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Living in Absurdity: an Analysis of Albert Camus's Thoughts on the Phenomenon of Suicide

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Abstract

This paper examines the phenomenon of suicide through the philosophical perspective of Albert Camus, particularly his concept of absurdity. Departing from contemporary cases and statistical data that indicate a growing number of suicides, especially among young people, this study explores suicide as a philosophical problem. This paper employs a philosophical analysis to examine Albert Camus's concept of absurdity. Camus argues that suicide is the most serious philosophical question, as it directly confronts the meaning and worth of human existence. The study elaborates Camus's notion of the absurd as the tension between the human desire for meaning, order, and clarity, and the indifferent, silent nature of the world that offers no ultimate answers. This tension is illustrated through the myth of Sisyphus, who is condemned to endlessly push a boulder up a hill only to see it roll back down. Sisyphus symbolizes the human condition: a continuous struggle without final fulfillment. Furthermore, the paper analyzes Camus's rejection of physical suicide and philosophical suicide. Philosophical suicide is understood as an attempt to avoid absurdity through false hopes or imposed meaning. Instead, Camus proposes an existential attitude of revolt, in which individuals consciously accept the absurd and continue to live without illusion. In this awareness, human beings attain freedom, authenticity, and even the possibility of happiness. Revolt, therefore, is understood as an existential stance oriented toward human freedom. In conclusion, this paper affirms that, despite the absurd nature of existence, life remains worth living. By embracing the absurd and persisting in one's existence, individuals can respond meaningfully to the challenges of modern life without resorting to despair or self-destruction.

Keywords

Absurdity; Suicide; Albert Camus; The Myth of Sisyphus; Revolt

INTRODUCTION

According to data from the World Health Organization (WHO), there are more than 720,000 cases of people dying by suicide each year.1 Indeed, suicide is one of the

1 World Health Organization, "Suicide," accessed 12 March 2026, https://www.who.int/news-room/fact-sheets/detail/suicide.

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leading causes of death among young people aged 15–29. The background to this phenomenon can be highly varied, usually influenced by social, cultural, biological, psychological, and environmental factors present throughout a person's life.

In Indonesia itself, according to data from Kompas, over the past 11 years (2012–2023), there have been 2,112 recorded cases of suicide.2 Of these, 985 cases (or 46.63 per cent) were committed by adolescents. A more in-depth survey was conducted by the Indonesia National Adolescent Mental Health Survey (I-NAMHS) in 2022. Of all the survey samples taken over the past 12 months, 1.4 per cent of adolescents admitted to having suicidal thoughts, 0.5 per cent had made plans to commit suicide, and 0.2 per cent had attempted suicide. These results are certainly concerning, as they indirectly suggest that some people still view life as not worth living.

The underlying causes are also not dissimilar, namely mental health. According to Wahyudi et al. (2025), the mental health of adolescents in Indonesia is influenced by various interrelated internal and external factors.3 These internal factors include: gratitude, self-confidence, and spiritual aspects. Meanwhile, the external factors include: family upbringing, academic pressure, social media use, and social support from peers and family.

Public awareness of the meaning of life can sometimes become blurred amidst the various pressures faced. People are no longer able to think clearly about the essence of life and view life as something of value and worth fighting for. Pressures from within and without often place them in a difficult and challenging position. In this crisis situation, when people can no longer find a reason to live, suicide may emerge as a possibility and be chosen. Suicide is seen as a legitimate shortcut to end suffering that, for some, seems as though it will last forever.

Questions regarding the meaning of life or the reason for living are indeed closely linked to the world of philosophy. Therefore, in this essay, we shall discuss in particular the thoughts of a renowned philosopher. He is Albert Camus, a French thinker, and his ideas on the absurd. Absurdity itself can be understood as the absence of reality, clarity and certainty. Therein lies a tension between humanity's hope for meaning and the reality of life, which often fails to provide definitive answers. From

2 Hilda B. Alexander, "985 Cases of Teenage Suicide; Mental Health the Main Cause," Kompas.com, 17 December 2023, https://lestari.kompas.com/read/2023/12/17/162703186.

3 Wahyudi, Abdillah Putra Mahesa, Adinda Lydia Putri, Adinda Naila Apsari Dalimunthe, Debby Widitya, and Safira Afifah, "Factors Influencing Adolescent Health in Indonesia: A Literature Review," JUKEJ: Jurnal Kesehatan Jompa 4, no. 1 (2025): 503–509.

this perspective, the phenomenon of suicide can be understood not merely as a social, economic or psychological issue, but also as one deeply rooted in existential concerns.

Albert Camus and the Concept of Absurdity

Albert Camus is a philosopher often associated with existentialism, due to his ideas being similar to those of the existentialist movement, which explores the meaning of life and human freedom. However, Camus himself did not like to be regarded as an existentialist philosopher. He is better known as a thinker of the absurd. Camus was born in Algeria on 7 November 1913 into a poor family. His father was killed in battle when he was still a child. Camus subsequently led a life much like that of any other child. Thanks to his intelligence, he secured a scholarship to complete his studies in philosophy.

Camus was active in the world of journalism. In 1944, he began working for a French newspaper. He was active in writing and speaking out about the importance of humanity, opposing fascism and colonialism.[4] Indeed, in 1957 he was awarded the Nobel Prize in Literature for his work and his commitment to human values. Throughout his life, Camus wrote many works, such as The Stranger, The Myth of Sisyphus, The Plague, Exile and the Kingdom, The Rebel, and many more.[5] This essay will explore Camus's thoughts on absurdity, as specifically discussed in his book *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (The Myth of Sisyphus).

Albert Camus is often regarded as an existentialist. Existentialism here is understood in relation to his thinking, which seriously questions the meaning of life, asserting that humans are fully responsible for the meaning of their own lives and that human existence is more important than its essence.[6] However, Camus himself rejected being labelled as part of the existentialist school. Indeed, he rejected the views of existentialist thinkers who sought to create meaning in life. He was a thinker of the concept of absurdity, which, in short, focuses on the meaninglessness of life.

For Camus, the absurd is a combination of two things: the way we want the world to be (how we wish the world were and how it ought to be) and the way the

4 Muh. Yasin Ceh Nur, The Absurdity of Humanity in the Perspective of Albert Camus's Existentialist Philosophy (undergraduate thesis, State Islamic University Alauddin Makassar, 2019), 19–20.

5 Nur, The Absurdity of Humanity in the Perspective of Albert Camus's Existentialist Philosophy, 20–23.

6 A. Sudiarja, "The Ethical Dimension of Albert Camus's Absurdity," Basis 71, no. 1, (2022): 9.

world actually is (the reality of the world, which offers no clear answers).[7] Humans tend to seek meaning in their lives, yet they will never find it through logic alone.[8] Generally speaking, people desire certain good things, such as justice and equality. We want the world to be fair, punishing the wicked and rewarding the good. Yet what actually happens is often not the case. The wicked go unpunished, and indeed receive good things, whilst those who act well are treated unfairly. This is what is understood as an absurd reality; in short, absurdity is the clash between humanity's desire to find meaning and a world that offers no answers.

The Myth of Sisyphus

This absurd reality of human life is depicted by Camus through a tale from ancient Greek mythology. Camus likens absurdity to the wretched fate of Sisyphus. He was punished by the gods to push a huge boulder up a hill, but the boulder always rolls back down. This is the story:[9]

Sisyphus was the first king of Ephyra, now known as Corinth. He is described as a clever, cunning and resourceful king. However, he used this cleverness to deceive and defy the gods.

On one occasion, the god Zeus abducted a woman named Aegina, who was the daughter of Asopus, the river god. Asopus went in search of his daughter as far as Ephira. Sisyphus, having learnt of this, immediately provided information on Aegina's whereabouts and where Zeus had taken her. In return, Asopus granted Sisyphus a spring for his city.

Zeus, upon learning of this, became furious, as mortals were deemed unworthy of interfering in the affairs of the gods. He immediately ordered Thanatos, the god of death, to bind Sisyphus in the underworld, so that he might no longer meddle in the gods' affairs. However, Sisyphus was no fool; with his cunning, he managed to trick

7 Erik Van Aken, "Camus on the Absurd: The Myth of Sisyphus," 1000-Word Philosophy, (2019). https://1000wordphilosophy.com/2019/05/01/camus-on-the-absurd-the-myth-of-sisyphus/

8 Yohanes Jettly Meicen Polii, "The Concept of the Rebel According to Albert Camus," Seri Mitra 2, no. 2 (2023): 129.

9 Hanny Nur Fadhilah, "Sisyphus, the Deceiver of the Gods, and Death: Cursed by Zeus," National Geographic Indonesia, 15 February 2023, https://nationalgeographic.grid.id/read/133693595/sisyphus-penipu-para-dewa-dan-kematian-berakhir-dikutuk-zeus?page=all.

Thanatos, bind him, and return to the upper world.[10] With Thanatos bound, everyone could live eternally and the world descended into chaos. The gods eventually realised this chaos and ordered the god of war, Ares, to free Thanatos.

After Thanatos was freed, Sisyphus was captured again and taken to the underworld. However, he still had another cunning plan. Before dying, he asked his wife not to perform a funeral rite for his body. Then Sisyphus died. In the underworld, he approached Persephone, queen of the underworld, and complained that his wife had disrespected him by not giving him a proper burial. Eventually, Persephone allowed him to return to the upper world briefly to reprimand his wife.

However, Sisyphus did not keep his promise to return to the underworld. He lived for many more years until, eventually, the gods once again forced him back to the underworld. His success in deceiving the gods twice made them furious. Because of his transgression, Sisyphus was then sentenced to roll a huge boulder up a steep hill. Yet just as he neared the summit, the boulder would roll back down. This forced him to start again from the bottom. There was no end to his labour. No success he could ever achieve. Thus, he was doomed to repeat this task for all eternity.

At the end of the story, it is told that Sisyphus was able to accept his fate happily (or rather, he tried to be happy). For Camus, Sisyphus's attitude is worth noting. Humans must respond to this absurdity in this way: accepting the fate of their lives happily, rather than despairing and becoming disillusioned.

Choosing Life Amidst Absurdity

When reflecting on the phenomenon of suicide, we are led to a fundamental philosophical question about life: is life meaningful and worth living? On this, Camus argues that suicide is the most serious philosophical issue.[11] He himself objects to the view that suicide is a reasonable solution to a life he believes to be full of absurdity. Why is this so?[12] Firstly, because by committing suicide, a person seems to be affirming the reality of this absurdity rather than the philosophical explanations that attempt to clarify it. Secondly, in reality, there are very few philosophers who are actually brave enough to commit suicide. However, there is a caveat: they chose suicide only out of despair or because they were forced to, not purely as a result of their deep

10 Cierra Tolentino, "The Myth of Sisyphus: A Tale of Endless Struggle," History Cooperative, 31 March 2025, https://historycooperative.org/the-myth-of-sisyphus/.

11 Aken, "Camus on the Absurd: The Myth of Sisyphus," 1.

12 Sudiarja, "The Ethical Dimension of Albert Camus's Absurdity," 10.

contemplation of the meaning of life. Camus himself, who explored this theme extensively, did not end his life by suicide. The third reason, according to Camus, is that no form of suicide provides a solution to this problem of absurdity.

In his writing, Camus distinguishes between two types of suicide: biological suicide and philosophical suicide.[13] However, he does not accept either of these as a way out of the problem of absurdity. Biological suicide is the type of suicide we generally understand, namely a person's attempt to end their own life. This usually occurs when someone experiences despair and is trapped in the darkness of facing life's absurdity.

Meanwhile, the philosophical suicide referred to here is the attempt to create meaning in life and to offer hope as a way out of the problem of absurdity.[14] For Camus, the attempt to create meaning in life is nothing other than a denial of the reality of absurdity itself. In response to this absurdity, philosophers attempt to offer deceptive and misleading justifications, as though there were still a possibility of meaning in this life. This philosophical suicide constitutes a contradiction within the reality of absurdity, as it attempts to flee from the reality of absurdity by creating false meaning, whereas absurdity demands that we continue to live amidst a tension devoid of definitive answers.

So what is Camus's solution to this problem of absurdity? First and foremost, Albert Camus does not create hope nor does he offer a doctrine to be followed in the face of absurdity. He does not attempt to provide a solution in the form of a doctrine, but rather offers an existential attitude: revolt. This revolt is understood as the human existential stance of choosing to live amidst an awareness of absurdity, without relying on metaphysical hopes or other illusions. Humans need to realise that the world offers no definitive answers. With this awareness, humans can live more freely, live authentically, and accept absurdity with a joyful attitude. From this attitude of joyfully accepting absurdity, creativity becomes possible in our lives.

CONCLUSION

Nowadays, cases of suicide in our society are on the rise. People end their lives for a variety of reasons and causes. These include the injustices that continue to occur, and the fact that human desires sometimes clash with a reality that offers no answers

13 Sudiarja, "The Ethical Dimension of Albert Camus's Absurdity," 10.
14 Sudiarja, "The Ethical Dimension of Albert Camus's Absurdity," 10.

or fulfilment for those desires. It is this tension that Albert Camus termed 'absurdity'. When reflecting on this phenomenon of absurdity, we are led to fundamental philosophical questions about life: is life meaningful and worth living? On this, Camus argues that life is worth living. Although this world is indeed absurd and often fails to provide certainty or fulfilment of our hopes, we must persevere; we must continue to strive for life.

The story of Sisyphus seems to be a fitting illustration of the reality of the absurdity that occurs. When punished by the gods to roll a boulder up a hill, he always fails. The boulder rolls back down. Then he tries again, and fails once more. He endures this punishment endlessly. Yet, he does not surrender to the absurdity of his situation. Sisyphus tried to accept that absurdity with joy. We too are invited to do the same: to be aware that life is absurd, to freely determine our own lives, and to stage a revolt (an existential rebellion) by continuing to live, to act, not to give up, and to accept the absurdity of life with a glad heart.

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