



# The Plague: Part Two



Part Two of *The Plague* recounts how plague begins to impact the lives of people in Oran. The crisis requires people to consider their role in society.

There are six stand-alone activities in this section that can help meet Saskatchewan's English B30 curriculum indicators.



- **The Philosophy of Camus: Justice, Not Hatred** asks students to consider what is justice, and start building their own idea of justice.
- **Health Concepts: Plague and Excess Mortality** continues with the ideas about objectivity and truth by opening up considerations of using singular statistics as holistic explanations.
- **Historical Context: The “Vaunted Might” of Science** establishes the historical basis of the scientific method and considers some of its conflicts with other forms of truth.
- **Think Local: Political Protest** examines ways for students to create change by opening up considerations of the concepts of resistance and rebellion.
- **Historical Context: Outlawing Science in Camus' Time** continues building on the historical and political context of *The Plague*, while also deepening student concepts of truth.
- **Health Concepts: Absolute Freedom and Universal Health Care** asks students to consider ideas of freedom and consider how we build the common good by limiting the ability of the strongest to dominate.



Together, these activities and the chapter questions build upon the philosophical and thematic underpinnings of *The Plague* introduced in Part One of this resource.

## Part Two • Chapter 1

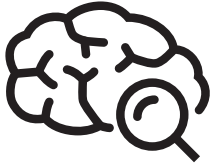
*The early days of Oran's lockdown are discussed, and broadly compared to the idea of imprisonment.*

// From now on  
it can be  
said that  
plague was  
the concern  
of all of  
us //

(57)

1. Review how communication in and out of Oran was halted. (57-59)
  - a) Were people able to get messages to friends and loved ones outside the community?
  - b) How have technological advancements improved our ability to communicate?
  - c) On the whole, have advancements in communication been a good or a bad thing? Or is there good and bad in most everything?
2. The lockdown trapped people inside Oran. However, locked-out residents could return if they wished.
  - a) Why would someone return to Oran?
  - b) Did anyone actually return to Oran?
3. Describe the emotional experience for people trapped in Oran? How does it compare to lockdowns experienced due to COVID-19?





## The Philosophy of Camus

# Justice, Not Hatred

Oran's lockdown is compared to prison. Citizens are called "the prisoners of the plague" (64) and going home is to return "to our prison-house" (61). In a direct reference to the justice system, the narrator says "We were much like those whom men's justice, or hatred, forces to live behind prison bars" (62).

This was not the first time Camus connected hatred to justice. An almost identical passage appeared in an early draft chapter of *The Plague*. The chapter, called "Exiles of the Plague," was included in the 1943 book *Domaine Français*, a collection of works written by French Resisters. Because of censorship in Vichy France, the chapters of this book were smuggled out of France and printed in Switzerland.

Seeing that Camus' comparisons between hatred and justice survived from an early draft of *The Plague* and made it into the final version of the novel, the concept was important to him. Thus, we should think more about the links between hatred and justice.

### What is Justice?

For as long as people have lived together, we have tried to determine what is "justice." There is no single answer. Justice is a complicated concept.

To help understand what we mean when we say justice, we can start by looking at the Oxford English Dictionary. They define justice as:

Maintenance of what is just or right by the exercise of authority or power; assignment of deserved reward or punishment; giving of due deserts.

This definition raises many questions about the concept of justice. What makes something right? Who should have the authority to exercise power? When is punishment deserved? A dictionary cannot tell us these things. To answer these questions, each of us need to develop beliefs. Only then can we determine what justice is.

Of course, not everyone will reach the same conclusions about justice. To be sure, some conclusions will be better than others. But the simple fact is that there are several possible answers to the question "What is justice?" This reminds us of Camus' concept of absurdism: sometimes, there is no single truth.

Even if there is no single truth about justice, we can understand some things about justice as it exists today in Canada.

Canada is a liberal democracy. In a liberal democracy, the state has the power to define what is a crime. As well, the state has the power to formally punish a person if they commit a crime.

This power does not mean that the state can do whatever it wants. Crimes cannot be declared on a whim and punishments cannot be handed out however the state pleases. We define crimes and we set

out the punishments through laws. Our laws are democratic constructs. This means that we, as citizens, collectively decide what justice is.

To think of it another way, our votes determine our governments and our governments determine our laws.

Because citizens ultimately determine the laws in a democracy, we get the laws we both want and deserve. An ill-informed and angry public may let hatred seep into the justice system. On the other hand, a fair-minded and thoughtful public has the power to make justice truly benefit society.

## Justice, Not Hatred

When a crime is committed, the law will spell out the possible consequences. Our laws have roots in ancient legal codes such as Hammurabi's Code and the Mosaic Laws. These legal codes delivered justice in two ways: they defined what was wrong, and they prescribed punishments for committing a wrong.

For example, Hammurabi's Code relied upon two types of consequences to achieve justice, retribution and restitution.

*Retribution.* If a wrong is committed, there should be some proportional punishment upon the perpetrator. This is where we get the idea of "an eye for an eye."

*Restitution.* The offender must repay the victim for goods stolen, damaged, or lost, or otherwise make amends for the wrong committed.

There are good things and bad things about retribution and restitution. That said, it is easy to see how these concepts could facilitate justice based in hatred.

On their own, retribution and restitution do little to address the underlying causes of crimes. As well, they do little to facilitate healing for the victim, the offender, and the community. Retribution and restitution alone could be considered a very shallow idea of justice.

A deeper idea of justice is rooted in an idea called restoration. Restoration relies on more than just retribution and restitution. Restoration takes a more holistic look at the community. It tries to heal and restore the entire community after a crime has been committed. Movements to incorporate restoration in our justice systems have existed since the beginnings of the Canadian state. Restoration has even deeper roots in traditional Indigenous justice systems.



Hammurabi's Code, circa 1800 BC, contained approximately 275 laws. Each law was written in two parts: a specific situation or case was outlined, and a punishment was prescribed.

## Indigenous Justice and Restoration

Understanding restoration from an Indigenous perspective requires an understanding of traditional Indigenous worldviews. These worldviews can be based on a hierarchy of dependencies.

Mother Earth is first in this hierarchy of dependencies, because everything and everyone depends on the earth for survival. The plant order is next because the animal world needs plants to survive. After that comes the animal order. Humans, dependent upon all these levels, are the least powerful and least important element in creation. For everyone and everything to survive and thrive, harmonious interconnections between these orders are required.

Traditional Indigenous laws reflect this worldview. To restore a community's harmony after a crime has been committed, the remedy must take into account the needs of victims, the community, and the offender. Restoration is meant to heal victims and communities, while encouraging offenders to confront the consequences of their actions and heal themselves, too.

### Crime and Punishment

Every crime involves unique circumstances. This makes it a challenge to determine the most appropriate consequences. This is why the police generally have some discretion as to whether or not a person will be charged with a crime. As well, for the most part judges have some discretion when determining the punishment if a person is found guilty of a crime.

Sweats, isolation, and the teachings and influences of elders, parents, and grandparents can be used to help accomplish restoration. Also important are the notions of honesty and harmony brought about by forgiveness, restitution, and rehabilitation. Restoration requires us to take a wider look at society when we decide what justice will be.

### Restoration and Camus

Retribution and restitution are parts of our justice system. But justice is more than just retribution and restitution. If we view justice as these two ideas alone, we end up with a very narrow conception of justice. In a sense, a narrow view of justice makes us “prisoners”: we are held captive by simple ideas that can let hatred—and not community well-being—grow.

Restorative justice can help us avoid the folly of basing our justice in hatred. The goal of restorative justice is to heal and rebuild. It can use ideas of restitution and retribution, but it looks beyond them too. Restoration requires a broader, more thoughtful look at the well-being of the community. Embracing restorative justice can help us avoid, as Camus put it, “men’s justice, or hatred.”

# Discuss

1. How would a belief that all things are interconnected temper hatred as a motivator for justice?
2. Sometimes, a person who commits a crime is sent to prison. It is important to remember that almost every person sent to prison will some day leave prison, and reintegrate into society.
  - a) Is justice achieved if prisoners are treated poorly?
  - b) Would communities be better-off if we invested more into education, addictions counselling, mental health, training programs, and other supports for people in prison?
3. What is your conception of justice?

## Part Two • Chapter 2

// it's an  
absurd  
situation,  
but we're  
all involved  
in it, and  
we've got to  
accept it as  
it is //

(73)

*Rieux once again meets Rambert, who is trying to leave Oran.*

1. The people of Oran are described as “worried and irritated – but these are not feelings with which to confront a plague.” (66).
  - a) How does worry and irritation manifest itself in Oran?
  - b) Why would worry and irritation be poor feelings for confronting a plague?
2. Re-read the conversation between Rambert and Rieux on pages 72-73 (“You’re using the language of reason, not of the heart”). In what ways does pure reason ignore human needs and tastes?
3. “Public welfare is merely the sum-total of the private welfare of each of us.” (74).
  - a) Are we all merely individuals? Or are we individuals as part of a greater society?
  - b) When making individual decisions, do we need to take into account the welfare of others? What happens if we don’t?





## Health Concepts

# Plague and Excess Death

Ideally, everyone will live a long and healthy life. However, everyone eventually dies. The reasons for death are varied, and this simple truth makes gauging the death toll of a pandemic a challenging task.

*The Plague* touches on this idea. As the disease spreads through Oran, the total number of deaths are reported. But this information alone may not be that helpful:

For one thing, all the three hundred and two deaths might not have been due to plague. Also, no one in the town had any idea of the average weekly death-rate in ordinary times .... the public lacked, in short, standards of comparison. (66-67)

Death statistics from COVID-19 suffer from a similar problem. Public health authorities have generally been adept at reporting the number of illnesses and deaths due to COVID-19. However, this statistic alone does not reveal the full scope of death. This is why some public health researchers also look to a statistic known as excess death.

Excess death is the number of deaths in a given period over and above what would be expected, given historical data. It is calculated by taking the total number of people who die, then subtracting the number of people who would be expected to die.

For example, say 90 people usually die every June in a city. If 100 people died in one particular June, the excess death for that month would be 10. Ten more people died that month than would be expected.

Excess death statistics can provide us with a different perspective on the impact of a pandemic than the death-toll from the disease alone. Because our behaviours change in a pandemic, the ways we die may also change. For example:

- the pandemic may result in increased deaths from other causes. For example, health care systems may be overwhelmed leaving less staff and resources available to treat other diseases.
- the pandemic may result in fewer deaths from other causes. For example, lockdowns and working from home may lead to fewer deaths from road accidents.<sup>1</sup>

As we can see, the number of deaths specifically caused by COVID-19 is only one part of the story.

That said, excess death statistics are a broad measurement. Broad measurements often miss details. Consider, for example, if there was a deadly natural disaster during a pandemic, such as a violent earthquake. Because the earthquake has no relation to the pandemic, the excess death statistics would not reflect the pandemic alone.

Statistics can help us understand trends in society. But no single statistic, alone, can tell us the entire story.

If you are interested in tracking excess death statistics, Statistics Canada—Canada's official statistics agency—tracks weekly death rates across the country. Find their tracking tool at [www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/71-607-X2020017](http://www150.statcan.gc.ca/n1/en/catalogue/71-607-X2020017)



# Discuss

1. Think about how pandemics change our behaviour.
  - a) What changes could increase the total death rate?
  - b) What changes could decrease the total death rate?
2. As deaths increase in Oran, Dr. Rieux starts to feel indifferent. His indifference brings to mind a saying attributed to Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin:

“One death is a tragedy, a million deaths a statistic.”<sup>2</sup>

  - a) Would over-exposure to something like death make us indifferent to it?
  - b) Do statistics alone dehumanise lived experiences?

<sup>1</sup> Hannah Ritchie, Max Roser, Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Joe Hasell. “Excess mortality from the Coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19).” *Our World in Data*. <https://ourworldindata.org/excess-mortality-covid>

<sup>2</sup> These words are often attributed to Soviet dictator Joseph Stalin. His exact words were not quite these. In the January 20<sup>th</sup>, 1947 *Washington Post*, he was quoted as saying “If only one man dies of hunger, that is a tragedy. If millions die, that’s only statistics.”

// where  
some saw  
abstraction  
others saw  
truth //

(78)

## Part Two • Chapter 3

*Father Paneloux delivers a fiery sermon, saying the plague is God's punishment. He claims that it will separate the just from the unjust.*

1. Are the people of Oran particularly religious? Why do they attend the Week of Prayer?
2. How does the storm and its abatement add to the atmosphere of Father Paneloux's sermon?
3. Paneloux warns that science is helpless against the will of God:  
"No earthly power, nay, not even – mark me well – the vaunted might of human science can avail you to avert that hand once it is stretched towards you." (81-82)
  - a) Is science helpless against plagues and other calamities?
  - b) Do we put too much faith in the "vaunted might" of science? If so, how?





## Historical Context

# The "Vaunted Might" of Science

Objective truths can be hard to find. This is why objectivity and truth sometimes is considered an ideal we strive towards, not an end we can always reach. In science, the search for objective truth happens through the scientific method. The scientific method is a dispassionate way of searching for knowledge, putting aside biases in favour of facts.

Generally, the scientific method unfolds by following a process. Scientists formulate an idea (called a hypothesis), then use careful experiments and observations to test the hypothesis. They make conclusions from these experiments and observations. The conclusions are reviewed by other scientists, and if they hold up to scrutiny, then the facts are said to be true.

This method does not mark the end point of knowledge. As understandings and ideas evolve, facts are open to be re-examined, and tested further. This process of observing, experimenting, testing, and re-testing is how science advances our knowledge and understandings of the world. Science is something of a continual building process.

Of course, there is no guarantee that this process will be entirely objective. Scientists may have their own agendas, and bias could creep into their work. As well, the priorities of governments and other funders often determine the broader scientific ideas that societies pursue. Yet, the risk of science being a product of pure bias is mitigated by a belief that scientific work should be open to continual experimentation and tests. After all, the strongest ideas, beliefs, and facts are the ones that can withstand the most vigorous questioning.

This is how the scientific method helps us find truths. Because science helps us find truths, it could be said that, broadly, modern society has faith in science.

A faith in science has disrupted other ways of knowing. This can explain Father Paneloux's pointed remark about the "vaunted might of human science" (81). He says this in his first sermon in *The Plague*, suggesting that at times we may put too much faith in science. Seeing that science is not always perfect, there may be some truth to Father Paneloux's point, too.

Conflicts between science's "vaunted might" and religion have broken out several times over the years. One of history's great conflicts between science and religion unfolded in the 1600s, when the Catholic Church faced off with an Italian scientist named Galileo Galilei.

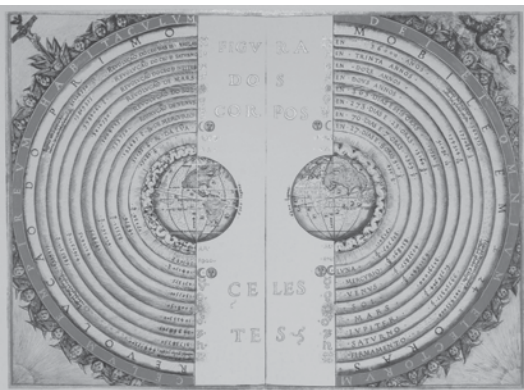


Illustration of the universe orbiting the Earth, from 1568. This theory is called geocentrism. The theory of a universe with the sun at the centre is called heliocentrism. Science has now shown that neither theory is entirely true.

## Galileo and the Creation of Modern Science

Galileo Galilei is the so-called father of modern science. He was a mathematician, astronomer, and physicist who lived in Italy from 1564 to 1642.

At the beginning of the 17<sup>th</sup> century, most educated Europeans believed that Earth was the centre of the universe, and celestial bodies like the sun and the planets orbited Earth. The Catholic Church agreed, using biblical passages to support the view that the Earth was the centre of the universe. But this was not the only theory out there. Alternative theories that said the Earth was *not* the centre of the universe had been around since at least the 4<sup>th</sup>-century BC. Galileo saw merit in these alternative theories, but had no means to prove them.

The invention of the telescope gave Galileo the opportunity to prove that the Earth was not the centre of the universe. The telescope was developed in the Netherlands in 1608. Galileo caught word of this invention, and soon started building his own. By 1609, he was pointing his telescopes to the sky.

Before long, he discovered four moons circling Jupiter. This discovery put a pretty serious wrinkle in the idea that *all* moving celestial bodies simply orbited Earth. As he observed more events through his telescope, such as sunspots and the phases of Venus, he built the case that the Earth was not the centre of the universe, but instead revolved around the sun. Galileo thus developed a theory that the sun was the centre of the universe.

In addition to being a curious scientist, Galileo was a talented writer and clever self-promoter. He chose to write about his discoveries in Italian. At the time, most thinkers wrote in Latin. By choosing Italian, he was able to reach the lesser-educated people of Italy. As more and more people read about Galileo's discoveries, more and more people began to wonder if the Earth really was the centre of the universe.

Growing acceptance of Galileo's theories annoyed many in Italy's elite, intellectual class. They held on to the traditional view of an Earth-centric universe. Instead of using mathematics and science to disprove Galileo, they instead resorted to character assassination. A campaign was begun to portray Galileo as anti-Catholic.



Galileo Facing the Inquisition, by Cristiano Banti. The Roman Inquisition was a 16<sup>th</sup>-century Catholic Church process to prosecute crimes against religion.

Galileo was a man of faith, and countered that his theories were not anti-Catholic. After all, the Church's standing practice was to interpret biblical scriptures as allegories when they conflicted with science. Unfortunately, Galileo's discoveries came at a time when the Church was facing off with the Protestant Reformation. Church leaders concluded that his theories would further undermine their authority. Thus, in 1616 the Church ordered Galileo to renounce his views about the Earth.

Galileo's rocky relationship with the Church took a turn for the worse in 1632. He published a book that more-or-less portrayed people who believed in an Earth-centric universe as simpletons. The Church put him on trial, and found him guilty of heresy. His books were banned, and he spent his final years under house arrest before dying in January of 1642.

## Galileo's Legacy

Galileo's theory that the sun—and not the earth—was the centre of the universe was a huge paradigm shift. He left a profound legacy that helped change our understanding of science and advance the study of astronomy. And his unceremonious final years under house arrest, with his books banned, stand out as an example of what can happen when scientific discoveries come into conflict with rigid beliefs.

It took centuries for the Church's relationship with Galileo to fully thaw. Starting in 1718, bans on most of his books were lifted. His remains were moved to Florence's main Franciscan church in 1735. By 1835, the Catholic Church had largely dropped its opposition to theories of a non-Earth-centric universe. Finally, successive 20<sup>th</sup>-century Popes acknowledged Galileo's role in the development of science and the errors that the Church made in their treatment of him and his ideas.

Galileo Galilei's story was not the first time that people with power locked horns with scientists that they did not want to believe. Nor would it be the last time. As we will soon discover, Camus himself watched up close one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's great scientific showdowns, between a French biochemist and supporters of Joseph Stalin's Communist Russia.

# Discuss

1. Galileo proposed some theories that turned out to be mostly true. He also proposed some theories—such as his theory of tides—that turned out to be completely false.
  - a) If a person has one idea that is good, does it mean that all their ideas will be good?
  - b) What does this tell us about putting blind faith in our leaders?

2. Consider Earth’s central role in life, from an Indigenous worldview:

From the realms of the human world, the sky dwellers, the water beings, forest creatures and all other forms of life, the beautiful Mother Earth gives birth to, nurtures and sustains all life. Mother Earth provides us with our food and clean water sources. She bestows us with materials for our homes, clothes and tools. She provides all life with raw materials for our industry, ingenuity and progress. She is the basis of who we are as “real human beings” that include our languages, our cultures, our knowledge and wisdom to know how to conduct ourselves in a good way. If we listen from the place of connection to the Spirit That Lives in All Things, Mother Earth teaches what we need to know to take care of her and all her children. All are provided by our mother, the Earth.<sup>1</sup>

What do we mean when we say something is “the centre of the universe”?

3. Galileo’s theory on the Earth was not the end-point of knowledge on astronomy, or the nature of our universe. In fact, we know now that Galileo was right to point out that the Earth revolved around the sun, but was wrong to suggest that the sun was the centre of the universe. Think back to Camus’ idea of absurdism.
  - a) Is there even such a thing as an end-point of knowledge?
  - b) How do we decide what is worth knowing?
4. How does the liberal democratic ideal of free and open exchange of ideas help society find truths?

<sup>1</sup> Assembly of First Nations. “Honouring Earth.” [www.afn.ca/honoring-earth/](http://www.afn.ca/honoring-earth/)

## Part Two • Chapter 4

// Try as he  
might to  
shut his  
ears to it,  
he still was  
listening  
to that  
eerie sound  
above, the  
whispering  
of plague //

(87)

*Grand tells Rieux about the novel he is writing.*

1. Grand has been spending countless months trying to “perfectly” (88) write the opening sentence to his book.
  - a) Especially in literature and the arts, can something ever be “perfect”?
  - b) How does Grand’s quest for perfection reflect Camus’ idea of absurdism and the search for truth?



## Part Two • Chapter 5

// That,  
in fact,  
was what  
struck one  
most — the  
excellence  
of their  
intentions //

(90)

*Rambert unsuccessfully tries to secure passage out of Oran.*

1. Public officials refuse to let Rambert leave Oran. Why must the rules apply equally to everyone?
2. Rambert “obtained much insight into the inner workings of a municipal office” (91) in his attempts to get permission to leave.
  - a) What did Rambert see and do?
  - b) Does the portrayal of municipal governance in this chapter make you more confident or less confident in government? Why?





## Part Two • Chapter 6

// peppermint  
lozenges had  
vanished from  
the chemists'  
shops,  
because  
there was  
a popular  
belief that  
when sucking  
them you  
were proof  
against  
contagion //

(96)

People carry on with activities such as going to restaurants, but they tend to spend recklessly.

1.
  - a) How did the newspapers change their reporting of death tolls?
  - b) Compare this approach to how contemporary media dealt with COVID-19 death statistics. Did the media try to dial down or emphasise the drama?
2. A newspaper, *The Plague Chronicle*, pops up. It promises authoritative information on the disease, but quickly begins to spout nonsense theories and miracle cures.
  - a) Does *The Plague Chronicle* remind you of any online information sources?
  - b) How can we limit the spread of misinformation while respecting the right to freedom of expression?





Think Local

# Political Protest



Thousands gather for a peaceful Black Lives Matter rally in Saskatoon on June 4<sup>th</sup>, 2020.

## Breaking Up Protests

When a protest breaks out, there may be a political bias in how authorities react. This is according to a study by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

They analysed American protests between May 1<sup>st</sup> and November 28<sup>th</sup>, 2020, and found disparities in how authorities intervened.

Left-wing protests were more likely to be broken up by police than right-wing protests. When protests were broken up, force against left-wing groups was used 51% of the time. Conversely, force was used to break up right-wing protests 34% of the time.

The people of Oran grow restless under the plague. As the days pass, the general mood begins to shift in a bad direction:

Discontent was on the increase and, fearing worse to come, the local officials debated lengthily on the measures to be taken if the populace, goaded to a frenzy by the epidemic, got completely out of hand. (95-96)

*The Plague* does not spell out exactly what is meant by the public getting “completely out of hand.” The only thing revealed is that

For in the heat, and stillness, and for the troubled hearts of our townsfolk, anything, even the least sound, had a heightened significance. (95)

Oran has become a tinderbox, where the slightest spark could set off a political fire. This type of environment is not only an issue for Oran of *The Plague*, but also for the world under COVID-19.

Two months into the COVID-19 lockdown, a political fire ignited in the United States. Suggesting just how deep-rooted society’s frustrations are, the fire instantaneously spread across the world. On May 25<sup>th</sup>, 2020, George Floyd died while in the custody of the Minneapolis police. A horrific ten-minute video of his murder at the hands of a police officer prompted untold thousands of people to say enough was enough, and pour into the streets in protest. Largely under the banner of Black Lives Matter (BLM)—a group established to bring attention to and help remedy the many injustices faced by Black people—by August 22<sup>nd</sup> over 16,000 protests took place worldwide.

The events included several peaceful protests in communities across Saskatchewan. From Estevan to Lloydminster, hundreds upon hundreds—and in some of our cities *thousands*—of people peacefully took to the streets to demand racial justice, something we should be immensely proud of.

The epicentre of the protests was the United States, where almost 8,000 happened by the end of August. Unfortunately, a handful of them—7%—had incidents of violence, such as rioting, looting, and vandalism. There is conflicting information about who was responsible: the only certainty is that sometimes, violence cannot be linked to a single source.

Ascribing responsibility for violence during a protest can be difficult. Sometimes, a few supporters of a cause can spark chaos, acting alone and without the approval of the protest's leadership. For that matter, sometimes protests are infiltrated by provocateurs, people who show up to start trouble so they can ruin the reputation of a movement, or to pursue their own violent agenda. And sometimes, what appears to be overreactions by the police can spark violence. This is why it can often be difficult to assign blame when a protest takes a turn towards violence.

## Violence and the Right to Protest

The overwhelming majority of all protests in the summer of 2020—especially in Canada—were peaceful and productive. The peaceful nature of these protests is even more remarkable given broader trends in public opinions on violence.



Protests need not be large to bring about public awareness. In July 2020, Tristen Durocher walked 600 kilometres to Regina's Wascana Park, setting up camp and holding a ceremonial fast. He did this to bring awareness to high suicide rates in the province's north. A judge ruled that attempts to remove his camp were unconstitutional: the park was a public square and a place to express dissent. In the judge's words, "In my respectful view, Tristen's ceremonial fast represents an admittedly small and personal attempt to encourage all of us to move a little further along in our national journey."

Three recent American public opinion polls suggested there is a troubling trend afoot regarding attitudes to political violence. Surveys by YouGov in late 2020, and Fortune/SurveyMonkey and the American Enterprise Institute in early 2021 all revealed growing support for political violence. This growing support could not be assigned exclusively to either people on the political left or people on the political right. Support for violence was remarkably similar across both groups. No similar polling is available in Canada.

In liberal democracies such as Canada, we have the right to protest. It is guaranteed in the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. However, we do not have the right to violent protest.

In exceptional circumstances, violence could be justified on political, philosophical, or moral grounds: for example, it would be difficult to fault people who violently opposed the Nazi occupation of France. But Nazi Germany has not invaded Canada. It is very difficult to justify violent protest in our society today, especially violence against other individuals.

Besides, from a purely practical perspective, resorting to violent protest increases the chances that we will not get the change that we want.

For example, researchers Maria Stephan and Erica Chenoweth looked at 323 violent and non-violent protest movements between 1900 and 2006. They found that 53% of the non-violent campaigns were successful in getting the changes they asked for. On the flip side, only 26% of the violent campaigns achieved their aims. Put differently, peaceful protest movements were twice as likely to succeed as violent movements.

Another study from Florida Atlantic University looked at groups seeking greater powers of self-rule. Self-rule can include such things as autonomous governing agreements, or full political independence from a state. Of the 168 racial and ethnic groups across 87 states

that engaged in independence protests, the strongest predictor that a group would be successful was if they used peaceful tactics and protests.

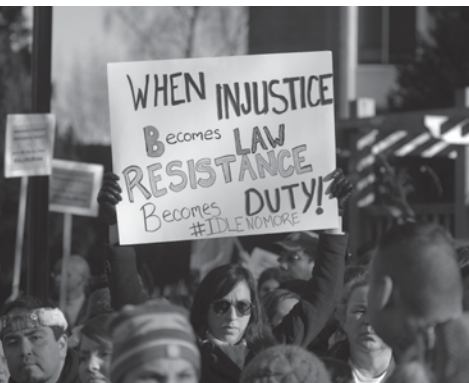
Violent protests may even set back a cause. This was suggested by a recent Princeton University study. It looked at American civil rights protests from 1960 to 1972. In places where non-violent protests took place, votes for the Democratic Party—which generally supported the civil rights movement—increased 1.6–2.5%. Meanwhile, in places where protesters initiated violence, votes by white people for the Republican Party—which generally opposed the civil rights movement—increased anywhere from 1.5–7.9%. Put more simply, peaceful protests strengthened support for civil rights; violent protests strengthened opposition to civil rights.

In fact, the Princeton study suggested that these voting shifts handed victory to Republican presidential candidate Richard Nixon in the 1968 election. Nixon defeated Democratic candidate and long-time civil rights advocate Hubert Humphrey.

None of this is to say that there has never been a time or place for violent protest. Every situation is unique. But on the whole, the most effective and the legal avenue for change in a liberal democracy is peaceful protest.

## Give Peace a Chance

Violent protest is not only against the law: it risks making protesters and their leaders look more like extremists than fellow citizens. While violent protests usually attract more media attention than peaceful ones, the attention can create a negative perception of the cause. Given that Canadians pride themselves on “peace, order, and good government”—a June 2020 survey ranked this as one of the top reasons why we are proud of our country—it should come as little surprise that people who peacefully use the system to create change have a greater chance of succeeding.



The Idle No More movement—to bring awareness to Indigenous rights—began with a teach-in at Saskatoon’s Station 20 West in December 2012.

Within days, peaceful protests such as flash-mob round-dances were happening across Canada and around the world.

Peaceful protest succeeds in part because it sends signals to several different groups in society. Average citizens become aware of important issues. Like-minded people, who may be reluctant to voice their opinions, learn that others share their beliefs. And people in power learn about and can act upon the desire for change. As former Prime Minister John Diefenbaker said in his memoirs, “There is an inherent fairness in people.” When presented with calls for fairness, decent Canadians will heed those calls.

Understanding the nature of peaceful protest and its power to influence minds helps explain the enormous success of 2020’s Black Lives Matter protests. The overall peaceful approach in Saskatchewan, in Canada, and across the world brought greater awareness to injustices and changed the nature of the conversation. In Canada, public opinion polls during summer and fall 2020 showed that an overwhelming majority of us—usually around 70%—supported the protests and the movement. Their peaceful nature

likely played a role in the widespread acceptance, and have been an important step towards creating a better society.

## Discuss

1. Studies have found that when peaceful protesters are treated violently—be it by government authorities or counter-protesters—support for the peaceful protesters’ cause tends to go up.
  - a) Why is this?
  - b) Is violence ever justified against peaceful protesters?
2. Camus had reservations about resorting to violence and murder, but he was not a pacifist. Having been part of the French Resistance, this is understandable. In *The Rebel*, Camus said

Authentic acts of rebellion will only consent to take up arms for institutions which limit violence, not for those which codify it. (256)

In other words, violence could be justified if it is committed in the pursuit of peace.

Discuss the contradiction of using violence to achieve peace. Is it justifiable?
3. Have you witnessed, participated in, or organised a protest? If so, for what cause? Did the protest help change people’s minds?

<sup>1</sup> John Diefenbaker. *One Canada: The Crusading Years 1895-1956*. Macmillan of Canada, 1975, p. 189.

## Part Two • Chapter 7

*Tarrou interviews Rieux, and the discussion turns to the role of God in society.*

// What's true  
of all the  
evils in  
the world  
is true  
of plague  
as well.  
It helps  
men to  
rise above  
themselves.  
All the  
same, when  
you see  
the misery  
it brings,  
you'd need  
to be a  
madman, or  
a coward,  
or stone  
blind, to  
given in  
tamely to  
the plague //

(106)

1. The plague serum is not very effective, and there is not enough supply for everyone. Only families with a sick member receive the serum.
  - a) Is this the best way to ration serum in Oran?
  - b) What is the best way to ration a vaccine in short supply? What evidence do you have to support your assertion?
2. Rieux's mother says "at my age there isn't much left to fear" (104).
  - a) Discuss her attitude. Why would she feel this way?
  - b) Is lacking fear a form of resistance?
3. Consider Rieux's comments about Father Paneloux and his sermon:

Paneloux is a man of learning, a scholar. He hasn't come in contact with death; that's why he can speak with such assurance of truth – with a capital T. (106)

  - a) Rieux has been witnessing death first-hand, Paneloux has not. Do scholars, theorists, and other experts necessarily understand reality?
  - b) How does Rieux's assessment of Paneloux relate to Camus' idea of absurdism?
4. What does Tarrou mean when he says his code of morals is "comprehension" (109)?

## Part Two • Chapter 8

// Plague is  
here and  
we've got to  
make a stand //

(112)

*Sanitary squads take to fighting the plague. Meanwhile, Grand fusses over the second sentence of his novel.*

1. The sanitary squads are an allegory for resistance cells of the French Resistance. Why does the narrator decline to ascribe a great deal of importance to the sanitary squads?
2. The narrator points out that “The local bacillus differed slightly from the normal plague bacillus as defined in text-books of tropical diseases” (112).
  - a) How does this statement apply to the book’s allegorical meaning about France?
  - b) Does all discrimination and oppression follow the exact same form everywhere?
3. What do Grand’s efforts on the second sentence of his novel tell us about the importance of taking action? Can things be over-thought?





## Historical Context

# Outlawing Science in Camus' Time

Albert Camus knew that truths can have a complicated relationship with power. This is why *The Plague* warns that “again and again there comes a time in history when the man who dares say that two and two make four is punished with death” (111). In fact, this passage from the book can help us understand how Camus forged a strong friendship with French biochemist Jacques Monod.

Camus and Monod met in 1948. Their friendship quickly grew. As Camus wrote in a 1957 letter to him, “I, who feel solidarity with many men, feel friendship with only a few. You are one of these, my dear Monod, with a constancy and sincerity that I must tell you at least once.” Camus and Monod shared similar pasts. Both men had been active in the French Resistance, and both had briefly been members of the Communist Party.

That Monod and Camus were one-time Communist Party members comes as little surprise. Communist parties around the world worked hard, especially in the 1930s, to recruit intellectuals, artists, and scientists to their cause. They believed that if their movement promoted thoughtful, competing views, science could play a strong role in a communist society. This is one reason why communism became popular with many thinkers in the 1930s and 1940s.

Unfortunately, the Soviet Union—the leading communist country for most of the 20<sup>th</sup> century—was turning increasingly authoritarian at this time. Its leader, Joseph Stalin, began to demand in the 1930s that all scientific theories serve communism. This meant that scientific ideas should only be pursued if they helped to advance communist ideology.

Stalin’s demand had two effects: it undermined the intellectual basis of communism, and in turn, this undermined communism itself. These effects are well-illustrated by Lysenkoism.

Lysenkoism was a wrong-headed Soviet view of genetic science. Lysenkoism undermined the relationship between many scientists with communism. Ultimately, it is believed that Lysenkoism set back the study of genetics in the Soviet Union by fifty years.

## The Growth of Lysenkoism

When Stalin demanded that all theories—including scientific theories—serve communism, Russian scientist Trofim Lysenko was hard at work developing a new theory of genetics. Lysenko believed that the genetic structure of plants could be changed almost



French stamp commemorating Jacques Monod. He believed “The most important results of science have been to change the relationship of man to the universe, or the way he sees himself in the universe.”



immediately, by modifying their environmental conditions. Lysenko said that these changed plants would then directly pass on their modified genetic structure to their next generation.

Lysenko thought that this theory could apply to all living organisms, not just plants. The theory ignored some key facts about genetics. However, the theory fit well with the Soviet ideal that a perfect society could be engineered and created.

A handful of Lysenko's early experiments looked promising. However, it soon became clear that there were major problems with his ideas. Nevertheless, because Lysenko's theory served communism, he won Stalin's approval. Lysenko was eventually promoted to the head of the Lenin Academy of Agricultural Sciences, the institute that directed all plant and animal breeding in the Soviet Union.

It would have been bad enough had Lysenko's wrong-headed science only contributed to crop failures in the Soviet Union, which it did. However, the authoritarian nature of the Soviet Union led Lysenkoism down a very dark path.

Soon, dissenting views of genetics were outlawed. Scientists who attempted to demonstrate problems with Lysenko's theories were persecuted. Many ended up in prison, some were even executed. With facts suppressed and researchers oppressed, a cloud of doubt was soon cast over *all* Soviet science. Researchers looking at Soviet science were unsure what was quality research, created through open debate, and what was faulty science, created to please Soviet leaders.

Meanwhile in France, some scientists who were communist party members began to twist their views of genetics to conform with Lysenko. Jacques Monod was deeply frustrated to see scientists put their loyalty to communism ahead of open scientific debate.

Monod's frustration led him to write a scathing article in the September 15<sup>th</sup>, 1948 edition of *Combat*. In it, Monod demolished Lysenkoism as a "doctrinal fantasy." He explained its scientific shortcomings, and accused the Soviet Union and Lysenko's defenders of corrupting science in the name of ideology.

History has proven Monod correct. He went on to win the Nobel prize, becoming one of the 20<sup>th</sup> century's most-celebrated scientists. On the other hand, Trofim Lysenko died in disgrace after the Soviets changed their science policies in the mid-1960s.

Shortly before Jacques Monod's death in 1976, he answered a letter from a 13-year-old admirer. In it, Monod outlined the qualities of life that appeared most important to him:

They are: courage, as much moral as physical, as well as the love of truth, or rather, the hatred of lies. I prefer to speak of the hatred of lies rather than the love of truth, since one is never sure of holding the truth, whereas with lies, one is almost always able to detect them, to discover them, and to denounce them.<sup>2</sup>

Monod believed that to find truths and expose lies, we must be open to debate.

## **“One must imagine Sisyphus happy”**

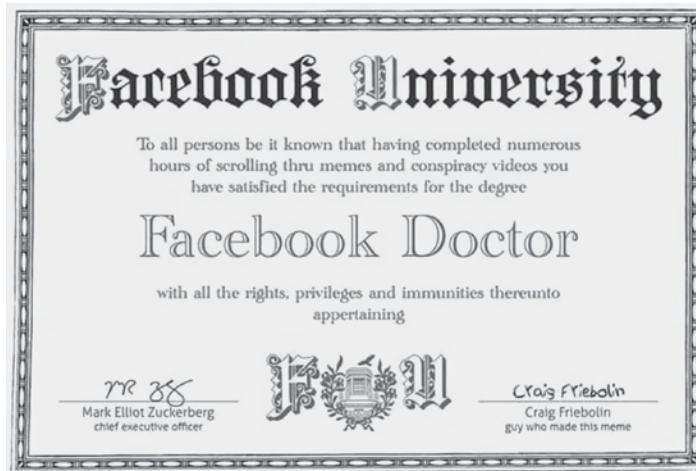
Albert Camus and Jacques Monod's experiences explain why both feared those times “when the man who dares say that two and two make four is punished with death” (111). Their Resistance against Nazi and Vichy efforts to stifle truth was a central part of their World War II lives. Following the war, both spoke out when they saw excesses taking place in Stalin's Soviet Union. To that point, Camus wrote

*The Rebel* in part to critique abuses of power with Russia's Communist Revolution. The book ended up costing Camus several friendships.

At the core, Camus and Monod wanted societies that embraced open searches for truth. The common connection of their beliefs can be seen in the opening of Monod's famous 1970 book *Chance and Necessity*. Monod began the book by quoting the closing of Camus' *Myth of Sisyphus*: we should find happiness in the search for truth.

## Discuss

1. Consider the point raised in *The Plague* that “again and again there comes a time in history when the man who dares say that two and two make four is punished with death” (111). Can you think of instances today where inconvenient facts are swept aside?
2. Think back to Father Paneloux's remark about the “vaunted might of human science” (81). Humans suffer from human weaknesses, such as ego, bias, and greed. What impact would our flaws have on the study of science?
3. Scientific facts evolve as research is done. When the facts change, the recommendations will change. Reflect on the changing health recommendations during the COVID-19 pandemic. Is it reasonable for knowledge to be fast-changing and sometimes uncertain in such a time?
4. Consider this widely-circulated meme:



Who is best-suited to grasp the complexities of science? Do we need to trust experts? Are experts always right?

5. A saying often attributed to economist John Maynard Keynes is  
“When the facts change, I change my mind. What do you do?”  
When the facts change, what do you do?

<sup>1</sup> quoted in Sean B. Carroll. *Brave Genius*. Broadway Books, 2012, p. 2.

<sup>2</sup> quoted in Sean B. Carroll. *Brave Genius*. Broadway Books, 2012, p. 496.

## Part Two • Chapter 9

// The only  
means of  
fighting a  
plague is  
– common  
decency //

(136)

Cottard introduces Rambert to smugglers who can get him out of Oran, and Paneloux joins the sanitary squads. Meanwhile, it is revealed that Cottard committed a crime in his past, which has led him to fear punishment. Rieux, Rambert, and Tarrou close the chapter by discussing human nature and its relationship to plague.

1. How is Cottard making extra money?
2. The magistrate tells Tarrou “It’s not the law that counts, it’s the sentence” (122). Discuss this statement. Do you agree?
3. As the death figures rise, Tarrou says that “more stringent measures should be applied” (131).
  - a) Is Tarrou right? Should the rules be tightened?
  - b) Why does society require rules? Are people incapable of acting responsibly without rules?
4. Rambert worries that humans “have lost the capacity for love” (136).
  - a) Do you believe humans can lose this capacity?
  - b) Throughout history, humans interacted within small communities. One school of thought—the “Dunbar Number”—suggests that we are capable of maintaining a meaningful circle of 150 people. This includes 5 loved ones, 15 good friends, and 50 friends. Social media now allows us to interact with thousands if not millions of different people. Do we have the capacity for such large-scale interaction?
5. Rieux says that “the only means of fighting a plague is – common decency” (136). Discuss.
6. Rambert asks to join Rieux in fighting the plague. How would their conversation the night before have led to Rambert’s change-of-heart?



## Health Concepts

# Absolute Freedom and Universal Health Care

Recall Rambert's statement in *The Plague* that "Public welfare is merely the sum-total of the private welfare of each of us" (74). The idea behind this statement is simple. Everyone is an individual. But none of us exist alone. We interact with other people in countless ways. Family, friendships, religious communities, schooling, workplaces, clubs, and even shopping are ways we interact and rely upon each other. The public—all of us—is a collection of private individuals.

Because we are interconnected, a community can only be healthy if most every individual in that community is healthy.

Think about what happens to individuals in a disease outbreak. Individuals must be quickly and accurately diagnosed, then effectively treated. Diagnosis and treatment helps the patient heal. Diagnosis and treatment also helps to keep the disease from spreading. If individuals are left to be sick, the disease can spread. This will harm the health of the whole community.

This simple reality—that a community cannot be healthy unless its individual members are healthy—is yet another reason why Canada has universal health care.

## What is Universal Health Care?

According to the World Health Organization, universal health care is achieved when

all people have access to the health services they need... without the risk of financial hardship when paying for them... [It requires] an efficient health system that provides the entire population with access to good quality services, health workers, medicines and technologies. It also requires a financing system to protect people from financial hardship and impoverishment from health care costs.<sup>1</sup>

Put more simply, universal health care provides everyone with quality, affordable (or free) health care.

Broadly, there are three types of universal health care systems.

The first is the Bismarck model, named after Otto von Bismarck. Bismarck was Chancellor of Prussia, an area that is mostly part of modern-day Germany. In 1893, Bismarck introduced a health care plan. The Bismarck model requires citizens to buy health insurance. In return, the government heavily regulates health insurance and health care, to make sure that it is affordable. In this system, doctor's offices and hospitals are either publicly or privately owned. When a person visits the doctor or hospital, the services are paid through their insurance.

The second type is the Beveridge model, named after William Beveridge. Beveridge was a British social reformer and cabinet minister. In 1942, he proposed a model for creating the UK's National Health Service (NHS). The Beveridge model is simpler than the Bismarck model: almost all doctor's offices and hospitals are owned and paid for by the government. Citizens are entitled to use these services.

Canada's model differs from the Bismarck and Beveridge models. It is called the National Insurance model. Generally, doctor's offices are privately owned, and hospitals are publicly owned. The government provides every citizen with health insurance. When we visit the doctor, the doctor sends the bill to the government. When we go to the hospital, our visit is paid for by the government.

## Saskatchewan and the Dawn of Universal Health Care

Saskatchewan is the birthplace of Canada's public health care. In 1948, the Tommy Douglas CCF (now called NDP) government introduced universal hospitalisation insurance. Under the program, all hospital visits and diagnostic services would be paid for by the province.

Prime Minister John Diefenbaker, a Progressive Conservative from Saskatchewan, was impressed with what the Douglas government had done. Diefenbaker took Saskatchewan's program national in 1958. The federal government provided every province with funding to implement hospitalisation insurance.

Diefenbaker's move freed up a considerable amount of money in Saskatchewan's health care budget. Thus, in 1962 Saskatchewan was able to implement universal health care insurance, the system we have today. Now, visits to the doctor would also be paid by the government.

Around the same time, Diefenbaker created the Royal Commission on Health Care Services. Its mission was to examine how to provide all Canadians with health care. They examined health care models around the world, and recommended that Canada follow Saskatchewan's model for universal health care.

The report spurred Lester Pearson's Liberal federal government to create a universal health care program for all Canadians. When introducing the new health law in 1966, the Minister of Health and Welfare said that

all Canadians should be able to obtain health services of high quality, according to their need for such services and irrespective of their ability to pay. We believe that the only practical and effective way of doing this is through a universal, prepaid, government-sponsored scheme.<sup>2</sup>

With this announcement, health care would become a right for all Canadians.

As we can see, the creation of Canada's universal health care was not the work of one politician or one government. Its dawn came from bold action in Saskatchewan, then politicians of all stripes



When universal health care was proposed for Saskatchewan, not everybody was in favour.

A protest representing this vocal minority of citizens was held at the Legislature on July 11<sup>th</sup>, 1962.

built on each other's work to create universal health care for all Canadians. Sometimes, a good idea transcends narrow conceptions of politics and ideology.

Universal health care is a recognition of our equality as citizens. Every Canadian is entitled to the same level of high quality health care, regardless of who we are or our ability to pay. And because every Canadian uses the same health care system, every Canadian has a vested interest in making the health care system work. It is a collective program for all, intended to make all of us healthier.

## Freedom to Choose?

The *Canada Health Act*—the law governing public health care—prohibits parallel private health care systems. Put more simply, you cannot go to a doctor's office and pay extra to receive quicker or "better" service. Broadly speaking, there is only one health care system in Canada.

Some individuals believe that they should be free to exit Canada's universal health care system and buy private health care. They believe they would benefit by being able to shorten their own waiting times. They also believe that if they exited the public health system, poorer people would benefit: resources would be freed up for the people who remained in the public system.

The Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada poured cold water on this idea. Its comprehensive study of health care systems around the world revealed that allowing separate private health care systems in Canada—sometimes called "two-tier" health care—would damage public health. According to the report, "there is no evidence these solutions will deliver better or cheaper care, or improve access (except, perhaps, for those who can afford to pay for care out of their own pockets)."<sup>3</sup> Only a select, wealthy few would benefit if Canada allowed private health care.

Nevertheless, Canada is a liberal democracy that exists under the rule of law. People can challenge laws that they believe violate the *Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Recently, a British Columbia surgery clinic did this. They argued that universal health care violated Section 7 of the *Charter*. Section 7 guarantees Canadians the right to life, liberty and security of the person. The clinic said that restricting everyone to the public health system infringed upon those rights. They argued that Canadians should be free to buy and sell private health care.

BC's Supreme Court rejected the surgery clinic's argument in 2020. The court ruled that a parallel private system cannot be allowed in Canada, because it would greatly damage public health care. The court pointed to several problems that would be created by "two-tier" health care. For example:

- doctors would exit the public system to get paid more in the private system. This would leave fewer doctors and clinics available for the public system
- health care costs would go up because the public system would need to compete with higher-paid doctors in the private system
- evidence from around the world showed that two-tier health care was objectively worse for the masses than universal health care

In conclusion, the court said that allowing private health care in Canada would

reduce the capacity of the public system to offer medical care, increase the public system's costs, create perverse incentives for physicians, increase the risk of ethical

lapses related to conflicts between the private and public practices of physicians, undermine political support for the public system, and exacerbate inequity in access to medically necessary care.<sup>4</sup>

In short, two-tiered health care might help a select few, but it would damage the health care system used by the overwhelming majority of Canadians.

All *Charter* rights—including the right to life, liberty, and the security of the person—are “subject only to such reasonable limits prescribed by law as can be demonstrably justified in a free and democratic society.” Allowing wealthy Canadians the freedom to create their own health care system would harm the health of Canadians as a whole. Therefore, the court found that prohibiting private health care systems is a reasonable limit on freedom.

Universal health care means that every Canadian is entitled to access to high-quality public health care. Like Rambert says in *The Plague*, “Public welfare is merely the sum-total of the private welfare of each of us” (74). If each individual can be healthy, we can all be healthy as a society.

## Back to Oran

*The Plague* contains no discussion about the nature of Oran’s health care system. Nevertheless, the need for one public, universal health care system is illustrated when the plague spreads across Oran.

Recall that there is an unexpected and sudden surge in demand for medical services. This leaves Dr. Rieux to lament that “they lacked adequate means of coping with the disease” (125). Only ten doctors and 100 helpers are available from other towns to help. Oran needs more doctors and medical equipment. However, medical equipment cannot be manufactured overnight and doctors cannot be trained over the course of a weekend. Supply is limited.

Now imagine a two-tier health care system, especially during a global pandemic. Demand for health care would spike. During this time, the rich could buy up as much health care as they wanted. With health care resources being snapped up by the rich, less resources would be available for middle-class and poor people.

The consequence: the health of middle-class and poor people would disproportionately suffer. And as their health declined, the health of the entire community would be harmed.

## Discuss

1. Think back to Camus’ statement in *The Rebel* that “absolute freedom is the right of the strongest to dominate” (251). How does health care illustrate the need for reasonable limits on freedoms?
2. How do universal social programs like public health care build social solidarity?
3. Canada does not have universal dental care, eye care, or prescription drug coverage. Should we?

- <sup>1</sup> World Health Organization. Questions and Answers on Universal Health Coverage. [www.who.int/healthsystems/topics/financing/uhc\\_qa/en/](http://www.who.int/healthsystems/topics/financing/uhc_qa/en/)
- <sup>2</sup> Alan MacEachen, Minister of National Health and Welfare, quoted in “Making Medicare: The Medical History of Canada, 1914-2007,” Canadian Museum of History, [www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/hist/medicare/medic-5h23e.html](http://www.historymuseum.ca/cmhc/exhibitions/hist/medicare/medic-5h23e.html)
- <sup>3</sup> *Building on Values: The Future of Health Care in Canada*. Final Report of the Royal Commission on the Future of Health Care in Canada, November 2002.
- <sup>4</sup> Supreme Court of British Columbia. *Cambie Surgeries Corporation v. British Columbia (Attorney General)*, 2020 BCSC 1310. [www.bccourts.ca/jdb-txt/sc/20/13/2020BCSC1310.htm](http://www.bccourts.ca/jdb-txt/sc/20/13/2020BCSC1310.htm)



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