

In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus contends that life is absurd. That is, that life is meaningless, and so the only true philosophical problem is the question of suicide and whether life is worth living within this context of the absurd. As such, Camus extends his discussion of the absurd to the Greek myth of Sisyphus, thereby illustrating why suicide is not the answer to the absurdity of life, and why one must imagine Sisyphus happy.

Consequently, the absurd exists in the confrontation between human beings' desire for unity and meaning, and the complete silence of the universe in response to that desire. Absurdity exists when man lives his life as if he has some higher purpose, but he realizes life is purposeless, for it is lived out of habit, and this realization is what leads to suicide. Yet, Camus ultimately rejects suicide because life does not require meaning in order to be lived, and so human beings must learn to live without some higher purpose (Camus, 12).

Camus discusses his conception of the absurd via Sisyphus, the mythological king condemned by the Greek gods to roll a boulder up a hill only for it to roll back down, thereby forcing Sisyphus to repeat the process for all of eternity. Camus illustrates the absurd through Sisyphus' recognition that rolling the boulder up the hill is a futile act with no purpose. Yet, despite this, despair is not the answer to the question of the absurd. Rather, Sisyphus must rebel in the face of meaninglessness in a defiant act against the absurdity of life.

Similarly, the absurd man realizes he cannot reconcile with nature or the universe; he realizes that the world is not reasonable. None of the attempts at reconciliation via religion, romanticism, or other philosophical ventures can explain his existence (Camus, 13). Instead, these attempts at making sense of the world only categorize things in the world, for there is no real understanding (Camus, 24-26).

To live in spite of the absurdity of life is to live while accepting this absurdity fully; an acceptance that the universe has no meaning, and by living in this way, man ultimately revolts against

the absurd. Sisyphus is the absurd hero because he revolts against his meaningless existence. Indeed, Sisyphus is the absurd hero because man's passions amount to an equal fate. That is, man's struggle for meaning is ultimately purposeless because the universe is silent, akin to Sisyphus' boulder inevitably rolling back down the hill.

The Myth of Sisyphus is tragic because Sisyphus's existence is purposeless, yet he desires purpose (Camus, 109). In other words, consciousness predisposes tragedy. That is, when man is conscious of the drudgery of life, he recognizes a desire for meaning, but life is without purpose. Life is tragic because the struggle for purpose comes with no acquittal. Therefore, man must act defiantly against his purposeless life by rejecting suicide, just as Sisyphus acts in defiance to the gods by choosing to roll the boulder up the hill once again.

It is important to note the distinction between happiness and purpose, for it is possible to have one without the other. As such, one must imagine Sisyphus happy in spite of his purposeless existence. One must imagine Sisyphus happy since, by rolling the boulder up the hill, Sisyphus revolts against the gods; he revolts against his absurd, purposeless, existence. One must imagine Sisyphus happy even without a higher purpose, for he is conscious of the absurdity of existence.

When one discovers life is absurd and there is no ultimate meaning, a different happiness ushers in. Since the universe is silent in response to one's desire for purpose, human beings must discover their own project, just as Sisyphus' project was his boulder. One must not see the world as "sterile and futile." Rather, we should see things as they are, not as we have come to see them through our various constructions; we must see life in all of its absurdity. Sisyphus is the absurd hero because he sees his situation as lucidity; he is consciously aware that rolling the boulder serves no ultimate purpose, yet he rolls it anyway. In this way, Sisyphus finds genuine happiness because he has accepted his fate.

References

Camus, Albert (1975). *The Myth of Sisyphus*. Translated by Justin O'Brien. London: Penguin Books

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