

Does Justice Require Victims? Reflections on Albert Camus's Thought

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INTRODUCTION

Democracy – real democracy – remains to be constructed.
And we will do so in an orderly society – a truly orderly society.¹

The trials of Nazi collaborators, which took place after the liberation of Paris from the grips of occupants, proved it necessary to redefine the definitions of primary values such as freedom, justice and equality. As Maurice Merleau-Ponty noticed, people who collaborated with the Nazi camp were proclaimed “traitors” not by means of criteria which could be set objectively, but due to the fact that the resistance movement had won.² In an alternative course of events, they would have been introduced as heroes, whose heroic attitude would have been inscribed on the pages of history forever. This shows only the evanescence of ideals, which can be easily manipulated when considered in the context of one prevailing concept. Czesław Miłosz in *The Captive Mind* captured this process most accurately. The writer managed to pinpoint the strength with which one dominant thought

¹ A. Camus, the editorial of September 2nd, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947*, trans. A Goldhammer, ed. J. Levi-Valensi, Princeton and Oxford, Princeton University Press, 2006, p. 27.

² See: M. Merleau-Ponty, *Humanizm i terror*, trans. J. Migasiński [in:] *Marksizm XX wieku: antologia tekstów*, cz. 1–3, ed. J. Dobieszewski, M.J. Siemek, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo Uniwersytetu Warszawskiego, 1990.

infiltrated the considerations of many minds of the post-war intellectual world. He also pointed out the consequences that occurred in the wake of the fleeting blindness which affected people's view of reality and impaired their ability to look critically at events.³ Even among the most sapient minds, the lack of unambiguous definitions of fundamental categories entails the danger of becoming lost when faced with the need for decision-making, and uttering distinct and unpopular judgments. However, events which took place in post-occupation France showed that the discourse regarding intuitively comprehended values gains significance when standing on the verge of inevitable fatalism.

The liberation became an impulse to discuss the fate of collaborators who, during the Second World War, did not cooperate with enemies actively, but encouraged such cooperation or criticized the State of Vichy for its passive participation in creating state politics.⁴ Such collaborators often provided arguments for the ultimate and official alliance with the aggressor. Among these collaborators were those who were known and acknowledged in the public eye and had a major impact on opinions within French society. Making use of their position, they tried to persuade as many people as possible to agree with their beliefs and, as a result, to weaken the influence of the resistance movement on the society. Such actions, however, in reference to the French Penal Code, which was officially valid at that time, could not be acknowledged as treason and qualified as a crime. The 75th article which regulated that issue defined particular premises of criminal liability, i.e. bearing arms against France, maintaining relations with a foreign power, committing to undertake hostilities against France, providing means to facilitate the entry of foreign forces into French territory, entering the service of a foreign power, and maintaining relations with a foreign power in order to encourage actions of this power against France.⁵ The lack of a premise which would allow people who were guilty of supporting the policy of occupants to be criminally responsible led to an extension in the interpretation of the phrase "maintaining relations with a foreign power." Strong voices were heard arguing that pro-Nazi agitation was also eligible to be qualified as a crime due to the contest of the article mentioned

³ See: Cz. Miłosz, *Zniewolony umysł*, Kraków, KAW, 1990.

⁴ See: T. Judt, *Historia niedokończona. Francuscy intelektualiści 1944–1956*, trans. P. Marczewski, Warszawa, Krytyka Polityczna, 2012.

⁵ The full text of the article is available at: <http://www.cdvfe-divisioncharlemagne.com/upload/Article%2075.pdf> [access: 22.09.2015].

before, even though an explicit base did not exist. Such an understanding of the article would have enabled as many supporters of the Third Reich as possible to be held criminally responsible, without the need for adjusting the law⁶ (which *nota bene* would not have been possible without breaching one of the most important elements of the rule of law: that law must not be applied retroactively, i.e. it is wrong to judge actions which happened before the law was enacted⁷).

The problem was the justification of many trials which relied on an ambiguous and equivocal legal basis. It raised doubts regarding the existence of the ideals of the rule of law, which the French Republic after the war was supposed to respect. The purge trials were conducted promptly, often without allowing witnesses to testify or evidence to be presented. The accused were also often sentenced to death.⁸ The purges brought about a division among prominent French intellectuals into two camps: those who raised critical questions about the trials and those who provided arguments for the endorsement of the trials. The head of the first group was Francois Mauriac, who tried to remind *Le Figaro's* readers of the issue of mercy. The second group was led by Albert Camus, who referred in the editorials of *Combat*⁹ to the issue of justice as the ground for the justification of the controversial trials.¹⁰

In this essay, only the *Combat* editorials which relate to the problem of justice will be taken into account. *Combat* was a newspaper established by the United Movements of Resistance, and Camus was the editor-in-chief in the period of 1944–1947.¹¹ We will attempt to unveil how Camus harnessed the concept of justice in order to justify the purge trials, and how the ambiguity of justice resulted in difficulties when considered in relation to the problem of the purges. The reasoning will lead us to the significant concept

⁶ See: T. Judt, *Powojnie. Historia Europy od roku 1945*, trans. R. Bartold, Poznań, Rebis, 2013, p. 59–65.

⁷ See: L.L. Fuller, *The Morality of Law: Revised Edition*, New Haven–London, Yale University Press, 1964, p. 51–63.

⁸ See: T. Judt, *Historia niedokończona...*, p. 67.

⁹ It is worth noting that even if Camus wasn't the direct author of some of the editorials, he had a major impact on creating them – the editorials were at first profoundly discussed by the whole editorial board of *Combat* (which *nota bene* were composed only of Camus, Henri Frederic, Albert Olliver and Pascal Pia) and published exclusively if each member accepted them (see: O. Todd, *Albert Camus. Biografia*, trans. J. Kortas, Warszawa, Wydawnictwo W.A.B., 2009, p. 375).

¹⁰ See: R. Drai, *Camus i Mauriac. Spór o miłosierdzie*, trans. S. Kowalski, „Gazeta Wyborcza”, 9th August 2014.

¹¹ See: J. Levi-Valensi, *Introduction [in:] Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. xxxi.

of revolution provided by Camus. Subsequently, *The Just Assassins* will be taken into consideration to provide us with deep insight into the relationship between justice and terror. Finally, the set of editorials titled *Neither Victims nor Executioners* will be discussed in regard to Camus's answers to the issues raised before. Our thesis is as follows: Camus sees the way out of the contradiction resulting from the concept of justice as provided in the *Combat* editorials in the rejection of the ideological thinking leading to absolutization of justice.

JUSTICE AND REVOLUTION

As Camus wrote in September 1944: "The difficult and prodigious task we face is to establish justice in the most unjust of worlds."¹² This is just one of many claims from the beginning of the post-occupation purge. He referred to the idea of justice as the most desired value needed for the foundation of the restoration process in France. In the same editorial, Camus explained how justice can be understood: "Justice for all means that the personality of the individual must be subordinated to the collective good."¹³ Later on, he added: "Whenever we deal with a social issue, we need to think about the individual, and whenever the individual claims our attention, we need to consider the good of all."¹⁴ Camus believed that social order required equilibrium between the government and the people it governed. And this harmony could be achieved on the basis of justice. As he put it directly: "There is no order without justice, and the ideal order lies in the happiness of people."¹⁵

For Camus, the common good demanded vengeance for the victims of the occupation. Their death was brought about by people, many of whom remained unpunished after the liberation. However, such a lack of compensation leads directly to the division of the society into those whose relatives have not been avenged and those whose actions have led to the death of others. In Camus's eyes, such a situation immediately causes the rise of hatred. In the long term it would also lead to the destabilization of the whole

¹² *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 257.

¹³ A. Camus, the editorial of September 8th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 31.

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 32.

¹⁵ A. Camus, the editorial of October 12th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 69.

nation. Therefore, in order to avoid internal disintegration, the society must face the problem of the embodiment of justice in the post-liberation system. In this context, Camus says:

We know full well that on the day the first death sentence is carried out in Paris, we will feel repugnance. At that moment we will need to remember the countless other death sentences imposed on men who were pure and will have to recall so many cherished faces now buried in the ground and so many hands we once loved to shake.¹⁶

Moreover, Camus had a negative opinion on the issue of divine justice. To put it simply, he claimed that there was no faith in divine justice anymore. Consequently, people have to turn themselves to human justice “with its terrible imperfections.”¹⁷ One of the negative sides of human justice is the necessity of making choices and accepting the consequences of one's decisions. In the age of war, a human being becomes an arbiter and faces all the difficulties entailed by the new role. Otherwise, depending only on divine justice, society would not be able to rid itself of postwar dilemmas. As Camus says: “One doesn't have to be a Christian to believe that sacrifices for justice are necessary.”¹⁸ He adds in the same editorial:

We invite Mr. Mauriac to consider the dilemma of those to whom the notion of divine judgment is foreign yet who retain a taste for man and hope for its grandeur. They must either hold their peace forever or become converts to human justice. This cannot take place without distress. But after four years of collective suffering in the wake of twenty-five years of mediocrity, doubt is no longer possible. And we have chosen to embrace human justice with its terrible imperfections.¹⁹

The principle of justice is therefore coupled with the problem of responsibility, which can be considered at two levels. The first one is related to the responsibility of the judges, the second one refers to the criminals who committed

¹⁶ A. Camus, the editorial of October 21th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 82.

¹⁷ A. Camus, the editorial of October 25th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 90.

¹⁸ A. Camus, the editorial of October 25th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 89.

¹⁹ *Ibidem*.

crimes during the war. When it comes to the latter, the responsibility of wrongdoers, Camus relates it to the concept of “proportional responsibility.” Responsibility did not concern only evident acts from the people criminally liable under the 75th article of the French Penal Code that was binding after the Second World War. Those who contributed indirectly to the criminal acts, such as industrialists and opinion-makers, were also considered responsible. That is why, according to Camus, an amendment of the Penal Code was needed. The crimes of the prominent politicians of the Vichy regime could be judged on the basis of the 75th article which determined that people who collaborated with the enemy should be judged. However, the post-liberation dilemma applied mostly to people who could not be judged on the grounds of this article, for example journalists or writers, whose fault had been to persuade others to collaborate with the Nazi occupants. For this reason, Camus postulated introducing a new type of crime: “consorting with the enemy,”²⁰ that would have had retroactive power. However, such a type of crime would have made the law unpredictable and vulnerable to change by the ruling regime. Camus seemed to recognize this problem when stating:

The notion of “consorting with the enemy” is useful. Or, rather, it must be put to use. Furthermore, if it is indeed the case that the application of this higher moral law involves the assertion of principles of punishment incompatible with the spirit of democracy, a corrective is nevertheless available.²¹

We come therefore to the first type of responsibility – responsibility of the judges of the actions from the occupation period. To consider this issue, we will appeal to the concept of revolution, as delivered by Camus. According to him – from the period of the *Combat* editorials – revolution is the use of force against the life of individuals in order to embody justice in reality. Camus wrote:

Nor can we forget that in both cases the lives of Frenchmen are at stake: the best of us will have to die in the war, and we will have to destroy the worst of us in the revolution.²²

²⁰ A. Camus, the editorial of September 28th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 50.

²¹ A. Camus, the editorial of October 18th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 77.

²² A. Camus, the editorial of October 21th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 82.

And also:

Regardless of our desires and reactions, there can be no doubt that France has a revolution to make as well as a war. That is indeed the drama it faces.²³

Revolution therefore is a tool held in the hands of the guards of the new order. It is the necessary step towards the restoration of social harmony. As was shown before, in Camus's eyes, justice demands vengeance for the pointless deaths of many victims. And revolution is the tool to cope with this issue. For Camus, revolution is inevitable for the same reason as in the case of war. Revolution is just the necessary corollary of the actions of people from the period of occupation, which enables sins to be judged. It helps with the restoration of social order, trust and the authority of the new power. Weaknesses will not pass unnoticed. Responsibility should be taken even after considering the fact that the choices were made in the extreme circumstance of occupation. Revolution is also the tool to restore the spirit of the nation, which will not break again under the influence of external forces. And, ultimately, revolution makes it possible to face hesitations that inevitably arise after each conflict, stifling the society.

We cannot escape from this drama by evading the question it raises. We can escape only by enduring it to the bitter end and drawing from it whatever truth it contains.²⁴

Revolution therefore strengthens bonds between members of the society. It enables a sense of security to be restored and harm to be redressed, building grounds for a liberated society. It is the tool embodying the pure concept of justice in the real world.

One of the problems with the concept of revolution is that revolution does not have to be legal. Camus says this explicitly. By postulating the *post factum* amendment of the law, he falls into a trap, which, when recognized, leads to his later reconsiderations. The winners of the war are allowed to build the post-conflict order on their own and no one is strong enough to stand up against them. And they can do it on behalf of justice. They are allowed to judge anyone anytime they find necessary, even if they have no grounds in the law

²³ A. Camus, the editorial of October 20th, 1944 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 81.

²⁴ *Ibidem*.

to do this. Such actions are allowed therefore to be arbitrary and judges are permitted to sentence anyone to death or to prison, if they find it beneficial for social order. Actions that are performed on behalf of justice are justified. The post-Hobbesian question remains: What is the difference between a state in which the winners are in control of other people's lives and a state of war?

The other problem with the concept of revolution in the shape that Camus provides is that the post-war time is defined by disorder. There are no new institutions created yet. It is hard to find judges whose opinions would not have been distorted by an occupation that caused emotional biases and who would consequently be able to defend themselves against the pressure imposed on them by the divided society. Society wants a quick punishment and that is the perfect field for abuse. People who were victims during the war, now turn into the judges of those who hurt them or their relatives. War provides two categories of people: occupants and victims. But when victims win the war, they get the power to judge the occupants. And if their means are unrestricted, then this can cause an overuse of power. Therefore, the revolution that was supposed to be carried out on behalf of justice can become an alibi for new tyrants.

Thus, starting with justice, Camus comes to the idea against which he fights shortly afterwards: that the pure concept of justice requires the division of the world into two categories and can provide justification for violence. This is what happened in France after the occupation: trials from the purge period were conducted promptly and often without allowing evidence or witnesses.²⁵ Their legal base was the amendment to the Penal Code implemented after the liberation, which was retroactively binding. The guilt of the collaborators was therefore often prejudged. This made the trials far from just, if justice is understood in terms of the rule of law. The concept of revolution that Camus provided, which was supposed to be applied in the context of the purges, leads to the idea of the division of society into two opposite camps and to the justification of the use of violence. Very promptly, however, Camus recognizes the failure of the purges:

We beg the reader's indulgence if we begin today with a basic fact: there can no longer be any doubt that the postwar purge has not only failed in France but is now completely discredited. The word "purge" itself was already rather distressing. [...] It seems that the straight path of justice is not easy to find amid

²⁵ See: T. Judt, *Powojnie...*, p. 59–65.

the cries of hatred coming from one side and special pleading of guilty consciences coming from the other. In any case, the failure is complete.²⁶

Camus had to deal with this issue of the purge trials on three different levels: (1) the issue of people who committed war crimes; (2) the issue of people who committed treason, but were acting according to the law as the authorities of the Vichy State; and (3) the issue of people who were urging others to leave the values of pre-war France and to turn towards Nazi occupants. And he seems to be aware of the complexity of this issue. The government officials of the Vichy regime tried to present themselves as heroes who were protecting the homeland. Their actions were not supposed to be considered as collaboration with the enemy, but as an appeal to the instinct of self-preservation.²⁷ The attempt of reconciling two different attitudes was not successful either for the left or for the right side. In this context, it is worth mentioning the case of Robert Brasillach – a critic of the government of Vichy, who was a well-known and respected writer in France at that time and an editor-in-chief of the pro-fascist magazine *Je suis partout*. On the pages of the magazine, he preached the need to transform cooperation with the Nazis into “a level of social friendship.”²⁸ He criticized the government for the lack of involvement in rebuilding the grandeur of France in accordance with the Nazi ideology and for throwing France into the arms of Bolshevism.²⁹ The trials of such people resonated strongly in intellectuals' minds after the war and polarized society. A good illustration of this division was the petition in favor of mercy for Brasillach, who was sentenced to death before evidence was provided during the trial. More importantly for us, Camus eventually signed the petition. However, in a letter to Marcel Ayme, he explained that his reasons for doing so were related to his moral turn against the concept of the capital punishment.³⁰

Camus's primary faith in justice, as expressed in early *Combat* editorials, was seriously reconsidered, leading the author to divide society into two categories: people who were allowed to make executions and those who could

²⁶ A. Camus, the editorial of August 30th, 1945 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 249–250.

²⁷ See: P. Klamann, *Między realizmem a oportunistem. Rzecz o Francji Vichy*, „Folia Historica Cracoviensia” 2012, no. XVIII, p. 310. See: R.O. Praxton, *Francja Vichy. Stara gwardia i nowy ład 1940–1944*, trans. J. Lang, Wrocław, Bukowy Las, 2011.

²⁸ J. Bartyzel, *Robert Brasillach*, <http://www.legitymizm.org/ebp-robert-brasilach> [access: 11.01.2015].

²⁹ See: *ibidem*.

³⁰ See: T. Judt, *Brzeźnię odpowiedzialności. Blum, Camus, Aron i francuski wiek dwudziesty*, trans. M. Filipczuk, Warszawa, Krytyka Polityczna, 2013, p. 146.

be judged out of the law system. The reason for this was war, which brutally destroyed the order of the nation. And defending the trials led Camus to the justification of violence. Having realized the consequences and the coherence between his former propositions and the effects of the purge, however, he confessed his aberration very quickly and put all his effort into pointing out the mistakes he had made in his previous reasoning.

JUSTICE AND TERROR

- With whom to talk about murder if not with a murderer?
- What murder? I remind myself only of an act of justice.³¹

The concept of the justification of violence occurs throughout Camus's later work. Mark Orme, the author of a detailed analysis of Camus's concept of justice, asserts even that the experience of the purge trials was a turning point in the writer's life, without which there would be no Camus that we know now.³² The thesis can be disputed – we need to remember that Camus took his stand in the dispute on the purge trials after having written *Caligula*, *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*, in all of which he tried to develop his own attitude to the crucial problem of the death of a single man. It was however in 1949, in the play titled *The Just Assassins*, where the writer dealt directly with the issue of the mechanism at the foundation of the legitimization of murder. For the purpose of this essay, the play is especially interesting for two reasons: firstly, there is much dispute concerning the meaning of the play, and secondly, it depicts many ways in which violence could be justified, but ultimately rejects all of them.

In *The Just Assassins*, Camus portrays a group of young people who decide to murder the Grand Duke for a higher purpose, i.e. in order to liberate the whole of society from the power of tyranny.³³ In the name of freedom they decide to kill their ruler, and this action is subsequently supposed to bring prosperity to the next generations. However, many more justifications for their

³¹ “– Z kim mówić o zbrodni, jeśli nie ze zbrodniarzem? – Jakiej zbrodni? Przypominam sobie tylko akt sprawiedliwości.” A. Camus, *Sprawiedliwi*, trans. J. Błoński [in:] A. Camus, *Dramaty*, trans. W. Natanson, M. Leśniewska, W. Błońska, J. Błoński, Kraków, Wydawnictwo Literackie, 1987, p. 274. All the quotes which appear in the essay were translated by the author.

³² See: M. Orme, *The Development of Albert Camus' Concern for Social and Political Justice*, Madison and Teaneck, Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2007, p. 127–152.

³³ A. Camus, *Sprawiedliwi...*, p. 229.

deed emerge from the pages of *The Just Assassins*. For Kaliyev, taking the life of the despotic ruler seems to be the only possible way that would allow a world where “no one would ever kill”³⁴ to arise. His romantic soul longs for beauty and joy, which can be embodied exclusively in a society deprived of violence. He understands revolution, therefore, in the way that it is an action carried out due to the faith in the opportunity to realize the vision of a just world in which no unjustified death would occur.³⁵

I am preparing the revolution, because I love life. (...) The revolution for life in order to give it a chance. (...) Besides, we are killing to build the world.³⁶

Annenkov – Kaliyev’s companion – decides to take part in the assassination due to his belief in the possibility of liberating society from the power of the tyrant. He is a sensitive man of honor, who regards the temporary violence solely as a means to prevent any future terror.³⁷ Dora – Kaliyev’s beloved – perceives murder as a terrifying necessity imposed by the demand for justice. She believes that the death penalty which will be later imposed on the perpetrator provides absolution for the sin. Death suffered on behalf of fulfilling one’s beliefs means that the murderers who died for their ideas will arise as heroes:

To perform the attack and then to go to the gallows – it’s giving your life twice. We will pay more than we owe.³⁸

Dora seems to recognize the evil to which she and her colleagues contribute, but her feeling appears to be blurred by the conviction that one day, evil itself will disappear. In the world surrounding the revolutionaries there is no place for such emotions as mercy or love – justice has engulfed them all, demanding full dedication and commitment.³⁹

Vojnov – another of Kaliyev’s companions – perceives the justification for murdering the Grand Duke in taking the decision to renounce lies. Justice

³⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 238.

³⁵ *Ibidem*.

³⁶ “Dlatego przygotowuję rewolucję, że kocham życie. (...) Rewolucja dla życia, aby dać życiu szansę. (...) A zresztą zabijamy, żeby budować świat.” *Ibidem*, p. 236–238.

³⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 229.

³⁸ “Ale dokonać zamachu, a później iść na szubienicę, to oddać życie dwa razy. Zapłacimy więcej niż jesteśmy winni.” *Ibidem*, p. 239.

³⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 259.

needs words – silence is exclusively another way of bearing the responsibility for injustice.⁴⁰ The sole means which can lead to liberation from this dilemma is an open fight, justified by one's beliefs. That is the only way to live in coherence with one's conscience, dictating the moral obligation of resisting evil.⁴¹ Such a position is essentially different from the attitude of Stepan, for whom the highest justification of murder is the idea of revolution itself.⁴² For him, the sacrifice of life is pointless, because one loses the chance to devote oneself to the revolution in the future.⁴³ Absolute justice requires obedience rather than exalted attitudes (which may lead solely to a stupor in the face of the need for real action⁴⁴):

I don't love life but justice, which is above life. (...) I came here to kill the man, not to love him or respect his distinctiveness.⁴⁵

The fight with tyranny requires toughness – only then can it be accomplished with success.⁴⁶ Thereby, according to Stepan, everything which serves the revolution is allowed. Stepan feels responsible not just for the freedom of society in general but also for the freedom of each man separately, which positions him beyond all moral principles.⁴⁷ In a world where God is dead, someone has to take God's duties on their shoulders. Although not a ruler-tyrant, justice has to be given to someone who feels strong enough for this task:

For us who don't believe in God, there's no choice: either full justice or despair.⁴⁸

However, in the face of human feelings and hesitations, the revolutionaries prove to be powerless. The perseverance of their ideals is examined when they reach the inevitable adversities. Kaliayev requires an explicit order to be given in order to gain the strength to overcome them and to regain moral composure, getting rid of the dilemma concerning the responsibility for his actions.

⁴⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 232.

⁴¹ *Ibidem*.

⁴² *Ibidem*, p. 251.

⁴³ *Ibidem*, p. 236.

⁴⁴ *Ibidem*.

⁴⁵ "Ja nie Kocham życia, ale sprawiedliwość, która jest ponad życiem. [...] Przyszedłem tu, aby zabić człowieka, nie po to, by go kochać czy uszanować jego odrębność." *Ibidem*.

⁴⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 248.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 250.

⁴⁸ "Dla nas, niewierzących w Boga, nie ma wyboru: albo pełna sprawiedliwość albo rozpacz." *Ibidem*, p. 263.

Annenkov recalls the principles of honor, which would aid him as a leader drawing an unambiguous line between morally right and wrong actions. Dora demands love in order to sacrifice her life to the revolution ultimately. The impulse forcing her to such devotion is the death of beloved Kaliayev, which results in the idea of perfect victory justifying the committed murder and prompting her to volunteer for another terrorist act.

According to some critics, Camus in *The Just Assassins* allows murder to be justified under certain conditions which all need to be fulfilled. John Foley, in his recent book addressing the issue, lists them all: (1) the victim is a tyrant; (2) the act must be discriminate; (3) the assassination is committed by a rebel in close proximity to his victim and the assassin must accept full responsibility for his individual action; (4) there is no less violent alternative to assassination.⁴⁹ It remains unnoticed, however, that the justification of murder can be considered at two different levels: the first one is the murder of a tyrant and the second one – the murder of a human. Despite the fact that killing the tyrant seems to become legitimate under some conditions, it automatically entails taking the life of a single man and, when perceiving the issue in compliance with Camus, justification for such an aspect of liberation from tyranny can never be provided. The death of an unjust ruler causes the death of a husband, a father and a friend as well.⁵⁰ “Murderers don’t know about that. If they knew, how could they inflict death?”⁵¹ the Grand Duchess asks in her final dialogue with Kaliayev. The bomb thrown at tyranny also implies the death of a single human, which seems to be expressed by Camus in the play. And when we forget about this, we can describe ourselves as already lost and subordinated solely to our theoretical considerations.

Compelling is the scene when Kaliayev meets Foka – a prisoner who hangs convicts based on orders that have been issued to him. However, when Kaliayev calls him explicitly “an executioner,”⁵² Foka’s answer appears quickly: “But aren’t you one as well?”⁵³ The same concept is manifested in the conversation with Skouratov – a member of the secret police who visits Kaliayev in prison. “The bomb wasn’t thrown by me at the man, but at tyranny,”⁵⁴ Kaliayev insists. “You shouldn’t pretend that you forgot about the head of the Grand Duke. But if you had taken it into account, your idea wouldn’t

⁴⁹ See: J. Foley, *From the Absurd to Revolt*, Stocksfield, Acumen, 2008, p. 93–96.

⁵⁰ See: A. Camus, *Sprawiedliwi...*, p. 274.

⁵¹ *Ibidem*.

⁵² “To ty jesteś katem?” *Ibidem*, p. 269.

⁵³ “A ty, barin, to nie?” *Ibidem*

⁵⁴ “Bombę rzuciłem nie na człowieka, ale na tyranie.” *Ibidem*, p. 271.

have been useful. For instance, what you have done would bring disgust not pride,”⁵⁵ Skouratov notes.

Camus asserts that any idea (including the idea of justice) can justify the murder of a man. The Grand Duchess recalls the Grand Duke sleeping in his armchair two hours before the assassination. “Many things die with one man,”⁵⁶ she notes. He wasn’t only a tyrant, but also a man, whom his relatives needed, who was giving support and who had his own habits. The revolutionaries backed away from the murder of children, drawing here a clear line for their actions. But one question was raised by Camus’s character: “If the idea cannot kill a child, is it worth killing the Grand Duke?”⁵⁷ There is no difference between these two types of homicide. No matter if one victim is a child and the other not – both are humans. A murder committed on a despotic ruler for the sake of the liberation of society remains always a violent act performed against someone. Therefore, it cannot be justified.

It has to be underlined that Kaliayev did not abandon his task easily, still being ready to sacrifice children in order to implement the pure idea into reality:

Here’s what I propose. If you decide the children have to be killed, I’ll wait outside and throw the bomb alone. I know I won’t miss. Just make the decision, I’ll be obedient to the Organization.⁵⁸

So was Stepan, who gave the most extreme arguments and had the most revolutionary attitude. Dora, in turn, took into account the authority and influence of the Organization which could be lost.⁵⁹ For Annenkov, the death of children was simply unnecessary.⁶⁰ One issue, however, remained forgotten by the revolutionaries: the murder of children would contradict the rule of justice, on behalf of which they committed their actions. If one draws a strict border between permissible and impermissible murder and distinguishes

⁵⁵ “(...) nie powinien pan udawać. Udawać, że zapomniał pan o głowie wielkiego księcia. Gdyby wziął ją pan pod uwagę, na nic by się panu nie przydała idea. Tak na przykład to, co pan zrobił, budziłoby w panu nie dumę, ale wstyd.” *Ibidem*, p. 272.

⁵⁶ “Wiele rzeczy umiera wraz z jednym człowiekiem.” *Ibidem*, p. 274.

⁵⁷ “Nasuwa się więc pytanie: jeśli idea nie potrafi zabić dziecka, czy zasługuje na to, a by zabić dla niej wielkiego księcia?” *Ibidem*, p. 273.

⁵⁸ “Oto, co proponuję. Jeśli postanowicie, że te dzieci mają zginąć, zaczekam przy wyjściu i rzucę bombę sam. Wiem, że nie chybię. Postanówcie tylko, będę posłuszny Organizacji.” *Ibidem*, p. 246.

⁵⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 248.

⁶⁰ *Ibidem*, p. 251.

one from the other, the existence of the justification of “permissible” violence must be admitted.

Such a conclusion offers a substantial insight into Camus's thought: he finds himself far from the condemnation of murder in general, but his ambition is to disclose the contradiction contained in the considerations and actions of the revolutionaries. The author does not aim to create a tone of moral correctness, but to draw the reader's attention to the obvious fact: placing any theoretical idea at the beginning of one's deliberations can lead to contradictory conclusions. The revolutionaries could have been right about the permissibility of the homicide of the Grand Duke, but they only considered it at an abstract level – when implemented in reality, it came down to the obvious, physical act of killing a specific man, which can never be morally justifiable. However, it needs to be underlined that Camus seems to believe that murder is not always unambiguously morally wrong – nonetheless, it is in each case one-sided, which results in rejecting the possibility to provide justification for killing – even for an exceptional one. Otherwise, a protest against violence would end up violently as well. The question could be raised, however, whether a murder, even if not justified, can be in some instances inevitable. And to this dilemma Camus seems to answer positively. But this issue requires a completely distinct deliberation.⁶¹

VICTIM AND EXECUTIONER

I would never count myself among people of whatever stripe who are willing to countenance murder.⁶²

Any attempt to accept certain acts of permissible killing ends up in failure. Justice comprehended abstractly requires advocating one of two sides: victims or executioners. Nevertheless, there is a considerable remedy to be given and Camus provides it explicitly in his set of essays titled *Neither Victims nor Executioners*. The essays appeared in *Combat* before *The Just Assassins* was published, but they can be considered as an answer to the problems identified in the play. Such a view seems to be questionable, but grounds for it can be seen when perceiving *The Just Assassins* as an endeavor to look closer at the

⁶¹ For deliberations on the inevitability of murder in Camus' thinking see: J. Foley, *op.cit.*, p. 96–100.

⁶² A. Camus, the editorial of November 30th, 1946 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 274.

pure mechanism of reaching the intellectual allowance for killing and at the dilemmas which accompany it. Only then does it appear that Camus, in *The Just Assassins*, set his goal in taking into consideration different ways of possible justification, instead of focusing on giving an answer to the basic question: Do actions completed on behalf of justice always require the occurrence of executioners and victims, as was the case during the purge trials and in the situation presented in *The Just Assassins*? In order to take a stance, thus, some of Camus's arguments and assertions from *Neither Victims nor Executioners* need to be presented:

1. Murder can never be legitimized.⁶³ Camus claims that if one rejects that fact, he or she must inevitably agree to replace one form of terror with another. Only by refusing the legitimization for the justification of violence would it be possible to “create the conditions for a just philosophy and for a provisional accord among those of us unwilling to be either victims or executioners.”⁶⁴
2. There is no way of persuading the representative of an ideology,⁶⁵ i.e. someone who is filled with ideological ideas will not be able to look critically at his standpoint. “In order to escape from this terror, we need to be able to think and to act on the basis of our thoughts,”⁶⁶ Camus asserts.
3. The end can never justify the means.⁶⁷ Another attitude leads directly to implementing nihilism into the world. However, it is important to note that giving unprecedented priority to moral issues is also an end that cannot be justified by any means.⁶⁸
4. The idea of a unified world order cannot be implemented without war,⁶⁹ i.e. each attempt to embody an order based on any value leads to failure – it entails murder, which is then legitimized by the value itself. According to Camus, such a situation can never take place. Murder cannot be justified.

⁶³ A. Camus, the editorial of November 20th, 1946 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, s. 260.

⁶⁴ *Ibidem*, p. 261.

⁶⁵ A. Camus, the editorial of November 19th, 1946 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 258.

⁶⁶ *Ibidem*, p. 259.

⁶⁷ A. Camus, the editorial of November 21th, 1946 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 262.

⁶⁸ *Ibidem*, p. 263.

⁶⁹ A. Camus, the editorial of November 26th, 1946 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 267.

5. A world order must be based on dialogue.⁷⁰ For Camus, the dialogue is a state in which no value has been given a superior merit. Only then is it possible to open one's mind to the diversity of the world of morality.

Absolute justice requires an affirming answer to the following basic questions: "Yes or no, directly or indirectly, do you want to be killed and assaulted? Yes or no, directly or indirectly, do you want to kill or assault?"⁷¹ Each man who wishes to answer positively needs to come back to the beginning of their deliberations and get rid of the uncritical faith in abstractly comprehended moral values. Only the rejection of an ideological division into good and evil is able to safeguard an individual from the trap of a series of justifications for their actions. Only when the premise of the lack of possibility regarding the existence of justification for murder is set can real order based on justice be built. Camus seems to warn here against the sacrifice of one's life for the sake of a supreme principle, which can lead to its own contradiction when comprehended abstractly and perceived solely theoretically.

In the set of essays *Neither Victims nor Executioners*, Camus states ultimately that each attempt to unify the world poses a danger of violence being implemented – someone always proves to be stronger.⁷² Such danger can be avoided only by dialogue held between contradictory sides of the dispute, which makes it possible to avoid the vicious circle of such reasoning that can reflect upon overuses. The pure concept of justice demands power, victims and executioners for its existence. The only remedy for such a condition is to divert justice from its absolute understanding, leading to the possibility of saving human life.

CONCLUSIONS

Abstract considerations regarding justice have led to the philosophical justification of violence, which Camus discerned in the pro-Marxist attitude of the intellectuals of post-liberation France.⁷³ The critics of deliberations encompassed

⁷⁰ A. Camus, the editorial of November 29th, 1946 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, s. 271.

⁷¹ A. Camus, the editorial of November 19th, 1946 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 259.

⁷² A. Camus, the editorial of November 26th, 1946 [in:] *Camus at Combat: Writing 1944–1947...*, p. 267.

⁷³ See: R. Aronson, *Camus and Sartre, The story of a friendship and the quarrel that ended it*, Chicago, University of Chicago Press 2005, p. 115–127.

in such works as *Humanism and Terror* by Merleau-Ponty or *Materialism and Revolution* by Sartre enabled Camus to pay close attention to the crucial aspect of the problem of justice: its absolute form can entail the justification of murder. Each attempt to draw any limit ends up in automatically placing someone in the role of an arbiter, who would impose such a border authoritatively. However, who is going to be that judge? And what if a mistake is made? Camus seems to remind us in *Neither Victims nor Executioners* of such fundamental questions which simply cannot be answered. Each person who performs such a role contravenes the assumptions of justice, which needs, above all, dialogue for its existence. But only the construction of a discourse deprived of any previous emotional biases is able to lead to distinct conclusions.

A query thus emerges: it is viable to leave emotions aside in the face of extreme events? The history of post-occupation France reveals the answer: it is highly difficult. Camus urges therefore putting another value on a pedestal which would be, firstly, free from such emotional attitude and secondly, would have clear and obvious borders. Only then would grounds for the elimination of all overuses would be given. This value would be the life of a person.

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