

Letter to P. B. Albert Camus

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February 15, 1953

My dear friend, I will begin with the apology I owe you for last Friday. It was not because of a lecture on Holland, but that I was summoned at the last moment to sign books on behalf of the flood victims there. This exercise, which I was doing for the first time, seemed something I couldn't refuse, and I thought you would forgive my inconveniencing you. But this is not the question, the question is what you describe as the difficulties of our relationship.

On this point, what I have to say can be expressed simply: if you knew one quarter of my life and its obligations, you wouldn't have written a single line of your letter. But you cannot know them, and I neither can nor should explain them to you. The "haughty solitude" that you, along with many others who lack your quality, complain of, would be a blessing for me, if it existed.

But people are quite wrong to assume I enjoy such paradise. The truth is that I fight time and other people for each hour of my work, usually without winning. I'm not complaining. My life is what I have made it, and I am the first person responsible for the way and the pace at which I spend it.

But when I receive a letter like yours, then I do feel I want to complain, or at least ask people not to heap abuse on me so easily. To be equal to everything today, I would need three lives and several hearts. Of the latter, I have only one, which can be judged, as I often judge it myself, to be of only average quality. Physically I do not have the time, and above all the inner leisure, to see my friends as I would like to (ask Char, whom I love like a brother, how many times we see each other in a month).

I haven't the time to write for reviews, neither on Jaspers nor on Tunisia, even in order to clear up one of Sartre's arguments. You will believe me if you want to, but I have not the time, nor the inner leisure, to be ill. When I am sick, my life is all upside down and I spend weeks trying to catch up with myself. But what is most serious is that I no longer have the time, or the inner leisure, to write my books, and it takes me four years to write something which, if I were free, would have taken one or two. Besides, for several years now, rather than freeing me, my work has enslaved me.

And if I keep on, it's because I cannot do otherwise and because I prefer it to anything else, even liberty, wisdom, or true creativity, even, yes even, to friendship. It is true that I try to organize myself, to double my strength and my "presence" by a timetable, by organizing my day, by an increased efficiency. I hope to be equal to it someday. For the moment, I am not. Each letter brings three others, each person ten, each book a hundred letters and twenty correspondents, while life continues, there is work to do, people I love and people who need me.

Life continues, and some mornings, weary of the noise, discouraged by the prospect of the interminable work to keep after, sickened also by the madness of the world that leaps at you from the newspaper, finally convinced that I will not be equal to it and that I will disappoint everyone—all I want to do is sit down and wait for evening. This is what I feel like, and sometimes I yield to it. Can you understand this? Of course, you deserve to be respected and talked to. Of course your friends are as good as mine (who are not so grammatically inclined as you think).

Even though I find it hard to imagine (and this is not a pose) that my esteem can matter to anyone, I do admire you. But for this esteem to transform itself into active friendship, we should indeed require real leisure, and many opportunities to meet. I have met a number of fine people, this has been the

blessing of my life. But it is not possible to have that many friends, and unfortunately this condemns me to disappoint people, I know.

I can understand that other people find it unbearable. I find it unbearable. But this is how things are, and if people cannot like me under these circumstances I expect them to leave me to a solitude that, as you see, is less haughty than you think.

In any case, I am replying to your bitterness without any of my own. Letters like yours, coming from someone like you, only make me sad, and compound the reasons I have to flee this town and the life I lead here. For the moment, although this is what I long for most in the world, it is not possible. I am thus compelled to continue this alien existence, and must count what you tell me as the price—rather a high one, I think that I must pay for having let myself be driven to it.

Forgive me, in any case, for having disappointed you, and believe me to be,
Faithfully, Albert Camus

The end