

The absurdity of life
in the myth of
sisyphus by albert
camus



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The Myth of Sisyphus by Albert Camus is a philosophical essay written in 1942 that addresses the question of whether life is worth living through. From the perspective of the author, people share a similar path to the Greek hero Sisyphus, moving a boulder up a mountain only for it to roll back down and to repeat the process indefinitely. Camus' essay represents a metaphor for life having no meaning, through his interpretations of past constructs. With the premise that all living things including humans are organisms evolved from the smallest bacteria, a package of atoms without a purpose in life or even a set of directions. Camus relates the human constructs of choice, religion and purpose to emphasize the incompatibility of human existence in the universe but in the end, unlike other philosophers, Camus feels that people should accept this to live better and to embrace the hopeless situation to get the most out of life.

Albert Camus was a French writer, journalist and philosopher, whose mother was illiterate and whose father had died from wounds during the Great War. As an advocate of human rights and a recipient of the Nobel prize, the words of Camus held a lot of weight and have undoubtedly contributed towards the philosophy of absurdity and existentialism. Thus to examine Camus' ideas and views, one would have to take a look at his past work. In his previous work, *The Stranger*, it is shown that people may not express or feel emotions when another person dies. In this case, the main character Meursault, does not feel any emotions towards his friend's death nor towards the man he shoots and kills in an altercation. Meursault feels no sadness or remorse. Only when he is sentenced to death does he express himself, stating prior to his death that he would not take the opportunity to turn to god, which Rubin

finds, indicates that life is indeed meaningless when death is trivial. In addition, the absence of a god or higher figure connects to his work with The Myth of Sisyphus in which without god, there could be no choice or purpose in life. Rubin finds an interesting distinction between the two in which it is not the pointless futility to despair over, but a futility which is to be acknowledged and celebrated. Like Sisyphus, Meursault has achieved a strange peace of his predicament and himself, silencing faith and hope and finding happiness in the absurd and acknowledging the meaninglessness of life.

In Camus' writing on The Myth of Sisyphus, the main idea can be interpreted towards life being absurd. People are born into the world in which they have no choice on the matter, " limited through the conceptions of society, resources... and the environment". When considering the scope of the world and the universe, Whistler explains how humans are in the " limit of nothingness", meaning that they have no real choices to make and thus no purpose. Camus presents the Myth of Sisyphus as a metaphor that explains how life is meaningless and absurd through his interpretations of purpose. It could be seen that the repetition of what Sisyphus does symbolizes the plight of humanity, representing what people do every day of their life with no alternative. Forced by the environment and surroundings which offer no choice of living differently. Camus establishes that human lives are without purpose, believing that the rest of humanity also understands but takes a leap of faith to believe that human existence does have a justified purpose. However, Elif describes Camus as someone who " does not want to make

that leap," as purpose emerges from choices, and because there is no one to choose to give people life (no god), humans would therefore lack purpose.

Furthermore, one must look at the state of being lost. Lost to god and lost to life, seeing as Camus' writing on Sisyphus seems to be advocating the rejection of what one is bound by. Sisyphus, like the rest of humanity is condemned to perform thoughtless tasks, symbolizing the absurdity which humans live in and, as Camus believes, the lack of purpose. As nothing that anyone does is attributed towards progression in "which progression means purpose." and the things made up by humans such as money, possessions and love are simply constructs for progression, which is to say that in the grand scheme of things, is meaningless to the universe. With the boulder also representing the fact that humanity has been condemned with a curse - as Whistler argues, the urges and the false constructs of humanity, and the things one needs to satisfy them.

In addition, it is made important to remember that Sisyphus is not moving the boulder indefinitely. Sisyphus is made to roll the boulder up a mountain, only for it to roll back down due to its weight, but in this moment, Camus expresses that "during that return, that pause, that Sisyphus should interest oneself". In the words of Elif, it is not the act of pushing the boulder itself that is most important, but rather the brief intervals before and after each trip up the mountain. Camus puts the true cause of Sisyphus' suffering not so much in the physical strain as he does over the the knowledge or consciousness that the futile task, set upon him is all he has to look forwards to or expect for eternity or the rest of his life. To Camus, the suffering of humanity wouldn't be the pain that is undergone that would be unbearable <https://assignbuster.com/the-absurdity-of-life-in-the-myth-of-sisyphus-by-albert-camus/>

but rather the conscious understanding that the pain and suffering would be all people would ever know, never leading to anything more fruitful. Camus compares this consciousness with the human condition, as every arc completed in life represents each time Sisyphus reaches the top with the boulder, which is inherently meaningless to the universe. Every test and exam passed only to move on to the next, from a larger perspective of completing elementary school to high school to university, the perspective gets larger as does the daily grind only to end in death and nothingness. What then, to leave no impact on the universe is there to continue living further when one could end it much quicker?

To Camus, Elif claims that suicide is one of the only real problems to existential philosophy. One of the major issues presented by Camus is that in a world that is meaningless and absurd, the purpose to live within suffering seems to be incompatible for many. The point that is trying to be made is that there is no solution to the problem on living in an absurd and meaningless existence. Camus' argument is that the sole solution to confront it is to live in the absurd, therefore confirming the incompatibility of human existence, or life in general. To commit suicide does not bring about the solution to eliminating absurdity, which is why Camus says one " must imagine Sisyphus happy." According to Whistler, all solutions to absurdity have been attempted or tried before, which Camus categorize as " honest" and " dishonest" ways, such as the use of religion for the purpose of erasing or distraction oneself from their lives. The honest way which Camus acknowledges is to live with and be aware of the absurd. Through either way, in order to avoid what Camus calls " philosophical suicide", or the errors of

absurdity again, one must imagine Sisyphus happy. In this way, one is able to achieve meaning in themselves and within absurdity. In this, Camus acknowledges the absurd and meaninglessness in life, and concludes that suicide is not the answer as it does not negate the meaningless existence to life.

Albert Camus' writing on *The Myth of Sisyphus* serves as a way in which to explain his interpretations of absurdity. To understand the absurdist philosophy of Camus, it is also necessary to know about the background and interpretation of his thinkings on the philosophical subjects of suicide, suffering and purpose. It is all well and good to carve out reasons for existing and to fill the empty spaces with meaningful prospects of money and love in order to find reason from the meaningless tasks set out from the false constructs of humanity. However, if there is no ultimate meaning, or at the very least not one which would provide a trace of hope and purpose that everyone could agree to, then what would be the point of undertaking ventures at all? Camus makes a point of confronting the reader with the solution to suicide - if the ultimate conclusion to life is total obliteration, then where is the point in living at all? This is what Camus ultimately means when he writes that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy," and thus, remains the reason as to how his writings represent a metaphor for how life has no meaning.