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Control Through Perspective

When a government treats its people as dangers to itself, it is typically the government that is empowered. Conversely, when people treat a government as a danger to themselves, it is typically the people who are empowered. Either way, one maintains control over the other by treating it as dangerous. In the same way, authority figures in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*, authority figures condemn characters for their moral issues to make them appear dangerous. Camus suggests that using humiliation through condemnation, authority figures are able to hold on to power.

The investigators had been actively looking into Meursault's life, and had learned that Meursault had "shown insensitivity" (64) the day of Maman's funeral. They searched with the intention of finding something that they could use to incriminate Meursault of the murder. However, proof that Meursault is amoral was enough to satisfy them; a man with morals would have had more solemnity at his mother's funeral than Meursault. In Raymond's case, a police officer said that Raymond "ought to be ashamed to be so drunk that he'd have the shakes like that" (37). By the police officer's standards, it is immoral to be so drunk, and especially to hurt someone while drunk. Raymond felt forced to justify himself to the officer; thus, the police officer was in control. The officer maintained his control over Raymond by criticizing him. In a similar way, prosecutors commonly use humiliation to maintain control, as shown after

Meursault pointed out to the lawyer that Mamam had nothing to do with the case when the lawyer said to Meursault that he clearly “had never had any dealings with the law” (65). The lawyer’s response suggests that it is commonplace in a trial to condemn the defendant for an offense that is not directly related to the crime that caused the trial; rather, it is to the prosecutor’s advantage to humble the defense in order to maintain power.

Authority figures make people appear dangerous by humiliating them; therefore, they can maintain control of power through humiliation. For example, the prosecutor condemned Raymond by telling the jury that “they were dealing with a monster, a man without morals” (95-96). After humiliating him by informing the jury of Raymond’s profession of procurer, the prosecutor proclaims that Raymond is a monster who is dangerous because of his amoral attitude towards the profession; he believes that Raymond does not belong in society. By portraying Raymond as a monster, the prosecutor causes the jury to distrust Raymond and Meursault by extension, thereby influencing the jury’s ruling of Meursault. If the prosecutor can convince the jury that the defendant is dangerous and does not belong in society, it is more likely that the verdict will be in the prosecutor’s favor—he will be in control. Had Raymond been moral, the prosecutor would not have been able to use him to incriminate Meursault. When asked by the defendant what Meursault is accused of, he responded, “I accuse this man of burying his mother with crime in his heart!” (96). The prosecutor had the opportunity to attack Meursault for one of his crimes. Of course, it would be to his advantage to choose the greater of Meursault’s two crimes: killing a man or having an amoral nature. Therefore, it must have been more useful for his case to attack Meursault for the way in which he buried Maman rather than for murdering a human being; he chose to attack Meursault for his humiliating amorality at the trial, which made

Meursault seem more dangerous. The purpose of the trial is not really justice for the murder. Rather, it is about making the defendant appear dangerous—enough to deserve capital punishment.

A court system is not an oppressive government per se; however, there are still commonalities in how people in power maintain their control. Both pose people of lesser power as dangers. It is important to understand how authority figures maintain their control because it does not just apply to *The Stranger*—it happens today.

The Stranger - Cultural Reflection

Initially, I understood that the robot woman in *The Stranger* by Albert Camus is like Meursault in that they share a similar personality; her qualities are an intensified version of Meursault's. Throughout the book, Meursault feels anxiety, especially when faced with the realization that he alone is responsible for his actions. For example, when Meursault returns to the bungalow after his first confrontation with the Arabs at the beach, Camus spends two paragraphs describing the anxiety that Meursault had gone through when faced with the choice of staying or returning to the Arabs to shoot them. The robot woman, however, although faced with the same realization, feels alienated—like a stranger. She acts in a secluded manner when she works and when she eats by herself at the table, barely speaking a word to Meursault.

After the oral discussion about existentialism and other external research, my understanding of the robot woman shifted. I realize now that the reason she appears to be an extreme version of Meursault, who represents many existentialist characteristics, is because she is an *Übermensch* as described by Nietzsche; in her brief interaction with Meursault in Part I, she exemplifies the ideal human being from an existentialist's perspective. Her incredibly precise movements show that she embraces the earth for what it is and that she creates her own values. Moreover, she accepts that the world is not an efficient one and values speed and clarity as a result. She strives to overcome inefficiency by working swiftly; she walks with haste and works even when at the dinner table. Rather than enjoying herself and her time at the restaurant as most people would, the robot woman eats her food as quickly as possible in order to get back to her work. The absurdity brought about by her unwillingness to conform to the world's inefficiency alienates her.