

Is suffering an  
inescapable part of  
life? are there any  
advantages?  
assignment



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Suffering is an Inescapable Part of Living What is “ suffering”? Does it have any advantages? Suffering is an inescapable part of life. Whether it involves the minor bumps and bruises of daily living or major traumas such as terminal illness, death, or the breaking of a family, suffering touches all of our lives at one point or another. Helen Keller once said, “ The world is full of suffering, but it is also full of people overcoming it”. Though Helen Keller was not a philosopher, in this quote she tells us why the topic of suffering is extremely important in life.

The fact that so many people face suffering everyday and question it’s existence in their lives, is the reason that so many strive to make the best out of the times when they are not suffering. Suffering makes us stronger and more understanding individuals because it gives us a chance to rise above hard times and help others going through the same things. Without suffering, we would not have many of the religions and faiths that we see in the world today. This is because many times when people suffer, they question, “ why is this happening to me” and find comfort in a religious group whose beliefs give them they answer they are looking for.

On September 11, 2001, the United States was given an example of why suffering can be so important. We saw a nation of people with different religions, backgrounds, and beliefs come together as one. We see every day that in the wake of suffering, people come together without question to help each other through the hard times. Suffering also plays a large role in appreciating life by giving people a reason to make the most of the time, things, and relationships they have, while they have them. Seeing how

quickly suffering can strike and change lives, makes people realize just how precious life is.

We see this often times when someone loses a loved one and are left to question if they told that person enough how important they were to them. Many times when we lose something or someone close to us, we make sure to learn from that loss and grow from it. If suffering did not exist in daily living, how would anyone be able to know what true joy and happiness feels like? How would be we able to to learn to appreciate our lives and the people and things in them? Would we have faith or believe in something greater? As you can see, suffering really is an important part of life and it makes a difference in lives every day.

Although suffering is not something people desire in life, it does make them who they are and gives them reasons to seek happiness. Many philosophers have pondered over the questions of suffering throughout history and have come up with my differing answers, views, and opinions. Siddhartha Gautama, Albert Camus, and Friedrich Nietzsche, each pondered this topic and have left us with three very different views on it. Siddhartha Gautama is the man that Buddhists recognize as the founder of Buddhism, and the Supreme Buddha.

It is believed that Siddhartha Gautama lived between 563 BCE and 483 BCE, but since there are no accurate records of his birth and death, others have suggested that he might have died around 410 BCE. Before looking at Gautama's views on suffering, we must look at the journey which led him to believe the things he did. Gautama's father King Suddhodana, wanted to

give his son the perfect life and keep him locked away from life outside their palaces in order to keep him from experiencing the pain and suffering that existed in the world.

Gautama led a very comfortable life, given everything he could ask for and never knowing unhappiness. At the age of 16, Siddhartha Gautama was married to his cousin Yasodhara, in what was said to be a happy, arranged marriage. They gave birth to a beautiful son and had a life that many desired, but it was not enough for Gautama. He felt as if his life was being used up, uneventfully, inside the hideaway life his father had created for him. He realized that he knew little about life in the outside world and as time went on, his desire to learn about that world grew.

One day, Siddhartha wandered outside of his home and traveled to the city of Kapilavastu. He had “ seen” the sights of the outside world before, but for the first time he was seeing the world from outside of his protected home and what he saw shocked him. First he saw a man, whose body was wrinkled and illustrated the degeneration of old age. Next he saw a man who was suffering from disease. Then he watched as a procession of people mourning, carried a corpse to be cremated by the river’s edge. After recovering from his confrontation with the realities of life, he decided that he could never return to his former ways of living.

He decided that he wanted to know the whole truth about life in the real world. He had seen the problems of the world and felt that now he needed to set out and search for a solution. Gautama set out on a long journey, first living with and learning lessons of meditation and sacrifice from two gurus,

then by joining five mendicant ascetics. These five mendicant ascetics, practiced self-mortification and self-denial. During the six years he spent in their company, Gautama practiced penance and fasting and explored the pathway of asceticism, which promised control of the senses and the refinement of one's spiritual nature.

After living on seeds and herbs, Gautama weakened to the point of death and one day sank into unconsciousness. He was revived by a girl from a nearby village, and woke to realize that asceticism was not the answer he was looking for. Once he was stronger, Gautama made his way southward to Gaya. As night fell, Siddhartha came upon a fig tree, and sat down by the trunk and sank into a deep meditation. According to Buddhism, on the full-moon day in the month of Vaishakha in the year 525 BC, Siddhartha reached the end of his quest by attaining enlightenment, and becoming the "Awakened One", otherwise known as Buddha.

The Buddha arose from the tree and visited Sarnath, where he shared the Truth with his five companions. They saw and believed, so Buddha set out and spent the next forty-five years of his life preaching and teaching the Truth in northeast India. Buddha was successful and was joined by many, including his wife and son. Gautama's last words were, "Go now, and diligently seek to realize your own salvation". With these words, Buddha lay on his right side, closed his eyes, and for the last time he ascended into trance.

He passed level by level into nirvana and from there, he passed into the final condition, parinirvana. Parinirvana is defined as, "Beyond Nirvana, the state

into which one who has attained Nirvana passes at death". Through his journey, Siddhartha Gautama learned to think as a true philosopher. He took the realities he faced and the experiences he had and saw, and attempted to understand them. He found that, " life is brief and painful; birth is evil and death is release; and the best way to live is to fall out of love with life and develop a state of mind that will provide an authentic experience of peace and joy".

Buddha believed that the way to escape suffering in life is to never attach to anyone or anything. He believed that these attachments will only cause you to suffer in the end. He once said, " He who loves 50 people has 50 woes; he who loves no one has no woes". This statement shows that he did not believe in loving people, he believed the less you love, the less pain you will have. Buddha believed that the way to free yourself of suffering is to follow the Four Noble Truths. The first of the Four Noble Truths is, " To live is to suffer".

This is because the human nature is not perfect and neither is the world we live in. During our lifetime, we will inevitably have to face physical suffering such as, pain, sickness, injury, old age, and eventually death, along with psychological suffering such as, sadness, frustration, fear, depression, and disappointment. It is thought that although there are different degrees of suffering, along with positive experiences in life that we perceive as the opposite of suffering, such as ease, comfort and happiness, life in its totality is imperfect and incomplete, because our world is subject to impermanence.

This means that we can never keep what we strive for permanently because happy moments pass us by, and ourselves and loved ones will pass away someday as well. The second of the Four Noble Truths is, “ To attach is to suffer”. It is believed that the origin of suffering is the attachment to transient things and the ignorance concerning them. Transient things are not limited to physical objects or beings, but can also be an ideas and all objects of our perception. Ignorance is the lack of understanding of how our mind is attached to impermanent things.

The reasons for suffering are desire, passion, the pursuit of wealth and prestige, striving for fame and popularity, or in other words: things we crave and cling to. Because the objects of our attachment are transient, their loss is inevitable, and suffering will follow. The third of the Four Noble Truths is, “ To detach is to avoid suffering”. As expressed in the second of the Four Noble Truths, attachment inevitably causes us to suffer, so it makes sense that Buddha would believe that to detach from transient objects would let us avoid suffering.

This idea of detachment is called Nirodha, meaning the unmaking of sensual craving and conceptual attachment. It is believed that Nirodha extinguishes all forms of clinging and attachment. This means that suffering can be overcome through human activity, simply by removing the cause of suffering. Attaining and perfecting dispassion is a process of many levels that ultimately results in the state of Nirvana. Nirvana means freedom from all worries, troubles, complexes, fabrications and ideas. Nirvana is not comprehensible for those who have not attained it.

The final of the Four Noble Truths is, "To avoid suffering follow the Eightfold Path". The Eightfold Path is a guideline to ethical and mental development with the goal of freeing the individual from attachments and delusions; and it finally leads to understanding the truth about all things. Step one in the Eightfold Path is, Right View, which means to see things the way they really are and realize the Four Noble Truths. This tells us to see things through, to grasp the impermanent and imperfect nature of objects and ideas, and to understand the law of karma and karmic conditioning.

It explains the reasons for human existence, suffering, sickness, aging, death, the existence of greed, hatred and delusion. Understanding of right view will inspire the person to lead a virtuous life in line with right view. The second step in the Eightfold Path is, Right Intention, which means that you must rid yourself of all qualities you know are wrong and immoral. Right View is believed to help the person decide what is wrong intention and what is right intention. The third step is, Right Speech, which tell us to refrain from using wrongful speech.

Wrongful speech includes, lying, swearing, abusive speech, and meaningless conversation. The fourth step in the Eightfold Path is, Right Action, which means to restrain from any actions which are considered wrong. This expresses that one must be morally upright in their activities and must not act in ways that would be corrupt or harmful to themselves or to others. The fifth step is, Right Livelihood, which means that a person should not engage in trades or occupations that could directly or indirectly result in harm for another living being.



The next step in the Eightfold Path is, Right Effort, which tells us that people should make a persistent effort to abandon all the wrong and harmful thoughts, words, and deeds. We should instead be focusing on what could be good for ourselves and others in our thoughts, words, and deeds. The seventh step in the Eightfold Path is, Right Mindfulness, which means that one should be aware of all that is going on around them at all times. It tells us that we should not act or speak due to inattention or forgetfulness.

The final step is, Right Concentration, which is the practice of concentrating on an object of attention until reaching full concentration and a state of meditative absorption. During this practice, the person will need to investigate and verify their right view. In the process, right knowledge will be found, followed by right liberation. Buddha believed that through following the Four Noble Truths and practicing the Eightfold Path, one could be free from suffering. These beliefs are practiced by those who belong to the religion of Buddhism in modern day, and have shaped many different cultures.

Albert Camus was born in Algeria in 1913. Camus was not only a philosopher, but also an author and he wrote many books in his lifetime. All of his books seem to reflect the way suffering is inescapable in everyday life. Camus believed that humans were not supposed to be living in the world. He thought that there was a sense of absurdity for human existence, that human beings cannot feel at home in a world where chaos, death, and suffering are present. Camus' beliefs stemmed from the horrors of World War Two, where he lived through suffering and had been surrounded by it as well.

Camus's feelings of injustice in the world and life without meaning resulted from the problems with himself and surrounding him. The suffering he saw made Camus realize that the world went on while people were living in horrible situations. He felt that people were aspiring to unreal goals which meant nothing in the whole face of life. Camus expressed this in a paper he wrote called, "The Myth of Sisyphus", where he uses the character Sisyphus's experiences to express his beliefs about life. Camus presents Sisyphus's ceaseless and pointless toil as a metaphor for modern lives spent working at futile jobs in factories and offices.

This was expressed when he wrote, "The workman of today works every day in his life at the same tasks, and this fate is no less absurd. But it is tragic only at the rare moments when it becomes conscious". Albert Camus saw suffering as life itself and expressed that the only way to not suffer is to never live. He shares the thought with Buddha that to live is to suffer, but unlike Buddha, Camus did not see a way to avoid the suffering. In his Notebooks (1942-1951), Camus explains the writing of his book, *The Plague*.

At one point he writes, "I want to express by means of the plague the stifling air from which we all suffered and the atmosphere of threat and exile in which we lived". This tells us that in reading his book, *The Plague*, he wants people to understand the suffering that surrounded him during World War II, and see why he feels the way he does about the world based on the events in his life. As mentioned before, Camus believed that life was absurd due to the fact that we live a "meaningless" life, full of suffering and chaos, and then we die. Camus felt that there were three solutions to the problem of absurdity, but expressed that he only agreed with the third. The first solution <https://assignbuster.com/is-suffering-an-inescapable-part-of-life-are-there-any-advantages-assignment/>

he thought of was physical suicide. He said that if we decided that living a life that is meaningless and full of suffering is not worth living, then we can simply choose to kill ourselves. Camus rejects this choice as cowardly. In his terms it is a repudiation or renunciation of life, not a true revolt. The second choice Camus said was to commit philosophical suicide. He describes philosophical suicide as a solution of positing a transcendent world of solace and meaning beyond the Absurd.

This means that instead of removing himself from the absurd confrontation of self and world like the physical suicide, the religious believer simply removes the offending world, replacing it, with a more agreeable alternative. Camus felt that to adopt a supernatural solution to the problem of the absurd is to eliminate reason, which in Camus' view is as fatal and self-destructive as physical suicide. The final choice, which Camus believed is the best of the three choices, is simply to accept absurdity, or better yet to embrace it, and to continue living.

Since the absurd in his view is an unavoidable, indeed defining, characteristic of the human condition, the only proper response to it is full, unflinching, courageous acceptance. Life, Camus said, " can be lived all the better if it has no meaning". Through the analysis of these choices, you can see that Camus did believe that suffering was a large and inescapable part of what made life absurd. He felt that though life is meaningless and we all die in the end, that because the suffering is inescapable, we might as well just embrace it and take from it what we can.

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was born in 1844 in Germany. He, like Camus, was not only a philosopher, but also a writer. Nietzsche believed that suffering is an inescapable part of life, but unlike Buddha and Camus, he did not see it as something we should try and escape. Nietzsche wrote a book called, “ Beyond Good and Evil”, and in it described his views on suffering and overcoming suffering in human life. Nietzsche thought of suffering as an opportunity rather than a burden. He believed that human strength and wisdom is elevated in direct proportion to the depths of human suffering and the overcoming of suffering.

In his book “ Beyond Good and Evil”, he wrote that: “ The discipline of suffering, of great suffering – do you not know that only this discipline has created all enhancements of man so far? That tension of the soul in unhappiness which cultivates its strength, its shudders face to face with great ruin, its inventiveness and courage in enduring, preserving, interpreting, and exploiting suffering, and whatever has been granted to it of profundity, secret, mask, spirit, cunning, greatness – was it not granted to it through suffering, through the discipline of great suffering? . This quote shows us that Nietzsche believed that suffering is the cause of all enhancements made by mankind. He believed that through suffering and overcoming suffering, man becomes stronger and more willing to fight to make things better. Nietzsche thought that the act of taking on overwhelming human suffering as a means of personal empowerment makes such an individual greater than other human beings. It allows individuals to set aside old values and beliefs and make their own intimate meaning in life.

In doing so, they become free. They can rightfully look down upon those still spending their lives, avoiding suffering as much as possible, reacting in fear when suffering comes into view, relying on ridiculous belief systems and avoidance mechanisms to fight suffering. In a way Nietzsche was telling us that, you can't have your cake and eat it too, that in order to become greater human beings, we must endure and overcome suffering. Nietzsche believed that people who have suffered are more wise and great than people who have not.

He expressed this in another passage from his book, "Beyond Good and Evil", by saying: "The spiritual haughtiness and nausea of every man who has suffered profoundly - it almost determines the order of rank how profoundly human beings can suffer - his shuddering certainty, which permeates and colors him through and through, that by virtue of his suffering he knows more than the cleverest and wisest could possibly know, and that he knows his way and has once been 'at home' in many distant, terrifying worlds of which 'you know nothing' - this spiritual and silent haughtiness of the sufferer, this pride of the elect of knowledge, of the 'initiated,' of the almost sacrificed, finds all kinds of disguises necessary to protect itself against contact with obtrusive and pitying hands and altogether against everything that is not its equal in suffering. Profound suffering makes noble; it separates". For Nietzsche, suffering makes one "hard". He believed that if what does not kill us only makes us stronger is true, then it is equally true that by overcoming suffering, by facing it squarely and by not turning toward such things as "faith" and "hope", we become something greater than what we were without suffering.

It is clear that Nietzsche believes that in the true nobility of humanity, the endurance of and triumph over suffering is a critical component to achieving greater rank. He seems to believe that the greater the suffering, the greater the life. There are so many things that we see, hear about, read, or experience in every day life that have to do with the subject of suffering. Everyone in the world will suffer at least one time in their life before they die. This is why people view suffering as an inescapable part of life. I could list thousands of sources of information that are relevant to the topic of suffering, but one book sticks out in my mind. For this assignment, I read the book, "The Plague" by: Albert Camus.

When I decided to read the book, I did not imagine that I would enjoy it as much as I did. It is somewhat depressing, but it does a good job of showing how suffering can affect large groups of people. The story is based in the fictional city of Oran in North Africa which is populated by several hundred thousand people. The people of Oran seem to take life for granted and are constantly driven by business or money, and only stop for life's finer pleasures on the weekends. When a sudden outbreak of plague begins in Oran, nobody pays attention at first. When the problem becomes too big to be ignored, the city is taken somewhat by surprise and placed under quarantine.

The city remains isolated from the outside world for over a year, and when the outbreak reaches its peak, hundreds are dying every day. The main characters in the story are Dr. Rieux, Cottard, Tarrou, Grand, and Rambert. Dr. Rieux is the narrator, and through his eyes and Tarrou's journal entries, Camus depicts a personal and lifelike view of major catastrophe, not by <https://assignbuster.com/is-suffering-an-inescapable-part-of-life-are-there-any-advantages-assignment/>

listing important dates or death statistics, but instead by focusing on the individuals involved in the crisis. After several months of the plague, we see the characters start to realize that there is shared suffering in what has happened. In realizing this, the characters set aside feelings of their personal suffering and band together to fight the plague.

When the plague finally passes, the Oran survivors react differently, but as time goes on, the routine returns to normal, as it was before the plague. At the end of the book Camus wrote, " only when a strong wind was blowing did a faint, sickly odor coming from the east remind them that they were living under a new order". This tells us that although the survivors of the plague had overcome the suffering, they would live with the lessons it taught them and the knowledge that it could always return. I felt that this book was important because it showed us, not only the way the individuals react to and are affected by suffering, but the way it can affect a community as a whole.

After all the research I did for this essay, I will have to say that I cannot find what I consider the truth of the matter in any of the beliefs of the three philosophers mentioned. I think this would be true for many people, due to the fact that we all have different views and opinions of the world and we all react differently to suffering. I personally believe that everything that happens in life; good or bad, is for a reason, and that we are shaped by the things we experience and the choices we make throughout our lives. This goes for suffering as well. I do believe that suffering is an inescapable part of life, but I also believe that it is a necessary part of living.

Suffering is not something I would wish upon myself or others, but I do believe that as hard as it can be to overcome, it does have some advantages. I think that through suffering people learn from mistakes and/or losses, learn to come together in hard times, and appreciate the good things in life. I have developed my own truth to suffering by overcoming times of suffering in my own life. I have in no way suffered half as much or as badly as many people in this world, but I believe that without enduring and overcoming the suffering that I have so far, I would not be who I am today. Through the suffering I endured and overcame, I saw how quickly life can change without warning and because of this realized that I need to appreciate the things I have while I have them.

As you can see, enduring and overcoming suffering has shaped the way I see suffering as an inescapable part of life and has taught me many important lessons. The most important thing I have learned through enduring and overcoming suffering is that tomorrow is never promised today, so we must take what we have now and make the most of it, and that we must not dwell on the suffering we endure, but instead we must overcome it and take away from it the important lessons it has to teach us. Bibliography Alisimo, Aazdak. " Who Was Siddhartha Gautama?. " 30 NOV 2008 . " The Four Noble Truths. " 1999 30 NOV 2008 . Camus, Albert. The Notebooks (1942-1951). 1965. Camus, Albert. The Plague. 1947. Wangu, Madhu. Buddhism. Oxford: Facts on File, Inc. , 1993.