

# The Plague In All of Us

*"I can say I know the world inside out, as you may see—that each of us has the plague in him; no one, no one on earth is free from it." (Camus 253)*

Philosophy: Existentialism Paper

## **The Plague In All of Us**

Reading *The Plague* by Albert Camus moved me to think deeper about what psychological afflictions are common to humankind, and what sort of emotional plagues have lived inside of me during my existence. Throughout my reading and my pondering, I discovered four plagues that seem inherent both in me and in the world of people that surround me. While many people discover tonics (such as popularity, relationships, alcohol, drugs, religion or wealth) that appear to reduce the blatanacy or effects of these intrinsic diseases, it seems as though we are all burned with an incurable mark of the plagues' existence within our souls.

### **The Plague of Feeling Unloved**

*"No doubt our love persisted, but in practice it served nothing;  
it was an inert mass within us, sterile as crime or a life sentence" (Camus 184).*

We are all born with a need for love. I believe that the desire for genuine affection, adoration, and acceptance is the greatest longing we as humans have. We want to know that someone is there for us. We want to know that we are truly respected and valued. We want to know that we are cared about, and that no matter what we do someone will love us unconditionally.

These desires drive us to look for love in every way that we can. We play baseball so our father will give us his nod of approval. We dress to impress in order that people will look our way and make us feel valued by their noticing us. We indulge in the pleasures of sex, alcohol, and drugs to delude ourselves into feeling that we are love and accepted. We get married hoping that the love we find there will be enough to fulfill our longing. Still, in the silences between the passions of emotional acceptance and temporary approval, we hear the piercing call for unconditional love that

has not been met. We feel the burning void in our hearts that tells us that unless we find that unconditional love, deep down we will always feel unloved. Experience and reality tells us that no other human or thing can truly satisfy the core yearning to be loved. Yet few, if any, know of a cure for this need. And so we are plagued, deep down underneath, day after day, by the feeling of being unloved.

### **The Plague of Loneliness**

*“Seated in the empty café, Rambert looked pathetically lost, a mere shade among the shadows, and Rieux guessed this was the hour when he felt most derelict” (Camus 109).*

By loneliness I do not mean we are plagued by being alone, or by the feeling that comes with being alone. Rather, I mean that humankind is afflicted by feeling lonesome, whether isolated or with a large group of people. This loneliness is a yearning for someone or something that most people cannot quite place. It is a sensation of an emptiness inside. It is a longing to be *fully* understood and *completely* known. It is the reason people can be in a room surrounded by loved ones, or having an intimate conversation with their closest friend, and still feel lonely inside.

### **The Plague of Not Belonging**

*“‘But, confound it,’ Rambert exclaimed, ‘I don’t belong here!’” (Camus 85).*

I believe this psychological plague is rampant in our world. Whether we try exceedingly hard to fit in with others, or decide to be as individualistic as possible, we are all left with an unsettled feeling inside that “we don’t really belong here.” Although many of us try to ignore the gnawing sensation of not belonging, we never quite succeed in dousing the feeling completely. I

believe that this plague, if realized and faced entirely, would overwhelm even the strongest of individuals.

This is why we run from it. We busy ourselves. We search far and wide for a place to fit in, for something or someone to tell us we belong. We strive hard for better positions at work; we settle ourselves into club memberships; we find identity in belonging to a lover or fitting in with a group of friends. We do this so that when the plague of not belonging creeps into our awareness, we can point to our job, club, lover or friends and say "Look, I do belong!" We resort to stereotypes, positions, and other people to define who we are.

All the while, though, we realize that these outside things cannot truly describe who we are inside. We are who we are, not who titles and labels define us as. And who we are on the inside *cannot* belong in this world... because we are all different, and because no one completely accepts another for their differences. Thus the plague of not belonging leaves us in search of something that cannot be found.

### **The Plague of Restlessness**

*"It was undoubtedly the feeling of exile – that sensation of a void within which never left us, that irrational longing to hark back to the past or else to speed up the march of time, and those keen shafts of memory that stung like fire" (Camus 71).*

Contentment is not inherent in humankind. Restlessness, however, is abundant in its intrinsic nature. We all find ourselves driven in some form or another for *something else*. Something more. Something better. We always seem to be sure that if we just had *that*—that one more thing—our restlessness would be satisfied and we would be fully content.

There is never a moment when the desire leaves us. We are never completely without want. We want to go to bed because we are tired. We want the air conditioning cooler so we can sleep better. We want the night to last longer so we do not have to get up. We want to get in the shower so we can feel clean. We wish we did not have to take a shower so that we could do something else instead. We want to eat breakfast ten minutes ago. We wish the toast was warmer than it is. We want to go back to bed. We would be bored if we did. We wish that we did not have to leave for work. We want a better job. We want the day to go by quicker. On and on our wishes and wants go, leaving us with a constant hunger to have something we do not have, be somewhere we are not at, or feel a way we do not feel.

Even though we have jumped fences many times before and gotten what we wanted only seconds ago, our desires pull us toward the grass on the other side of whatever fence is presently before us. We are ever restless, searching for the “something else” that promises fulfillment but ends up bringing only greater longing.

## Work Cited

Camus, Albert. The Plague. New York: Random House, Inc., 1975.