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### **Gregor Samsa and Meursault: Two of a Kind**

Gregor Samsa from “The Metamorphosis” and Meursault from *The Stranger* are incredibly similar characters. Looking at their characters from the perspective of existentialism shows how many of their character traits are similar, or even identical. They both lack basic human emotions; they rejected their true selves; and they died because of this.

Existentialism is a system of philosophy that focuses on the wellbeing and personal happiness of the individual. Existentialists believe that a person should live their life primarily for themselves, seeking their own happiness first and helping others find their happiness second. One of the key points of existentialism is the belief that a person should spend their life striving to be their most authentic self. They believe that you should live your life as *you*, without hiding any part of yourself, and without trying to change who you are. With this in mind, Samsa and Meursault can be compared quite easily.

Samsa blatantly disregards his own self-interests throughout the entirety of “The Metamorphosis”. He gives up his own personal happiness by tirelessly working a job he does not want in order to keep his family in good financial shape. Alongside this, which is going against his true self already, we can see that Samsa buries a large part of himself to accomplish what he thinks is right for his family. When his family tries to take all of his furniture out of his room, he tries to protect one specific thing: his writing desk. “Now, Gregor could still do without the chest of drawers if need be, but the writing desk really had to stay. And scarcely had the women left

the room with the chest of drawers, groaning as they pushed it, when Gregor stuck his head out from under the sofa to take a look how he could intervene..." (Kafka, 24) This shows that Samsa valued his writing desk, specifically, above the rest of his furniture. From this the reader can conclude that Samsa's true passion – which will forever remain unfollowed – was for writing. He went entirely against his authentic self in order to do what he thought he needed to for his family. This is widely considered to be one of the primary causes of his metamorphosis, he rejected his human nature and in turn became a large, grotesque, insect.

On the other hand, Meursault spends all his time in the book living life without care for anything, including himself. He does what he thinks he should do, not caring about consequences to himself, and not caring about what he wants or his own happiness in any way. He even shows extreme indifference towards a personal choice of immense magnitude, getting married. "That evening Marie came by to see me and asked me if I wanted to marry her. I said it didn't make any difference to me and that we could if she wanted to." He killed a man because he was inconvenienced, not because he disliked him or had any other personal reason to kill him rather than simply walking away. Meursault never sought to be his true self; he was in most ways a shell of a man. He was not his true self, but unlike Samsa he was not a false self either. Meursault simply was.

One particular parallel between Samsa and Meursault, would be the fact that everything mentioned above led to both of their deaths. Gregor Samsa, after his metamorphosis, could no longer work to help his family. In fact, the metamorphosis made him into a burden for his family. Perhaps, in his insectoid state he was intended to reflect on himself, to realize that he had been ignoring his own wishes all this time, and now that he could not work for his family anymore he would be forced to think on his own wants and needs. This did not come to pass. Samsa instead,

realizing that his family would be better off without him, starved himself to death. “He had eaten nothing for such a long time. The meals which came in here came out again exactly the same.” (Kafka, 39) Meursault, on the other hand did reflect before his death. This came too late though, as his indifference led him to killing a man without remorse, regret, or really much thought at all. He killed the man because of the harsh sunlight, which reminded him of when he buried his mother, and stressed him out. “The sun was the same as it had been the day I'd buried Maman, and like then, my forehead especially was hurting me, all the veins in it throbbing under the skin. It was this burning, which I couldn't stand anymore, that made me move forward. I knew that it was stupid, that I wouldn't get the sun off me by stepping forward.” (Camus, 58-59) If Meursault cared at all about his own wellbeing, his own morals, he would not have killed a man he hardly knew over something so meaningless.

Samsa and Meursault are very similar characters when you look at them through the lens of existentialism. They both do not particularly care about their own wants or needs, their thoughts or fears, their dreams or nightmares. They simply exist, living under the control of outside forces rather than truly thinking and living for themselves. In these ways, they are, as stated at the start of this paper, incredibly similar characters.

### **Works Cited:**

Kafka, Franz. "The Metamorphosis." Kurt Wolff Verlag, 1915,

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