The Rebel Study Guide

The Rebel by Albert Camus

BOOKRAGS

Contents

Plot Summary

This detailed philosophical examination of the history, purposes and manifestations of rebellion places its considerations within the context of the question of whether contemporary reality's attitudes towards murder, either institutionalized or individualized, are justified. Other contextual elements include a focus on the value of the individual, the effect both moderation and excess have on both the intentions and actions of rebellion, and the relationship between rebellion and art.

In his introduction, the author professes introduces his intention to examine the origins of humanity's individual and collective impulse towards rebellion. He relates both the intention and the examination to the question of whether murder, either as sanctioned by governing society or erupting as the result of individual disenchantment, is ever justified. The relationship between the spirit/intentions of rebellion and murder is explored, in various contexts, throughout the book, starting in Part 1, "The Rebel," where the author provides a brief definition of rebellion, begins a detailed examination of different sorts of rebellion, and explores the relationship between rebellion, history and murder.

Part 2, "Metaphysical Rebellion," uses elements of Greek mythology, Roman history and the Bible as context for its examination of the history and spirit of rebellion. He then explores the work of European philosophers, particularly Nietzsche and Hegel, to examine rebellion's relationship with contemporary belief systems, particularly nihilism.

Part 3, "Historical Rebellion", places the author's examination of specific and archetypal manifestations of rebellion within the context of an analysis of the French Revolution, taking incidents and individuals associated with that particular historical event, examining them in his context of his theories about the origins of rebellion, and explores ways in which those (arguably idealistic) origins became corrupt. Examination of this corruption takes the author into a detailed consideration of the Communist Revolution, which he suggests employs various forms of terrorism to ensure the continuation of its self-interested agenda. Here he draws careful lines of distinction between the rational and irrational, suggesting that rebellion is in some ways anchored in the former, while revolution is in many ways anchored in the latter.

Part 4, "Rebellion and Art," takes the author's analysis in a different direction. Rather than exploring the idea of rebellion from a historical and/or factual perspective, he defines the spirit of rebellion by comparing it with the spirit of artistic creation, suggesting that both come from essentially the same place - the existentialist desire to affirm the value of individual human existence, and the hope inherent in that affirmation.

In Part 5, "Hope at the Meridian," the author places himself and his writings at a key point in history - the mid 20th Century, after two world wars have damaged the world's collective psyche and driven parts of it (specifically the Communist Soviet Union, with which the author is particularly concerned) into profound social, political, and spiritual

instability. In this section, the author returns his focus to the question of whether murder is ever justified, examining the subject in both philosophical and historical terms.

The book concludes with an expression of hope that through moderation, in both the individual and the society in which he lives, the pure and altruistic spirit of rebellion (in which the ultimate good of all is the primary motivator of action) will take its proper place as a defining aspect of humanity's quest to improve itself.

Introduction and Part 1

Introduction and Part 1 Summary and Analysis

This detailed philosophical examination of the history, purposes and manifestations of rebellion places its considerations within the context of the question of whether contemporary reality's attitudes towards murder, either institutionalized or individualized, are justified. Other contextual elements include a focus on the value of the individual, the effect both moderation and excess have on both the intentions and actions of rebellion, and the relationship between rebellion and art.

"Introduction"

The author asserts that his book is defined by his will to "face the reality of the present," which he says is defined by justified crime - specifically, the crime of murder as rationalized on/by multiple levels of society. He suggests that to understand and live within that reality, to determine whether it is grounded in any kind of justice, and to determine whether it must change, humanity must know "whether or why we have the right to kill." He examines that question first in relation to absurdism (see "Objects/Places - Nihilism and Absurdism"), and suggests that absurdism is "the desperate encounter between human inquiry and the silence of the universe..." The author then defines a key paradox within the philosophy - that while an absurdist claims to believe in nothing because everything is meaningless, at the same time s/he believes in his /her protest against any philosophy that proclaims that there IS meaning. This inclination to protest, the author goes on to suggest, is rebellion, a manifestation of a central impulse at work, to some degree or another, sustained or suppressed, in every human soul. He then contends that genuine understanding of rebellion's nature and purpose can only result from inquiring "into its attitudes, pretensions, and conquests [in order to perhaps discover] the rule of action that the absurd has not been able to give us; an indication ... about the right or the duty to kill and, finally, hope for a new creation." This, he writes, is the purpose of this work.

"The Rebel"

In this first chapter, the author dissects the origins, manifestations, and ramifications of rebellion. He describes its beginnings in an individual's desire to resist a form of oppression and control, and its growth into active resistance based on the belief that individual suffering can lead to improvement in the lot of others. "When [someone] rebels," the author writes, "a man identifies himself with other men and so surpasses himself, and from this point of view human solidarity is metaphysical..." adding that rebellion "reveals the part of man which must always be defended." This leads him to the concluding suggestion that ultimately, solidarity among members of the human race is grounded in rebellion, which in turn can only find strength in solidarity - a premise that again places rebellion in direct contrast to absurdism, which claims that suffering is entirely individual. "I rebel," the author writes, "therefore we exist."

Analysis of books of this nature (that is, books that are essentially themselves a form of analysis) must take place on two levels - as commentary on both the analysis itself and on how that analysis is presented.

In the case of this book, and on the first level of commentary, there is the clear sense that for the author, the primary source of rebellion is with the individual - specifically, with an uncomfortable relationship between an individual and his/her circumstances. This lack of individual comfort, again in the author's perspective, eventually reaches a point where s/he is at first inclined to effect change and then takes action to do so. Both are defined by the author as rebellion, with his key point being that both inclination and action begin with the individual and expand into a group. This is why the shift in pronoun in the final line is so important, from "I" to "we."

On the second level of commentary, the author's presentation of his beliefs and his reasons for holding those beliefs is, at times, difficult to follow. This may be partly the result of translation from the original French, and partly the result of philosophy consisting, on some level, of semantics - of taking the meanings and implications of words to the nth degree. Once the intensity of language is penetrated, however, these first two sections function as a clear indication of what is to follow, stating the author's thesis, his intention to explore the circumstances giving rise to that thesis, and outlining his plan for conducting that exploration.

Part 2, Introduction and Sections 1, 2 and 3

Part 2, Introduction and Sections 1, 2 and 3 Summary and Analysis

"Metaphysical Rebellion"

The author defines this sort of rebellion as that experienced by man because of his frustration with the universe (as opposed to individualized rebellion felt by a slave towards its master). The result of metaphysical rebellion, the author suggests, is that humanity comes to realize it has to take responsibility for creating its own rules and reality. This metaphysical situation, he contends, carries with it extensive consequences, some of which include rebellion-triggered murders which, he adds, are not the responsibility of rebellion in and of itself.

"The Sons of Cain"

This chapter begins with commentary on the story of Prometheus (see "Important People"), whom the author suggests has all the superficial characteristics of a metaphysical rebel but who acts according to the classical Greek philosophy of existence - that everything experienced, even punishment, is ordered and just. The bulk of this section is then taken up with an analysis of the development of Christianity in relation to this classical Greek idea - specifically, the Old Testament idea of a vengeful god against whom it was impossible to rebel juxtaposed with the New Testament ideal of a God-as-man (Christ - see "Quotes," p. 32) whose suffering embodied non-rebellion. He refers to humanity as "the children of Cain" (see "Important People"), suggesting that Christian rebels have portrayed God as "a cruel and capricious divinity" who provoked the first murder (i.e., Cain's murder of Abel). The author adds that this portrayal was taken even further by existentialist philosophers like Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche.

"Absolute Negation" and "A Man of Letters"

Here the author discusses the philosophical writings of the Marquis de Sade (see "Important People") who developed his theories of humanity during several spells in prison (where, the author suggests, "dreams have no limits and reality is no curb.") According to the author, Sade reduces humanity to the lowest, most animalistic common denominator, and therefore advocates instinctual murder while condemning contemplated, institutionalized, legal murder. He describes these as being laid out in Sade's reams of writing - he was, the author writes, "the perfect man of letters. He created a fable in order to give himself the illusion of existing."

"The Dandies' Rebellion"

This section begins with the suggestion that the poetic rebels of the Romantic Movement were men of letters like Sade, but didn't believe humanity was inherently animalistic. Instead, according to the author, the rebellious Romantics (see "Important People - The Dandy") believed that the human self blurs the line between good and evil, with both in one individual as the result of "outraged innocence" or a deep kind of spiritual wound. The dandy, he writes, can only "be sure of his own existence by finding it in the expression in others' faces..." rather than by connecting with reality instead of mere feeling. This, the author suggests, makes them less than genuine rebels, in that "rebellion gradually leaves the world of appearances for the world of action ..."

"The Rejection of Salvation"

In this brief chapter, the author examines (in considerable detail) the next stage in the evolution of rebellion from the perspective of a character in a novel - Ivan Karamazov, in The Brothers Karamazov by Dostoyevsky (see "Objects/Places"). He illustrates how Karamazov puts God on trial for allowing evil to exist, and comes to believe that if that is indeed who/what God is, he can no longer believe in God or in salvation offered by Him. This, the author proposes, is the beginning of contemporary nihilism (see "Objects/Places"), and the questioning of whether an individual human being, or even individual society, can function in a state of rebellion.

In this section, the author begins his systematic analysis of how both understanding and acting on humanity's inclination towards rebellion have manifested throughout the centuries. It's important to consider, here and throughout the book, why the author chooses to examine what he does. For example, the story of Prometheus is one of many stories of Greek myth (let alone other classical myths such as Egyptian, Hindu or Chinese) that contain stories of rebellion. Likewise, the story of Cain is one of many such stories in the Bible, either the Old Testament (the rebellion of Moses and the Jews against Pharaoh) or the New (the very existence of Christ himself). In terms of his more contemporary considerations, why does he choose to examine the teachings of the Marquis de Sade and Dostoyevsky - and why, in particular, does he choose to explore "the rejection of salvation" through the actions and perspectives of a character in fiction? Yes, Ivan Karamazov can easily be seen as a voice for Dostoyevsky himself, particularly when taken in the context of the author's other writings - but why does the author choose to make his points in the way he does? The reason could be as simple as his choice of examples easily and effectively support his thesis. It might also be that the examples he cites are perhaps more accessible and/or more archetypal (that is, universal) than others he might have chosen. It's possible to see in the analysis of the dandies, for example, the universal human tendency for individuality to evolve into vanity. In any case, his manner of presenting his arguments continues to be, for the most part, rational but somewhat convoluted, clearly aimed at an audience who has at least the beginnings of philosophical understanding and perspective. The writing here is not for the beginner.

Part 2, Sections 4, 5 and 6

Part 2, Sections 4, 5 and 6 Summary and Analysis

"Metaphysical Rebellion" cont'd.

"Absolute Affirmation" and "The Unique"

In his introduction to this section, the author defines a central paradox at the core of the relationship between rebellion and justice. "If God is denied in the name of true justice," he asks, "how can an idea of justice be defined without an idea of God?" (see "Topics of Discussion - Debate this quote ...") He then examines the work of the German philosopher Stirner (see "Important People"), who proposes that there is nothing beyond individual existence - no eternity, no rules (since what individual existence wants and demands it has a pure and unquestionable right to obtain), and therefore no crime, especially no murder. The author points out that such a philosophy can only end up in the destruction of the human race, and suggests that here, where philosophy is at its darkest, "is where Nietzsche's exhaustive search then begins."

"Nietzsche and Nihilism"

The author begins his study of Nietzsche (see "Important People") and nihilism (see "Objects/Places") with several statements of Nietzsche's belief - that God is dead, that there is therefore no morality, that Christianity is a corruption and a betrayal of Christ's teaching, and that socialism is just distilled, non-religious Christianity. He also suggests that at the core of Nietzsche's belief system was the conviction that true freedom means there are no rules - but, the author wonders, how can you judge what feels free if there are no rules by which to measure it? The author also comments on Nietzsche's contention that "the rebel who at first denies God finally aspires to replace him." The final part of this chapter is taken up with an examination of how Nietzsche's philosophies were absorbed and corrupted by, among others, Marxism and Nazism. In both, the author suggests, "nature is to be subjugated in order to obey history; [but] for Nietzsche, nature is to be obeyed in order to subjugate history."

"The Poets' Rebellion"

Here the author writes that "rebel poetry, at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth century, constantly oscillated between ... the irrational and the rational, the desperate dream and ruthless action." He adds that through exploration of both reason and surrealism, important poets of the time (particularly Lautrémont and Rimbaud - see "Important People"), strove to find reason in a world and philosophy without reason.

"Lautrémont and Banality"

This particular poet, the author writes, was simultaneously determined to destroy traditional belief in the traditional God and to conform to the rules and ways of the society in which he (God) lived and worked. He contrasts these forms of rebellion with what he describes Lautrémont's desire to conform to the ideals of rebellion without apparent willingness to accept either its truths or its consequences.

"Surrealism and Revolution"

The author begins this analysis of surrealism with the suggestion that while Rimbaud (see "Important People") was perhaps the greatest of the rebellious poets, he failed himself, his talent and his philosophy by giving himself over to the emptiness at the heart of nihilism. He discusses, at considerable length, the qualities of surrealism (see "Objects/Places - Surrealism"), its rational approach to destruction (of rules, tradition, etc) coexisting at the same time as its instinctive joy in being alive, and its emphasis on materialism. He also explores the tensions between Marxism (which, he suggests, focused on domination and control of the irrational) and surrealism (which, he suggests, celebrated the irrational), while suggesting that there were surrealists who saw both as manifestations of a universal unity.

"Metaphysical Rebellion - Nihilism and History"

In this section, the author suggests that at the core of any and all rebellion is a cry against the inevitability and inherent futility of death (see "Quotes," p. 100). In searching for reasons to struggle against death, the author proposes that metaphysical rebels (i.e., those described above) have striven to destroy what society, blind faith, and lack of thought have defined as reasons, and have also striven to position existence itself as such a reason. Nihilism, he adds, has attempted to remove the need for such reasons, and in fact smothers "the force of creation" to the point where acts of violence (such as murder) are perceived as the ultimate manifestation of man's power OVER existence - in other words, essentially removing existence as a reason for living.

A key element to note on both levels of commentary on this book (that is, on its analysis and on the way it presents that analysis) is that at times it is written with an almost off-putting objectivity. An example here can be found in the author's extensive analysis on the work of Nietzsche - the author presents summations of Nietzsche's work without making it immediately apparent whether he supports that work or not, whether he believes what Nietzsche believes or not. The detail and length of the author's exploration certainly suggests that he thinks Nietzsche is important, and he does seem to be making the effort (here and throughout the book) to point out both the flaws and the strengths of the arguments he's considering. However, he rarely (if ever) makes actual value judgments on them - in other words, he's leaving it to the reader to make those judgments. Here again can be seen a manifestation of the author's core existentialist perspective (see "Important People - The Author" and "Style - Perspective") - the idea that both experience and interpretation of life is up to the individual.

Also in this section, for the first time (specifically Part 2 Section 6, "Metaphysical Rebellion - Nihilism and History") the author draws a clear link between an individual's need/desire for rebellion and death, the core truth of human existence against which s/he is rebelling. The implication is that rebellion, by its nature, functions in direct opposition to murder in any/all its forms. For further consideration of this question see "Themes - Murder as Anti-Rebellion."

Part 3, Introduction, Sections 1 and 2

Part 3, Introduction, Sections 1 and 2 Summary and Analysis

"Historical Rebellion"

The author introduces this section by contending that "every act of rebellion expresses a nostalgia for innocence and an appeal to the essence of being ..." while revolution, grounded in violence and ultimately in murder, is the continuation of an endless cycle - the transfer of power from one form of government to another (see "Quotes," p. 106). The suggestion here is that revolution doesn't always spring from rebellion's desire to better humanity's lot, but from a simple desire for power.

"The Regicides"

The author begins his analysis of the process of authority's breakdown (a necessary aspect of revolution) with an examination of the origins of the French Revolution in 1789. He writes that that was "the starting-point of modern times, because the men of that period wished, among other things, to overthrow the principle of divine right..." (the principle that power was a gift and responsibility given by God) upon which society and government had functioned for centuries. Here and throughout the following sections, he uses the words and speeches of the revolutionary speaker Saint-Just (see "Important People") as the primary illustration of his points.

"The New Gospel"

Here the author suggests that the origins of both the Revolution and of Saint-Just's philosophies, particularly the belief that the king (and therefore divine right) must die, were grounded in theories proposed by the French philosopher Rousseau in his book The Social Contract (see "Objects/Places"). The book's theories, he writes, establish the will of the people in the place of God. He concludes with the suggestion that whatever form God takes in government, the first act and/or function of the revolution is to "murder" his representative on earth (see "Quotes," p. 118).

"The Execution of the King"

The author here continues his analysis of the French Revolution as an archetype of revolution's purposes and manifestations, specifically focusing on Saint-Just's speeches attacking the purpose and function of the King, which he says are based in theories first put forth by Rousseau. He then suggests that the ultimate point of both speech and theory is that the king must die - in other words, be murdered (murdering a monarch is called "regicide").

"The Religion of Virtue"

Here the author suggests that in the will and action of the Revolution (as defined by the speeches of Saint-Just), faith in God and king was to be replaced by faith in the power, virtue, and will of the people - reason defined by nature.

"The Terror"

The author suggests here that Saint-Just's post-revolutionary philosophy advocated the principle of proving virtue or be imprisoned, which he (the author) suggests justified individual and State terrorism alike, particularly The Terror (see "Objects/Places - The French Revolution and The Terror"). He concludes this section with a summary of how the socio-political and philosophical aftershocks of the French Revolution were felt in the centuries that followed - in the eventual ending of all constitutional monarchies, in the continued struggle to define law by reason instead of by belief, in the influence of Russian Communism, etc.

"The Deicides"

In this section, the author examines the work of the German philosopher Hegel (see "Important People"), who suggested that human advancement was the result of the eternal struggle between masters and slaves, which he (Hegel) believed would always exist in some form or another. Hegel also contended, according to the author's analysis, that humanity's separation from the animal world (and therefore from its animal self) is the quality of not consciousness but SELF-consciousness - the desire to be recognized as an autonomous, individual being - the implication here is that this desire was the motivation for both rebellion and revolution. Hegel celebrated, the author writes, "the divinity of man" - essentially killing God (or committing "deicide"), but then writes that after Hegel died interpretations of his philosophies rather than the philosophies themselves took root, and like corruptions in Nietzsche led to Nazism and Marxism.

It can't be denied that the author's analysis of the causes and consequences of the French Revolution is thorough and clearly connected to his thesis. It also can't be denied, however, that it is the revolution closest to his personal experience (as a citizen of the country in which it took place). In other words, the value of his analysis of the principles in question is somewhat limited as the result of his focus on the French Revolution. A reader might be reasonably inclined to test the author's theories within an analysis of the American Revolution, for example, or the revolution in South Africa that ended apartheid, or the Cultural Revolution in China. It could be argued that the French Revolution is an archetype, an individual example of a universal principle, and that the author is here utilizing it as such. But as the author himself points out in later analysis, there are differences in culture and history that make revolution in each country unique in terms of theory, how that theory is applied, and the after effects of those applications. It could also be argued that the author's focus on Communist Revolution in subsequent sections of the book does in fact take the author's analysis beyond the limits discussed above. There is evidence, however, that that focus seems to be grounded in an intellectual (personal?) agenda to show the world the flaws and dangers of the Communist revolutionary system at least as much as in the intention to define the flaws of revolution in general. In other words, there is the sense that in exploring these two

revolutions in particular exclusion of other historical examples, the author loses a degree of objectivity.

Meanwhile, in "The Deicides" there is another example of the author objectively presenting a point of view and leaving it for the reader to draw conclusions. Specifically, in his presentation of Hegel's perspectives on individuality, there are clear echoes of the author's own existentialist philosophy (see "Style - Perspective"). Again, however, he avoids stating his beliefs and/or his reactions to the theory under discussion - but an astute reader, one with the philosophical and/or intellectual background necessary to thoroughly understand both the facts and implications of this book, will be able to make this, and other similar connections.

Part 3, Section 3

Part 3, Section 3 Summary and Analysis

"Historical Rebellion - Individual Terrorism"

The author introduces this section with commentary on the eager Russian acceptance and manipulation of Hegel and other German philosophers.

"The Renunciation of Virtue"

The author describes how pre-revolutionary Russian philosophers embraced French revolutionary philosophy, realized its flaws, and then even more eagerly embraced the German philosophies of Hegel. They came to believe, the author suggests, that what was wanted "was not the absolute of reason but the fullness of life," the destruction of reality in order to affirm the value of individual experience.

"Three of the Possessed"

In this chapter the author explores the philosophies and actions of three Russian philosophers exploring the boundaries of revolutionary nihilism - Pisarev, Bakunin, and Nechaiev (see "Important People"). He writes that eventually the influences of these three radicals waned, and attention returned to the re-valuing of the people, which in turn led to the formation of the Socialist Revolutionary Party (see "Objects/Places") within which, the author writes, "the terrorists were born".

"The Fastidious Assassins"

The first part of this section contains a list of assassinations (of royalty, aristocrats, and power keepers) in the early part of the 20th Century, and commentary by the author that the writings of the killers a belief that they did what they did (i.e., destroy current reality) in the name of future generations. This was, he adds, "the moment when the spirit of rebellion encounters, for the last time in our history, the spirit of compassion". It is this spirit, the author writes, that led this group of assassins to a kind of integrity. Not only did they refuse ("fastidiously") to follow through on their plans if there was any risk of innocents being hurt, they also believed that their actions must, and justifiably, end in their own deaths. The author goes on to say, however, that as the movement towards revolution advanced, this sort of integrity got left behind.

"The Path of Chigalev"

The author writes that while these "fastidious assassins" were doing their work, a movement was evolving designed to take advantage of that work and seize power. This, the author suggests, was state terrorism, whose advocates worked towards creating revolution for the many by actions of an elite few. "Rebellion," the author writes, "cut off from its real roots ... now contemplates the subjection of the entire universe." This, he

adds, is the "path of Chigalev" - the neo-nihilistic love of money and unlimited freedom leading to unlimited despotism and dictatorship ... a situation, he continues, which negates real rebellion.

In this brief section, the author begins his dissection of the process of rebellion and revolution in what was once the Soviet Union. As discussed in relation to Part 3, Sections 1 and 2 above, there is the sense that in this section, the author is beginning to reveal his personal agenda. This is, in short, to define and explore the flaws in what he indicates throughout the book is, in his belief, the most repressive and destructive revolutionary machine of his time, and perhaps of all time. Granted, he does seem to be making the effort to disguise this agenda in objectivity by using the Communist Revolution as an example of what can happen when the altruistic spirit of rebellion becomes corrupt by the power seeking spirit of revolution. An example of this can be found in the chapter headed "The Subjugation of Virtue", in which the theoretical principles at the heart of revolution are portrayed as having roots in the author's own existentialist, value-of-the-individual philosophy. Nevertheless, the lack of comparison to other socio-cultural revolutions can be reasonably interpreted as somewhat telling.

Part 3, Sections 4 and 5

Part 3, Sections 4 and 5 Summary and Analysis

"Historical Rebellion - State Terrorism and Irrational Terror"

The author begins this section with the suggestion that while early 20th Century dictators like Hitler and Mussolini (see "Important People") used the writings of Hegel and Nietzsche (among others) to justify their actions and philosophies, their programs celebrated and promoted the irrational, rather than the reasoned. The consequences, the author suggests, were an increasing, over-reaching belief in violence and in the unquestioned power of the state - in short, conquest itself (the pursuit of control through creating irrational terror in the victimized) became the end, rather than the means. This, the author suggests, is the reason the movement ultimately failed - its aims were ultimately empty. He also suggests, however, that Hitlerian principles and processes influenced a state in which terrorism became founded in rationality and, therefore, achieved a degree of success. This state, he writes, was the Soviet Union.

"Historical Rebellion - State Terrorism and Rational Terror"

The author introduces his analysis of the development of the Russian system by suggesting that Karl Marx (see "Important People"), while formulating his philosophy, relied on circumstances, theories and his own prophetic vision of the future more than on facts. This, he suggests, led to an inevitable hollowness in Marxism similar to that of Hitlerism.

"The Bourgeois Prophecy"

This section begins with an examination of the parallels between Christianity and Marxism. The author suggests that while both professed to foster communion between God and man, in Christianity God became man, is in humanity, and therefore guides humanity, whereas in Marxism humanity (in the form of community) is the spiritual ideal - in other words, humanity becomes God. This, the author suggests, led Marx to an awareness that the bourgeoisie (see "Important People") needed some sense of transcendence in their philosophy of existence, which in turn led him to shape his theories in that direction and give his work a semi-messianic quality.

"The Revolutionary Prophecy"

Here the author describes how Marxist thinking included the revolutionary prophecy that in capitalism, humanity is moving towards a new and more enlightened state of economic, and therefore personal, relationship with itself (communism). The author then examines how Marx's understanding of economic history (essentially that of institutionalized slavery) informed his core belief that workers' activity must be recognized for its value to the self and to society, an interpretation of Hegel's prophecy of struggle between "the particular and the universal." In other words, Marx suggested

that the triumph of the worker is in fact the triumph of the universal, leading the author to describe that prophesied world as a "Utopia" (see "Objects/Places").

"The Failing of the Prophecy"

The author suggests here that "the idea of a mission of the proletariat has not, so far, been able to formulate itself in history." This, he contends, is the result of a number of social and economic factors Marx did not take into account, particularly leaders who were idealistically "interested in making immediate use of human unhappiness for the sake of happiness in the distant future, rather than in relieving as much and as soon as possible the suffering of millions of men." This, the author suggests, led to the adoption of violence and totalitarian rule to ensure that the journey to revolution continue (a journey that Marx believed and insisted MUST continue to its utopian end). This, the author proposes, is "the kingdom of ends," a kingdom founded (to what the author suggests would be Marx's horror) in the violent suppressions of Eastern Europe in the middle of the 20th Century.

"The Kingdom of Ends"

This chapter describes how Lenin (see "Important People") took Marx's philosophy and, through a process of exerting control over the people (if necessary by violence), laid the foundations of Soviet Communism. A key component of this process, according to the author, was Lenin's (apparently deliberate) inability to pinpoint when the ultimate revolution, the ultimate achievement of the idealized goal, would be realized - a circumstance which, the author adds, sustained Lenin's contention that control over the worker must be maintained in order to ensure achievement of the goal. "And so," the author continues, "the way to unity passes through totality."

"Totality and Trials"

In this section, the author describes totality as the principle by which Lenin and his socio-political-philosophical heirs (the leaders of the mid-20th Century Marxist-Leninist Soviet state, including other Eastern European countries) asserted and maintained the power of the idealized revolution which they claimed to be enacting. He describes the central tenet of totality as the State and the Revolution having become God, and maintaining their control through institutionalized terrorism (in which humanity is reduced to the status of an object) and the looming threat of trial (for not being a strong enough advocate of the state on terms decided by the state).

The challenge in this section, as it in fact is throughout the book, is to apply the insights obtainable through detailed examination and discussion of the particular to the general. It isn't something the author always does, again manifesting his core existentialist philosophy - it's up to him to present the facts and theories, it's up to the individual to make sense of them. In this specific case, it's almost entirely up to the reader to determine how the author's specific, in-depth analysis of the causes and consequences of the Communist Revolution relate to the causes and consequences of revolution in general, or in principle. How, for example, does what happened in the Soviet Union

relate to post-Revolutionary War America? to post-Cultural Revolution China? to post-apartheid South Africa?

At this point, it might be worth considering how, if at all, the author's philosophy of existentialism is idealistically, and idealogically aligned with conservativism. Both belief systems essentially value the individual over the communal, both contend that the individual knows his own needs, desires and values, and that the individual is best placed to determine how to live by and/or enact those values. It could also be argued, however, that both fail to take into account human's capacity for selfish self interest, and perhaps even to an extent ignore and/or celebrate it. Further consideration of this point can be found in the author's consideration of moderation and excess in Part 5)

Part 3, Section 6

Part 3, Section 6 Summary and Analysis

"Historical Rebellion - Rebellion and Revolution"

In this chapter, the author suggests that rebellion is an affirmation of human value, while revolution, in order to sustain itself, is ultimately a cheapening of humanity. He makes several points, among them "Rebellion's demand is unity; historical revolution's demand is totality ..." and "... the first is dedicated to creation so as to exist more and more completely; the second is forced to produce results in order to negate more and more completely ...". Finally, he suggests that revolution "...is always obliged to act in the hope, which is invariably disappointed, of one day really existing..." The inference here is that rebellion, by its very nature (see "Quotes," pp. 248 and 250) affirms its own existence. The author also discusses the negative impact of nihilism on both rebellion and revolution, suggesting that "this particular form of madness" is what betrays the lessons of history to the ambitious hunger of post-rebellion revolution. Finally, he suggests that revolution must ultimately become subject to the impulse that governs rebellion, to improve the individual situation. This, he asserts, can (and is?) defined and described by artistic creation.

In this transitional chapter, the author essentially sums up his book's central theories about the difference between rebellion and revolution, theories which seem to be clearly and thoroughly grounded in his personal existentialist philosophy. Again, he seems to be presupposing that human beings, engaged in rebellion and/or revolution, have the capacity to be reigned in by moderation, a theory he develops further in Part 5. In other words he, like most philosophers, seems to function almost exclusively in the realm of the ideal, rather than in the real - it could easily be argued, for example, that his faith in moderation fails to take into account the existence and effects of adrenaline and/or ego.

Part 4

Part 4 Summary and Analysis

"Rebellion and Art"

The author begins this section with the comment that because art "rejects the world on account of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is," it is rebellion in its purest form. He goes on to suggest that the visions of the future found in the work of the artist and in the (theories? actions?) of the rebel are essentially the same thing, with the basic difference that art takes the future out of the realm of history (event or goal), and places it into the realm of what already is.

"Rebellion and the Novel"

Here the author writes that the main reason novels (perhaps all art?) are both created and enjoyed is to create a sense of unity and order in a world where there is none. They do so, he suggests, by exploring and explaining the past, and therefore defining the present - even in the face of inevitable death. This, he implies, is the ultimate value in both art and rebellion - to give meaning in the presence of death, the ultimate meaninglessness.

"Rebellion and Style"

In this section, the author reasons that there is no such thing as entirely realistic art - that art by definition is a selective representation and/or shaping of certain elements of reality in order to create the sought-after unity described above. He suggests that the way that representation takes place is stylization - "... the simultaneous existence of reality and of the [artistic] mind that gives reality its form..." which, he adds, is what rebellion does - striving to strike the balance between presentation of plain fact and shaping that fact to define a new reality.

"Creation and Revolution"

The author comments here that if revolution (which is by definition a breaking down of the old order) is to be successful, the creation of art (which is by definition a creation and/or sustaining of order, illusionary or no) will, at least for a short while, need to be curtailed. He counters this suggestion with the assertion that the creative impulse as manifest in art will never disappear completely from the human experience, either as individuals or as a group (see "Quotes," p. 274). Finally, he concludes that in the unity and idealism portrayed in art there is beauty, of the sort that speaks to the truth of "the common dignity of [humanity] and the world [it] lives in."

The key question arising from this section is this - if the author were not himself an artist (which, as a novelist and theatre writer, he is), would he feel the same way? Would he have the same perspective? He himself points out that throughout history, philosophers

have denied the value of art, essentially because in their perspective it avoids reality. The author's point is the exact opposite - that art distills, reflects, and ultimately inspires reality, and that it is therefore necessary. Which side is the more correct? It's interesting to note here that the author's objectivity, his capacity for presentation of fact and leaving the reader to draw conclusions, somewhat falls short here. There is not, in this or in the following section, the sense that he is not stating fact, but opinion. For further consideration of this shift, see "Style - Tone").

Part 5

Part 5 Summary and Analysis

"Thought at the Meridian - Rebellion and Murder"

The author begins this final section with commentary that society in general, and European society in particular are, at the time he's writing (the early 1950s) in a state of upheaval and confusion as the result of several acts of rebellion that transformed into revolution and have, in the process, justified murder. He writes that the theory and practice of murder have betrayed the spirit of rebellion, and that in and of itself, murder (individualized or systemic) destroys the spirit of unity (humanity united with and supportive of itself) in which rebellion begins.

"Nihilistic Murder"

In this section the author suggests nihilism defines murder as a manifestation of existence's essential pointlessness, while true, selfless rebellion sees murder as an aspect of the dehumanizing spirit of destruction it's rebelling against. The implication here is that the freedom sought by the rebel is absolute freedom for all, but that "the freedom to kill" is the one freedom the true rebel cannot and will not advocate.

"Historical Murder"

In this section, the author examines the paradoxical principles at the core of both rebellion and nihilism in terms of history (see "Objects/Places"). He goes on to suggest that revolution in the middle of the 20th Century (the period during which he's writing) is at a meridian, a reflective turning point. This he defines as a socio-political place between "the risk of a universal war" and a turning away from the violence and the nihilism that brought it into power.

"Moderation and Excess"

Here the author begins with the statement that "rebellion with no other limits but historical expediency signifies unlimited slavery." He then suggests that society must continually and repeatedly remind itself of the spirit and intention of rebellion to ensure it stays within its self-recognized and self-defined limits. Part of the reason rebellions have evolved into oppressive revolutions, he suggests, is that those limits have been crossed. In other words, moderation has given way to excess - but moderation can be learned, he points out, through exploration of the relationship between the real (which isn't entirely rational), and the rational (which isn't entirely real).

"Thought at the Meridian"

An example of struggle in pursuit of this relationship, the author suggests, is the trade union movement, which values the work and contribution of the individual within the

context of the rebellious, right-seeking spirit of the collective - an example of how rebellion "relies on reality to assist it in its perpetual struggle for truth." True rebellion is, he suggests, ultimately realistic, seeking revolution on behalf of life, not in defiance of it. He concludes with the suggestion that moderation and rebellion are in perpetual conflict with the forces of nihilism, excess and solitude. "We all carry within us," he writes, "our places of exile, our crimes and our ravages ... but it is our responsibility ... to fight them in ourselves and in others."

"Beyond Nihilism"

In this concluding section, the author writes with barely restrained hope about the continued power of, and need for, rebellion in its truest spirit and most genuine sense - dedication to the ways of nature, moderation, wisdom and dignity. He writes of how murder of all sorts (physical, spiritual, social, economic, political) has become institutionalized, and how acts of rebellion small and large are speaking out for dignity and universal human value. While many are giving up on the present, he suggests, abandoning rebellious dreams of contemporary freedom to hope of an idealized future. Others are celebrating their individuality, their own excellence - and there, he writes, justice still lives, joy is still present, and "the soul of our time" shall be remade.

There are two key elements to note in this section. The first is the re-emergence of murder as a pivot for the discussion. It has, throughout the book, been referred to glancingly, as a point of contact with the author's original premise as defined in the introduction. In other words, here in the book's final chapters he answers his thesis by saying, in effect, that no, there is no justification for murder of any sort. It is anti-rebellion, which means that it is ultimately anti-individual, not just destructive of the physical life but of the spiritual life at the universal core of human existence.

The second key element to note here is the introduction (arguably late in the process) of the idea of moderation - the contention that the human race has the capacity to govern itself, as a collective and as individuals, with reason and perspective. This, like many of the author's contentions places him squarely in the camp of the idealistic (along with so many of his fellow philosophers who apparently function from a place removed from the messiness of perhaps inevitable human desire, passion, vulnerability, and greed). The point is not made to suggest that the author's dream of moderation is neither good nor valid - but it is, as history (unfortunately?) shows, the exception rather than the rule.

The Rebel

Summary and Analysis

The Rebel

Summary and Analysis

Characters

The Author (Albert Camus)

Camus is one of the most well-known and respected of the 20th Century philosophers. He developed his theories and perspectives over the course of several years working in a variety of careers and disciplines - theatre, journalism, essay writing, and fiction. A particularly noteworthy experience in his life is his active involvement in the French Resistance during World War II, a non-military citizen's movement that took various forms of action against the Nazis' invasion of France. It might not be going too far to suggest that his experiences at that time can be seen as both a manifestation and a source of the beliefs about rebellion and revolution explored throughout this book.

A former winner of the Nobel Prize in Literature, Camus is regarded by contemporary philosophers as one of the earliest and most influential contributors to the development of existentialism, a philosophy of existence that explored and emphasized the essential importance of individual human experience in defining the nature, purposes and ends of being. Here again, his participation in the French resistance can easily be seen as a powerfully motivating component - the Nazis, as Camus suggests in this book, were essentially anti-individual on almost every level. For exploration of how his personal philosophical perspective informs his writing in The Rebel, see "Style - Perspective." That said, the bulk of Camus' writing, both fiction and non-fiction, took place in the years immediately following World War II, during a time when the roots of the Cold War (the decades-long escalation of militarily-defined mistrust between the Communist East - Europe and Asia - and the Capitalist West) were digging themselves into international culture, thinking, and politics. In this historical context, Camus' personal experiences and perspectives can be seen even more clearly as both defining and motivating his desire to advocate for individual rights, dignity and the opportunity to "rebel" (to improve his lot in life, which Camus says is the function and purpose of rebellion).

Prometheus

Prometheus, referred to in Part 2 Section 2 and throughout the novel, was one of the Ancient Greek gods - specifically, a Titan, one of the ancestors of the Olympian gods (Zeus, Hera, Athena, etc). Unlike his brother gods, who set themselves up as being supreme and far above humanity in every way, Prometheus had sympathy for human beings and gave them the gift of fire. He was punished by his brother gods for his actions, chained to a rock for all eternity and condemned to have his immortally regenerating liver eaten daily out of his body by a raven. His rebellion, the author writes, was undertaken in the truest, purest manifestation of the principle of rebellion - the desire to improve the lot of individuals.

Cain

In the Old Testament of the Christian Bible, Cain was the oldest son of Adam, the first man. In an act of (rebellious) anger against God and Adam for favoring Abel, the younger son, Cain killed Abel and then lied about what happened.

(Marquis de) Sade

Sade was a French soldier and revolutionary, frequently imprisoned for rebellious thought and action. His unusual sexual tastes and practices gave rise to the term "sadism," which means to take pleasure in the suffering of others.

The Dandy

In general, a "dandy" is a man who takes an excessive pride and interest in his personal appearance at the expense of every other interest - except, that is, in the way other people react to his appearance. He is, in the author's perspective, the embodiment of romanticism (see "Objects/Places" below), and cites self centered poet/dandies like Milton, Byron and Lermontov as examples.

Dostoyevsky / Ivan Karamazov

Dostoyevsky was a famous Russian novelist and philosopher, imprisoned for rebellious thought and writing. Ivan Karamazov is a character in one of his most famous novels, The Brothers Karamazov. For examination of the place of both author and character in the development of metaphysical rebellion, see "Part 2, Sections 3 and 4."

Nietzsche, Stirner

The opposing philosophies of these two German philosophers are examined in Part 2, Section 4. Both were advocates of nihilism (see "Objects/Places"), but where Stirner advocated the perspective that nothing had any meaning, Nietzsche explored the often paradoxical ramifications of living in existence with that perspective.

Lautrémont and Rimbaud

These two poets, in the author's mind, took Romantic principles of rebellion in another direction - towards reason, possibilities for "the rebel to adopt courses of action completely destructive to freedom." Lautrémont, according to the author, advocated the principles of rebellion (i.e., the destruction of God and faith) but only to a point - he conformed to and wrote about its ideas without actually living them. Rimbaud, by contrast, lived the ideals of nihilistic rebellion to a self- and talent-destructive fault.

Saint-Just

This French politician and philosopher lived during the French Revolution (see "Objects/Places"), and was in fact one of its leaders. In essence, he advocated for the power of the people, asserting their will and their rights were the fundamental justification for the Revolution's (often violent) acts of freedom.

Hegel

A German philosopher noted for his exploration of how the human mind grew and functioned, his cynicism about the dark core of humanity's individual existences, his idealized view that reason will eventually bring humanity to an idealized peak of awareness and idealized, intellectual fulfillment.

Pisarev, Bakunin, Nechaiev

These three Russian philosophers, the author suggests (Part 3, Section 3 - "Three of the Possessed"), were in the forefront of developing Russian revolutionary thinking. Pisarev was in the forefront of the movement that added egoism (self-interest as the source of morality) to nihilism, "denying everything that is not satisfaction of the self." Bakunin immersed himself in Hegel and as a result positioned himself on the side of constant, justified rebellion with the goal of creating "a new world, without laws, and consequently free." (see "Quotes," p. 158). Nechaiev, according to the author, "pushed nihilism to the farthest coherent point" by advocating pure revolution which was, to Nechaiev, "more important than the people it wanted to save..."

Hitler and Mussolini

In Part 3 Section 4, the author discusses how these two notoriously murderous dictators (Hitler of Germany, Mussolini of Italy) used and corrupted the philosophies of Hegel and Nietzsche in order to justify their quest for control of their countries and, eventually, the world.

Karl Marx and Vladimir Lenin

Marx was the socio-political-economic philosopher whose theories and prophecies were the groundwork of Soviet socialism, and eventually of communism. Lenin was the politician and reformer who refined (some would say corrupted) Marx's beliefs into the philosophy that gave rise to Communism and the Soviet Union. This philosophy essentially recreated the age-old master/slave relationship into uneducated proletariat and educated leaders who maintained control, over both the revolution and those whom the revolution was intended to benefit, by any means available, violent or otherwise.

The Bourgeoisie

"Bourgeoisie" is a term used for centuries, and within the context of a number of socio-political rebellions and revolutions, to describe the middle class, with its aspirations towards prosperity, status, and maintenance of their security in the face of opposition from the lower, intellectual, and aristocratic classes.

Objects/Places

Rebellion

Rebellion, as defined by the author throughout the book, is the act of improving life - specifically, an act of resistance against an oppressive, limiting circumstance undertaken in order to change that circumstance for the betterment of both the individual and those with whom he shares the experience of oppression.

Revolution

Revolution is the act of rebellion taken one step further - to assume control over those who participated in maintaining the earlier status quo in order to permanently and totally destroy that status.

History

In general, history is both defined and perceived as the placement of those incidents in time. Throughout the book, however, the author defines history differently - specifically, as the relationship between incidents in time, referring repeatedly to historical actions as those that take place with an awareness of that relationship.

Nihilism and Absurdism

Nihilism is, in short, the philosophic belief that nothing in and/or about existence has any meaning or purpose. Absurdism is the philosophic belief that the universe is governed by chaos and that efforts to bring about order are pointless - in other words, chaos IS the purpose. Both philosophies claim that no human being therefore has any reason to have any faith in anything. The nihilism of Nietzsche takes this lack of faith one step further, operating from the premise that a nihilist "is not one who believes in nothing, but one who does not believe in what exists."

Mid-20th Century Europe

The author's examination of rebellion takes place within the socio-political-cultural context of mid-20th Century Europe, a period of intense instability on all levels as the result of the recent Second World War. A key component of this instability was the expansion of Eastern Communism in Europe (the Soviet Union, East Germany), which in turn was beginning its decades-long struggle with Western Capitalism (Western Europe, North America). The result that the beliefs and perspectives explored in The Rebel were, on some level, defined by belief in the necessity for rebellion against these instabilities and expansions.

Romanticism

In the context of this book, romanticism is defined as a rebellion against the idea that humanity's primary relationship is with God - a rebellion that, in fact, suggest humanity's primary relationship is with itself, and therefore each individual's primary relationship is with him/herself.

Paradox

A "paradox", of which there are several in this book, is a situation in which two opposite and contradictory truths exist at the same time. An example can be found in the author's introduction, specifically his commentary on absurdism - while an absurdist claims to believe in nothing because everything is meaningless, at the same time s/he believes in his /her protest against any philosophy that proclaims that there IS meaning.

The Brothers Karamazov

This novel by Russian novelist Dostoyevsky tells the story of three brothers involved in the murder of their father, and how they each cope with the idea that they have, to all intents and purposes, committed the primal sin of patricide.

Surrealism

This philosophical movement advocates "absolute rebellion, total insubordination, sabotage on principle, the humor and cult of the absurd ... the incessant examination of all values ... the refusal to draw any conclusions [which] is flat, decisive, and provocative." In other words, anything goes ... at any time.

The French Revolution and the Terror

Taking place in the late 1780s, the French Revolution saw the removal of the aristocracy from power and its replacement with government by the will and power of the people. The author cites the Revolution as a (the?) prime example of how and why a revolution functions, specifically examining the role that death (murder) plays in the definition and achievement of its goals. "The Terror" is the term used to describe the period late in the Revolution in which any individual who didn't sufficiently agree with the ideals of the Revolution was persecuted.

The Social Contract

This book by the French philosopher Rousseau examines the nature and purposes of government. Its essential theses are based on the belief that the will of the people is never wrong, that the core function of government is to act on that will, and that

government's central responsibility is to take what form is necessary in order to take that action effectively.

The Socialist Revolutionary Party

This group of Russian revolutionaries came into being in the early 1900s. They were, the author writes "...disillusioned with love, united against the crimes of their masters, but alone in their despair, and face to face with their contradictions ... they could resolve only in the double sacrifice of their innocence and their life".

Utopia

"Utopia" is a term originating with Ancient Greek philosophy used to describe an ideal socio-political arrangement, a paradise of happiness and contentment.

Art

In Part 4 of The Rebel, the author defines art as having the same essential purposes and ideals as rebellion - to change and/or improve the lives of individuals within society and culture. Art, he contends, brings the hope for the future inherent in the principles and actions of rebellion into the present. In other words, art suggests that the aspired-to world doesn't exist in the future (a principle of rebellion) - it already exists, it only needs to be reached for and connected with. For further consideration of this philosophic possibility, see "Topics for Discussion - Consider the relationship ..."

Themes

The Origins of Rebellion

Exploration of this theme takes place on every page of the book, defining both its purposes and its function. The author repeats the point in a variety of ways, but essentially contends that rebellion, in spirit and in fact, comes into existence as a result of the natural inclination of every human individual to improve his/her lot in life in the face of a circumstance that s/he experiences as oppressive and limiting.

(At this point, it may be important to note that this theme is, almost without exception, considered and explored from the context of rebellion against society - its rules, institutions, and governing philosophies. The context and/or value of individual rebellion in perhaps smaller, more personal and more intimate circumstances isn't explored - there are no considerations of youthful rebellion against parents, for example, of the rebellion of women against the authority of men or of indigenous races against the control of colonists. Upon consideration, it's certainly possible to see how the author's principles and theories apply under those circumstances, a situation that suggests the general soundness of those theories.)

The author's intention and practice is clearly to explore his central thematic concern in a broad social and historical context, tracking the history and motivations of rebellion from Classical Greece to mid-20th Century Europe, the troubled time and place in which the book was written. He places that concern in juxtaposition with a practice equally central to the development of his theories ... murder, in all its forms.

Murder as Anti-Rebellion

Throughout the book, the author places the essentially life affirming theory, spirit and practice of rebellion in opposition to the essentially life destroying justification, intention and practice of murder - the nurturing of life as opposed to the destruction of life. On most occasions, the murder he seems to be referring to is actual physical murder - the deliberate ending of life in an individual human body. On several occasions, however, he seems to be referring to murder of a different sort - of spirit, of a movement, of intention, of possibility, or of hope. Most of the time, these references to murder (of whatever sort) are themselves juxtaposed with the author's essential condemnation of revolution, which he seems to suggest is rebellion gone wrong, evolved into a desire for power for its own sake (as opposed to a desire for power for the sake of improving individual lives). In the context of these references, murder becomes for him a manifestation of that power, an extension of what he often refers to as the age-old master slave dynamic in which an individual perpetuates power over another.

Exploration of this central dynamic (rebellion vs. murder) is, in fact, a core thread linking ideas with ideas, chapters with chapters, and images with images throughout the book.

It is, in fact, its central thesis as indicated by the introduction - is there ever a circumstance, is there any sort of rebellion, in which killing is justified? Again and again, the author suggests the answer is no, an answer that seems to be connected to the book's third core theme, the value of the individual.

The Value of the Individual

As discussed in "Style - Perspective" and "Important People - The Author," the book's essential philosophical context is that of existentialism, the belief that individual experience is the ultimate determining factor in defining and/or understanding the reasons for existence. This belief is at the core of both the thematic premises defined above - that rebellion is essentially an individual's expression of desire to improve his life, and that murder is essentially wrong because it ends an individual's experience of existence. It must be noted that the term "existential" does not appear in any context or in any form throughout the entire book, but the philosophy does undeniably form the intellectual and experiential background for the author's theoretical analysis.

It's important to note, however, that the author goes to considerable (and repeated) lengths to suggest that there must be limits, self-imposed through reason and moderation, on what the individual desires and/or accomplishes. This is particularly apparent in relation to the discussions of personal power and murder. The author clearly suggests that too much of the former leads to corruptive power over others (engendering the kind of control that the theoretical spirit of rebellion rejects), while the latter is in fact the ultimate manifestation of that power (the capacity, not to mention the will, to end a fellow individual's existence). In other words, the individual must value the lives and experiences of other individuals as much and as thoroughly as he values his own, and must constantly be aware of striking the right balance between self-interest and the interest of the other selves, who are equally as self-interested, with whom s/he shares the world.

Style

Perspective

As discussed in "Important People - The Author," Camus' intellectual and narrative perspective in The Rebel is defined by his philosophical perspective - specifically, by his existentialism, the belief that individual free will was (is?) the primary motivator of human action and development, and therefore of the evolution of humanity as a whole. With that in mind, then, it's quite possible to see existentialist belief at the core of the theories Camus develops here. Throughout the book, he suggests the spirit of and/or the impulse to rebellion ultimately originates, and is defined by, the individual's determination and/or desire to improve the circumstances of his life. By extension, this means societal rebellion is the result of a group of like-minded individuals, all motivated by discomfort within similar external circumstances, joining with one another to advance their internal individual goals. The Rebel can therefore be seen and/or interpreted as a treatise on an aspect of existentialist philosophy - rebellion as a manifestation of the existentialist experience.

(It's essential to note that neither the word "existential" nor the principles of the philosophy are ever directly referred to in the book - they are, as suggested in "Themes" above, inherent in the ideas and theories themselves.)

There is the sense throughout the book that the author's intended audience is his fellow philosophers. There are a number of occasions when he refers to individuals and/or situations without explaining who they are - in other words, with the assumption that the reader can identify the reference him/herself. There is also a certain intellectualism in the book's overall tone (see below), a sense that the author is, in his own mind, speaking to those on a similar experiential, educational, intellectual plane. This tonal quality reinforces the idea that the author is, to all intents and purposes, striving to communicate with what are essentially colleagues. In that context, then, it's possible to see that the intended impact on this audience is to trigger deeper thought and further conversation, rather than awaken new understanding in a perhaps less educated, less enlightened audience.

Tone

It must first be noted that the book was originally written in French and translated, meaning that it may not be possible to get a full and accurate sense of the author's original tonal intent. That said, and as suggested above, the overall tone of the book is one of intellectual discussion, of a reasonably objective injection of new information and/or perspective into an ongoing debate. If the reader is a member of the intended audience described above, this tonal quality could very well be engaging, effective, and above all thought provoking. For readers who aren't well-educated fellow philosophers

and/or intellectuals, the language and ideas, as well as the way they are presented, could very well be more than a little overwhelming.

In that context, it's interesting to note that in the book's final sections (4 and 5 - "Rebellion and Art" and "Thought at the Meridian"), the author (and presumably the translator) allow a slightly different tonal quality to enter the writing. Where the early sections have been, as suggested, quite objective and unemotional, an undercurrent of passion begins to make itself felt in these final sections. It never becomes overt or overwhelming, but there is a certain sense that here the author believes what he's saying and feels strongly about it, whereas before there is the sense that he has considered what he's saying and has thought deeply about it. There is a personal, spiritual, emotional connection to the ideas in these sections not present in the earlier chapters. While the earlier lack of evident feeling isn't automatically a bad thing, there is certainly the sense that those earlier chapters in some sense presented "the problem," while the passion in the final two sections carries with it the suggestion of the author's faith that the ideas there present "the solution." That solution might be summed up in one word - hope.

Structure

Structurally the book is put together in a fairly academic, linear, straightforward fashion - presenting a thesis, presenting the reasons the thesis is what it is, testing the thesis in various circumstances, and finally presenting a resolution to the question posed by the thesis. It must be said that within that structural context, it's not always easy to discern the relationship between each section and its title - there are occasions when it's quite clear, but on other occasions considerable examination of content is required before the reasons for its structural context become clear. In other words, form and function don't always support each other.

On the other hand, and in consideration of the book's tonal qualities described above, there is a certain sense of an almost novelistic narrative structure - that is to say, a movement from set-up through complication into resolution. In fact, it might not be going too far to suggest that there is something almost fairy-tale like at work here. Not that the author starts with "once upon a time," but he certainly does take a central character (the human individual) on a kind of journey through difficult circumstances (the dragons in this case are political, philosophical, and economic) into a happy ending (the hope found at the core of both art and rebellious thinking). In other words, through the broad strokes incorporation of such an archetypal, ultimately optimistic narrative structure, he is on some level bringing the intellectual experience of theoretical analysis into the realm of archetypal human experience and/or desire.

Quotes

"If we believe in nothing, if nothing has any meaning and if we can affirm no values whatsoever, then everything is possible and nothing has any importance ... evil and virtue are mere chance or caprice." p. 5.

"Man is the only creature who refuses to be what he is." p. 11.

"A god who does not reward or punish, a god who turns a deaf ear, is the rebel's only religious conception." p. 29

"Christ came to solve two major problems, evil and death, which are precisely the problems that preoccupy the rebel." p. 32

"...as the movement accelerates, rebellion is less and less willing to accept limitations." p. 39

"... whether he abases or vaunts himself, the rebel wants to be other than he is, even when he is prepared to be recognized for what he really is." p. 82.

"...rebellion is adolescent. Our most effective terrorists, whether they are armed with bombs or with poetry, hardly escape from infancy." p. 82

"One hundred and fifty years of metaphysical rebellion and of nihilism have witnessed the persistent reappearance, under different guises, of the same ravaged countenance: the face of human protest." p. 100.

"Human insurrection ... is only, and can only be, a prolonged protest against death, a violent accusation against the universal death penalty ... a perpetual demand for unity." p. 100.

"Rebellion is, by nature, limited in scope. It is no more than an incoherent pronouncement. Revolution, on the contrary, is ... the injection of ideas into historical experience ... rebellion ... leads from individual experience into the realm of ideas." p. 106

"In order to prove that the people are themselves the embodiment of eternal truth it is necessary to demonstrate that royalty is the embodiment of eternal crime." p. 118

"Philosophers...are rarely read with the head alone, but often with the heart and all its passions, which can accept no kind of reconciliation." p. 135.

"...nothing can discourage the appetite for divinity in the heart of man." p. 146.

"...is a world without laws a free world? That is the question posed by every rebellion." p.158.

"The future is the only transcendental value for men without God." p. 166

"...rebellion cannot lead, without ceasing to be rebellion, to consolation and to the comforts of dogma." p. 170

"Men of action, when they are without faith, have never believed in anything but action." p. 178.

"When the concept of innocence disappears from the mind of the innocent victim himself, the value of power establishes a definitive rule over a world in despair ... the power to kill and degrade saves the servile soul from utter emptiness." p. 184.

"... the negation of everything is in itself a form of servitude ... real freedom is an inner submission to a value which defies history and its successes." p. 186.

"If the mind is only the reflection of events, it cannot anticipate their progress, except by hypothesis." p. 220

"Once the impossibility has been recognized of creating, by ... rebellion alone, the free individual of whom the romantics dreamed, freedom itself has also been incorporated into the movement of history." p. 233

"...the voice of rebellion will...be saying what all the world can already see - that a revolution which, in order to last, is condemned to deny its universal vocation or to renounce itself in order to be universal, is living by false principles." p. 237.

"In every word and in every act, even though it be criminal, lies the promise of a value that we must seek out and bring to light." p. 248

"...rebellion, in [humanity], is the refusal to be treated as an object and to be reduced to simple historical terms. It is the affirmation of a nature common to all men, which eludes the world of power." p. 250.

"Suffering, sometimes, turns away from too painful expressions of happiness." p. 254.

"Real literary creation ... uses reality and only reality with all its warmth and its blood, its passion and its outcries. It simply adds something that transfigures reality." p. 269

"Every act of creation, by its mere existence, denies the world of master and slave." p. 274.

"...mysterious melodies and the torturing images of a vanished beauty will always bring us, in the midst of crime and folly, the echo of that harmonious insurrection which bears witness, throughout the centuries, to the greatness of humanity." p. 276

"In ancient times the blood of murder at least produced a religious horror and in this way sanctified the value of life. The real condemnation of the period we live in is, on the contrary, that it leads us to think that it is not bloodthirsty enough." p. 279-280

"To force solitude on a man who has just come to understand that he is not alone, is that not the definitive crime against [humanity]?"

"There are two sorts of efficacy: that of typhoons and that of sap." p. 292.

"...it is those who know how to rebel, at the appropriate moment, against history who really advance its interests." p. 302

Topics for Discussion

Consider the author's contention in the introduction that contemporary society (that is, society contemporary to him) is filled with institutionalized, justified, rationalized murder. Consider also the book's definition of murder as explored in "Themes - Murder as Anti-Rebellion." What sorts of murder other than the physical are taking place in your society? What is being said and/or done to justify those murders? Are they actually justified? Why or why not?

Debate this quote from Part 2, Section 4. "If God is denied in the name of true justice," the author asks, "how can an idea of justice be defined without an idea of God?"

In every country, in every period of history, there are acts of revolution similar in purpose and manifestation to the French Revolution (see Section 3). Analyze and discuss the principles and manifestations of revolution in your particular historical/societal context. Consider the origins of the impulse to rebel, the point at which rebellion became revolution, and whether rebellion's questions and concerns were answered by the revolution.

In contemporary society, "terrorism" is a politically, emotionally, and culturally loaded term. What are your reactions when you hear it? What are the contemporary implications of the term? Relate the idea of terrorism past and present to the concepts of rebellion and revolution as defined by the author. Is there ever genuine justification for terrorism?

Keeping in mind that both sides of any conflict could, in their own mind, justify the other side as advocating terrorism, what are the differences between the "fastidious assassins" referred to in Part 3 Section 3 and contemporary terrorists? Is there any genuine integrity in a terrorist act? Explain your answer.

Consider the analysis of Part 3, Sections 4 and 5 - specifically, the way the author doesn't apply the lessons and warnings of the Communist Revolution (which he suggests MUST be applied) to other socio-cultural revolutions. What failings of the Communist system have resonances and/or warnings for America? for China? for South Africa? for other post-revolutionary systems?

Consider the relationship between art and rebellion as defined in Section 4 and in "Objects/Places - Art." Do you agree or disagree with the contention that art and rebellion have their sources in the same spiritual/philosophical condition? Why or why not?

In your experience, what are some manifestations of the spirit/intention/purposes of rebellion in art? Consider both historical and contemporary works of art, and also various forms of art (painting, sculpture, fiction, poetry, theatre, etc). What is your experience of how those works are received? Created? Regarded by history?

Consider the quote from p. 292. What does the quote mean? In what sense does it apply to the theories and philosophies explored in this book? In what ways might it apply to the way contemporary society functions?