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Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation

Jean-Paul Sartre

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In 1952, Jean-Paul Sartre engaged Albert Camus in a celebrated and bitter public confrontation that had wide-ranging cultural significance. The year before, Camus had challenged the prevailing political wisdom in his renowned work, The Rebel. In response he was attacked in print, first by Francis Jeanson writing in Les Temps Modernes, a journal edited by Sartre, and then by Sartre himself. In a series of highly publicized articles, these literary and cultural titans locked horns over human values, social and political policy, the nature of human freedom, the meaning of history, and the direction that Western civilization should take.

This book contains the first English translation of the five texts constituting this famous philosophical quarrel. Personally animated, passionately argued, polemically focused, this confrontation was as much a personal encounter as it was a theoretical debate. Alternating between stylistic brilliance and stinging sarcasm, each draws upon their years of past involvement as former friends both to make their criticisms more pointed and their theoretical critique more challenging. At the same time, their views serve as lightning rods for the wider cultural forces of which they are partial expressions.

In addition to the two Camus and Jeanson articles, and a revised and corrected version of Sartre’s article, the volume includes a detailed biographical and critical introduction, which sets the historical context, plus two new essays by contemporary scholars presenting both a "Sartrean" and a "Camusian" perspective on the cultural and philosophical significance of this historic confrontation. Readers will not only be drawn into the issues raised by these two great thinkers but realize that their debate is still with us, perhaps more forcefully than ever.

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