meaning in what he does and everything has the same value. Moreover, his uncommittedness can be observed when Marie broaches the issue of marriage. Again, he says that he did not mind marrying her and he could marry her if she wants to. Obviously, life for him is meaningless and nothing has any significance. Consequently, he is a free man who chooses to lead a life that is consistent with his own interests and desires.

**Rebellion**
Meursault, as an absurd man does not obey the conventions of society. For instance, he does not mourn for his late mother or express any kind of regret. His actual rebellion emerges when he confronts the attorney and later the priest. He thinks that his actions do not need any justification by a transcendent being. Hence, when the prosecutor shows him the crucifix and asks him whether he believes in God, he answers in the negative. He acknowledges Camus’s belief that one must make life in this world meaningful and be responsible for one’s deeds. Such kind of a worldview makes him an honest man who rejects any kind of pretence and who never gives false accounts even at the cost of severe punishments. Moreover, he believes that his actions have consequences only in this world; therefore, he rebels against the idea of afterlife. As indicated earlier, he is sincerely attached to earthly life and dies happily as he has recognized that he has lived a happy life.

Meursault builds walls around themselves and choose to have tenuous relations with the people around him. Then, he prefers to live a life which lacks purpose and direction towards progression. Lastly, he discloses the reasons behind their alienation either through their attitudes or through their openly and sharply expressed ideas.

The Plague

_The Plague_ is Albert Camus’ most popular novel. The story is of an Algerian society that is quarantined on the arrival of the plague. The story begins with dead rats appearing in the streets and the inhabitants start falling ill with a strange illness. But _The Plague_ is more than a horror tale. Camus set _The_
Plague in the Algerian city and society of Oran. In April the inhabitants begin to notice more and more dead and dying rats. Panic spreads throughout the population as the sight of staggering, dying rats and the bodies they leave behind become more and more commonplace. The collection and cremation of the rats begin as the human population starts falling ill with a mysterious fever. The doctors become convinced that the illness is bubonic plague but the authorities are slow to act. Finally, as Oran is ravaged by the plague, the city is placed under quarantine.

The response to the plague by the public is one of personal panic with a longing for absent family. Some inhabitants attempt to escape the sealed city while others remain to fight the plague the best they can. The plague and the fear that comes with it is embraced by at least one citizen of Oran. He is a criminal, wanted by the police, who lived a life of fear and hiding. After the arrival of the plague, he lives not in lonely fear but in a new community of fear. He exploits the plague, acting as a smuggler and making a large personal fortune. After several months of the plague, the people of Oran come to recognize the collective suffering in what has happened. Putting aside feelings of their own personal misfortune, they bind together to fight the plague. When the plague finally passes, the Oran survivors, as one would imagine, react differently. However, after time, the routine gets back to normal as it was before the rats started to die in the street. Before we get to comfortable having reached the end of the novel, Camus reminds the reader that although the plague has left Oran, the plague could return at any time in our society.
The central irony in *The Plague* lies in Camus’ treatment of “freedom.” The citizens of Oran become prisoners of the plague when their city falls under total quarantine, but it is questionable whether they were really free before the plague. Their lives were strictly regimented by an unconscious enslavement to their habits. Moreover, it is questionable whether they were really alive. It is only when they are separated by quarantine from their friends, lovers and families that they most intensively love them. Before, they simply took their loved ones for granted.

Camus’ philosophy is an amalgam of existentialism and humanism. Because he did not believe in God or an afterlife, Camus held that human beings live under an inexplicable, irrational, completely absurd death sentence. Nevertheless, Camus did believe that people are capable of giving their lives meaning. The most meaningful action within the context of Camus' philosophy is to choose to fight death and suffering.

In the early days of the epidemic, the citizens of Oran are indifferent to one another's suffering because each person is selfishly convinced that his or her pain is unique compared to common suffering. When the epidemic wears on for months, many of Oran’s citizens rise above themselves by joining the anti-plague effort. The recognition of the plague as a collective concern allows them to break the gap of alienation that has characterized their existence. Thus, they give meaning to their lives because they chose to rebel against death.

However, Camus’ novel declares that this rebellion is nonetheless a noble, meaningful struggle even if it means facing never-ending defeat. Thus,
The Plague is infused with Camus’ belief in the value of optimism in times of hopelessness. Everyone who chooses to fight the plague, to rebel against death, knows that their efforts increase their chances of contracting the plague. They make a choice to act and fight for themselves and their community becomes even more meaningful. In particular, Camus expresses through fiction, more powerfully and more memorably than anyone else in his time, the painful social, moral and spiritual dilemmas of modern man: evil, alienation, meaninglessness, and death.

At the end of The Plague, the narrator reveals himself as Dr. Rieux. Perhaps Dr. Rieux withholds his identity because he is concerned with maintaining his objective distance from the chronicle. Because he defines The Plague as a chronicle, one would expect a journalistic report of the facts. Considering Camus’s ideas about the impossibility of reaching an objective truth, it is not possible to agree with Dr. Rieux’s assessment of his own document. Furthermore, despite Dr. Rieux’s claims of objectivity, his description of pre-plague Oran society is heavily laced with irony. Rieux states that the spirit of pre-plague Oran is one of empty commercialism. The lives of Oran's people are entirely circumscribed by their habits. Every day, they follow the same routines of work, movies, cafes, and shallow love affairs.

One would assume that people would take immediate action in response to a phenomenon as grotesque as the dying rats, but to do so would require a grave underestimation of the power of indifference and denial. The city government is slow to respond to the problem. Rambert’s newspaper refuses to
publish a full condemnation of the sanitary conditions in Oran. It is only when
the newspaper swings into ponderous motion and begins clamouring for action
that the city government arranges for the collection and cremation of the dead
rats. This foreshadows the point during the epidemic when dead plague victims
will meet the same fate. Moreover, everyone assumes that it is someone else's
responsibility to take care of the swarm of dying rats. No one wants to depart
from his or her comfortable, isolated routine to deal with the problem.

Many people do not want to admit that the rats pose a serious health risk
to human beings, so they resort to rationalizing the phenomenon. M. Michel
states that pranksters planted the dead rats in the building where he works. Dr.
Rieux’s asthma patient declares that hunger drove the rats out into the open to
die. Both of these ‘rational’ responses are actually completely irrational. Hunger
does not explain the blood spurting from the rats' muzzles. M. Michel's
explanation doesn’t explain why there are hundreds of death rats in buildings all
over the city.

On the phenomenon of the rats, Dr. Rieux states that it is as if an infected
abscess had burst open, implying that Oran itself is diseased in some way. Over
the course of the epidemic, it will become clear that indifference and denial
constitute the metaphorical disease to which Rieux alludes. People are all too
ready to deny that a collective problem does not concern them. It seems that the
manager for the hotel where Tarrou is staying is more upset that “everyone is in
the same boat” than he is with the disturbing implications of the plague of rats.
Tarrou’s notebooks deal with a number of philosophical questions in addition to the small details of daily life in Oran. These notebooks constitute a large portion of Rieux’s chronicle. This gives further support to the implication that Rieux’s “chronicle” deals with issues far deeper than a journalistic catalogue of facts. Rieux’s description of Oran’s character implies that Oran's citizens are not living their lives to the fullest. Their narrow, circumscribed routines and their indifference prevent them from making the most of their finite existence. They are wasting their time. Tarrou’s concern about wasting time echoes Rieux's own frustration with the Oran's time wasting tactics in response to the swarm of rats and later with the rising epidemic.

Tarrou posits that one does not waste time only when one is always aware of time. He muses that one can make oneself aware of time by indulging in intricate, frustrating, complicated routines. However, his suggestions for making oneself aware of time seem uncannily similar to the habitual routines that rob the residents of Oran of their sense of time: his philosophy is as meaningless as the meaninglessness it attempts to address. The coming epidemic will compel him to think of his question in a more meaningful light- in terms of life and death, individual and social responsibility. Simply being aware of time via constant frustration does not necessarily mean that one is not wasting time. Awareness of time is only one step in the process of actually making productive use of it.

Just as with the rats, everyone considers it someone else's responsibility to deal with the mysterious illness in Oran. The government officials and Dr. Rieux’s colleagues do not want to break with the status quo, so they waste time
discussing whether the disease is definitely contagious or it is definitely the bubonic plague. Dr. Rieux’s stance is that they should act as if the disease were the bubonic plague. He does not relish the idea of waiting for new cases to prove his suspicions. His main concern is saving as many lives as possible.

Castel understands the obstinacy of the city government and his colleagues. Even when the government posts warnings all over the city, the posters are unobtrusive. Dr. Rieux feels that the situation calls for an attitude of all or nothing. If the government does not completely implement all the measures for dealing with a possible epidemic, it is as good as doing nothing at all. Unobtrusive posters do nothing to impress the public with the potential danger of the situation. The asthma patient, as a voice of the general public, remarks that the disease is probably an outbreak of cholera, a far less serious illness. This indicates that the paltry measures taken by the city government have not been terribly effective.

Dr. Rieux realizes that human beings have too much faith in rationality to really appreciate the threat of an impending catastrophe. Wars and plagues are not rational, logical disasters. To respond to the threat of such disasters with a hysterical grip on rational, ordered thought is completely irrational given the possible scale of death and suffering that they represent.

Most people in Oran are obsessed with maintaining their “peace of mind”. This obsession causes them to be indifferent to the suffering of people around them. “Peace of mind” for most people in Oran means not having to deal with
the suffering of other people. They do not want their comfortable, habitual routine disturbed.

Grand and Cottard are neighbours, yet they do not really know each other. Only with Cottard’s attempted suicide do they become acquainted with each other. Although Grand is obsessed with learning how to communicate, he is going about it in the wrong way. He works alone on his book and his Latin, but he does not communicate with other people around him. Cottard tried to speak to him several times, but he never succeeds in communicating his fear of being arrested. Grand did not prompt him to speak, so he too lost the opportunity to break free from his shell of isolation.

Dr. Rieux thinks it is unimaginable that a city with harmless people like Grand could be subject to a deadly plague epidemic. However, there is no rational or moral meaning behind a plague epidemic. Its choice of victims is completely impartial—there is no rational or moral reason why people like Grand should or should not die of the plague.

Only when they are imprisoned do the citizens of Oran realize the relative freedom they once enjoyed. Before, there was nothing restricting them except the force of their own habits. However, just as before the plague, they continue to be selfishly self-absorbed with their personal suffering. Each citizen believes his distress is somehow unique. They do not try to find the right words for their suffering because they are horrified to think that their listener pictures a common, mass-traded emotion. Partly, Oran's people lack the imagination to
communicate their suffering to other people; they were consistently bored before the epidemic.

The plague makes Rambert realize that he values love and happiness over his profession— that is, his means for making money. However, he is still preoccupied with his personal distress. Insisting that he doesn't belong, he declares that there is a rational reason for his ‘right’ to leave Oran. Nevertheless, he does not realize that there is nothing rational in his situation, just as there is nothing rational in the arrival of a plague epidemic in Oran. Rieux must treat everyone as if they had the plague even if they may not be infected. The consequences for acting otherwise are too dire. The plague requires all or nothing attitude if the authorities of Oran are to prevent it from spreading to other cities.

Rieux realizes that Rambert’s accusation that he uses the language of abstraction is true to some extent. He does have to avoid pity and sentimentality because he needs to preserve his emotional stores to continue working against the plague. Unlike Rambert, he recognizes that the plague is his concern. The plague concerns everyone in Oran whether they want to admit it or not. Everyone in Oran is a potential carrier of the illness, and thus, a threat to everyone on the other side of the city walls. Therefore, in one sense, the plague is an abstraction, existing outside and beyond itself in the threat it poses. It requires people like Rieux to respond abstractly, and coldly, in response to the individual suffering of people like Rambert.
The irony in Paneloux’s sermon is that death is an irrefutable fact of human existence. He states that no human science can save a doomed victim of the plague. In truth, no human science can save any person from death of any sort. There is nothing that makes a plague death more meaningful than any other death. Camus implies that death is senseless no matter how it happens. Before the plague, the citizens of Oran were doing little more than waiting for death, passively entertaining themselves as their lives slipped through their fingers. They did not have the capacity to love intensely simply because they lived in complete denial, or completely unaware, of the certainty of their deaths. Paneloux doesn’t ask his congregation to break with their meaningless inaction, to make the most of what may be the last day, the last week, or the last month of their lives. The plague is neither a rational nor a moral disaster. Hence, the only meaningful thing to do in response to it is to rebel against it, that is, against death.

Tarrou’s hotel manager states that Othon’s wife is ‘under suspicion’, but he and Tarrou are not. His statement is an irrational denial of the shared catastrophe of the plague. It echoes Rambert’s request for a certificate declaring him plague-free from Rieux. Everyone in Oran must face the prospect of catching the plague; everyone is ‘under suspicion’ of contagion. Denial, flight, indifference are all forms of ‘wasting time’, of surrender to the plague. It is ironic that the hotel manager and Tarrou should criticize Othon for his indifference and inaction. They are indifferent to him, his wife, and his family. It is not solely Othon’s responsibility to fight the plague for his wife’s sake, but
everyone's. Most people in Oran expect someone else to take responsibility for defending their lives, so they waste time complaining about the lack of effort on the part of the city government, the medical authorities, and their fellow citizens.

Rieux’s asthma patient has chosen to mark time by counting peas from one pan into another at a firmly regulated speed. This image is strongly reminiscent of Tarrou’s suggested methods to avoid wasting time. He speculated that constant awareness of time via tedious, complicated, or frustrating routines would prevent an individual from wasting time. However, his suggestions were merely forms of filling time with unpleasant activities rather than pleasurable ones. Such activities are merely cultivated ‘habits.’ Tarrou now realizes this because he considers the asthma patient's method for marking time a meaningless, time-wasting habit. Even though the asthma patient decided that he had worked enough, he still does not make any meaningful use of his time. He exchanged the habit of work for a different way of marking time.

Grand desires to write a flawless manuscript may be admirable, but it is also debilitating. A flawless manuscript is an ideal, but it is also impossible. To write a flawless manuscript would be akin, then, with curing the plague. Neither is possible. Camus thus outlines the inverse of the habitual daily routines that take up the days of most of the inhabitants of Oran: a complete lack of action because of an understanding that the ideal can never be attained. Both ways of being are ultimately isolating and stultifying; both are meaningless. As the plague progresses, though, and Grand begins to try to help fight the disease, a third option for facing the meaninglessness of life appears: acknowledge the
absurd impossibility of winning the struggle for the ideal, and then struggle anyway; only in such a knowing, futile structure can an individual carve out both self-meaning and community.

The pneumonic form of the bubonic plague is transmissible via airborne contagion. It is also far more deadly than the form that is transmitted via fleas. Therefore, despite the best efforts of men like Rieux, they are facing defeat in the anti-plague struggle.

Tarrou is impatient with the authorities’ inability to recognize the plague as a collective disaster. They engage in their own form of denial with daily death statistics and bombastic talk about whether 130 deaths as opposed to 150 is a ‘victory’. They do not respond to the deadly menace of the plague with real, devoted action. Most of the public chooses to complain about the state of affairs, but Tarrou is one individual who decides to do something about it. Because the authorities have not really made a concerted effort to recruit volunteers, Tarrou takes on that responsibility for himself. He does not believe in forcing people to fight the plague. It is only meaningful if people volunteer their time and efforts; he refuses to see people condemned to death, in contrast to Paneloux.

Paneloux believes that there is a ‘Truth’ behind the plague. However, for Rieux and Tarrou, ‘truth’ is a matter of recognizing the plague as a collective disaster that must be opposed. As a doctor, Rieux has frequently seen people face impending death. One patient declared her resistance to death even as she took her last breath. The dying realizes the utter futility of their resistance, yet many of them declare defiance anyway. Rieux does not harshly condemn
Paneloux because he views the clergyman as merely ignorant. Paneloux has not watched plague victims struggle with the excruciating pain of the disease. Neither has he seen the implacable manner in which the plague continues to kill its victims despite their intense desire to continue living.

Rieux’s personal life experience has taught him what ignorance can do. He did not choose the medical profession out of ideals of heroism. He only learned what it meant to be a doctor when he saw his first patient die. His experience has taught him about the absurdity of human existence. Human beings are condemned to die from birth, yet most people have an intense attachment to life. Rieux decided then that his duty is simply to fight death with all of his resources. Since he does not believe in God or the afterlife, Rieux believes that the here and now is all that matters. Although the anti-plague efforts seem to make no difference, he is unwilling to consent passively to death. He gives meaning to his life by choosing to accept the absurdity that his struggle against death is a never-ending defeat even though denial and inaction are much easier.

It might seem that Cottard’s delight in the plague is due to his participation in the profitable smuggling trade that it spawns. However, his happiness is also due to his relief that everyone in the city now shares his terror. Prior to the epidemic, he was alone in his fear. Nevertheless, he fails to make the crucial connection with others that Tarrou, Rieux, and eventually Rambert, make. Although everyone in Oran is now afraid, he is still alone in his suffering. Others share their distress by contributing to the collective anti-plague struggle.
He states that it's not his job to help fight the plague. However, this is no different from what many people thought before Tarrou's extensive recruiting effort. He is indifferent to the scale of death brought by the plague because of his selfish obsession with his personal suffering.

Rieux offers Grand as a hero because he does not believe in idealized ideas of heroism. The capacity for good deeds, he asserts, exists in every person, not a few, noble, exceptional people. A very few people commit truly exceptional good deeds, but the numerous little good deeds are, on the whole, more important and more meaningful.

When their imagination ceases to provide the means to fill their idle time, Oran’s citizens finally acknowledge their collective plight. Everyone is equally condemned because the plague snatches its victims from all walks of life. In revealing the absurdity of hierarchies by refusing to obey them, the plague illuminates the universal absurdity of hierarchies: all people, rich and poor, young and old, live under a death sentence every day of their lives. Death is always a collective catastrophe because it is humankind's collective fate.

The distinctions of burial fall away under the flood of corpses: the plague victims are disposed of in the same manner as the rats had been a few months earlier. Any attempts on the part of the living to impose a posthumous hierarchy on the victims are exposed as utterly absurd. Similarly, many people realize that there is no rational or moral hierarchy in the suffering caused by the plague. The community begins to see itself as a true community, united in a profound
experience made perhaps more profound and leveling for the very reason that it is absurd.

Earlier in the novel, Rambert accused Rieux of using the language of abstraction instead of the language of the heart. He came very close to accusing Rieux of indifference. It is true that Rieux dispensed with sentimental pity. It is also true that he hardens his heart against the suffering of the plague victims, but it is not true that he is indifferent to their suffering. Indifference is a state of inaction or denial in response to other people's suffering. Rieux must harden his heart against his own suffering in order to continue contributing to the anti-plague effort. His wife is slowly dying in a sanitarium 100 miles from Oran while he is trapped in the city.

The desire for human contact is a powerful human need, especially in times of suffering. Now that everyone suffers from a constant sense of fear, Cottard feels less alone. However, he does not really break free from his alienation. Constant fear breeds distrust. Everyone in Oran must distrust everyone else as a possible carrier of the plague. They flock to movies and cafes to feel less alone, but it is unwise to assume that mutual escapism really constitutes a breach of their collective isolation.

The actor playing the role of Orpheus forces his audience to recognize the real dangers facing them. Escaping to a performance of Orpheus is merely surrender to and denial of these dangers. The play is also about lovers separated by death. It entertains the fantasy that a loved one can be reclaimed from the jaws of death. The actor's collapse forces the audience to confront the false
illusion this play creates. They have denied the possibility of their own deaths by indulging in fantasies about absent loved ones. The actor's breach of the accepted routine forces them to confront the plague as a real danger to each and every one of them. When reality creeps into the fabric of the public's fantasy world, they react with disorganized terror. The point made by this scene is that everyone is just as isolated while indulging in escapist rituals of entertainment as they are in their collective terror of death.

Camus does not fully answer the problem of human isolation. Both Fear and denial are responsible for the isolation that Oran's people suffer during the epidemic. They respond to this isolation in different ways. Camus implies that the people of Oran can break the alienation and isolation produced by their fear of the plague by putting up a collective resistance against it. Fighting the plague is an affirmation of the human will to survive while the paralysis of fear and escapism are acts of surrender.

Paneloux cannot produce a moral or rational explanation for an innocent child's horrible death. His second sermon is an interesting variation on Rieux's "all or nothing" response to the plague. Paneloux believes that the suffering of innocents is not explicable in terms that human beings can understand. Therefore, it is a test of Christian faith in the utmost sense: the Christian is faced with the choice between believing everything and denying everything about God. In a sense, Paneloux asks his congregation to accept a condition of ignorance. He chooses not to consult a doctor when he becomes ill because he wants to put all of his faith in divine Providence. However, the symptoms of his
illness do not match those of the plague. Therefore, Rieux marks him as a ‘doubtful case’ after his death. This represents the doubtful nature of Paneloux’s understanding of human existence. He chose to accept death passively, something that the novel argues against. He denied the basic drive of the human will to survive.

After fighting for the lives of others, Tarrou fights for his own life when he contracts the plague. Unlike Paneloux, he does not passively consent to the death sentence of the plague. He struggles with all his strength. His symptoms are a magnification of the normal symptoms—they conform to both the pneumonic and the bubonic forms of the plague. Therefore, he is clearly not a ‘doubtful case’. The difference in his death and Paneloux’s death indicates that Tarrou reached understanding of the human condition whereas Paneloux did not.

Neither Rieux nor Tarrou condemns Cottard for his indifference because they understand that it springs from his ignorance and alienation. It is interesting that they do not mention the unnamed crime he committed in the past when discussing his guilt. Rather, they sympathize with his constant fear of arrest. Perhaps this is because they do not understand human relations in terms of guilt at all. Rieux himself states that the only things that Oran’s people share for certain are love, exile, and suffering.
References:


4. Ibid., p.11.


