

THE HUMAN CO.  
BOOK CLUB | FEB 2022

ALBERT CAMUS

# THE MYTH OF SISYPHUS

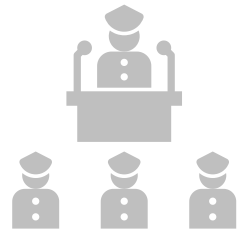
An illustration of the myth of Sisyphus. A small, dark silhouette of a person is shown at the base of a large, dark, craggy mountain, pushing a large, white, circular boulder up its slope. The background is a solid, warm brown color. The style is minimalist and evocative.

# QUOTE

"THE ABSURD IS BORN OF THE  
CONFRONTATION BETWEEN HUMAN  
NEED AND THE UNREASONABLE  
SILENCE OF THE WORLD."



**WORLD WARS**



**AUTHORITARIANISM**



**COLONIALISM**



**INJUSTICE**

# **HISTORICAL CONTEXT**

OF CAMUS' WORLD

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Camus was a philosopher, journalist, and playwright, born November 7, 1913, in the then-French colony of Algeria. By 1957, he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature. He would die just three years later at the age of just 46.

A French citizen born in Algeria, he felt a sense of displacement his whole life, even though French citizens had more rights and freedoms than the Arabs and Berbers. The Arabs and Berbers were mistreated under French rule, an injustice that would manifest as anti-colonial sentiments for Camus despite his technical status as a colonizer.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

His political ideologies became left-leaning as he witnessed increasingly aggressive authoritarian and fascist regimes attempting to overtake Europe. He became frustrated with bureaucracies that were more concerned with efficiency and spending rather than the rights of people.

Throughout the years, he moved away from Communist ideals and began focusing on the rights of workers, speaking in favor of labor movements and strikes and speaking against "wage slavery."

He believed that people should have autonomy over their own lives, advocating for the decentralization and democratization of institutions.

# ABOUT THE AUTHOR

His philosophical works were intended to put a more positive spin on nihilism, finding freedom rather than despair in the fact that life is inherently meaningless.

He posed the question of suicide, stating that if life is indeed meaningless, one must ask and decide whether or not theirs is worth living.

Overall, he believed that if we are to be here on this earth, we should enjoy our time by living presently. Happiness is the only true goal of living, so we must speak out against the injustices and sufferings of others so that we may all live more freely.

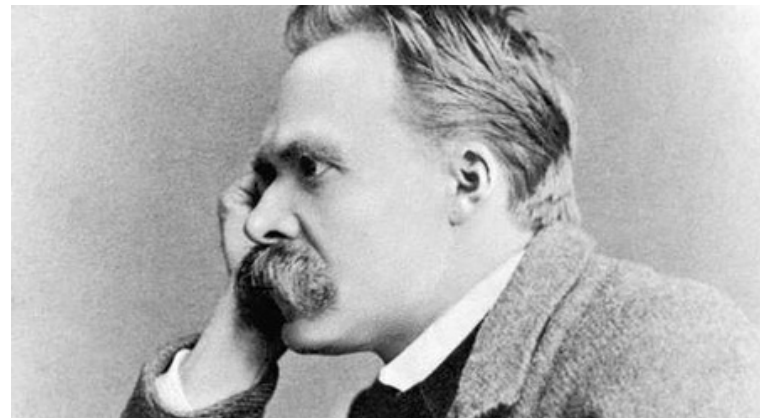
"I REVOLT, THEREFORE  
WE EXIST."

# COMPARISON OF IDEOLOGIES



## EXISTENTIALISM

"The belief that through a combination of awareness, free will, and personal responsibility, one can construct their own meaning within a world that intrinsically has none of its own."



## NIHILISM

"The belief that not only is there no intrinsic meaning in the universe, but that it's pointless to try to construct our own as a substitute."



## ABSURDISM

"The belief that a search for meaning is inherently in conflict with the actual lack of meaning, but that one should both accept this and simultaneously rebel against it by embracing what life has to offer."



# POSSIBLE RESPONSES

## PHILOSOPHICAL SUICIDE

"Completely embracing a religion or a spirituality framework—because one believes it's too hard to sad or difficult to live on without one.

"Adopting a religion or some sort of nebulous “spirituality”—as someone who has accepted the truth of intrinsic meaninglessness—amounts to either intellectual laziness, emotional weakness, or some combination thereof. It is to say that the truth is too difficult to consume and accept, and that you've chosen to believe something untrue because it is easier."

## PHYSICAL SUICIDE

"Life [is] ultimately meaningless and therefore either too boring or too painful to continue.

"To commit suicide is to turn one's back on the beauty that life has to offer, which... should only be explored in extreme cases."

## ACCEPTANCE

"Continuing on despite knowing that ultimate meaning is not possible.

"Camus' Absurdism is about working within our human limitations, but without abandoning our respect for ourselves or the truth. Absurdist often either adopt or construct a belief structure that provides a day-to-day reprieve from the crushing impossibility of true meaning. Such constructs allow us to trick our evolution-soaked brains into extracting meaning from the universe, while never forgetting that the system itself is a trick."

# MAJOR THEMES

## HABIT

“Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering.”

## HOPE

“The typical act of eluding...is hope. Hope of another life one must ‘deserve’ or trickery of those who live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it.”

## ANTINOMY

“Kierkegaard wants to be cured. To be cured is his frenzied wish... The entire effort of his intelligence is to escape the antinomy of the human condition.”

# MAJOR THEMES

## HABIT

“Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering.”

## HOPE

“The typical act of eluding...is hope. Hope of another life one must ‘deserve’ or trickery of those who live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it.”

## ANTINOMY

“Kierkegaard wants to be cured. To be cured is his frenzied wish... The entire effort of his intelligence is to escape the antinomy of the human condition.”

# MAJOR THEMES

## HABIT

“Dying voluntarily implies that you have recognized, even instinctively, the ridiculous character of that habit, the absence of any profound reason for living, the insane character of that daily agitation, and the uselessness of suffering.”

## HOPE

“The typical act of eluding...is hope. Hope of another life one must ‘deserve’ or trickery of those who live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it.”

## ANTINOMY

“Kierkegaard wants to be cured. To be cured is his frenzied wish... The entire effort of his intelligence is to escape the antinomy of the human condition.”

WHAT DO YOU THINK OF THE WORK SO FAR?

WAS THERE ANYTHING IN PARTICULAR THAT STOOD  
OUT TO YOU OR RESONATED WITH YOU?

HOW DID THE WORK MAKE YOU FEEL AS YOU WERE  
READING IT?



“DOES THE ABSURD DICTATE DEATH?”



“HOW SHALL I NEGATE THIS WORLD WHOSE POWER  
AND STRENGTH I FEEL?”



THINKING OF NOTHING: “BUT IF THAT REPLY IS  
SINCERE, IF IT SYMBOLIZES THAT ODD STATE OF SOUL  
IN WHICH THE VOID BECOMES ELOQUENT, IN WHICH  
THE CHAIN OF DAILY GESTURES IS BROKEN, IN WHICH  
THE HEART VAINLY SEEKS THE LINK THAT WILL  
CONNECT IT AGAIN, THEN IT IS AS IT WERE THE FIRST  
SIGN OF ABSURDITY.”

# #4 DISCUSSION



“WEARINESS COMES AT THE END OF THE ACTS OF A MECHANICAL LIFE, BUT AT THE SAME TIME IT INAUGURATES THE IMPULSE OF CONSCIOUSNESS. IT AWAKENS CONSCIOUSNESS AND PROVOKES WHAT FOLLOWS.”



“THINKING IS LEARNING ALL OVER AGAIN HOW TO SEE,  
DIRECTING ONE’S CONSCIOUSNESS, MAKING OF EVERY  
IMAGE A PRIVILEGED PLACE. IN OTHER WORDS,  
PHENOMENOLOGY DECLINES TO EXPLAIN THE WORLD,  
IT WANTS TO BE MERELY A DESCRIPTION OF ACTUAL  
EXPERIENCE... CONSCIOUSNESS ILLUMINATES IT BY  
PAYING ATTENTION TO IT.”



“ONLY IN NOVELS DOES ONE CHANGE CONDITION OR  
BECOME BETTER. YET IT CAN BE SAID THAT AT THE  
SAME TIME NOTHING IS CHANGED AND EVERYTHING IS  
TRANSFORMED.” (72)



“A MOTHER OR A PASSIONATE WIFE NECESSARILY HAS A CLOSED HEART, FOR IT IS TURNED AWAY FROM THE WORLD... [DON JUAN’S LOVE] BRINGS WITH IT ALL THE FACES IN THE WORLD, AND ITS TREMOR COMES FROM THE FACT THAT IT KNOWS ITSELF TO BE MORTAL. DON JUAN HAS CHOSEN TO BE NOTHING.” (73)



“[ADRIENNE LECOUVREUR] IN THE DEATH  
THROES REFUSING IN TEARS TO REPUDIATE  
WHAT SHE CALLED HER ART GAVE EVIDENCE OF  
A GREATNESS THAT SHE NEVER ACHIEVED  
BEHIND THE FOOTLIGHTS. THIS WAS HER  
FINEST ROLE AND THE HARDEST ONE TO PLAY.  
CHOOSING BETWEEN HEAVEN AND A  
RIDICULOUS FIDELITY, PREFERRING ONESELF  
TO ETERNITY OR LOSING ONESELF IN GOD IS  
THE AGE-OLD TRAGEDY IN WHICH EACH MUST  
PLAY HIS PART.” (83)

# #3 DISCUSSION



# DISCUSSION

ON CONQUERORS: “CONQUERORS SOMETIMES TALK OF VANQUISHING AND OVERCOMING. BUT IT IS ALWAYS ‘OVERCOMING ONESELF’ THAT THEY MEAN. YOU ARE WELL AWARE OF WHAT THAT MEANS. EVERY MAN HAS FELT HIMSELF TO BE THE EQUAL OF A GOD AT CERTAIN MOMENTS. AT LEAST, THIS IS HOW IT IS EXPRESSED. BUT THIS COMES FROM THE FACT THAT IN A FLASH HE FELT THE AMAZING GRANDEUR OF THE HUMAN MIND. THE CONQUERORS ARE MERELY THOSE AMONG MEN WHO ARE CONSCIOUS ENOUGH OF THEIR STRENGTH TO BE SURE OF LIVING CONSTANTLY IN THOSE HEIGHTS AND FULLY AWARE OF THAT GRANDEUR.” (88)



# DISCUSSION

“ BUT IN FACT THE PREFERENCE THEY HAVE SHOWN FOR WRITING AND IMAGES RATHER THAN IN REASONED ARGUMENT IS REVELATORY OF A CERTAIN THOUGHT THAT IS COMMON TO THEM ALL, CONVINCED OF THE USELESSNESS OF ANY PRINCIPLE OF EXPLANATION AND SURE OF THE EDUCATIVE MESSAGE OF PERCEPTIBLE APPEARANCE. THEY CONSIDER THE WORK OF ART BOTH AS AN END AND A BEGINNING. IT IS THE OUTCOME OF AN OFTEN UNEXPRESSED PHILOSOPHY, ITS ILLUSTRATION AND ITS CONSUMMATION.” (101)

“ SOLELY IN THIS SENSE JESUS INDEED PERSONIFIES THE WHOLE HUMAN DRAMA. HE IS THE COMPLETE MAN, BEING THE ONE WHO REALIZED THE MOST ABSURD CONDITION. HE IS NOT THE GOD-MAN BUT THE MAN-GOD. AND, LIKE HIM, EACH OF US CAN BE CRUCIFIED AND VICTIMIZED—AND IS TO A CERTAIN DEGREE.” (107)





“THE THESIS-NOVEL, THE WORK THAT PROVES, THE MOST HATEFUL OF ALL, IS THE ONE THAT MOST OFTEN IS INSPIRED BY A SMUG THOUGHT. YOU DEMONSTRATE THE TRUTH YOU FEEL SURE OF POSSESSING. BUT THOSE ARE IDEAS ONE LAUNCHES, AND IDEAS ARE THE CONTRARY OF THOUGHT.” (115-116)



# DISCUSSION

“ THIS UNIVERSE HENCEFORTH WITHOUT A MASTER  
SEEMS TO HIM NEITHER STERILE NOR FUTILE. EACH  
ATOM OF THAT STONE, EACH MINERAL FLAKE OF THAT  
NIGHT-FILLED MOUNTAIN, IN ITSELF FORMS A WORLD.  
THE STRUGGLE ITSELF TOWARD THE HEIGHTS IS  
ENOUGH TO FILL A MAN’S HEART. ONE MUST IMAGINE  
SISYPHUS HAPPY.” (123)

