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Albert Camus "The myth of Sisyphus": An evaluation

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Abstract

The article caption "Albert Camus' the Myth of Sisyphus" explores considerable sympathy, analysed contemporary nihilism and the sense of absurd. Its central concern is what Camus calls the absurd. He introduces his philosophy of the absurd, man's futile search for meaning, unity, and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world devoid of god and eternal truths or values. The myth of Sisyphus is related to existentialism. Sisyphus is the epitome of the absurd hero because he is able to recognize the absurdity of the human condition, abundant hope, find happiness in material reality and ultimately find meaning in the struggle itself. Furthermore archetypal method has been adapted.

Keywords: struggle, desire for unity, existentialism

Introduction

Albert Camus, a distinguished French writer, was born in Mondovi, town to the north-east of Algeria, on November 7, 1913. He grew up in a working-class district of Algiers, the capital of Algeria. After the death of his father who was an agricultural worker, the family moved to Algiers. Circumstances forced his mother to adopt the humble occupation of a charwoman, there being no other means of livelihood. Camus received his early education in a school in Algeria and was helped by one of his teachers in securing a scholarship which proved to be a boon to the family. It was about this time that he read the works of Andre Gide, Malraux, and perhaps Sartre. HE was passionately fond of sports and games- and interest which remained with him to the end of his life. His other interest was the theatre. In 1930, when he was hardly 17 the doctors declared him to be afflicted with consumption, and so he rented a separate house, and was tended by one of his uncles. At this time he earned money by following various pursuits- e.g. selling shares for a car company, working as a clerk in a marine Broker's office, and doing an Assistant's job in the Meteorological office. He was working for the communist party also, and did not miss his university classes. He found time to study Greek at the university, and became almost a Greek scholar. When France surrendered to Hitler in 1940, he migrated to North Africa and became a teacher in a school there. But he returned to Paris in 1942. After the second worldwar, he left for the United States for a lecture tour in 1946. Camus' comparatively short life of 46 years came to an end because of a car accident on January 4, 1960. However, he earned much literary name and fame not only in his own land and in Europe but in the Entire Western World. HE has made a rich and a not worthy contribution to the literature of the world by his essays, novels, dramas and philosophical books. His literary oeuvre includes "Cross Purpose", "Calibula", "State of Siege", "The Just Assassins", "The Wrong Side and the Right Side", "The Stranger", "The Outsider", "The Myth of Sisyphus", "The Fall", "Exile and the Kingdom"

His writings possess many qualities, but the chiefest among them is his view that man is doomed to loneliness in this world. This concept may be said to form the core of his philosophy. Evil, atheism, death and pain are the recurring themes in his works. Camus received the noble prize for Literature in 1957 because his literary production with clear sighted earnestness illumines the problems of the conscience in modern times. His name is associated with "a philosophy of the Absurd" which bears some resemblance to Existentialism.

"The Myth of Sisyphus", titled "Le Mythe de Sisyphe" in French, and published in 1942 is a philosophical essay by Albert Camus. The English translation by Justin O' Brien came out in 1955. In it the writer, with considerable sympathy, analysed contemporary nihilism and the sense of "absurd". Its central concern is what Camus calls "the absurd".

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Camus claims that there is fundamental conflict between what we want from the universe (whether it be meaning or reason) and what we find in the universe (formless chaos)

Camus gives a quite different account of philosophy and politics of existentialism. He introduces his philosophy of the absurd, man's futile search for meaning, unity, and clarity in the face of an unintelligible world devoid of God and eternal truths or values. The myth of Sisyphus is related to existentialism. According to Messerly, the first basic idea of existentialism is that reason is an inadequate instrument with which to comprehend the values, depth 'mystery and meaning of life. We can see that for Sisyphus this is very much the case. Camus claims that Sisyphus is accused of a certain levity in regard to the gods.

As a punishment in the Hades for his trickery or cunning Zeus made Sisyphus, the king of Corinth, roll a huge boulder endlessly up a steep hill. The maddening nature of the punishment was reserved for the king Sisyphus due to his hubristic belief that his cleverness surpassed that of Zeus himself. This fate is related in Homer's 'Odyssey' (Book-xi).

In philosophy, 'the Absurd refers to the conflict between human tendency to seek inherent value and meaning in life and the human inability to find any in a purposeless, meaningless, or chaotic and irrational universe. In absurdist philosophy, the Absurd arises out of the fundamental disharmony between the individual's search for meaning and the meaninglessness of the universe. Camus states that it does not counter the Absurd. Rather, in the act of ending one's existence, one's existence only became more absurd. Camus considered Absurd to be a fundamental and even defining characteristic of the modern human condition. The notion of Revolt refers to both a path of resolved action and a state of mind. The absurd man demands certainty above all else, and recognizes that he can only be certain of the absurd. The only truth about himself that remains constant is his desire for unity, reason, and clarity and the only truth about the world that seems certain is that it conforms to no obvious shape or pattern. As a metaphor for the human condition and the absurdity of our experience, Sisyphus is the epitome of the absurd hero because he is able to recognize the absurdity of the human condition, abundant hope, find happiness in material reality, and ultimately find meaning in the struggle itself.

Camus, Nietzsche and Sartre were all heavily influenced by Kierkegaard. Camus was the father of Absurdism, which rejects that any meaning to life exists at least in relation to humanity and seeks to point out the absurdity in the human search for meaning in life despite the fact that life is meaningless. He uses the Greek legend of Sisyphus as a metaphor for the individual's persistent struggle against the essential absurdity of life. He opens the essay by asking if the conclusion that life is meaningless necessarily leads one to commit suicide...If that were the case, we would have no option but to make a leap of faith or to commit suicide, says Camus. Living with the absurd, Camus suggests, Camus sees Sisyphus as the absurd hero who lives life to the fullest, hates death, and is condemned to a meaningless task. He presents Sisyphus's ceaseless and pointless toil as a metaphor for modern lives spent working at futile jobs in factories and offices.

In "The Myth of Sisyphus" Camus argues that a loss of hope need not be a cause for suicide. On the contrary, he suggests

that recognition that there is no hope for anything beyond certain death (what he calls the realisation of absurd) actually offers the possibility of a happier existence.

In the first section, Camus sets out the fundamental purpose of his essay, describes his concept of absurd and articulates the consequences of one's encounter with the absurd. This purpose is to determine whether or not life is worth living after one becomes aware of its fundamental absurdity. He defines the absurd as the condition in which "the world evades us and becomes itself again" rather than something that belong to us or any higher power. He describes the moment at which one recognises this as an encounter with the absurd.

Because there is no remedy for this awareness, Camus proposes revolt, or "constant confrontation" with the absurd. He also suggests that freedom is available in the absurd since any "scale of values" is tied to a belief in the meaning of life. One is no longer bound to these values. A third consequence of the absurd says Camus, is passion, or the enthusiastic embrace of the meaningless life and a rejection of suicide.

Camus offers some examples of those who, he thinks have a deeper insight into the absurd, such as lovers, actors, and conquerors. The loves pursue the pleasures of love knowing they are fleeting and rare. The actors make a living by appearing to live, and conquerors act decisively instead of engaging in useless moralizing. These types, he says, have an advantage over others because they know that any sense of enduring accomplishment is illusory.

Camus also discusses the functions of art in the absurd. Art does not explain the absurd or solve the problems it creates, argues Camus, but rather describes the conditions of existence with an awareness of its futility. Creative enterprises, however, offer the artist opportunities to maximize their experience. In creating art, Camus suggests, artist makes the most of their lives.

Finally, Camus lays out a metaphor for absurdity in the figure of Sisyphus, Sisyphus is a figure from Greek mythology who has been condemned by the gods to roll a boulder up a steep hill only to have it roll back down where he must repeat this task infinitely. Camus asks us to consider Sisyphus, especially at the point where it must repeat his task. Since he accepts that he has no hope of ever doing anything else, he does what he does each time with "his scorn of gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life." this, for Camus, makes him the absurd hero.

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