

Jean paul sartre vs albert camus

Profession, Philosophers



The two most influential philosophers and gleaming icons of post-world war 2 era were Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. They both worked on an intellectual level to fight for injustice, to raise the conditions of proletariat and for that they knew a new political system had to be constructed. Camus believed that freedom must have limits, that justice and freedom required constant rebalancing and political moderation. Whereas Sartre believed that justice and freedom could be achieved under communism. They had different approaches towards existentialism, which is a philosophy of the individual and its struggle through life - a focus on the subjective life that we all live, rather than a search for objective truths external to us.

After the world war II, existentialism was not only a philosophy but a lifestyle. Jean Paul Sartre was a leading existentialist in France, he advocated radical freedom and personal responsibility of the individual. He preached about authenticity, nothingness, bad faith (self-deception), moral choice and that existence precedes essence, meaning " Man Makes Himself" Jean-Paul Sartre.

Albert Camus however, rejects the theory of existentialism leading to an open debate with Sartre. Albert considered himself as an Absurdist, the absurd is born out of this struggle between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world. Albert's theories on absurd became widely appreciated and famous with time. " To decide whether life is worth living is to answer the fundamental question of philosophy," Albert Camus

PHILOSOPHY OF SARTRE AND CAMUS

After the Second world war during the time when Paris was being rebuilt, the French existentialist Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus were close friends. They both had good intentions to guide this new France towards a more equitable future. They become recognized personalities, their every movement got reported in the newspapers. Although in 1952 they split and broke their friendship. The disagreement between Camus and Sartre became the philosophical feud of the century.

Sartre and Camus had different approaches on existentialism. Sartre was a Marxist, who cared about the radical freedom of men. He did not think much of human nature, but Camus had closer outlook to humanism. Camus called his philosophy as Absurdism, it tries to embrace our nature as meaning-makers, even knowing that the world is intrinsically meaningless. It basically leaves the choice up to humans to make sense and meaning out of life.

Camus illustrated the problem of absurdity through the story of Sisyphus, a tale he adapted for a book-length essay *The Myth of Sisyphus*.

Similarities between Sartre and Camus

Sartre and Camus might be known for being an odd pair but they had a few similar school of thought. Sartre, Camus and their intellectual companions rejected religion, staged new and unnerving plays, challenged readers to live authentically, and wrote about the absurdity of the world – a world without purpose and without value. Philosophically, the idea of freedom bounded Camus and Sartre and politically, the fight for justice united them. They were intrigued to bring justice to the working class who were treated unfairly.

Camus and Sartre thought of them as shackled to their labour and shorn of

their humanity. They worried about how to make meaning in an essentially absurd godless world, they both claimed that it must be created from within because we are all condemned to be free.

They both were observed embracing existentialism. It was apparent that their philosophical appearance reflected their living conditions and background. As existentialists they both equally voiced for freedom. Camus and Sartre shared a common ground on the belief that life is full of choices, every individual had to choose for himself, " Even avoiding choosing is a choice in itself (Sartre, 1993)". A person is bound to make choices in his course of life, A person must make choices in a bid to deal with the absurdity which characterizes the world. They also believed in freedom to choose, Sartre's philosophy was mostly about freedom of choice, he thought that for an individual the right of freedom to choose was caused by what he wants once he bears the consequences in his mind. Camus felt that man possess freedom to create the purpose for his life and that could happen once he embraced absurdity.

Sartre VS Camus

Jean Paul Sartre and Albert Camus officially broke ties with each other during the increasing tensions of cold war, Sartre took side of Soviet Union, while Camus said he was on the side of humanism (saving lives). The main issue that split them was the news about the Soviet camps (concentration camps), Sartre didn't deny that they existed, but he stated that do not despair the proletariats by telling them that the Soviet had labour camps, but Camus said that since we denounced German camps, we must denounce Soviet camps also.

Philosophical approach of Sartre

Jean Paul Sartre said that human beings live in anguish not because we are trapped in this world but because we are condemned to be free. He says that there is no certain way that we must live or be, no God who designs the purpose for us and no human nature who fixes how we should live. He states that existentialism is humanism. For him existence precedes essence, a human creates his own life by making choices, even the decision to not to choose is a choice itself.

“ In fashioning myself, I fashion humanity” - Sartre. He believed that he is what he does, he makes choices without any fixed values. In his philosophy he talks about the unlimited freedom, in order to fully recognise our freedom, we will come across the term “angoisse” or anguish of existence, everything is terrifyingly possible because absolutely nothing has any God given purpose. He also mentions bad faith, we are in bad faith when we set certain rules or require things to be in a certain way and not search for other options. The most famous example of bad faith is stated in the book, “Being and Nothingness” where he notices a waiter who seems to look convinced with his job as if he has accepted himself as he is rather than a free human being.

As being a Marxist, he sincerely despised capitalists and its governing system. He believed that we are free to dismantle capitalism, people feel captive because they don't have enough money. This issue enraged Sartre on a political level. The theory that he supported, Marxism, allowed people to enjoy and explore their freedom by reducing their role played in their lives by material things. However, the FBI got suspicious by Sartre's philosophy

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and tried to find out what he meant. He simply encouraged people to find full potential in themselves, he urges us to find the fluidity of existence, to find the urge to build new institutions, habits, outlooks and ideas. In conclusion, not to step back for the sake of traditions, customs and status quo.

Philosophical approach of Camus

Camus was not from a bourgeois background like Sartre, he became famous from publishing his books such as *The stranger*, *The fall* and *The plague*.

Although much of his philosophy is mentioned in his book length essay, "The myth of Sisyphus". The myth of Sisyphus starts with, "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide. Judging whether life is or is not worth living amounts to answering the fundamental question of philosophy", this is however a more literal meaning of suicide. Albert Camus puts forward a term called 'philosophical suicide' which means "killing off our inquiring minds, by accepting easy stock answers to life's fundamental questions." These questions might be; where are we going? Is there an ultimate justice?

For Camus the easiest way of committing philosophical suicide is by admitting or following the ready-made belief system, such as those provided by world's religions. Camus believes that the main reason we believe in God is because it relieves us from the anxiety we hold about our future. He says, We believe in God to alleviate our insecurities about the injustice that takes place in the world, we hope that there is a higher power, an ultimate authority which will finally provide justice. He believes that religion is only one form of philosophical suicide, there are other forms like culture and

media. An alternative to philosophical suicide is to confront the fundamentals of nature which he calls absurd.

An absurd man is someone who lives without appeal, someone who confrontationally realizes how absurd life really is. Also, for Camus, recognising absurdity means to remain non-accepting of it. Camus finds that the pointless and repetitive nature of our existence, our criticism of the existence of the world is a lot like the mythological character Sisyphus, who is condemned by the Gods in a repetitive cycle of labour in the form of rolling a huge boulder up the hill only to see it roll back down again. Camus illustrates Sisyphus as the proletariat of Gods, absurdity is present in animal's existence too but they don't experience it. However, humans experience absurdity due to our consciousness. Camus claims that in the final analysis, one must imagine Sisyphus as a happy person, but Sisyphus's happiness like the happiness of the absurd man is quite similar but different to what happiness is portrayed as.