

Albert camus' idea of
life having no
meaning in the myth
of sisyphus



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Today, we find ourselves striving to find meaning in our lives by attending university, finding a career, and making enough money to live comfortably. Some may say that life is worth living because of this search. Others, such as Albert Camus, claim that our life has no purpose and it is through the consciousness of our lack of purpose that we can find meaning. By our consciousness of our lack of purpose, we come face-to-face with the absurd. Of this encounter are raised three consequences. Camus identifies these consequences as revolt, freedom, and passion. In Camus' story, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Sisyphus is convicted to futile labor, revolts against his own death, and is perceived as the absurd hero. Camus talks about the ways in which Sisyphus is sentenced to punishment because he chose life over death. When Sisyphus sides with life, he finds himself cursed to futile labor. Sisyphus is used as a representation of the human condition.

At the beginning of *The Myth of Sisyphus*, there had been an abduction of Aesopus' daughter, Aegina. Aesopus was complaining to Sisyphus about his daughter's disappearance, when Sisyphus, who knew of the abduction, offered information in exchange for water. By his choice of water as a blessing, Sisyphus was punished in the underworld. Sisyphus is punished by having to push a boulder up a hill. When Sisyphus finally pushes the boulder to the top of the hill, he finds that the boulder rolls back down to where it started. At this point, Sisyphus walks back down the hill to repeat the process of pushing the boulder up the hill. Camus reflects, "The struggle itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart". This identifies that Sisyphus finds passion in pushing the rock up the hill. Camus claims that Sisyphus acknowledges the futility of his duty and the certainty of his fate.

Camus states that “ crushing truths perish from being acknowledged”. What Camus means is that through the acknowledgement of a crushing fate, one can overcome that fate. For Sisyphus, the acknowledgement of the futility of his task is what gives his bleak existence meaning.

Due to the futile labor and torture that Sisyphus must endure, he revolts against his death by seeking permission from Pluto to return to Earth.

Through Pluto's granting of Sisyphus' request, Sisyphus was able to return to Earth. When arriving to Earth, Camus says, “ Many years more he lived facing the curve of the gulf, the sparkling sea, and the smiles of earth”.

Sisyphus revolted against his death by running off to continue living. When the gods find him, they immediately take him to the underworld and force his fate onto him. Although Sisyphus' return to Earth was not very long, that act alone was his refusal of death. Camus claims that the only way to refuse death is to live. We refuse to think about our death even though it is our fate. We can be aware of this, however, we seem to be occupied with living in the future and obsessing over our past. Camus reflects on how revolt gives us value. Therefore, by Sisyphus revolting against his death, he is given value through the consciousness of it. From Camus' perspective, in order to live a meaningful life, we must remain aware of our fate while simultaneously revolting it.

During the futile act that is Sisyphus' fate, there is a point where he becomes conscious of his task's futility. It is at the point when he must walk down the hill that he becomes conscious. Camus states, “ At each of those moments when he leaves the heights and gradually sinks toward the lairs of the gods, he is superior to his fate. He is stronger than his rock”. This is the most

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important part of Sisyphus' existence because it is here that he becomes "superior to his fate." Sisyphus is made superior to his fate, through consciousness, because he thinks of his circumstance and will then transform his torture into his victory. Camus claims that "the lucidity that was to constitute his torture at the same time crowns his victory". From this quote, we can gather that through the consciousness of our futile acts, we can overcome their futility and find a way to make them meaningful. Sisyphus is conscious of his difficult tragedy, however, it is this lucid recognition that gives Sisyphus his victory over his fate. By Sisyphus accepting his futile labor, he remains conscious of his situation, which gives meaning to his life, making him an absurd hero.

Camus uses Sisyphus as an example to support his claim that life has no purpose, and through the acknowledgement of this, he can give life meaning and make it worth living. Camus uses Sisyphus as a representation of the human condition by identifying Sisyphus as being convicted to futile labor, revolting against his own death, and as being the absurd hero. We can compare Sisyphus' existence to that of our own. Through the revolt of our fate to die, we continue to live. By living one's life similarly to Sisyphus' life, one can find meaning through acknowledging the futility of their actions. Camus ends his essay by saying that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy". It is through Sisyphus' perspective of his existence that he finds meaning, and ultimately, happiness. Sisyphus finds meaning in his futile labor by remaining conscious and continuing to push the boulder up the hill. We can find meaning, like Sisyphus did, by taking part in futile acts while remaining conscious of their futility. Many people live their lives consumed by their

daily routines and habits, completely oblivious of their fate to die. Some may be conscious of this fate and some will ignore it. Many of us try to find meaning in our lives so that we have a reason to continue living. However, Camus believes that this order must be reversed. The search for meaning does not make life worth living, it is only through living that meaning can be found. Camus' aim in writing *The Myth of Sisyphus* is for the story to be used to change people's perspective on finding meaning in life.