
The Question of Suicide in Albert Camus' the Myth of Sisyphus

Albert Camus studied the philosophy of the absurd and decided that, to him, the most important philosophical question was “why not commit suicide?” In “The Myth of Sisyphus: An Absurd Reasoning” (1942), he discusses his thoughts on the answer to this question. He considers the absurdity of life, how to deal with it, and explains his reasoning throughout the story of Sisyphus. He concludes his thoughts with saying “at that subtle moment when man glances backward over his life, Sisyphus returning toward his rock, in that slight pivoting he contemplates that series of unrelated actions which become his fate, created by him, combined under his memory's eye and soon sealed by his death.” Although this may seem miserable at first, Camus clarifies throughout his writings that it is possible to find happiness in a meaningless, habitual life. He believes that “killing yourself amounts to confessing. Life is too much for you, you do not understand it,” and giving up is not the answer. Happiness can be found, and life can be lived passionately, full of experiences, but still have no purpose.

First, it is necessary to give some context on the myth of Sisyphus. In the story, it is not clear on how he came to his fate, but it does tell the readers that Sisyphus had a passion for life, and a hatred for death. He cheated the gods, and he is faced with an eternity of futile labour. He is to roll a rock up a hill, only to have the rock roll back down every time it reaches the top. Now at first, Camus suggests that the gods are clever to give Sisyphus this punishment, but at the end he “conclude[s] that all is well,” with Sisyphus, and that he is a happy man. The only way for this to happen is for Sisyphus to acknowledge his crushing truth of his eternity, and once he does this, it is just a little less crushing. He knows the whole extent of his fate and has discovered what Camus calls the absurdity of the meaningless of the habit of life, from which springs happiness. He is a master of his own days and as he walks back down the hill, he is free to reach a state of accepted content.

Camus relates this back to our own lives and that we are in the midst of filling our days with meaningless tasks, such as Sisyphus is. People look for solutions by either discovering the meaning they want through a leap of faith, or they conclude that life has no meaning. These seem to be the only two options, so if someone does not believe in a deity or any religion, and they decide that there is no meaning, should this person automatically commit suicide? Camus thinks no, that there can be a third possibility that we can accept and live in a world devoid of meaning or purpose; this is the absurd. Suicide amounts to confessing that the world is too chaotic and devoid of purpose, it is too much to handle, as quoted earlier. Camus believes that the third possibility can let us live a fulfilling life, even with accepting that it is a meaningless and

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absurd world. Facing the absurd in our world and accepting it, is the only way to find happiness in it.

The absurd is defined as one's search for purpose within this life, but what is key is the inability to find any. People desire purpose in life, and this is why they make leaps of faith and jump to religion for answers, but truly knowing and accepting the absurd means that you are conscious and okay with the fact that there is no possible meaning to this confusing and chaotic world. Acknowledging the absurd, may seem like automatic suicide, but by accepting the absurd, it can be living life to the fullest, in spite of being aware that humankind is here for a short time, all people must die, and this is an unreasonable world. There is a constant conflict of what we want from the universe and what we will find in the universe. If you choose to live the third option of the absurd life that Camus proposes, there are three characteristics of the absurd; the revolt, freedom and passion. We are always aware of our desire and reality, and the difference between the two is called the revolt of the meaningless of life. Suicide is a way out of this consequence, but hope is also a way. Revolting the notion that all people must die must be constant. Freedom is the second consequence. In most people's lives, they are under the impression that they have the freedom to make choices, and these choices usually lead to a common goal. The struggle with this, is that it limits the possibilities to comply with the goal. When the absurd is accepted, this goal has disappeared for there has been acceptance of no true meaning in life, and freedom is a whole new concept. It is a new type of freedom to think and act as one chooses, knowing that they do not have to fulfill any predetermined roll. Man is now free of any preconceptions he has or other people have for their life and may live to the fullest in freedom. Finally, the third consequence is passion. Sisyphus himself had a passion for life, and it is nice to think that this passion continued even when rolling the rock. There is no reason for doing one thing rather than another, meaning there is no reason for him to be doing anything else but rolling that rock up the hill, for, as said before, there are no roles to fulfill when living in acceptance of the absurd. In this case, it only makes sense to judge the quantity of experience in a life. Camus desires to live a full life, full of passion, the more experiences, the better. Being aware of every moment that passes us and treasuring the present can lead to a happy life.

When people discover the absurd, there is a feeling of uncertainty, just as there is in the philosophy of skepticism. The skeptic, Descartes, and Camus start on the same basis by doubting everything, and dismissing all meaning. However, this is where Descartes chooses one of the first two options, of suicide or faith, and chooses to believe in a deity in order to evade skepticism. Camus mentions a few existentialist philosophers at the end such as Kafka, and Kierkegaard who are unable to accept their absurd conditions, and instead make a leap of faith as well. Those who make a leap of faith are struggling with the absurdity and attempt to explain it with their faith, evading the fact that there is no truth. However, Camus accepts the uncertainty and knows he can only live his life to the fullest. He is similar to Hume in this sense

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as well, as Hume decided that absolute skepticism destroyed common sense of the physical world and created mitigated skepticism. People can doubt their daily lives, and accept the absurd, but only to the point of human intelligence. It only makes sense to live life to the fullest, with revolt to suicide, freedom and passion for life, accepting that not only is there no meaning, but that there is no purpose in looking for one for it is beyond human comprehension.

Sisyphus keeps pushing, knowing the certainty of his fate, but also knows that he is free to reach a state of accepted content. In the moment where Sisyphus walks back down the hill to retrieve the rock again, he is happy, and if he is happy with this even more absurd fate than the reality of this world, then all people have the opportunity to also find content in their meaningless, habitual lives.

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