



TO STUDY THE INFLUENCE OF MORAL SURROUNDINGS ON HUMAN BEHAVIOUR IN ALBERT CAMUS WORK

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ABSTRACT

This article undertakes a thorough analysis of Camus' message from the start of his career to its conclusion. The analysis also highlights the impossibility of developing an absurdity-based ethical framework. I start by examining Camus' absurdist phase, which comes before he starts to seriously defend certain ideals. This will cover Caligula and the Sisyphus Myth. The move of Camus from absurdist to moralist will be covered in the following section, which will contain The Rebel and The Plague. These two sections concentrate on the themes that run throughout each work, and for each of them, I explore how Christianity influences and is treated, the function of absurdity, and the principles that Camus is advocating or supporting. I draw attention to the challenges in balancing morality with the ludicrous by comparing the stances Camus takes in The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus to the ideas presented in his final book, The Fall.

KEY WORDS: Influence, Moral, Surroundings, Human Behaviour in Albert Camus.

INTRODUCTION

MYTH OF SISYPHUS

There is only one philosophical issue that is actually serious, and that is suicide. Camus begins *The Myth of Sisyphus*, his essay on the absurd and its ramifications for human life, with this audacious and stunning claim. One might immediately respond that there are more significant philosophical issues than the issue of suicide. Camus might first take into account the epistemological dilemma of whether we can genuinely know whether life is worth living, even though this topic is unquestionably crucial. Camus, however, does not genuinely take into account the issue of suicide as a whole. It is simple to understand how one would conclude that life is actually worthless as a result of life's absurdity after only giving this topic some thought. For instance, a person who is reared as a Christian is taught that accepting Christ and securing a position in the Kingdom of Heaven is the goal of life. Camus is aware of this issue and plans to address it seriously:

Hitherto, and it has not been wasted effort, people have played on words and pretended to believe that refusing to grant a meaning to life necessarily leads to declaring that it is not worth living. In truth, there is no necessary common measure between these two judgments....One kills oneself because life is not worth living that is certainly a truth— yet an unfruitful one because it is a truism. But does that insult to existence, that flat denial in which it is plunged come from the fact that it has no meaning? Does its absurdity require one to escape it through hope or suicide — this is what must be clarified, hunted down, and elucidated while brushing aside all the rest. Does the Absurd dictate death? This problem must be given priority over others, outside all methods of thought and all exercises of the disinterested mind.¹

The *Myth of Sisyphus* never directly addresses the topic of Christianity, yet it is still a crucial part of the struggle with absurdity. The beliefs of the Christian faith were largely taken for granted by Europeans as they went about their daily lives for centuries. But as

science and reason gained power, these beliefs came under scrutiny. It got more and more difficult to believe in ideas like the Immaculate Conception or the Resurrection since they ran completely counter to what we know to be factually viable. Jesus could not have been anything other than a man, mortal like all other men, as more and more people began to believe. Furthermore, there was no longer any hope for the resurrection of man if Jesus himself had not been raised from the dead.

Camus understands the importance of this decline of religion for humanity. Camus is primarily interested in the problems that Christianity claims to be able to fix. As a philosopher, he was fascinated with issues such as the position of mankind in the cosmos, the significance of human life, the justifications for living, and moral issues that are prevalent in all religions, including Christianity. Every one of Camus' writings contains references to the ridiculous, but nowhere does he spend as much time explaining the concept as in the opening chapter of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "An Absurd Reasoning." Man's encounter with absurdity is practically inevitable.

It happens that the stage sets collapse. Rising streetcars, four hours in the office or the factory, meal, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep, and Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm—this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in that weariness tinged with amazement.³

Sisyphus persists in pushing the rock up the mountain despite the absurdity and cruelty of his fate and the knowledge that it will only fall back down again. And it's possible that none of our deeds have any lasting or deeper purpose.

CALIGULA

In practically all of Camus' writing, including his 1938 play *Caligula*, the idea of finding meaning in the face of absurdity recurs. The notorious Roman Emperor Caligula assumes the role of the ridiculous in this four-act play. Caligula develops an obsession with the impossibility of the impossible following the murder of his sister and girlfriend Drusilla. He eventually learns to accept the fundamental truth that "Men die, and they are not happy." He believes that his subjects need to be educated on this truth, which he regards as a logical conclusion. In order to do this, Caligula orders all Roman citizens to be put to death, disinherit their children, and bequeath all of their wealth to the State. He gives instructions for a list to be made, with the order of their deaths fixed, but with room for customization.

He will thus show the brutality of life and the imminence of death, which can only be changed if the impossible is made possible. It should be noted that Camus himself did not intend for the play to be studied philosophically before studying its philosophical implications. It was not Camus' purpose to advance any philosophical stance, he writes in the preface of a book collecting his dramatic work.

I look in vain for philosophy in these four acts. Or, if it exists, it stands on the level of this assertion by the hero: 'Men die; and they are not happy.' A very modest ideology, as you see, which I have the impression of sharing with Everyman. No, my ambition lay elsewhere. For the dramatist the passion for the impossible is just as valid a subject for study as avarice of adultery. Showing it in all its frenzy, illustrating the havoc it wreaks, bringing out its failure—such was my intention. And the work must be judged thereon.¹¹

The darker aspect of the ludicrous is expressed in Caligula's claim that men die and are unhappy. The phrase "Men die" conveys the sense that nothing matters because death will ultimately make all of our efforts useless. When taken literally, the claim that men "are not happy" actually signifies that human happiness is fragile and transient because men



typically experience both joyful and miserable moments. Even though a happy life is one filled with love and money, unlike what people may wish to believe, everyone eventually ages and passes away. And this notion could be enough to drive anyone to despair in a life full of folly.

One cannot obtain freedom at the expense of another because both the master and the slave are reliant upon the other. Caligula murders his subjects, who then murder him. In the end, the ludicrous victimizes everyone equally and the impossible remains impossible. Once more, Camus' counsel is to accept this absurdity and learn to live with it rather than fight it in vain by trying to be God. Because of his futile desire to exalt himself above everything else, Caligula has the "wrong freedom." The "correct freedom" is the one Cherea suggests which the ability to pursue happiness alongside other people is.

A LETTERS TO GERMAN FRIEND

Camus discovered that his ludicrous universe had been turned upside down by the outbreak of the Second World War and the German occupation of France. Camus was unsure of the nature of good but was certain that the Nazi government embodied real evil. France had all but lost trust in the goodness of God after being defeated and devastated by the German invaders, and nihilism was rife. There had never been a more pressing need for a powerful moral voice, and Camus decided to act as that voice. He understood that his previous justifications for living without appeal and appreciating earthly life would no longer be sufficient, and he would now have to take on one of the most difficult challenges of his life: determining a moral justification for resisting oppression without relying on divine intervention. The circumstances at the time made this work even more challenging. In the occupied France, criticizing the Nazi dictatorship was a risky business, and Camus understood he was taking a life-threatening risk. When he accepted to serve as editor-in-chief of the Resistance newspaper *La Revue Noire*, subsequently known as *Combat*, in 1943, he was able to establish a venue through which he could share his thoughts while remaining unknown. *Combat's* sole purpose was to "fight for our freedoms," and by the end of 1943, a quarter of a million copies had been distributed. When André Bollier, *Combat's* printer, committed himself moments before being detained by the Germans and forced to expose the identities of his fellow Resistant, the danger of Camus' position became abundantly evident. Despite the possibility of being tortured or imprisoned in a concentration camp, Camus was able to publish four fervently anti-Nazi letters that were deeply idealistic in nature under the pseudonym *Letters to a German Friend*. French readers undoubtedly had no notion the young man who had written *The Stranger* was the author of these letters given the stark contrast in tone between them and Camus' previous works. Their complete lack of moral uncertainty would be the most noticeable distinction. Camus takes a strong stance and doesn't attempt to soften his views with wordy ethical reasons. He sends letters to a fictional German buddy who is now his enemy, and he does so with a firm assurance that he hopes will rub off on his fellow citizens.

The illustration of the most significant change between Camus' absurdist and his moralist phases, the significance placed on solidarity in fearlessly facing the harsh fate of absurdity (again

symbolized by execution), shows how Camus frequently returns to this picture in his letters. His focus turns from the individual's place in society to how society affects the individual, from the issue of suicide to the issue of murder.

THE REBEL

After the war, Europe's political landscape underwent another significant change, and Camus felt forced to record his opinions on the world's politics at the moment. The alliance between France, Britain, and the United States and the Soviet Union broke down after World War II, ushering in what would come to be known as the Cold War. The political landscape in France was divided between a considerably larger spectrum of political ideas than it was in the United States, which was expanding its nuclear arsenal and waging war against communism in North Korea.

The Rebel by Albert Camus, which was published in 1951, explores the idea of "man in revolt" through literature and history while providing his own viewpoint on the aspirations of society and the appropriate boundaries for governmental authority. In the first sentence, Camus states his aim clearly:

There are crimes of passion and crimes of logic. The boundary between them is not clearly defined. But the Penal Code makes the convenient distinction of premeditation. We are living in the era of premeditation and the perfect crime. Our criminals are no longer helpless children who could plead love as their excuse. On the contrary, they are adults and they have a perfect alibi: philosophy, which can be used for any purpose—even for transforming murderers into judges.

This will be Camus' retaliation against what he considers to be one of the greatest crimes in the world: morally justifiable murder. The criminals he is criticizing are not those who kill someone in a fit of rage but rather those who murder their enemies repeatedly for a greater, ideological goal. Camus' primary target is communism, which he criticizes to the point where his friendships

with Sartre and Beauvoir are shattered. The Rebel has five main sections that total more than 300 pages and don't all expressly address or even mention communism. The objective of this book is to continue the same line of thinking that Camus started with in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. He shifts his focus away from suicide and asks whether rebellion always results in murder in the beginning, outlining the key points he will be making throughout the book. Camus defines what he means by a rebel, what causes revolt, and what ideals result from rebellion in the first main part, "The Rebel," of his book. The next major section, "Metaphysical Revolt," is where Camus addresses the metaphysical dimensions of rebellion and analyzes the idea, drawing on the writings of Dostoevsky and Nietzsche. In the section titled "The Rejection of Salvation," Dostoevsky's *The Brothers Karamazov* is used as evidence as it discusses the effects of God being excluded from the moral norms of the day. He examines Nietzsche's writings and the idea of subjecting God to moral judgment in "Absolute Affirmation." Finally, he revisits the subject of revolt and murder in "Nihilism and History." The second and largest part of the book, "Historical Rebellion," explores the idea of revolt and revolution through a number of different historical manifestations. Camus investigates the French Revolution in "The Regides," paying close attention to Saint-Just and his defenses of *The Rebellion*. In "The Decides," it is discussed how twentieth-century ideas, particularly Hegel's, advanced the goals of the French Revolution. The "adolescent country" of Russia was influenced by German philosophers, and Camus explores how this line of thinking gave rise to terrorist governments in "Individual Terrorism." In "State Terrorism and Irrational Terror," the Nazi government and Hitler's uprising are used as illustrations of ingrained nihilism at its worst. Camus solely criticizes Marxism and denounces the oppressive goals of Russian Communism in "State Terrorism and Rational Terror," which is the final chapter. Finally, Camus examines his own time period and the results of rebellion in "Rebellion and Revolution."

The fourth section, "Revolt and Art," examines several works by Van Gogh, Proust, and Shelley in order to analyze the idea of rebellion in art and literature. One of the numerous points he raises is how we often perceive other people's lives as novels because they have a coherence that can only be found in a piece of art. However, as in the book, happiness and misery do not last forever. Instead, "one morning, after many dark nights of sorrow, an irresistible longing to live



will reveal to us that all is over and that pain has no more meaning than happiness," as stated in the novel.

Thoughts at the Meridian, the book's concluding portion, present findings about society's ethics that go beyond Camus' prior works. The statement made by Camus in his introduction—that unbridled insurrection does in fact result in murder—is addressed in "Rebellion and Murder." Camus, however, applies the ancient Greek principle of moderation in "Moderation and Excess." Finally, Camus concludes in "Beyond Nihilism" that revolt, when practiced within its correct bounds, moves us beyond nihilism, affirms life, and advances the cause of man.

At the core of metaphysical rebellion is the issue of evil, which should not exist if the creator is omniscient, omnipotent, and kind. Camus is receptive to this kind of thinking, although he does not go as far as Nietzsche in his support for ethical nihilism. In reality, he blames Christianity and its adulterations for many of the horrors throughout history, just as he blames Nietzsche and his ideas for being misused and twisted during his time period.

THE PLAGUE

The Rebel is where Camus most explicitly expresses the notions of battling evil and a shared destiny with all men, but *The Plague*, which he wrote several years prior, also had similar ideas. The book, which was written just after the Second World War, is essentially a metaphor for what life was like in France and other parts of Europe when Germany occupied those countries. Camus uses the Algerian city of Oran as the backdrop for this enormous tragedy, bringing it down to an aesthetically manageable size when the town's gates are shut upon the discovery of a bubonic plague outbreak. Camus conveys his ideas of steadfastness against violence and commitment to the plight of others with a level of moral insight that surpasses his earlier work through a small cast of characters, including Dr. Bernard Rieux who does his best to fight *The Plague* throughout the long tragedy and Jean Tarrou, a stranger to the town of Oran who nonetheless sacrifices everything in the struggle against the disease.

The Myth of Sisyphus was concerned with the problem of suicide. In *The Plague* Camus substitutes this problem for that of a strange form of martyrdom, a kind of religion of happiness through atheistic sanctity.

Five segments make up the narrative of *The Plague*. The first section introduces Dr. Rieux as he and the residents of his village deal with an unexpected invasion of dead rats, which he quickly realizes is caused by a plague epidemic. Part II starts with the town of Oran being sealed off, preventing separated comrades from communicating with one another and imprisoning those inside. Rambert, a journalist, is one such sufferer because he is unable to visit his wife in France. Father Paneloux, the local parish priest, preaches that the plague is a tool of divine vengeance. In an effort to stop the disease's spread, Jean Tarrou, a visitor to Oran, decides to launch a cleanliness squad. Part III essentially recounts the height of *The Plague's* destruction, including the funeral rites that gradually get less formal until the dead are simply piled up in ditches. Rambert makes multiple attempts to flee and return to his wife before deciding to stay and assist, although Part IV

of the book is the longest and most dramatic piece. After seeing a plague-infected kid die, Father Paneloux gives a second sermon that is far more empathetic than the first. Tarrou, who tells Rieux that his goal is "to become a saint without God," gives voice to the major ideas guiding Camus' moral philosophy at the time. Tarrou is identified as one of The Plague's ultimate victims in the chapter's conclusion. Rambert is reunited with his wife, the town is reopened, the infestation is finished, and Rieux admits that he is the narrator.

Camus' call to those of us who live in peaceful times, when the virtue of unity and working together for a common cause is not as easily attainable, is the book's concluding message in *The Plague*. It is our responsibility to keep in mind that calm times do not last forever and to be prepared to fight for what is right should violent times ever be imposed upon us once more.

And, indeed, as he listened to the cries of joy rising from the town, Rieux remembered that such joy is always imperilled. 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 would 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.⁹

War and plague are not common occurrences in human experience, as Rieux reflects earlier in the book, but everyone has a tendency toward ignorance and violence.

THE STRANGER

Numerous significant aspects of Camus' perspective completely shift between the 1942 release of his first book *The Stranger* and the 1956 release of his final book *The Fall*. Even though he consistently holds the belief that morality originates from humans rather than God and that existence is fundamentally absurd, his opinions on how humans should live in this absurd world have changed. In *The Stranger*, one of Camus's most popular and famous works from the 20th century; he first considers the moral implications of a ridiculous existence. *The Stranger* is presented from the viewpoint of Meursault, a young man living in Algiers, and is written in brief, self-contained phrases to give the text more of a ridiculous aspect. We can tell right away that this man is odd from the start. The narrator of the book recalls the passing of his mother in the first paragraph, yet he seems more concerned with remembering the precise day than with how he feels about it. It would appear that Meursault is either emotionless or has feelings that are significantly dissimilar from our own.

Nothing appears to matter to Meursault, not even how he spends his own life. The majority of his conditions in life are determined by chance, and when making decisions, he just considers the option that presents the least amount of opposition. He meets Raymond by happenstance, and it is Raymond who drags him into the confrontation that results in Meursault shooting an Arab on the beach at the conclusion of the first segment. The narrative never provides a clear explanation for why Meursault shot the Arab; the only justification given is the intense heat of the sun. In Part Two, Meursault is tried for the crime and found guilty; yet, his conviction has more to do with his character than it does with the crime. The penultimate chapter, where Meursault is waiting to be executed and is agitated by the jail chaplain's attempts to convert him, contains the majority of the philosophical material. Who or what is Meursault intended to stand for? He is obviously not a reflection of the typical individual, and in fact, it nearly seems impossible that such a guy could ever exist.

Clarence is troubled by his freedom and terrified by the thought of dying, but he finds a solution to both issues by becoming a judge-penitent. He spends his time loitering in an Amsterdam dive bar in search of smart individuals who might be useful to him. He confides in them for days,



telling them everything about himself, even his vices and transgressions, and then he waits for them to do the same. This helps to allay Clamence's concerns about passing away. He no longer has to be concerned about any of his lies being proven true by telling others the truth about himself. On the other hand, though it can be lessened, the weight of our freedom and the guilt it brings with it cannot be removed. Even though judgment cannot be avoided, it can be shared:

Is not the great thing that stands in the way of our escaping it [judgment] the fact that we are the first to condemn ourselves? Therefore it is essential to begin by extending the condemnation to all, without distinction, in order to thin it out at the start.

He is not pleading for or giving forgiveness in his confession. He solely cares about comprehension. He wants everyone to realize that they are just like him. By holding others accountable for their own actions, he spreads the load of freedom and lessens his guilt.

THE GUEST

One of Camus' most significant fictional works is *The Guest*. It was included in the collection titled *Exile and the Kingdom* when it was published in 1957. Many of Camus' most important moral and philosophical issues are discussed in *The Guest*. It also addresses significant colonial issues of the time. In the years before the Algerian War, which started in 1954, he worked on the story. The narrative underwent numerous alterations because Camus was cautious to avoid escalating the rift between the French and Arab Algerians in his portrayals of his characters. These changes made the story more unclear, particularly in how the Arab was portrayed.

The story's actions occur at the beginning of the Algerian War. They observe the headmaster Daru as he grapples with the ethical question of what to do with an Arab prisoner who has been handed over to him by gendarme Balducci. The story emphasizes characteristics of Algerian culture and free will while focusing mostly on the difficulty of housing a prisoner.

The Guest captures Camus' understanding of the human situation despite the fact that his political, moral, and philosophical views were still forming at the time of its composition. Camus concurred with Kierkegaard that despair is a human emotion rather than an action. He observed this mood of despondency brought on by his seclusion from the outside world. In *The Guest*, Daru's descent into moral despair is depicted against the backdrop of his isolation.

As he watches two strangers come closer, Daru's loneliness is immediately apparent. From his vantage point on the plateau, he observes them detachedly, failing even to identify his friend. Despite spending days alone himself, Daru is not always lonely. In light of the hardship and hunger experienced by the plateau's people, he is even appreciative of his circumstances. Therefore, his solitude is a state of self-sufficiency. As long as his basic needs for warmth, food, and shelter are met, Daru appears to be able to live for an endless amount of time. In fact, the novel explores each of these wants, whether it is the desire for a sweater while observing the two men, the warmth of Daru's modest accommodations, or the bags of grain in the classroom.

Daru thinks on the peculiarities of the area as he waits for the two guys to arrive at the schoolhouse. The desolate landscape that dominates the plateau symbolizes Camus' ludicrous worldview in which the cosmos is totally mute and indifferent to humankind. The country is plain wicked; it is neither forgiving nor benevolent. Camus frequently alluded to this harshness of nature, such as when the two men were compelled to climb the hill without the aid of a route. An already challenging walk is made even more dangerous by the ice and snow of nature. Nature also acts in a very illogical manner. Nature eventually provides water in the ludicrous shape of snow after an eight-month draught. These meteorological circumstances are just a part of nature on their own, but when paired with a need for anything, they take on an absurdity according to Camus. By combining harsh physical conditions with essential human requirements for survival, he creates a picture of the ludicrous. It is their combined presence that is ludicrous, not man or the world. It is their only connection. Daru remembered the starved people wandering the plateau during the draught, one of many examples of humans striving to survive in the harsh natural environment. They won't benefit from the plateau.

The narrator discusses the four rivers of France that are depicted on the whiteboard when Daru enters the classroom again. This introduces the political and cultural currents that serve as one of the story's key pillars. The conflict between the Arab culture and the occupying French causes great grief in the novel, which was written at the start of the Algerian uprising against the French. The political and cultural friction between the European Algerians and the Arabs prohibits any sense of kinship despite the fact that they live in the same hard climate. Windows in Daru's schoolhouse, where he also resides, face south. He first notices the two men in this view to the south, but after donning warmer clothing, he can no longer see them from the window. The windows throughout the story foreshadow the character's hope to see an Arab moving in that way when he turns to look to the south at the conclusion. The Arab countries are currently represented by the south.

With the writing on the blackboard, Daru's alienation from the plateau region becomes more obvious and hazardous. It's unclear from Camus's writing that authored the note. It's possible that Daru himself penned it as a way to convey his morally ambiguous condition



of despair. The note, nevertheless, might have been created by Daru's pals. In that case, they reenact Daru's moral dilemma. The authors of it are in a position to judge Daru for it even though they are not privy to his moral conflict.

CONCLUSION

Camus reacts with a ferociously humanistic idealism against the Nazis' harsh realism. The only person who has the power to stop the ludicrous course the world is on is Man. "Man is that force that finally destroys all dictators and deities." Ironically, Camus' stance and his adversaries' can both be characterized as "naturalistic." Many people would turn to nature as their next source of values after rejecting religion as a source of morals. If God is unable to instruct us on how to live, perhaps we should follow what nature would advise. The supreme value in nature, according to the Nazis, is survival of the fittest. The desire for happiness and justice, on the other hand, was seen by Camus as the value we should be battling for, if not the ultimate value. He offers the following ethical claim: "Human beings should work together to oppose injustice and foster happiness because it is natural for them to desire justice and happiness despite the world's indifference to these goals." Camus blames France's initial defeat on the lengthy, laborious search for explanation that her people underwent. Early in his career, Camus offers objectives that are certainly not those that a country can unite around and sacrifice its citizens for. Camus, though, is adamant that what his compatriots had learned from their failure will be what ultimately brings them triumph.

Camus was fascinated with this issue in his early writing. But starting in 1941, he began to give it less and less attention in favor of social, political, and philosophical issues. Perhaps this explains why any criticism of his writings before 1941 tends to focus on the theme of man and nature before abandoning it entirely and focusing on the social, political, and philosophical aspects of his later works. However, the topic of man and nature is evident in all of Camus' writings; only a handful ignores it entirely. The way that man and nature are portrayed in French literature changes significantly over time. Nature nearly vanished from French literature in the following century. Racine and Molière were more interested in the human condition, his psychology, and etiquette than in man and nature. The topic of man's relationship with nature resurfaced with Rousseau. He saw the natural world as being "good," as opposed to the deprived civilized society. The Romantic Movement of the nineteenth century, which had as its main issue how man should relate to nature, was largely inspired by Rousseau's writings. After that, man's emotional expression and haven from civilisation were found in nature. The Realists saw nature from an intellectual perspective, in contrast to the Romantics. In their works, nature lost all of its inherent power and changed into a meticulously observed, impartially depicted setting for human activity. The relationship between man and nature is still a common theme among writers in the twenty-first century, including Ramuz, Giono, Bosco, Colette, and arguably the most notable of all: Albert Camus.

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