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Existentialism & Phenomenology
Midterm, Question #1

At the end of *The Plague*, Albert Camus writes, “He knew what those jubilant crowds did not know but could have learned from books: that the plague bacillus never dies or disappears for good; that it can lie dormant for years and years in furniture and linen-chests; that it bides its time in bedrooms, cellars, trunks, and bookshelves; and that perhaps the day will come when, for the bane and the enlightening of men, it would rouse up its rats again and send them forth to die in a happy city.” I believe that Camus ended the book in a way as a reminder for the way things are, and we should not be so ignorant. This quote from *The Plague* shows how blissfully ignorant the people are and hints to the idea of what anxiety is.

After the plague seemingly subdued, life picked up for the people of Oran. They began to move back into the way that their life was prior to the plague. The plague took life as they knew it away, and gave them restraints. Now that the plague was seemingly gone, they could easily put it and its true effect out of mind. If they wanted to find out about the plague really, all they had to do was pick up a book and find out more about the plague bacillus. They would learn that the plague isn't gone; it is merely dormant. However they don't want to know that, they prefer to not live in fear and start the cycle of anxiety over again.

Anxiety is always present, much like the plague is. It never really goes away, but we put it out of our minds in order to continue on with our lives. We start off in the state of innocence and ignorance. Here we ignore certain truths, like the people of Oran who have happily returned to this state at the end of the book. They don't want to know that they live with the plague, but they

could find that out and cast themselves into a life with anxiety. As far as they are concerned, the plague doesn't exist anymore. The plague bacillus and anxiety share this in common, they are always present, and they don't go away. Whether we choose to acknowledge them or not is our choice. However the plague can awaken at any time and allow itself to be known. With the rats, the plague can announce itself and cast the people of Oran back into an anxious state. That is the same with anxiety; it can spring onto us at anytime. It's always there, lying in every aspect of our lives, silently awaiting a chance to reemerge.

The plague and anxiety has nothing that can restrain them. In *The Plague*, Rieux engaged himself in the Sisyphean labor of trying to cure the plague bacillus. He tried relentlessly to find cures, to do whatever he could possibly do to help subdue the plague bacillus, but he could not. The plague bacillus, like anxiety, however takes on the role of controlling the people. The plague bacillus took away the townspeople life. It reduced them to living in controlled environment and it took away their hopes, and their futures. This shows the relationship of anxiety to the individual. Anxiety, like the plague, cannot be controlled, however it can control the individual. Anxiety has no object, however we still try to treat it, and make it go away.

The plague is anxiety; it helps us understand what anxiety is. Anxiety lies dormant, much like the plague, but it's not hidden from us; it's merely covered. If we so choose to, we could uncover it and live with it, but we make the choice not to, much like the people in Oran who make the choice not to. Anxiety and the plague could reemerge at any given time, without any warning. We cannot control it; rather they control the people that they touch. The people of Oran couldn't control the plague, they didn't know enough about it, and they didn't have the proper

medications to combat it. They had to wait for it to run its course. The same goes for anxiety.

Anxiety has no object, it cannot be control, and there is nothing that can combat it. Whoever has to deal with anxiety has to allow it to run its course. When it's has reached it's end of that cycle, we have the choice, do we continue to live with the knowledge knowing that it is there, or do we go back to the state of ignorance and innocence. Then we have to prepare ourselves for the shock for when the rats die in our streets.