

ALBERT CAMUS

Most famous for his philosophy of “Absurdity”
(The myth of Sisyphus)

And opposition to the Nazi’s as part
of the French Resistance



ALBERT CAMUS

Biography

- Born 1913 Algeria (controlled by France)
- Dad died in 1914 at the Battle of the Marne. Camus never knew him.
- A stratified society. He was “black foot” (slang term for French citizens born in Algeria). He was poor. Arab and Berber Algerians had fewer rights. Other parts of society will have many more rights. This upbringing will have an effect on his views.
- Interested in rugby and swimming

- He is influenced by ancient Greek philosophers and by Nietzsche.
- 1933, in relationship with Simone (eventually his first wife) who was addicted to morphine. Married 1934, divorced 1936 (she was having an affair)
- 1935, joined French Communist Party (even though he was not a Marxist), seeing it as a way to fight “inequities between Europeans and ‘natives’ in Algeria.
- In Algeria he founded a theater, and wrote and produced plays

- In 1940 moved to Paris. He is there when the Nazi’s invade. He tried to flee, but could not.
- Tried to join French army, but rejected because he had tuberculosis as a teenager.
- In Paris, he became active in the French Resistance against the Nazi’s. Published a banned newspaper, writing under a pseudonym.
- Married again in 1940. He was having affairs. Twins born with 2nd wife in 1945

- Spoke out against the Soviet invasion of countries during the Cold War. Pro-European integration.
- 1957, won the Nobel Prize for Literature (at age 44, 2nd youngest recipient in history)

- Died 1960 France. A lover of fast cars, he died suddenly in a car crash.
 - ↳ Not assassinated by the KGB, as rumors suggested



Philosophy (major ideas)

He was not an academic philosopher

His writings revolved around the question “Does life make sense?”

↳ He believes that tradition values and way of life had collapsed

Absurdity lies in the opposition between...

(1) the human need for meaning, and

(2) the unconcerned and meaningless world.

The presence of the absurd makes the problem of suicide the most fundamental philosophical question

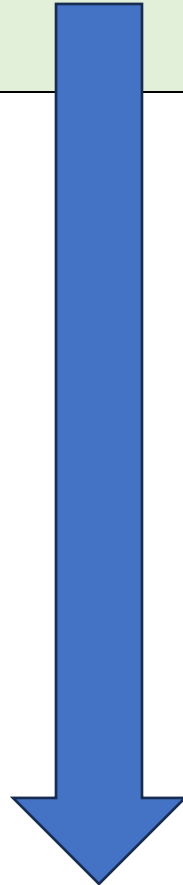
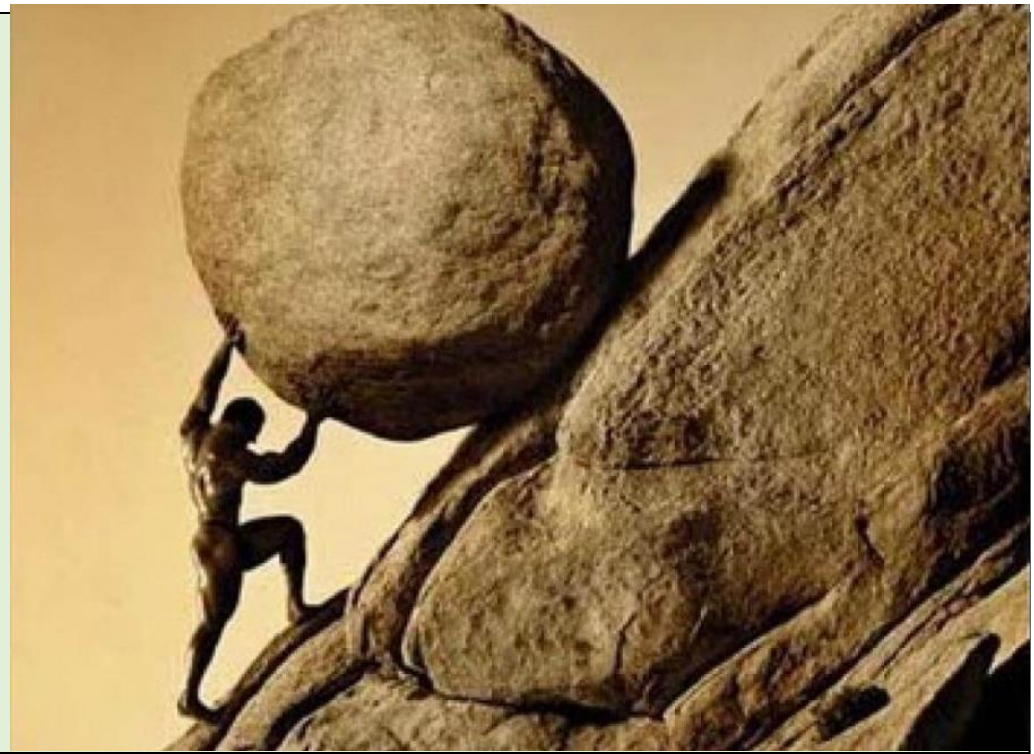
↳ the absurd does not dictate death.

↳ what gives life its value is the consciousness of the absurd together with the revolt that consists in a defiant heroism that resists injustice

↳ by rebelling against the absurd conditions that waste life – whether they be social, political or personal – the rebel shows solidarity with other persons and encourages the struggle for a more human world.

“The myth of Sisyphus”

↪ Sisyphus is a figure from Greek mythology who became infamous for his general trickery (would kill travelers through his lands) and twice cheating death. He ultimately got his comeuppance when Zeus dealt him the eternal punishment of forever rolling a boulder up a steep hill in the depths of Hades.



Homer tells the story in both the 'Iliad' and the 'Odyssey' (date to 8th century BCE)

- In this work, Camus adopted a theme from the ancient Greeks, and considered the nature of Gods and heroes.
- He put forth the character Sisyphus – a mortal who challenged fate.
- Sisyphus would not submit to authoritarian Gods, and the Gods retaliated by requiring him throughout eternity to push a huge boulder up a hill only to see it roll down again.
- Endless repetitions of this task apparently gained him nothing, but he persisted in his task.
- We have no progressed fundamentally beyond the mythological condition of Sisyphus, Camus argued.
- This prompts Camus to suggest that the only true philosophical question is that of suicide...that is, judging whether life is worth living
- Camus did not think God or religious faith could resolve this problem

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- His quest is to live “without the aid of external values” (1955)
- He felt an appeal to God was no longer credible, for in our time the “absurd” had center stage
- Absurdity – Camus states – can strike anyone, anywhere
- A person feels alien, like a stranger, even to themselves
- His feeling arises through an encounter between the world and the demands we make as rational beings.
- Specifically, Camus explains, absurdity arises from the confrontation between (1) human needs, and (2) the unreasonable silence of the world.
 - ↳ regarding pt.2, that is, we ask a thousand “Why’s” that lack answers. We want solutions, but as soon as thought asserts something it is proved flawed. Hence, “absurd”
- Claim: if human awareness did not exist, then absurdity would not exist either.
 - ↳ Example: we go about our routing day, like clockwork patterns, but the moment we question “Why”, the tediousness sets forth.
- The absurd is a total absence of hope
- Thus, only death (suicide) can bring an end to the absurd awareness
- Suicide, then, is an option
- But to Camus it is NOT.
- Camus felt it is important to die unreconciled; untroubled.
- To die of the absurd is not death by one’s free will
- Camus felt we should let absurdity remain in order to defy it (this giving life meaning again)

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Back to the story

- Sisyphus is Camus's absurd here
- Sisyphus both loves life and hates death
- He never gives up and is never dishonest
- He accepts fate only to defy it
- Thereby, he gives meaning to existence
 - ↳ meaning that cannot negate absurdity but rather refuses to succumb to it.
- Camus wanted all people to find a way to life like Sisyphus
- Much of his writing and speeches are devoted to this.
- Camus wants us to focus not on Sisyphus pushing the rock to the top of the hill, but instead to him at the top
- He reaches the top
- He knows the rock will roll down the hill, and it does
- But as Sisyphus heads down the hill to retrieve it, he does not despair
- He surmounts his fate by scorning it.
- Sisyphus sees clearly...
 - (1) he has ceased to hope for release by the Gods,
 - (2) yet by giving up hope and feeling absurdity squarely, he has created meaning.
- Life has meaning if we make it so by our determination.