

## A Camusian Archetype: Embracing Absurdity with Meursault

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**Abstract:** This paper aims to expound on Camus' progressive philosophy through Meursault's power as an archetype emphasizing Camus' engagement with the absurd. The analysis focuses on Camus' specific works *The Myth of Sisyphus* and *The Stranger*. The selection of books is based on the internal relationship of the outputs, as the works resonate with Camus' philosophical development. This paper will be guided by the question, "How does Meursault display the individualistic approach to the absurd in a world that seeks meaning?" Specifically, the paper aims to uncover the reasons behind Meursault's persistence amidst the nonsense. The discussion is organized into three parts: First, the introduction discusses Camus from his first troika, particularly by exploring Meursault's attitude toward the world, establishing a foundation for interpreting his character. Second, the paper compares Meursault to Sisyphus, the embodiment of an absurd hero, to highlight the differences in their embrace of the absurd. This comparison sheds light on what defines a Camusian archetype and the significance of Camus' series of the absurd. Through these discussions, the paper elucidates a description and/or interpretation of the cycle of resolve in Meursault's character, thereby responding to the challenge of the absurd. Finally, the conclusion argues that Meursault, as a Camusian archetype, symbolizes an individualistic embrace of the absurd and happiness.

**Keywords:** *absurd, ethics of quantity, pessimism, solipsism, transcendence*

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### Introduction

Is there any meaning in this world? If there is, how can I find it? If there is none, should I create it or should I just embrace the meaninglessness of this world? Alternatively, should I attempt to take my own existence if living has no meaning or point? These questions have likely troubled the minds of some or may soon set foot on others, yet these questions are not ordinary, even if they arise in the typical day-to-day reflections of individuals. Rather, these are the fundamental existential questions that probe into the very nature of life and meaning. Albert Camus offers a unique perspective on these questions. However, it is important to note that while Camus is often associated with the existentialist movement, Camus did not see himself as an existentialist—often expressing surprise at being linked with the movement. Nevertheless, those associations are based in Camus' philosophy of the absurd. However, Camus does not offer a sense of comfort to these existential questions; he does not offer a blanket of text that we can hide.<sup>1</sup> Instead, I argue that Camus advocates for an engaging and "active" approach to life. His philosophy calls for confrontation rather than

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<sup>1</sup> Louis Hudon, "The Stranger and the Critics," *Yale French Studies*, no. 25 (1960): 59–64.

escape, a battle with the absurd even when the result may be futile—a continuous rebellion against meaninglessness. For Camus, the act of resisting, even in the face of inevitable loss, is itself a victory.

Camus asserts that individuals would go far beyond in search of meaning. At the end of it, the world will not respond nor cater to our desire for meaning. Life inherently has no meaning to give or is indifferent to this search. Indeed, the meaninglessness of the world has profound consequences on a person's quality of life. For example, the act of imposing meaning upon an indifferent world is not just a common but fundamental aspect of human existence. This, in turn, affects one's motivation and plays a significant factor in how one lives and how one may want to continue living. With this, Camus offers a perspective in encountering an “existential crisis” or traversing the absurdity of existence. He believes that people must confront life and its uncertainties head-on by continuously pursuing the things that ignite passion and curiosity, without the need to impose meaning on all of those things. This act of defiance, which Camus calls “rebellion,” is not a rejection of absurdity but an acceptance of it—living in full awareness of the world's indifference yet choosing to persist.<sup>2</sup> For Camus, the meaninglessness of life does not warrant surrender but rather demands active engagement. He believes that when we focus on giving meaning to everything, we risk being the persecutors of our own lives.

Moreover, for Camus, it is neither a leap of faith nor physical suicide that is the solution to overcoming the absurd life. Both, in his view, are forms of escapism—ways of avoiding rather than confronting the problem. Instead of seeking an escape, Camus challenges individuals to face absurdity directly. Thus, he presents two choices: either embrace the absurd and live despite it or escape from it. Camus extensively advocates for the former. His works suggest that humans must actively rebel against the absurd by living with full awareness of its presence, rather than retreating into illusions or despair. Life becomes truly fulfilling when a person, despite the absurdities of life, chooses to rebel against it—not by seeking an ultimate meaning but by asserting one's existence through action. Camus' method asserts that people can grasp suffering, uncertainty, and absurdity in their rawest form and genuinely overcome them. To illustrate this philosophy, Camus introduces the character of Meursault in *The Stranger*, a figure through whom he explores his early existential thought. Meursault's journey reflects Camus' evolving ideas on absurdity, morality, and the confrontation with death: “This man, gentlemen, this man is intelligent... He knows how to answer. Knows the value of words. And no one can say that he acted without realizing what he was doing.”<sup>3</sup> This line, spoken by the prosecutor during Meursault's trial, reveals how society perceives him. He is not judged merely for his crime but for his detachment from societal norms. Meanwhile, Meursault himself states: “He said the truth was that I didn't have a soul and that nothing human, not one of the moral principles that govern men's hearts, was within my reach.”<sup>4</sup> Here, Meursault similarly acknowledges his alienation from conventional morality, reinforcing his role as an archetype of the absurd hero. These two quotations above can be found in the latter part of *The Stranger*, where Meursault is on trial for murder. Yet, more than his crime, he is condemned for his refusal to conform—to feign grief, to show remorse, to abide by society's expectations of meaning and morality.

Therefore, to fully grasp how Meursault embraces absurdity and what his character represents in Camus' philosophy in *The Stranger*, I will explore his attitude toward the world, allowing to showcase Meursault's personality and reasoning. However, it is crucial to note that Meursault's confrontation

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<sup>2</sup> Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay on Man in Revolt* (New York: Vintage, 2012), 22.

<sup>3</sup> Albert Camus, *The Stranger* (New York: Vintage, 1988), 100.

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, 101.

with the absurd is not static but develops throughout the novel. Just as Camus underwent intellectual growth, evident in the evolution of his works, so too does Meursault's perception of death, the value of life, and the experience of absurdity shift as the plot unfolds. Most importantly, this paper will focus on what Meursault signifies as an archetype within Camus' first series of philosophical works, establishing what it means to embrace the absurd. To situate this discussion further, I will discuss Meursault within the broader dilemma Camus grapples with in his first series, namely, the problem of solipsism. I argue that Meursault embodies this philosophical tension, offering a lens through which we can examine both the limitations and the potential of an absurdist worldview. Understanding this context is essential, as it will be explored in the following sections of this paper.

### **Meursault's Attitude Toward the World**

This part of the paper serves as an introduction as well as an analysis of Meursault's character. It aims to provide insight into how Meursault embodies Camus' notion of the absurd hero and offers readers a foundation for understanding what a Camusian archetype is—although this paper is limited to the character of Meursault. Meursault's early attitude can be expressed even before the readers truly get to know him; they can quickly judge him from the novel's iconic opening lines in *The Stranger*: "Maman died today. Or yesterday maybe, I don't know."<sup>5</sup> As Meursault addresses her, his detached tone immediately signals his unconventional outlook on life. It is as if he does not pay enough attention to how or when his mother died. His indifference is not limited to his words; his actions—both before and after the burial—underscore his emotional detachment. Unlike those around him, who are visibly grieving, Meursault's attitude triggers others at his mother's wake, and this discomfort will only intensify as the story goes on. This explains Meursault's detached attitude from socially held norms and values; he is unbothered by them.

This attitude extends to his relationship with Marie, whom he meets shortly after his mother's death. For many, pursuing romance so soon after bereavement might seem inappropriate, but Meursault's unpretentious personality and indifference to social expectations allow him to act without such considerations. Therefore, it is not surprising that he got into this situation with Marie, even if others might think that he should still be grieving. At face value, his relationship with Marie appears to be founded on physical pleasure rather than emotional depth. However, when Marie asked him about marriage, he responds: "I explained to her that it didn't really matter and that if she wanted to, we could get married. Besides, she was the one who was doing the asking and all I was saying was yes. Then she pointed out that marriage was a serious thing. I said, 'No.'"<sup>6</sup> At first glance, this exchange might suggest that Meursault is careless or indifferent toward commitment, but a deeper reading reveals that he simply does not subscribe to the same values as others. For him, the societal weight of marriage is arbitrary, another construct without inherent meaning.

Meursault lives with a sense of expediency, that is, he lived his life to experience everything in the world and not bound by societal expectations. His purpose was to try and uncover everything the world has to offer, not to be the best on everything. This might seem ironic given his reluctance to be

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<sup>5</sup> Camus, *The Stranger*, 101.

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, 41.

assigned to a better job.<sup>7</sup> At this point, however, Meursault is still open to anything as his character evolves throughout the novel, encountering situations that gradually expand his awareness of the absurd. Some argue that Meursault's character is seen as detached from socially held norms and values that may seem important to an individual's life, like love, friendship, family, and the value of life itself.<sup>8</sup> While I agree with their characterization, I contend that Meursault is not like any other nor tries to be like others; in his own way, he is free yet still trapped in an absurd society—and we have trapped him. Meursault was trapped in the judgmental gaze and unfair decision of those who did not understand him. Kumar and Dr. Pandey observe that:

Meursault being an existential hero to the core, observes the world through his five senses. He enjoys all those things which are connected with senses. So the abstract ideas like love, sympathy, compassion and attachment has no place in his life. And typical of an existential character, he is a detached observer and he seldom has an interaction with others.<sup>9</sup>

This observation reinforces the idea that Meursault is a stranger in society, not simply because he is indifferent but because there are no others who behave and think like him. Meursault's attitude is unapologetic and unbothered; societal norms do not pressure him, rather it is society that feels pressured by his existence. His presence challenges their deeply held values, and in response, they attempt to contain him, to bind him to their moral framework. In this sense, Meursault knows that the moment he embraces the absurdity of life, it is him against the world.

Furthermore, Meursault had lost his ambition due to the struggles of his past and his early concept of the inevitability of Death. This makes him have an accepting attitude about his situation, not because he is comforted by the situation he is in, but because he is contented with what he has. Meursault believed that at the end of the day, whether he got a better job or not, he would still suffer, and nothing significant would change. Part of this attitude is his inclination to focus on the present and not mind the future. This follows his absurdist view, that regardless of his choices, the world will remain indifferent to human needs. As Hornedo puts it, Meursault disregards both the past and the future because he recognizes the world's fundamental indifference to human needs.<sup>10</sup>

Moreover, for Meursault, transcendence is an illusion, nor should people believe and hope that there is. For him, it is unreasonable to believe in the value of faith. He states: "Since we're all going to die, it's obvious that when and how does not matter."<sup>11</sup> This means that he was ready to die. He did not fear death. As a result, he had no regard for being converted or having faith in the afterlife. This relationship brings out his non-conformity to the mode of transcendence or having faith in the afterlife and divine beings. In the journal written by Macharia, she concludes that Meursault's rejection of the transcendence stems primarily from those who submit to philosophical suicide or leap of faith. They waste their lives trying to relieve themselves of the responsibility to tackle the absurd and in this compromise, they lived their lives submitting to socially held norms that lead to the persecution of

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<sup>7</sup> Riley Keaton Imlay, "The Importance of Perspective in The Stranger and The Myth of Sisyphus: The Absurdist's Need for Conscious Rebellion," Capstones and Honors Theses, West Virginia University 7, no. 1 (2018): 10-12.

<sup>8</sup> Rakesh Kumar and Dr. Sanjay Pandey, "The Stranger's Meursault: An Epitome of an Existential Hero," *Turkish Online Journal of Qualitative Inquiry* 12, no. 3 (May 2021): 4848-4849.

<sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>10</sup> See Florentino H. Hornedo, "Albert Camus's Literary Perception of Contemporary Philosophic Problems," in *Pagpapakatao and Other Essays in Contemporary Philosophy and Literature of Ideas* (UST Publishing House, 2002).

<sup>11</sup> Camus, *The Stranger*, 114.

others.<sup>12</sup> Shobeiri further expands on this by stating that Meursault represents a man who fully lives within the absurd, one who believes in what is already known and can be felt. In fact, in the earlier part of his story, he does not submit to socially held ideas and acts mainly based on his senses.<sup>13</sup>

On the topic of his attitude towards his trial, if we are basing morality on the motivation or intent of a person, then it is difficult to say that all of his actions are good or bad since he lacks motive in everything that he does. For Meursault, these actions either seem insignificant to his life or simply do not evoke any feeling in him. This means that things or events will not significantly affect him or change his course of life such as his marriage with Marie, his lack of ambition when he was offered better work, and when he killed the Arab. This follows his absurdist view that no matter what choice he makes in his life, the world will still be indifferent to it. Alternatively, he lacks the consciousness that some of his acts are immoral or will lead to catastrophe, like when he helps Raymond and does not defend himself during his trial. So, when he was on trial, Meursault chose not to defend himself against the unfair trial and judgment of society, even if he had the urge to do so since it would mean submitting to those who persecute him. He could have lied during the cross-examination and saved himself, but he remained silent rather than cater to a court that was more interested in its own narrative than in the truth—that silence is his way of revolting against the absurd. In their study, Saadanm asserts that: “Meursault refuses to lie, thus he doesn’t take part in the game... *The Stranger* tells the story of a person who, without any heroic pretensions, is willing to die in the service of the truth without hesitation.”<sup>14</sup> This supports the idea that Meursault’s attachment to the truth makes those who are jealous or bitter about him. In another journal written by Heiji Li, Li suggests that Meursault’s attitude is more of an Anti-Hero in its modern-day definition because he does not want to get involved in the beliefs of others about transcendence, nor could he put himself into pessimism.<sup>15</sup> The simple fact that he is honest about what he wants and what he thinks is beyond people’s comprehension. As an anti-hero, he displeases what others please; he does not desire to satisfy the ego of others, as compared to heroes who please the people. Meursault is the symbol that the people need in his story in order to realize that not all that society dictates is the truth, yet they reject him.

Equally important is that when Meursault is on trial and in prison, he is able to reflect on his life and the mundane routines that people subject themselves to, which initiates his consciousness toward his embrace of the absurd. He accepts that life must be lived in revolt against the meaninglessness of the world, which, even if humans cannot completely overcome it, should still be challenged without resorting to transcendence or pessimism. If it gets the best of him, this mundaneness will cause anguish and frustration, leading to an unhappy life. Nonetheless, his attitude is not like others. Meursault was able to grasp the nature of living in an absurd world. That is why he was like that towards the world. Meursault’s outlook on the world helps him embrace the absurdity of life, and for him, it is necessary to live in the present moment, for there is no afterlife—the only certainty is death. Thus, for Meursault, what truly matters is our immediate experiences. However,

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<sup>12</sup> Milkah N. Macharia, “The Incomprehensibility of Life: An Analysis of Albert Camus's the Stranger,” *International Journal of Philosophy* 1, no. 1 (2022): 69-77.

<sup>13</sup> See Ashkan Shobeiri, “Meursault, an Absurd Happy Man,” *Australian Journal of Basic and Applied Sciences* 7, no. 2 (2013): 838-839.

<sup>14</sup> Hayder Saadanm and Al-Hasani, Hayder, “Existentialism and Absurdity in Albert Camus’s “The Stranger”, Psychological Study,” *American Research Journal of Humanities & Social Science* 6, no. 5 (2023): 17.

<sup>15</sup> Hejie Li, “Analysis of the “anti-hero” image of Camus's characters,” *Journal of Education, Humanities and Social Sciences* 7 (2023): 280-283.

what does ‘essential’ mean for Meursault? If he has a detached attitude towards those that society commonly hold as necessary, then what does he value? What is essential for Meursault is his realization of the absurdity of life and his belief that only happiness can alleviate it. Meursault does not mind the struggle that he faces as long as he does not submit himself to philosophical suicide because, for him, it is just a form of comfort to those who cannot embrace the absurdity of life.

Camus problematizes the concept of solipsism in the first series, which is embodied by the character of Meursault. Solipsism in philosophy is linked to the idea that a person lives only by themselves and can only know themselves.<sup>16</sup> Others have tried to argue that in their analysis, Meursault is driven more by his sense of pleasure than by rationalizing a meaningless world.<sup>17</sup> However, this paper proceeds using Camus’ ethics of quantity. Camus asserts that it is because of the absurdity of life that our existence remains uncertain. When our life is uncertain, we may die randomly; what matters is not the quality but the quantity of living. However, this is not a form of hedonism that advocates doing all things that pleasure someone. As Hochberg explains it:

The lucid man will not kill himself or another, since the maintaining of the absurd condition weighs equally against suicide and murder. This imposes a limitation on the enjoyment of life and avoids the nihilism implicit in the ethic of quantity. Likewise, one’s freedom is limited by the absolute value of life. Hence, this second value, freedom, is subordinate to the first, life. Even so, it, in turn, provides a further limitation on the way one lives one’s life. The lucid man does not interfere with the “legitimate” freedom of others. Thus, the lucid man becomes the moral man, and out of absurdity emerges morality.<sup>18</sup>

This means that because of our consciousness about the lives of others, our actions are naturally limited by moral considerations, that is, there are certain boundaries that cannot be crossed. In Meursault’s case, his criminal case is a representation of what can happen if someone is not conscious enough of others’ existence. This does not mean he should be acquitted, but it offers a lens through which we can interpret his behavior.

In Ruan’s paper, Camus backs that the absurdity of life takes away the things we qualify as necessary; however, it does not take away the number of things or experiences that we have had.<sup>19</sup> In the same paper, Ruan also mentions that

This explains how at the end of *The Stranger*, Meursault can feel “ready to start life all over again,” even though his execution is imminent. By being acutely aware of the absurdity of his unfolding existence, he affirms his freedom, the fact that he determines the quantity of his own duration. He does all of this, in spite of that fact that he does not have much time left.<sup>20</sup>

This ethical framework does not prioritize who has the most achievements or who is the best among the rest in terms of numbers or statistics. As Sadler describes it, using a sports metaphor, his philosophy is not about “career points” or “home runs” but rather about how one engages with life

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<sup>16</sup> Encyclopedia Britannica Online, s.v. “Existentialism,” accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.britannica.com/topic/existentialism>.

<sup>17</sup> Riley Keaton Imlay, “The Importance of Perspective in *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus*: The Absurdist’s Need for Conscious Rebellion,” *Capstones and Honors Theses, West Virginia University* 7, no. 1 (2018): 18.

<sup>18</sup> Herbert Hochberg, “Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity,” *Ethics* 75, no. 2 (1965): 87–102.

<sup>19</sup> Thomas Ruan, “Absurd Time: Understanding Camus’ Quantitative Ethics Through Bergsonian Duration,” *Episteme* 26 (2015): 7.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

itself.<sup>21</sup> It is unlike any other ethical system where the holiest in society gets to be crowned and sanctified. Needless to say, this ethics of quantity is one perspective that best represents Meursault's attitude in *The Stranger*, which reflects Camus' philosophy. Camus' discussion of the ethics of quantity appears in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and the reason it resonates closely with Meursault is that it is still within the same philosophical trajectory as that of *The Stranger*. Finally, Meursault does not know when he will die. As a matter of fact, he views the "when" of his death as irrelevant. So, he lives to experience things, and that is one aspect that was also displayed in his relationship with others. Camus' idea of "lucidity" plays a crucial role here; it refers to an individual's ability to grasp their own life and make choices based on that understanding. Now, if we measure Meursault's philosophy only based on his relationship with others, we belong to what Camus criticizes about a society that focuses on material, standardized, and social norms.

### Meursault Compared to Sisyphus

This section of the paper showcases what Meursault symbolizes in his story. It is also necessary that Meursault's character is compared to the figure commonly referred to as the "Absurd Hero," which is no other than Sisyphus himself. This comparison would lead to a more established understanding of Meursault as a Camusian archetype as opposed to the association of Sisyphus's character as the pinnacle of overcoming the absurd. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus discusses Sisyphus as the ultimate embodiment of the absurd condition. Sisyphus, condemned by the gods for his defiance, is sentenced to push a boulder up a mountain only for it to roll back down each time he reaches the summit.<sup>22</sup> However, rather than resigning to despair, he accepts his fate and continues the task, embracing the struggle itself. Camus famously concludes that "one must imagine Sisyphus happy," highlighting that his defiance against the gods lies in his conscious acceptance of his fate.

Analyzing both of their characters in terms of their "embrace of the absurd," I argue that one is complete while the other is still progressing. Even if they both achieve the conclusion that acceptance is critical to happiness, their means and prior attitudes are different. On the one hand, Sisyphus's embrace of the absurd is unlike Meursault's; it is a level higher because Sisyphus' revolt against the Gods was seen and is observable at the peak of the story—where it matters the most—this exemplifies his commitment to live in accordance with his own values, affirming life despite its futility. On the other hand, Meursault was late in realizing the absurdity, that is, humans tend to submit and do nothing for the sake of persecuting others. Meursault embrace of the absurd is individualistic; he fails to communicate it in a way that others understand, which leads to his alienation and persecution. It is not his fault for acting that way, but his detachment from others hinders him from actively demonstrating what it means to embrace the absurdity of life, which is why people never understand him.

Moreover, his passivity towards the meaninglessness of the world is something that people in his story hate and something that we, too, the readers, must not follow. This passivity is contrary to the life-affirming value that Camus promotes. Unlike Sisyphus, who consciously revolts against his punishment, Meursault initially submits to his circumstances without resistance. It is only at the end

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<sup>21</sup> "Albert Camus, The Myth of Sisyphus | An Ethics of Quantity | Philosophy Core Concepts," YouTube video, posted by Gregory B. Sadler, November 20, 2020, accessed October 24, 2024, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Ye2qdtPHAz0>.

<sup>22</sup> Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus* (New York: Vintage, 2018), 123.

of *The Stranger*, when he faces his execution, that he achieves a similar sense of acceptance. One piece of evidence that could sustain this disparity between the two characters in the same series is their chronology. *The Stranger* was published earlier than *The Myth of Sisyphus*. So even if they are in the same cycle, it might be that although their embrace of the absurd is both individualistic, they were not able to share it with others in their stories. For instance, Sisyphus is much closer in personality, mainly his life-affirming attitude, to Dr. Rieux from *The Plague* who will come after him and Meursault, if we are basing it in the series they belong. By that lens, Meursault and Sisyphus are very different at face value, from the way they handle the circumstances of their lives, how they want others to see them. Their means might be different, but they both showcase what Camus means to live in an absurd world or to be in a state of absurd living. With this, we can provide some of the similarities in their attitude and in their embrace of the absurd: Both Sisyphus and Meursault do not believe in a divine being. In the case of Sisyphus, he rejects the judgments of the gods. He also shies away from the idea of transcendence. Also, they both reject external sources of meaning such as myths. As a result, Meursault is hated by the people around him and Sisyphus is hated by the Gods. Furthermore, they experienced was getting judged; they are both judged, but the gods judge one, and the make-believe gods judge the other. Most importantly, they believe that they are the masters of their lives and that no one else can affect their lives more than their own acts. This is important because even if the people and the gods persecuted them, they were able to realize and accept the absurdity of life, which, for Camus, is the pinnacle of one's life. Their embrace of the absurd was the reason why they overcame their existential crisis during their time of torment, mainly when Meursault was in prison and when Sisyphus was sentenced to push a rock for eternity.

Lastly, they were able to find happiness at the end of their story. Meursault and Sisyphus lived in the “perpetual tension of rebellion,” and they were both in pursuit of happiness, which they found in the journey.<sup>23</sup> Meursault achieves a sense of peace before his execution, much like Sisyphus finds contentment in his eternal struggle. Meursault’s embrace of the absurd made him realize that this world is indifferent, but that does not mean that people stay passive and just wait for their deaths. During his time in prison, he self-reflects on his current situation; a testament to this is Shobeiri’s analysis of Meursault, in which it was stated in their work that “Therefore, a change gradually appears in a man who has got used to living in the present... He gradually learns to live without any physical stimulation. He is changing and is no longer captured by sensational factors. In this way, lack of freedom is no longer a problem for him. He admits that he is not unhappy.”<sup>24</sup> Life is meant to be lived; its absurdity is supposed to be experienced and embraced. At the same time, Sisyphus realizes that his suffering is enough to make him happy. He chose to be happy and accept that this is his life after all. No one can control its outcome but himself, even in the face of suffering.

Like Sisyphus, whose fate is grim as long as he hopes for something better, Meursault too cannot be happy if he hopes for an alternative. He must learn to accept his current situation in order to overcome his deep despair. Meursault, who symbolizes an absurd man, is able to find happiness, even in his cell, and to be stronger than his fate. According to AviSagi, Meursault, unlike alienated characters who suffer deeply, is at peace with himself.<sup>25</sup>

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<sup>23</sup> Thomas Marcellus Coskren, O.P., “Albert Camus and the Pursuit of Happiness,” *Dominicana Journal*. (2016): 202.

<sup>24</sup> Shobeiri, “Meursault, an Absurd Happy Man,” 841.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 840.

The significance of this comparison and why it is worth adding to this paper is that *The Stranger* and *The Myth of Sisyphus* are under the same series, which Camus calls the cycle of the absurd. These two characters are the foundation of Camus' Philosophy about the absurdity of life; their contrast highlights the different situations in which a person can be subjected to the absurd and their unique response to it. Both Meursault's and Sisyphus's embrace of the absurd prevents them from resorting to either transcendence or pessimism, which is valid for every character that will be discussed in this paper. The difference only lies in their approach and the stages of that "embrace in the absurd" they were. Moreover, this comparison also proves that Sisyphus' embrace is more fortified than Meursault's embrace, which further proves that Meursault is the beginning of a series of characters that will tackle and embrace the absurdity of life. Sisyphus, in a way, represents the fully realized absurd hero, while Meursault's journey marks the initial steps toward this realization. In addition, there is also the play that belongs in the first series on Camus entitled *Caligula*, in which the plot portrays the wrong embrace in the absurd. Through this first series, Camus may be illustrating different ways individuals respond to the absurd—some, like Sisyphus, embracing it fully; others, like Meursault, only realizing it too late; and still others, like *Caligula*, distorting it into something destructive.

## Conclusion

Meursault's philosophical self-examination leads him to reject societal conventions and instead embraces the world as it is regardless of the struggles. By the end of his journey, he is not unhappy; he had come to terms with himself. So, like Camus, Meursault undergoes intellectual development, but his transformation remains incomplete. Had he reached his realization earlier—before the weight of societal judgment bore down on him—he might have fought for his life. Yet, his story is meant to end where it does. He was not the absurd hero that some might expect, nor does he wholly embody Camus' doctrine of absurdism in life—or maybe he never had the chance.

I would like to state, not as a prescription, it is not necessary for anyone to become an "absurd hero" like Sisyphus or as honest as Meursault. Rather, what matters is recognizing how they personify the "embrace of the absurd." Their struggles are fictional, yet they reflect profound existential challenges. Meursault's realization of the absurd makes him unafraid of its inherent consequences. In *The Stranger*, living in the absurd does not guarantee that people will acknowledge someone like Meursault. Instead, they might try to persecute someone like him for their peculiar yet free attitude. His disinterest in conventional emotions and values makes him an enigma to society: some see him as a threat, while others might view his indifference as liberating. This means that either one will be persecuted like Meursault, or it will help someone realize the importance of such values which they kept themselves at a distance. Meursault navigates the absurdity of life by directing himself to a state where he was able to evaluate or re-evaluate his life. Due to that, he was able to realize the absurdity of everything while the importance of his life and the truth he clings to remain. Meursault's rebellion against the unfair and unreasonable society led to his death. However, his embrace of the absurd leads to the realization that his life is something to be valued in an absurd world—something that he does not do earlier in his story. In his words, I felt that I was happy and that I was happy again. For everything to be consummated, for me to feel less alone, I had only to wish that there be a large crowd of spectators the day of my execution and that they greet me with cries of hate.

With this, I assert that what Meursault projects as an archetype is an imagination of Camus of what it means to live in absurdity alone. His journey is a solitary one, but it highlights the significance of individual self-discovery in an indifferent world. As Camus' philosophy seems relatable, Meursault's

personality is not guaranteed to apply to the majority, and nothing is wrong with that. I would even argue that in our own reality, we might be the same person who tries to persecute Meursault. Nevertheless, the value that Meursault offers is crucial in understanding what embracing the absurd on an individual level signifies. Camus does not suggest that we should live like Meursault, nor do I argue that we should follow his example. Rather, Meursault serves as a mirror, forcing us to question whether we would condemn him or, perhaps, find echoes of ourselves in him.

Finally, Meursault, as a Camusian archetype, symbolizes happiness. This happiness is defined by the journey itself, not as an endpoint, but as a process. As such, in the pursuit of what will make him happy, he found his happiness. As cliché as it sounds, Meursault was able to find his happiness as his story was narrated. It is as essential as the air he breathes in his prison cell. This is what kept him sane in an insane world. His resolve at the end of the novel is not resignation but an affirmation: he is not unhappy. This sense of happiness sustains him in his embrace of the absurd, and vice versa; embracing the absurdity of life leads to his happiness. Meursault's character reminds us that to truly embrace absurdity, that one ought to live in the present moment, be true to oneself, and realize that relationships with others are crucial, as well as the virtues – even if they are, ultimately, meaningless – must still matter for someone to embrace the absurdity of life entirely. Even if such values are absurd concepts, knowing them will help someone not to resort to either transcendence or pessimism. What Meursault lacks in fully embracing the absurd is that he more than makes it up by being himself in a world that makes him forget who he is and dictates what he should be. He is neither a hero nor an anti-hero. He is Meursault, a Camusian Archetype who symbolizes the development of one's embrace in the absurd.

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