

What does it mean to
lead an authentic
existence is it
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[Literature](#), [Russian Literature](#)



Authentic Existence The nature of authentic existence is a highly complex question. While most individuals do not spend large amounts of their daily lives contemplating whether their lives are truly authentic, it's clear that the nature of authenticity is an important social concern. In contemporary art and music, questions of authenticity are oftentimes raised, and indeed the personal narrative of the individual musician or artist generally factors into their public acceptance. While authenticity is an important factor in society, it's also important on an individual basis. This is a question that existential philosophers considered. One such account of authentic existence is found in Albert Camus' *The Stranger*. With reference to this text, this essay considers the nature of authentic existence and whether it is possible to live an authentic existence and remain a member of society. When considering the nature of authentic existence, Albert Camus posits a life void of meaning. In his novel, *The Stranger*, protagonist Meursault goes through life ostensibly attempting to live an authentic existence. Consider Camus when he writes, "Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know. I got a telegram from the home: 'Mother deceased. Funeral tomorrow. Faithfully yours.' That doesn't mean anything. Maybe it was yesterday" (Camus, pg. 25). In these regards, Camus is positing an authentic existence based on a true and physical approach to reality. In Meursault's unenthusiastic reaction to his mother's death is more authentic than individuals who pretend to experience grief; or individuals who grieve when in reality death is just another aspect of life. Later in the text, Camus writes, "She said, 'If you go slowly, you risk getting sunstroke. But if you go too fast, you work up a sweat and then catch a chill inside the church.' She was right. There was no way

out” (Camus, pg. 49). Here, Camus is extending the question of authentic existence from one of approaching life from the perspective of its physical aspects, to one wherein the individual also understands that there is no ‘ meaning’ in the sense that many people embrace. For Meursault in this quote the only reality and meaning of existence is death and attempting to achieve some deeper sense of meaning is fruitless because ‘ there is no way out’. Ultimately, Camus is distinguishing authentic existence from inauthentic existence through a perspective on life that views it for its pure physical dimensions, void of any aspects of superficial meaning. As the text advances Camus considers the interaction Meursault has with society while partaking in this authentic existence. In relations with his girlfriend, Meursault states, “ A minute later she asked me if I loved her. I told her it didn’t mean anything but that I didn’t think so” (Camus, pg. 118). This interaction is one that goes against general social standards, wherein one would attempt to lighten the truth of the situation rather than authentically expressing their feelings. Still, it seems that it would be possible for society to function while still demonstrating authentic existence. Rather than considering existence in terms of authentic and inauthentic, it seems that there are varying shades of life. In some regards, interpersonal communication is based on a level of what Camus’ might term inauthenticity, but in reality is authentic existence as it allows individuals to function in a productive way without conflict. In this sense it may be impossible to live as purely authentically as Camus’ proposes. In another sense, living without an overarching sense of meaning may be possible. Meursault states, “ I said that people never change their lives, that in any

case one life was as good as another and that I wasn't dissatisfied with mine here at all" (Camus, pg. 175). Here Meursault is indicating that despite the elements of his authentic existence that place him at odds with social standards, he also indicates that he is generally satisfied with his life. While many people feel that they need to embrace a false meaning, whether it be through religion or art, etc., it seems that in honestly embracing the emptiness of our existence we are able to live lives as functional members of society. In conclusion, it's clear that the question of authentic existence in society is a complex question. Through an examination of Camus' *The Stranger*, this essay has argued that in many regards living a purely authentic in interpersonal communications is impossible. From another perspective, the essay also argues that in authentically embracing the true essence of our reality and meaninglessness, humanity can still live functional lives. References Camus, Albert. (1946) *The Stranger*. New York: Vintage Books.