

# Argumentative essay on characters in camus the plague

[Experience](#), [Belief](#)



Albert Camus' novel *The Plague* uses characters and their relationships quite heavily in order to provide a character-based reaction to the epidemic they are dealing with in the town of Oran. In the book, numerous characters have different reactions to death, some shying away from God and others embracing it. Some choose to turn their life around, others lose their minds even further.

Dr. Bernard Rieux narrates *The Plague*, and provides a significant voice of reason for the town. He is one of the more ethically driven characters of the novel, acting out of rationality and practicality, rather than faith and impulsivity. While the authorities drag their feet and fail to act, Rieux works hard in order to help fight the plague, despite how little his methods work. He puts aside all of his selfish notions of safety and the welfare of his wife in order to help put things right within the town.

At the same time, Dr. Rieux takes great umbrage when he fails to save the city magistrate's son; he decides to give up on God and abandon whatever faith he might have had, choosing to reject religion in favor of existentialism (Camus Journal, p. 61). He had a great sense of duty, going through the motions of helping people even when he knows it is a lost cause. This sense of helplessness wears him down, and it forces him to maintain a certain emotional distance from his patients, in order to prevent himself from feeling too much for the doomed.

Jean Tarrou provides an alternate account of the plague, offering a greater sense of philosophy than Rieux; at the same time, he rejects God the same as Rieux, but he focuses his energies to helping people fight the plague.

Since he comes from elsewhere (he is Oran on vacation only), he offers an outside perspective on the town, allowing for a more distanced perspective on how people behave within Oran. He and Rieux both agree that death must be fought whenever possible, using that similar philosophical focal point to work together to fight the plague.

Fathe Paneloux provides the alternative perspective to Rieux and Tarrou, that of Christian faith and belief. However, the death of the magistrate's son also shakes his own faith, making him come to the conclusion that "if God wills a child's suffering and death, he and other Christians must will it too" (Camus Journal, p. 61). He chooses to accept the circumstances of the plague instead of fighting God's will. According to him, you must accept everything God does or reject it all; you do not have the luxury of choice. He channels his faith into support of whatever happens, including the disease, which prevents him from taking an active role in fighting the plague. Even when he himself turns ill from the disease, he allows God to take him wherever He wills, not asking for medical assistance.

While these characters represent the grand philosophical constants of the plague, Joseph Grand and Cottard represent the common man, and the solidarity that this community wishes to show to each other. While Cottard was suspicious and antisocial before the plague, its presence seems to starve something in him, wishing to thrive despite the presence of the sickness, selling booze and cigarettes to those who want it. He is a very temperamental figure, sometimes being very happy, other times attempting to kill himself. After the plague is over, he loses his mind and is arrested; the

plague finally sent him over the edge, as panicky as he already was beforehand.

Joseph Grand, on the other hand, is a far calmer figure, if a bit of a perfectionist. He provides a stark contrast to the wild, unpredictable Cottard, instead having a quiet sadness to him because of his lack of ability to communicate properly through words to his satisfaction. He cannot seem to keep or finish anything; his wife left him, and he perpetually tries to write a book but cannot get past the first sentence. When he catches the plague, it seems as though things are over for him; however, once he recovers surprisingly, he takes steps to get his wife back and get that book finished. For him, the plague reminded him of his mortality, and so he is given a new lease on life.

In conclusion, the major characters of *The Plague* face a great number of philosophical challenges and some dramatically alter their viewpoints as a result of such a horrific epidemic. Reiuix and Tarrou seek to find their way through practicality and the existential fight against death; Paneloux, however, seeks to trust God's will, whatever it may be. Cottard allows the frenzy of the plague to make him lose his mind further, while Joseph Grand uses his brush with death to remind himself of the things he still has to do. These varied reactions to such a traumatic experience showcase the role of the book as a character study in the face of a terrible crisis, showcasing that people have different reactions to a major disaster.

## **Works Cited**

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