Friedrich Nietzsche, one of the forerunners of what is now known as existentialism, ushered in a new era of intellectual activity with his famous aphorism, "God is dead." To many, Nietzsche's message was confused and not well received. However, among political turmoil and the tumult of the twentieth century, this idea was posited through a different lense through the works of writers such as Camus, Sartre, and de Beauvoir. Specifically, Camus' *The Rebel* explores the ideas of rebellion, the absurd, and revolution, which resonate with the subversive and uprooting nature of Nietzsche's message. The goal of this paper is threefold: to interpret Nietzsche's famous claim that "God is dead," to identify its philosophical implications, and to explicate and analyze Camus' response to Nietzsche's claim.

The way Nietzsche sees it, God has been usurped by the powers of economy, industry, capitalism, and decadence. The language used within the story of the madman colors Nietzsche's outlook on the world as a desolate and confused place, showing the anguish and fret of the madman who looks around and sees that no one understands his message. Nietzsche believes not only that God is dead, but that God had been killed by Christianity, and was found rotting in the manner of a corpse. God decomposes because he had died along time ago; corrupt religiosity was a slow poison running through God's veins as false ideologies and bigotry became rampant and man perverted the name of God to colonize, murder, spread fear, and assert power. Not only has the Judeo-Christian God died, but the God that provided morality, purpose, blessings, and comfort to countless people. Religion was not the only culprit, seeing as the globalized world of ever advancing technologies made God unnecessary. God's spot in the lives of the west was lost to human ambition and enterprises sparked by the enlightenment. Not only is God dead, but people do not know nor do they care that their master has fallen.

Upon closer observation of the story of the madman, one can further unpack the richness of Nietzsche's message. First, the madman within the story is strikingly similar to Diogenes the Cynic, an ancient greek philosopher known for his absurd behavior and lifestyle, chiefly wandering through the marketplace with a lit lamp in the daytime. Diogenes' iconoclasm was likely a source of inspiration for the character of the madman, both figures who hold sharp critiques of the society they live in. It is also significant that the madman's monologue occurs in the marketplace, a bastion of worldly values, as well as a pillar of social and economic life.

From Augustine and Aquinas to Descartes and Leibniz, the idea of an omnipotent omnibenevolent God in line with the one of Christianity permeated the discipline of philosophy. The universe, human nature, moral dilemmas, and other intellectual quagmires cited God as a variable at the least, and a panacea at the most. However, Nietzsche was the harbinger of a new message that was far more sobering: humanity is accountable for its actions. With the fictitious ruler ripped from the sky, who deems what is good and evil, who or what provides purpose, and how is life lived with its creator dashed? Nietzsche's claim ultimately beckons the question, "what do we do next?" From this point, one might worry that humanity will unsuccessfully scour the earth in search of something to worship and put time and effort into. Many mistakenly interpret Nietzsche as claiming that nihilism is the end point, and that all people are doomed to wander aimlessly. This is a grave misinterpretation; nihilism for Nietzsche is the starting point, the ashes from which the Übermensch rises and new values are created. Through nihilism, people realize the true absurdity of their condition and discover that life has no teleological meaning. While it seems natural for humanity to panic since the ball is in their court, the death of

God wipes the slate clean, and Nietzsche desires to utilize this and create a renaissance for humanity through strength and self realization.

Albert Camus, a twentieth century French-Algerian philosopher, devotes a section of his book, *The Rebel*, to Nietzsche's nihilism. According to Camus, "With [Nietzsche] nihilism becomes conscious for the first time" [65]. Upon reading Camus' work, one finds that Nietzsche's nihilism largely coincides with his ideas on absurdism and rebellion. Both philosophers believe that life is void of teleological meaning, and Camus explicitly acknowledges this when he says, "[Nietzsche] diagnosed in himself, and in others, the inability to believe and the disappearance of the primitive foundation of all faith- namely, the belief in life" [66]. One can argue that Camus strongly agrees with the declaration of God's death, as seen in his philosophy of absurdism and his work *The Myth of Sisyphus*, which highlights humanity's repetitive and meaningless existence. Camus saw that Nietzsche wanted to turn the death of God (along with the destruction of archaic values[1]) into a renaissance in which humanity creates its own new values.

Both Nietzsche and Camus recognize that after nihilism action must be taken and that, "The death of God accomplishes nothing and can only be endured in terms of preparing a resurrection" [71]. Nietzsche's passive and active nihilism go hand in hand with Camus' idea of rebellion. Passive nihilism, or the deconstruction of values is almost synonymous with the rebel's proclamatory "no" to the state of affairs is involved with, and active nihilism, or the creation of new values, is similar to the rebel's "yes" to something outside of themself that they are ready to die for. Camus goes out of his way to explain that Nietzsche's assault on Christianity, "is only in

[1] For more information about the destruction of values, refer to Nietzsche's *Thus Spoke Zarathustra*.

so far as it represents morality" [68], and while many Christians are angered at the idea of nihilism, Camus merely sees it as a prime example of the current template that needs to be deconstructed. In a way, Christianity, though not explicitly stated, can be seen as the marketplace in addition to the churches that Nietzsche's madman visits.

Camus states that, "Nietzsche's philosophy, undoubtedly, revolves around the problem of rebellion. More precisely, it begins by being a rebellion" [68]. While nihilism is rebellious, one may call it an overstatement to reduce the entire project Nietzsche undertakes to be a rebellion. Rebellion, like nihilism, deconstructs normative values, but rebellion seems to end in solidarity, revolution, or death. Moving forward from the death of God is far more significant for Nietzsche, and necessitates that man not only construct new values, but ascend the role of God that would have otherwise been aspired toward. Rebellion (at least for the slave) is often rooted in injustice experienced by the self or others, while creating new values in a Nietzschean manner is not partial to any presupposition of good or evil of old values, and necessitates replacing them regardless. However, Camus does realize the necessity for constant rebellion to keep the metaphysical state of affairs "fresh," and he also understands that revolution betrays itself. These ideas should be compatible with nihilism and the creation of new values.

According to Camus, "He who cannot maintain his position above the law must in fact find another law or take refuge in madness" and, "It is he, and he alone, who must discover law and order" [70]. It seems problematic that Camus states one must *find* or *discover* law order, as this implies that it is found outside of oneself. This is where Camus' seems to diverge from Nietzsche's nihilism. The rebel necessarily identifies a greater value outside of themself, while the Übermensch, according to Nietzsche, generates their own values and subscribes to them

accordingly. Camus even says, “Nietzsche’s message is summed up in the word *creation*, with the ambiguous meaning it has assumed...The transmutation of values consists only in replacing critical values by creative values” [74]. The difference between Camus’ “discovery” and Nietzsche’s “creation” is ambiguous, but the language of each writer demonstrates a difference in the supposed origin of values.

Furthermore, Camus fails to capture the intensity and passion of Nietzsche’s nihilism. While “[Nietzsche] always leaves intact the person of Jesus” [68], there is no doubt that he absolutely hates Christianity and its betrayal of the God it secularized and ultimately killed in a Judas-esque manner. Lastly, Nietzsche imagines a potential humanity beyond divinity, while Camus recognizes that humanity will likely rinse and repeat its historical cases of revolution and continue to betray itself.

Camus handily recapitulates the essence of Nietzsche’s idea of the death of God, as well as the recreation of values in *The Rebel*. One can also find many similarities between absurdism, rebellion, and nihilism. The purposelessness of life juxtaposed with the rigid morality and religiosity of Christianity as captured by Nietzsche and retold and explored by Camus provides an excellent template to compare and contrast their philosophies. While not identical, the two philosophies stand side by side perfectly as demonstrated by Camus’s monologue: “The ‘can one live as a rebel?’ became with [Nietzsche] ‘can one live believing in nothing?’ His reply is affirmative. Yes, if one creates a system out of absence of faith” [66].

Sources:

Camus, Albert. *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt*. New York: Vintage Books, 1991.