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## ABSTRACT

This work is aimed at exploring Camus' notion of the meaning of life which he holds as absurd. He gave the solution of this meaninglessness of life as Revolt. There is a grounded need for man's continual reflection on the meaning of life and this stands as the purpose for embarking on this research work. This reflection will accentuate into man's full realization of his authentic existence, since looking at our everyday endeavors, man has encountered series of problems and difficulties to which he seeks meaning. Camus outlined three possible responses to the meaninglessness of life which are: suicide, revolt and the leap of faith. He condemned suicide and the existential leap as evasions and endorsed revolt as a proper solution to absurdity of life. Camus having suggested revolt as the solution to absurdity, I note the need also to elevate people's belief that life is worth living. This work adopts as its research method, an expository and reflective approach. Here we shall with a detailed and deep reflective inquiry expose the place of absurdity in Camus' philosophy in order to fully understand his notion of the absurd. With this exposition, a critical analysis of the problems of suicide and revolt will be made.

*Keywords:* problem; absurdity; solution; suicide; revolt.

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# The Problem of Absurdity and its Solution in Albert Camus Existential Philosophy

Ignatius Nnaemeka Onwuatuegwu<sup>α</sup> & Ambrose Tooohukwu Arinze<sup>σ</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*This work is aimed at exploring Camus' notion of the meaning of life which he holds as absurd. He gave the solution of this meaninglessness of life as Revolt. There is a grounded need for man's continual reflection on the meaning of life and this stands as the purpose for embarking on this research work. This reflection will accentuate into man's full realization of his authentic existence, since looking at our everyday endeavors, man has encountered series of problems and difficulties to which he seeks meaning. Camus outlined three possible responses to the meaninglessness of life which are: suicide, revolt and the leap of faith. He condemned suicide and the existential leap as evasions and endorsed revolt as a proper solution to absurdity of life. Camus having suggested revolt as the solution to absurdity, I note the need also to elevate people's belief that life is worth living. This work adopts as its research method, an expository and reflective approach. Here we shall with a detailed and deep reflective inquiry expose the place of absurdity in Camus' philosophy in order to fully understand his notion of the absurd. With this exposition, a critical analysis of the problems of suicide and revolt will be made.*

**Keywords:** problem; absurdity; solution; suicide; revolt.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

As one can observe from the Myth of Sisyphus, Camus developed the idea of the absurd and thereby presented the belief that the individual person has worth. However, he opined that this

individual person, though with his worth, unfortunately lives in the world that denies his worth. (Camus; 1999). The absurd implies the confrontation that ensued between the usual order of human thinking and the orderlessness that are discovered in the world.. He categorically stated in the Myth of Sisyphus that "the only truly serious problem of philosophy is suicide because suicide is the confession that life is not worth living" (Camus; 1999). Having established the above point, he then proceeds further to establish the absurdity of existence. For him, people should accept the absurdity of their lives. Nevertheless, he was against the illogical act of killing oneself.

His view on absurdity suggests that our lives on earth are futile and full of suffering as exemplified by Sisyphus, a man sentenced by the gods to eternity of fruitless and hopeless work. He pushes a very large stone up a mountain, a strenuous labour that takes superman energy to accomplish. Immediately he pushes the stone to the top of the mountain, to stone rolls down to the bottom of the valley again. Though knowing very well that his efforts and strength are incapable of achieving the job, yet, he baffles the gods by his insistence and persistence to carry on with the fruitless job.

Zaretsky taking the stand of Camus said that absurdity is the essence of tragedy which is the state of human life. Thus, the forces confronting each other in tragedy are equally legitimate, equally justified (Zaretsky; 1999). It is both dramatic and naïve to believe that only one side is just and justifiable (Zaretsky; 1999). There is no easy answer and no side is completely right. Robert holds that life is full of no-win situations; life is a no-win situation itself, which is why life is tragedy (Zaretsky; 1999). Camus holds that irrespective of all these difficulties and contingencies of life, there is happiness and worth

in living (Camus; 1999). For him, these can only be achieved by being conscious and willing which amount to revolt; for happiness negates punishment. Unlike nihilism, solipsism and other depressing philosophies, Camus' absurdity assures of the hope of victory over the pointless world, and it is by realizing the absurdity of every situation and choosing to get going. Just as Sisyphus, in any kind of absurdity, man puts his or her energy into a struggle of life and rather than choosing to die, we choose to live our lives the best possible way (Camus; 1999).

However, once a person becomes aware of the existence of the absurd, he faces two possible solutions: suicide or recovery (revolt). Whichever he chooses, he is free for the choice is solely his to make. Camus having rejected physical or philosophical suicide upholds the final alternative which is confronting the truth of human existence and accepting it over suicide or the 'leap'.

## II. THE PROBLEM OF ABSURDITY AND ITS SOLUTIONS

The problem of absurdity is quite pertinent as expressed by Camus. The most poignant critique is that absurdity rejects the Christian 'leap of faith' and the attitude that says, 'do not do anything; God will do it for you'; and instead substitutes 'it's own', 'we cannot change anything any longer, no matter how hard we try' (Internet; 2010). The solutions to absurdity are embedded in its problem. Therefore, for Camus, there are three ways of dealing with the meaninglessness of existence which are; suicide, leap of faith and revolt.

### 2.1 Suicide

Although life is filled with both ends of ups and downs such as sufferings, happiness, loneliness, sickness, hunger and death, the meaninglessness and purposelessness of these do not worth committing suicide. Killing oneself in the face of all these, tantamount to declaring that life is too much than you can carry on or that one does not comprehend it. It is also merely confessing that life is not worth the trouble" (Camus; 1999). Though Camus understands that we are strangers

to the life we live, he does not see suicide or termination of life as what we should accept. The question of suicide motivated Camus into searching for the meaning of existence and asking 'why we are here.' From his inquiries, he arrived at the view that suicide is not good and should be abrogated; and that lack of faith in God should not be an excuse for committing suicide.

Suicide is an act of cowardice. This is seen when Haggins wrote, "Suicide as an escape from overwhelming personality disaster, an evil life, misery, frustration, or dishonor, far from being an act of fortitude is an act of cowardice" (Haggins; 1956). For it is just like solving a long term problem with short term solution. Suicide, for Camus is a kind of weak-minded acquiescence to an unjust destiny. It is the admittance that the absurdities of life like calamities and sickness have overwhelmed us and made us to escape it through an invitation to instant death.

### 2.2 Leap of Faith

Camus, through his work, *The Myth of Sisyphus* had nothing but scorn for a leap of the theistic existentialists who he saw proposed 'a leap of faith' to deal with absurdity. For him, the essence of the leap is the denial and death of reason. He rejected their doctrine on the ground that their action was nothing but an act of suicide or act of committing suicide. This is because when one leaps to faith in his search for meaning, he abandons that search and relies on God to proffer solutions to his search. He labeled the theistic existentialists and their teachings, 'philosophical suicide' by saying, "I am taking the liberty of this point of calling the existential attitude philosophical suicide" (Camus; 1999). The reason for calling them such is because it amounts to killing off the fundamental and distinctive part of the human being, which is human reasoning.

Kierkegaard believed that a belief in anything beyond the absurd requires an irrational but necessary religious' acceptance (leap of faith). Nonetheless, Camus referred to this as a 'philosophical suicide'. Perhaps, this was why he said that "what can a meaning outside my condition mean to me? I can understand only in

human terms" (Camus; 1999). More so, Kierkegaard's childhood having been so frightened by Christianity, he ultimately returns to its harshest aspect.

Antimony and paradox for him become the criteria of the religious"(Camus; 1999) and he believes that without God, there is no hope in this futile world. Camus, on the other hand believes that "the absurd does not lead to God, the absurd is sin without God" (Camus; 1999). Camus said that "there is no future life, that it is the reason for his inner freedom"(Camus; 1999) when he upholds that there is nothing like eternal life or after-life.

### 2.3 Revolt

Camus holds that absurdity can never be accepted, instead, it requires constant revolt and confrontation. The rebellion Camus is advocating is a 'metaphysical rebellion', whereby the rebel protests against his condition and against the world of creation (Camus; 1999). Camus developed his philosophical idea of the revolt in his work "The Rebel", which he began in the *Myth of Sisyphus*. For him, it is the spirit of rebellion that awakens human beings to the issue of meaninglessness and spurs them to encountering life authentically. He holds also that the act of rebellion cannot exist without the feeling that someone is right. Camus nevertheless suggested that the solution to absurdity is not to escape to philosophy or suicide, but rather, to accept it as a given.

Furthermore, Camus holds that "suicide does not represent the logical outcome of the revolt"(Camus; 1999) because suicide does not follow revolt. Revolt rather provides humans with reason to face the utter meaninglessness of their existence. It gives man the unique opportunity of being conscious of his experiences and what accompanies that experiences. He further believes that our decision to live and not commit suicide keeps 'the absurd' alive and "keeping the absurd alive is above all contemplating" (Camus; 1999).

The question to be asked having made it this far is whether revolt can be relied upon as a perfect

solution to the question of meaninglessness of life and human existence.

### III. CONCLUSION

Having examined Camus' meaning of life, one therefore holds like Sidonja that one's fate is his and in one's hands just like Sisyphus (Manushi; 2012). Our life is solely our thing for we do not need any paradigm. The absurd is our damnation for one needs no leap of faith or higher power to give meaning to one's life. One is therefore to live his life since he has accepted it as meaningless. One's action is therefore the rock which Sisyphus rolls up the hill; while the hill; the height where the rock is rolled up is one's goal (Camus; 1999). One needs only be happy and live with the absurd, for in the absurd one finds the meaning to one's life. Since death is the ultimate end of all absurdities, one should like Sisyphus repeat his actions towards finding meaning to life until one can do no more.

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