REVISITING THE CAMUS-SARTRE DEBATE

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The publication of *L'Homme révolté/The Rebel (1951/1956)*–Albert Camus's best-known work pertaining to political thought–triggered an intellectual battle royal that was joined by polemicists of every conceivable ideological hue. A scathing review of the book by Francis Jeanson (1922-2009) in *Les Temps Modernes* provoked Camus (1913-1960) into writing a stiff rejoinder which he directly addressed to the reviewer's mentor, Jean-Paul Sartre (1905-1980), who in turn responded vehemently. The acrimonious debate between Camus and Sartre became something of a *cause célèbre*, ended their friendship, and signaled the growing polarization of French intellectuals in the Cold War era. My paper revisits this debate by focusing on the important philosophical and political questions which it raised. I seek to illuminate the issues at stake by positing Maurice Merleau-Ponty (1908-1961) as another interlocutor in this debate. Merleau-Ponty was a major French philosopher who had been close to Sartre, but grew critical of him and eventually articulated a position akin to the one advanced by Camus.

FIRST BLOOD

Due to the massive presence of the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), communism had emerged as a major axis of ideological and political life in post-World War II France. Moreover, Marxism had made a vigorous appearance on the French intellectual scene. Throughout the late 1940s, Camus had been engaged in polemics with pro-Communist intellectuals like Maurice Merleau-Ponty and Emmanuel d'Astier.[1] It was therefore natural that his critique of Marxism and Soviet communism should become the focus of the critical reception accorded to *The Rebel.* This aspect of the book predictably received lavish praise from the anti-Stalinist Left, liberals and conservatives. The reviews in *Le Monde, Combat* and *Le Figaro* alike described *The Rebel* as a major landmark; while the rightwing extremist *Action*

Française saw it as a welcome return to nationalism and piety (Lottman, 1979: 496).

Equally predictable was the hostile reaction of the communist press, especially since the PCF was then staunchly pro-Soviet and Stalinist. Pierre Hervé, a party critic, wrote disparagingly about Camus' ignorance of harsh political realities such as colonial oppression, and described the anarcho-syndicalists extolled by him, as agents of American capital (Thody, 1961: 147). Such mindless hostility annoyed Camus, but hardly occasioned much surprise or bitterness. What did come as a bitter surprise to him was a virulent attack launched by Sartre's *Les Temps Modernes* in the form of Francis Jeanson's lengthy review, '*Albert Camus ou l'āme révoltée*'[2] (Jeanson, 1952a)–a pun on the title of Camus' book, *L'Homme révolté.*

Jeanson found the popularity of *The Rebel* suspicious. He attributed it to the malleability of Camus' thought and to his vague humanism. He saw in the 'excessively perfect' style of the book a cloak that concealed the poverty of its content. Camus' Mediterranean mind, passionately fond of intellectual transparency, could not come to terms with the human contradictions and suffering of the real world. This explained his tendency–prefigured in the novel *La Peste/The Plague* (1947/1982)–to take a detached view of the human condition and to expound a 'Red Cross morality'. In *The Rebel,* it led him to reject the role of history and economics in the genesis of revolutions, and to reduce the concept of revolution to that of man's divinization. Hence, the book's curious "... silence about the essence of the revolutionary phenomenon – the conditions in which it arises, its real dynamics, and the forms of human behaviour that constitute it" (Jeanson, 1952a: 2078).

Jeanson accused Camus of caricaturing Hegel and Marx. Thus, Camus heedlessly hurled the charge of nihilism at Hegel, labelled Marx as a determinist, and treated Stalinism as a logical outcome of Marxism, without bothering to prove his contention. He did not situate Stalinism historically and instead converted it into a bogey to underscore the relative superiority of capitalism–a ploy, which would utterly fail to convince the proletarian and colonial victims of the latter. Camus' most fundamental weakness was his inability to grasp the dialectic of history. This led him to insist dogmatically on the inevitable miscarriage of all revolutionary projects, and to the advocacy of an inefficacious ethic of revolt. Therefore, *The Rebel* turned out to be "...a pseudo-philosophical pseudo-history of 'revolutions' ...a failed great book..." (Jeanson, 1952a: 2090).

COUNTERBLAST

The review took Camus unawares as his relations with Sartre's group had been on the whole cordial. A recent issue of the journal had, in fact, carried his essay on Nietzsche, which formed a part of *The Rebel.* Camus was particularly hurt by Jeanson's egregious intellectual arrogance and his callous caricaturing of the book's argument and style (Brée, 1979: 247). He also felt badly let down by Sartre and sent an indignant rebuttal to *Les Temps Modernes,* addressing him formally as '*Monsieur le Directeur*' ('Dear Editor'). Together with Sartre's and Jeanson's equally spirited replies, it was published in the August 1952 issue of the journal.

Camus accused Jeanson (throughout referred to as Sartre's collaborator) of making a travesty of *The Rebel,* and of inventing a fanciful biography for its author. Responding to the charge that the book had been warmly received by the Right, which supposedly indicated its dubious character, he wrote: "The veracity of a thought is not determined by whether it belongs to the Right or the Left and even less by what they decide to make of it.... If, finally, the truth appeared to me to be on the Right, I would be there" (Camus, 1952: 317). Moreover, the charge was factually inaccurate, as many Right-wing critics like Claude Mauriac had expressed serious reservations about the book. Camus decried Jeanson's silly assumption that fine style necessarily indicated a conservative sensibility, as also his insinuation that anyone critical of Marxism was *ipso facto* reactionary.

Responding to Jeanson's criticism of *The Plague,* Camus argued that the former confused the modesty displayed by the narrator of the novel with disengagement and failed to explain how a contemplative attitude could give rise to a 'Red Cross morality'. Moreover, such a reading completely missed the obvious fact that the movement from *L'étranger/The Outsider* (1942/1982) to *The Plague* was in the direction of solidarity and participation. Even as Jeanson misread the context of *The Rebel,* he stubbornly refused to discuss its central theses: "the definition of a limit disclosed by the very movement of revolt, the critique of post-Hegelian nihilism and Marxist prophecy, the analysis of the dialectical contradictions regarding the end of history, the critique of the notion of objective culpability" (Camus, 1952: 321). Instead, he found in the book a non-existent thesis and took Camus to task for denying any role to history and economics in the genesis of revolutions, though the latter had explicitly stated that the focus of the book was on the ideological dimension of revolutions.

Camus chided Jeanson for attributing to him a position he did not defend: “all evil is located in history and all good outside of it” (Camus, 1952: 323). In fact, *The Rebel* sought to demonstrate that pure anti-historicism was as harmful as pure historicism: whether one put values above history or absolutely identified them with it, the result was nihilism. Not satisfied with misinterpreting the text, Jeanson went on to provide a fictitious biographical explanation of Camus’ alleged antipathy to history. On this account, the latter had first encountered history only after leaving the Algerian idyll and participating in the Resistance. As the hopes he had pinned on the Resistance failed to materialise, he got disillusioned with history and withdrew into a shell. Camus pointed out that in Algeria, he had been engaged in a struggle against colonial injustice, that he had never treated the Resistance as a happy or easy form of history, and that he had no intention of retiring to a life of artistic leisure.

Camus then went on the offensive: “[I will demonstrate] that the attitude to which your article testifies is philosophically founded on contradiction and nihilism, and is historically ineffectual” (Camus, 1952: 326). His first charge was that Jeanson (and by implication, Sartre) was defending “...Marxism as an implicit dogma without being able to assert it as an explicit political position” (Camus, 1952: 326). All criticism of Marxism was labelled as Right wing, Marx and Hegel were constantly invoked as authorities, and non-Marxist revolutionary traditions were treated with derision. And yet, nothing was said about the unravelling of the Marxist prophecy, the Hegelian sources of the political cynicism afflicting communism, and the misfortunes of authoritarian socialism.

To Camus, this contradiction was symptomatic of a deeper malaise. On the one hand, it revealed the pathetic passions of the repentant bourgeois, and on the other, the futile attempt to reconcile the existentialist vision of human freedom with the Marxist doctrine of historical necessity. Through his passage from extreme freedom to extreme necessity, and his acquiescence in the despotism of the communist state, Jeanson exposed his capitulation to nihilism: “As long as you have not clarified or refuted this contradiction, defined your conception of history, colonised or banished Marxism... you cannot get out of nihilism” (Camus, 1952: 331).

Camus pointed out that while Jeanson had accused him of preaching inefficaciousness, the latter’s position amounted to doing nothing by undertaking everything. Moreover, he was tired of receiving “...lessons in efficacy from critics, who have never placed anything other than their armchair in the direction of history..." (Camus, 1952: 332). Finally, he admonished his interlocutors not "...to jeer at all that makes the rebellion fecund and gives it a future in the name of everything in it that courts submission" (Camus, 1952: 333).

ENDGAME

Sartre's angry rejoinder began by announcing the end of his friendship with Camus: "Our friendship was not easy, but I will miss it. If you end it today, that doubtless means that it had to end... you have so deliberately put me on trial, and in such an ugly tone of voice, that I can no longer remain silent without losing face" (Sartre, 1965: 71). He accused Camus of practising self-righteousness, dissimulation and didacticism: "While doing us the honour of joining this issue of *Les Temps Modernes*, you bring a portable altar with you." (Sartre, 1965: 72). He particularly condemned the latter's 'dirty device' which involved addressing Sartre to criticise Jeanson, who was superciliously treated as a non-entity. Camus was further held guilty of justifying quietism on account of his alleged refusal to make a distinction between the masters and the slaves and his consequent failure to clearly side with the oppressed.

Turning to Camus' arguments, Sartre found fault with his contention that the existentialists heedlessly advocated absolute liberty. Charging his detractor with philosophical incompetence, Sartre pointed out that liberty was not a physical force, hence no brakes could be applied to it: "[liberty] is determined by its undertakings, it finds its limits in the positive but necessarily completed character of the former" (Sartre, 1965: 89). Even in the domain of politics, as the architects of the French revolution clearly understood: "...the limits of a right (that is to say, a liberty) is another right (that is to say, still another liberty) and not some 'human nature'..." (Sartre, 1965: 89). The existentialists had not endowed human beings with limitless liberty in order next to throw them in chains: "...I see around me only liberties already enslaved and which are trying to tear themselves from their congenital slavery. Our liberty today is nothing except *the free choice to fight in order to become free*" (Sartre, 1965: 90).

Sartre then focused on what he saw as Camus' inability to come to terms with the dynamics of History. He attributed this to the latter's captivation by the anti-historical cast of classical French thought and his obsessively anti-theistic preoccupation with metaphysical injustice: "...you didn't reject History through having suffered from it and because you discovered its face with horror. You rejected it, previous to all experience, because our culture rejects it, and because you once placed human values in the struggle of man 'against heaven'" (Sartre, 1965: 94). Even Camus' participation in the historic Resistance could be explained by the fortuitous coincidence that the fight against the Germans epitomised the union of men against inhuman fatalities. His failure to realise that the struggle against nature is at once a cause and effect of man's struggle against man led him to advocate a return to the status-quo after the War: "In short, for a period of several years, you were what could be called the symbol and the proof of class solidarity" (Sartre, 1965: 97).

Sartre dismissed as meaningless Camus' questions as to the meaning and objective of History: "...the problem is not to know its objective, but to give it one...if there are any transcendent values to History, they are manifested through human actions which are, by definition, historical" (Sartre, 1965: 103). Camus had wrongly accused Marx of teleology, for the latter had only spoken of an objective to prehistory, an objective, which would be attained in the womb of History itself, and then surpassed. On account of his failure to understand History, Camus had effectively placed himself outside it. He had thus come to personify an abstract notion of revolt, futilely "...comparing a world without justice to a Justice without content." (Sartre, 1965: 104).

In his response, Jeanson too assailed the Camusian notion of revolt, which he thought was founded on a wrong-headed rejection of the most emancipatory philosophy (Marxism) and the most revolutionary movement (Communism/Stalinism) of the era. While Camus castigated Marxism as being either "an impotent science or a romantic folly", [it actually represented a] "a sublation of both scientific positivism and historical fatalism" (Jeanson, 1952b: 377). The Stalinist movement, despite all its failings, remained "the only one claiming to be revolutionary, and mobilising, especially in our country, the vast majority of the proletariat" (Jeanson, 1952b: 378).

Thus sundered from both critical thought and progressive politics, Camus' supposedly radical exhortations paradoxically promulgated a reactionary creed:

> You christen Revolt with the name of consent... simultaneously, you change indifference into courage, inaction into lucidity, and complicity into innocence.... This common revolt does not lead you to solidarity, it merely designates a juxtaposition of solitudes... you overplay the role of Moderator;

> only you are able to know how far their Revolt must go.... Your pompous lessons of average humanity thus achieve a perfect recuperation of the Absolute through your condescension with regard to the relative (Jeanson, 1952b: 381-382).

Jeanson saw this descent into magniloquent conformism as the pathetic denouement of Camus, "the High Priest of absolute Morality" (Jeanson, 1952b: 382).

Camus did not publicly respond to the torrent of criticism let loose by Sartre and Jeanson. He did write a text in defence of *The Rebel* in late 1952; but it was published posthumously (Camus, 1965: 1702-1716). In his moving obituary on Camus, Sartre described the end of their dialogue as "just another way of living *together* without losing sight of each other in the small, strait world that has fallen to our lot" (Sartre, 1964a: 126).

RESONANCE

Commenting on the Jeanson-Camus-Sartre exchange in his book *L'Opium des intellectuels/The Opium of the Intellectuals* (1955/1957), the liberal French thinker Raymond Aron (1905-1983) wryly noted that only in the Parisian air thick with metaphysical miasma could such a controversy take place; if one were to get rid of Hegelianism, all speculation as to whether the USSR embodied the Revolution would become superfluous (Aron, 1957: 57). He nevertheless supported Camus for his forthright if somewhat unoriginal and philosophically inexact critique of communism and blamed Sartre for politically supporting that ideology without offering a coherent argument in its defence.

It was, however, Maurice Merleau-Ponty who indirectly provided an interesting perspective on the debate in his essay 'Sartre and Ultra-Bolshevism' (Merleau-Ponty, 1995). The essay was written in response to Sartre's strident championship of the Communist Party in '*Les Communistes et la paix*'/'*The Communists and Peace*'–a series of articles published in *Les Temps Modernes* during 1952 (Sartre, 1964b). In this influential series of articles that marked an important stage in the crystallization of Sartre's Marxism, he modified the earlier existentialist notion of individual liberty by locating it in the historical situation. The class asymmetry generated by capitalism was seen as a major hindrance to the realisation of human freedom. Only a working class constituted through and led by the Communist Party could transcend the capitalist society.

'Sartre and Ultra-Bolshevism' contains a little-noticed, passing reference to the debate on *The Rebel*.[3] However, its relevance stems from the fact that Merleau-Ponty–an outstanding philosopher and pioneering theorist of phenomenology in France, who had earlier championed the communist cause and had in fact played an important role in drawing Sartre to Marxism–wrote it to voice his disillusionment with communism and his critique of Sartre's existentialist Marxism, both of which were crucially implicated in the debate. Merleau-Ponty's break with communism was ostensibly triggered by his negative response to what he perceived as the Soviet Union's imperialist role in the Korean War. However, more fundamental theoretical issues lay at its root and it was through an articulation of these in his polemic contra Sartre that he arrived at a position, which Camus, his former detractor, would have found congenial.

Merleau-Ponty opens the essay with a melancholy account of the historical trajectory of communist praxis:

> [The] dialectic in action responds to adversity either by means of terror exercised in the name of a hidden truth or by opportunism.... But it is one thing to experience this and yet another to recognise and formulate it. It was only implicitly that Trotsky resigned himself to this when, in his last years, he said that the course of things would perhaps call into question the Marxist thesis of the proletariat as the ruling class and of socialism as heir to capitalism. The communists are very far from this admission (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 95).

The dialectic thus serves communism merely as an ideology. Sartre himself denounces the dialectic, but nevertheless seeks to salvage the communist project by resorting to "...ultrabolshevism, in which communism no longer justifies itself by truth, the philosophy of history, and the dialectic but by their negation" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 100).

Sartre's defence of communism is founded on an idiosyncratic voluntarism which is completely alien to the spirit of classical Marxism. This is evident in his understanding of key concepts such as history, class, party and revolution. Whereas Marx understood communism as the realisation of history, Sartre sees it as an entirely voluntary effort to go beyond, destroy and recreate history. When he turns to history, it is not to secure an objective understanding, but to look at man and society (as Sartre himself puts it) 'with the eyes of the least-favoured'. Merleau-Ponty argues that such "...extreme personalism makes history into a melodrama smeared with crude colors, where individuals are types" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 147). Merleau-Ponty finds the same arbitrariness in Sartre's conception of the party and the working class which are conjured up as responses of an anchorless will to the trap of events. The party, once established, acquires a supreme status in the Sartrean scheme. It is in and through the party that the workers establish their existence, identity and agency. Its unity must be preserved at any cost. Therefore, there is no space for pluralism or the accountability of the leadership. The party's decisions cannot be questioned, as by definition, they translate the movement of history.

Sartre has little to say about the revolution because he knows that it has no basis in reality. As Merleau-Ponty points out, the revolution "...is no longer the truth of the existing society and of every society; it is a dream which passes itself off as truth.... In a word, it is a myth." (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 135). Yet, Sartre tenaciously clings to the myth, while turning a purblind eye to the history of the revolution and to the blows inflicted by Stalin on the revolutionary project. This tunnel vision may be partly explained by Sartre's violent dislike of the very real defects of capitalism, which makes him accept non-capitalism in whatever form. His fascination with the revolution leads him to treat even literature in a purely instrumental manner. But such a position is contrary to Marxism: "A Marxist does not expect literature to be the consciousness of the revolution, and this is exactly why he will not admit in principle that it be made a means of action...[writers] are men of speech and experience; one should not ask of them to think 'objectively' the historical totality" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 157).

Merleau-Ponty argues that the antinomies of Sartre's politics stem from his flawed ontological premises. This argument draws together the threads of his larger critique, and deserves to be quoted at length:

> In social life [à la Sartre], there are no things done together. They must be invented. One must here create from nothing the milieu of a common enterprise or history, and one must even create the subject of this enterprise: the Party. There is no point in demanding here that each consciousness find itself through common action: it must transform itself and be converted into action. The "I think" was able to recover itself through the common life with the other; but where this common life does not exist, the "I think" must explode, it must first create the common life. Thus, in Sartre, what gives to the gaze of the least-favored its absolute authority and to the Party its historical monopoly, and consequently the duty of absolutely respecting communism, is the fact that the initial discord of the other with me and of me with myself lives again undisguisedly and imperiously in the discord between the bourgeoisie and the proletarians and that it demands a solution for which this time the elements are not

> given. It is Sartre's ontology that determines that history as a common future be sustained by the pure action of a few, which is identical to the obedience of the others. Choice, freedom, and effort become conquest and violence in order to become everyone's affair. (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 163).

In other words, it is the desperately agonistic marxisant Cartesianism of Sartre, which drives him into the embrace of a discredited and dangerous ideology.

Whereas Sartre posits a rigid dichotomy of men and things, Merleau-Ponty emphasises the significance of 'the interworld' where personal relationships are mediated through human symbols. It is only by acknowledging that all actions are symbolic actions and renouncing the myth of 'pure action' that one could meaningfully attempt to change the world. Moreover, one ought to recognise that contemporary symbolic life was out of joint and that the Marxist dialectic was incapable of uniting it: "One must then go back, attack obliquely what could not be changed frontally, and look for an action other than communist action" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 201).

Merleau-Ponty's essay on Sartre forms part of his book *Les Aventures de la dialectique/Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955/1995). The book carries an epilogue, where the author clarifies his own political stance. He makes no bones about his disillusionment with the myth of the revolution: "There is no dialectic without opposition and freedom, and in a revolution opposition and freedom do not last for long. It is no accident that all known revolutions have degenerated... revolutions are true as movements and false as regimes" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 207). This disillusionment is expressed even more categorically in his critique of the Marxist historian Daniel Guérin (1904-1988): "The abortion of the French Revolution, and of all the others, is thus not an accident... the failure of the revolution is revolution itself. Revolution and its failure are one and the same thing." (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 219). We must therefore refuse to reenter the circle of revolution, and instead seek a regime that does not aim at remaking history, but only at changing it.

The way to such a desirable regime lies through a radical critique of Marxism, which in the case of Merleau-Ponty, is also an autocritique:

> To say as we did that Marxism remains true as critique or negation without being true as an action or positively was to place ourselves outside history.... There must be something in the critique itself that germinates the defects in the action. We found this ferment in the Marxist idea of a critique

> historically embodied, of a class which is the suppression of itself, which, in its representatives, results in the conviction of being the universal in action, in the right to assert oneself without restriction, and in unverifiable violence. It is the certitude of judging history in the name of history, of saying nothing that history itself does not say [that] makes the Marxist critique a dogma and prevents it from being self-criticism. (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 231).

These innate contradictions have paradoxically turned the emancipatory Marxist project into a source of new oppressions.

Such a critical attitude towards Marxism and communism, however, does not prevent Merleau-Ponty from emphasising the serious defects of capitalism. Hence, he underscores the necessity of an autonomous non-communist Left. While promoting coexistence between communism and capitalism to safeguard peace, the independent Left would conduct a sustained critique and comparison of the two systems, in the process disclosing "...a generalized economy of which they are particular cases" (Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 225) and opening up the possibility of transcending them. It would engage in a transparent and moderate pursuit of freedom as well as justice via both parliamentary politics and social struggle.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

The foregoing discussion highlights the remarkable convergence between the originally antagonistic trajectories of Merleau-Ponty and Camus, which the latter explicity appreciated. At a conference on 'The Future of the European Civilization', held in Athens in 1955, Camus approvingly cited *Adventures of the Dialectic* as evidence of Merleau-Ponty's liberation from the shackles of the Marxist ideology. He made a pointed reference to the chapter entitled 'Sartre and Ultra-Bolshevism', seeing it as a vindication of his own analogous arguments in *The Rebel.* (Weyembergh, 2009: 541-542).

The Sartre group took serious note of Merleau-Ponty's critique and Simone de Beauvoir published a stinging rebuttal in *Les Temps Modernes* (Beauvoir, 1955). Sartre's own defence of his brand of Marxism appeared in the form of his magnum opus, *Critique de la raison dialectique/ Critique of Dialectical Reason* (1960/1991). Interestingly, the latter testifies to the continued importance of an agonistic ontology within the Sartrean worldview (Kulkarni, 2011: 139-141).

At least in the world of Anglophone scholarship, the eventual concordance between Camus and Merleau-Ponty does not seem to have received the attention it deserves. Thus, even a recent, comprehensive book like *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*, which takes into account Merleau-Ponty's writings of the 1940s, contains only a passing, perfunctory reference to his later work discussed above (Sprintzen and van den Hoven, 2004). That Camus' assessment of Marxism and of its Sartrean inflection should find an echo in Merleau-Ponty's critique is particularly significant, for the latter could hardly be charged with philosophical incompetence or political woolliness–accusations frequently hurled at Camus by his detractors. The two thinkers' common emphasis on the need for an independent Left is also noteworthy. They thus steered clear of the Cold War ideological polarisation[4] and opened up new horizons of thought.

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NOTES

1. In post-World War II France, the euphoria of Liberation had evaporated and the dream of ushering in a peaceful revolution had turned sour. The contentious and divisive politics of the Third Republic had returned with a vengeance to haunt the new regime. In January 1946, General de Gaulle, the head of the government, resigned in exasperation and in May 1947,

the Communist ministers were dismissed for their refusal to support the government's wages policy. Henceforth, the Gaullist Right and the Communists were bent on wrecking the Fourth Republic. To these domestic divisions were added others resulting from the onset of the Cold War in the international arena and the intensification of nationalist struggles in the colonies of France. Together, they inevitably caused realignments among the politically active intellectuals who formed opposing groups. Camus preferred to plough his lonely furrow, and was often caught in the cross-fire.

Meanwhile, the Sartre group was moving closer to the Communists. In 1946, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a prominent member of this group, published a series of articles in *Les Temps Modernes* defending the Moscow Trials and the use of revolutionary violence by the Communist Party on the ground that the working class was the only bearer of an emancipatory future and the Party was its sole spokesman. Merleau-Ponty's articles were intended as a refutation of Arthur Koestler's critique of the Soviet regime in his novel *Darkness at Noon* (1940). Camus was then in touch with Koestler, and gave credence to the latter's firsthand knowledge of Stalinist excesses. An outspoken opponent of Spanish fascism, Camus became increasingly critical of Soviet communism. These regimes' scant regard for human life led him to stress its inviolable sanctity. In November 1946, he wrote a series of articles under the title *Ni victimes ni bourreaux* expressing his opposition to totalitarian ideologies which bred terror and oppression.

2. The title of the review obliquely alludes to the Hegelian critique of the 'beautiful soul' [*belle âme*]. Hegel deploys this notion to describe a person who is excessively conscientious and so refuses to dirty his hands by acting in a decisive manner; instead, he self-righteously denounces the actions of others on supposedly moral grounds. To Hegel, all action leads to the loss of innocence; but it is reprehensible to refrain from action and to attribute base motives to others (Inwood, 1992: 190).
3. The reference is to Jeanson's position regarding the Stalinist movement:

> [It] does not appear to us to be authentically revolutionary. Yet it is the only one which claims to be revolutionary.... We are therefore at one and the same time against it, since we are critical of its methods, and for it, since we do not know whether the authentic revolution is not a chimera...(quoted in Merleau-Ponty, 1995: 166).

Merleau-Ponty, who was a cofounder and editor of *Les Temps Modernes*, clarifies that despite the "we", he never agreed with this text. He then denounces it in no uncertain terms: "These lines give the entire essence of 'progressivism', its dreamy sweetness, its incurable bullheadedness, and its padded violence" (Ibid.).

4. It was Camus who coined the seminal phrase 'end of ideologies' to envisage a situation where people would reject murderous political projects geared to the realisation of absolute utopias. In 'Neither Victims nor Executioners' (1946), he wrote:

> There is indeed hope in this contradiction, for it forces, or will force, the Socialists to make a choice. They will admit that the ends justify the means, which is to say that murder can be legitimized; or they will reject Marxism as an absolute philosophy, confining themselves to its critical aspect, which is often still valuable. If they choose the first, they will end their moral crisis, and their position will be unambiguous. If they choose the second, they will show that our time marks *the end of ideologies*, that is, absolute utopias which in reality destroy themselves through their enormous costs. Then it will be necessary to choose a new kind of utopia – one that is more modest and less destructive (Camus, 1991: 125; emphasis added)

The subsequent trajectory of the 'end of ideology' thesis is, however, another story.

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