



## THEMATIC CONCERNS OF ALBERT CAMUS

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### ABSTRACT

Albert Camus's political philosophy of rebellion and limits is ultimately grounded in an aesthetic theory, which in turn is dependent on a broader understanding of the nature of symbols. In his essays and notes Camus develops a theory of symbols in which he insists that human beings are symbolic creatures and that human experience and symbolization are interdependent realities. Camus felt that art, in particular the philosophic novel, played a significant role in the rearticulating of symbols. The basis of the recollection or the creation of symbols is the consciousness of the community, particularly the shared consciousness of the human condition. Symbols act as mediations between the empirical world and the world of imagination. They are not literal descriptions of threat empirical reality, nor are they simply flights of fancy. Symbols are necessarily bound and free. So, too, Camus argues, must be the politics on which they are based. His writings explore subjects such as the irrationality of the universe, the absurdity of human existence, the meaninglessness of human life, the significance of the physical world, suicide, decay, and death, the nature of human revolt, exile, and redemption. As a writer, Camus created a body of literature that used a range of genres and themes to communicate the breadth and depth of his concerns, particularly those regarding moral and political issues. He is committed to both the busy and contemplative parts of life. It is right that Camus' most famous work is *The Stranger*. Meursault, the novel's primary character, has a worldview and morals that distinguishes him from the rest of human society. Camus' first collection, *Between* and *Between*, was released in 1937, with *Nuptials* following two years later. Camus' pieces in both editions mostly reflect his love of Algeria, with sensual descriptions of the region and its inhabitants. Algeria's scenery and climate influence much of Camus' work, both conceptually and metaphorically. Camus' work explores themes such as exile, redemption, separation, revolt, and absurdity. In this paper, I have focused on the different themes of Camus. His writings reveal the themes of the irrationality of the universe, absurdity of the human existence, the meaninglessness of human life, the importance of the physical world, suicide, decay and death, the nature of human revolt, exile and redemption.

**Key words :** Albert Camus's, themes, parts of life

### INTRODUCTION

Albert Camus was a French Algerian philosopher, author and journalist. He won the Nobel Prize in literature at the age of 44 in 1957, the second-youngest recipient in history. Camus was born on 7 November 1913 in a French Algerian Family. Camus's views contributed to the rise of the philosophy known as absurdism and also he considered to be an existentialist, though he rejected on several occasions. "The Stranger", enigmatic first Nobel by Albert Camus, published in French as *L'Étranger* in 1942. It was published as 'The Outsider' in England and 'The Stranger' in the United States. Following "The Outsider", *The Plague*, published in 1947, that tells the story of a plague sweeping the French Algerian city of Oran, for this Nobel he achieved the Nobel prize in 1957. "The Fall" published in 1956, and he wrote many short stories and plays, and gained many literary fame. Two of Camus's works were published posthumously. The first entitled 'A Happy Death' and second was an unfinished novel 'The First Man', which Camus had written before he died. Many philosophers considered him an existentialist, even though he firmly rejected the term throughout his lifetime. In 1945, in an interview he hesitated that, "No, I am not an existentialist, Sartre and I are always surprised to see our names linked". Though he rejected to call himself as existentialist, yet his themes and outlook are after cited as examples of existentialism.

## OVERVIEW OF CAMUS'S WORK

The French writer Albert Camus (1913–1960) first became known in intellectual history when, in his thirties, he proclaimed the experience of the Absurd as a part of his own culture and that of the next generation. As we'll see, his ideas are largely an evolution of Pascal's research. Like Sartre, Camus is the most well-known Existentialist, and his popularity stems more from the strength of his literary expression than from the depth of his ideas. The committee's brief explanation of the award's justification, "for his important literary production, which with clear-sighted earnestness illuminates the problems of the human conscience in our times," provides us with a clear understanding of the significance of the work. He was awarded the 1957 Nobel Prize in Literature. Since its inception, Camus's writings have consistently addressed the issue of the human conscience; similarly to Sartre, his own fortunes are correlated with the fluctuating and frequently perplexing needs of his turbulent era. Camus, in contrast to Sartre, was always of the opinion that the label of Existentialist is offensive. He rejected the label of philosopher because, like Kierkegaard, he was wary of systems and preferred the flexibility that came with being a man of letters. His writings are philosophical in that they frequently confront conventional issues in unconventional ways, much like Wittgenstein's continuous thought. But Camus was first and foremost a writer, even with his obvious aptitude for philosophy. His thoughts on life, death, and the human condition have made him a significant voice in this century, and his straight, concise, and well-crafted language style has garnered him fame on a global scale.

### THE STRANGER

#### *The Irrationality of the World*

Although *The Stranger* is a work of fiction, it has a deep resonance with Camus' philosophical concept of absurdity. Camus' works argue that individual lives and human existence in general have no rational meaning or order. People, however, struggle to accept this notion and are always seeking to identify or construct rational structure and significance in their life. The term "absurdity" refers to humanity's vain quest to find rational order when none exists. Though Camus does not expressly use the term "absurdity" in *The Stranger*, the concept is present throughout the work. Meursault's visible environment, as well as his internal universe of thoughts and attitudes, lacks rational structure. Meursault's decisions, such as marrying Marie and killing the Arab, lack a logical basis. Nonetheless, society seeks to create or enforce rational explanations for Meursault's inexplicable behavior. The notion that things happen for no cause and that events might have no significance is disruptive and dangerous to society. The trial sequence in Part Two of the novel shows society's attempt to create a rational order. Both the prosecution and Meursault's lawyer provide logical, reasoned justifications for Meursault's crime, as well as the concept of cause and effect. However, these theories have no validity and are merely attempts to dispel the scary notion that the cosmos is illogical. The entire trial is thus an example of absurdity, a hopeless attempt by humanity to impose rationality on an irrational reality.

**As if this great outburst of anger had purged all my ills, killed all my hopes, I looked up at the mass of sighs and stars in the night sky and laid myself open for the first time to the Benin indifference of the world. And finding it so much like myself, in fact so fraternal, I realized that I'd been happy, and that I was still happy. For the final consummation and for me to feel less lonely, my last wish was that there should be a crowd of spectators at my execution and that they should greet me with cries of hatred.**

#### *The Meaninglessness of Human Life*

A second fundamental component of Camus' absurdist worldview is the belief that human life has no redeeming significance or purpose. Camus contends that the only certainty in existence is the inevitability of death, and that because all humans will inevitably die, all lives are equally pointless. Meursault gradually comes to this

knowledge throughout the work, but he does not fully grasp it until after his dispute with the chaplain in the last chapter. Meursault recognizes that, just as he is apathetic to most of the universe, the universe is also indifferent to him. Meursault, like all other persons, was born, will die, and will be forgotten.

Paradoxically, whether Meursault is able to achieve happiness depends on whether he comes to this seemingly terrible realization. When he completely accepts the inevitability of death, he realizes that it makes no difference whether he is executed or dies naturally at an advanced age. This understanding permits Meursault to abandon his hopes of avoiding execution by submitting a successful judicial appeal. He sees that the illusory hopes that had before filled his mind would do little more than instill in him a false belief that death is avoidable. Meursault realizes that his hope for a long life has been a burden. His emancipation from this illusory hope allows him to enjoy life for what it is and make the most of his remaining days.

**The Chaplain knew the game well too, I could tell right away: his gaze never faltered. And his voice didn't falter, either, when he said, 'Have you no hope at all? And do you really live with the thought that when you die, you die, and nothing remains?' Yes, I said.**

### *The Importance of the Physical World*

The Stranger reveals that Meursault is significantly more concerned in the physical features of his surroundings than in the social or emotional ones. This emphasis on the sensate world stems from the novel's premise that there is no higher meaning or order to human existence. Throughout *The Stranger*, Meursault's attention is focused on his own body, his personal relationship with Marie, the weather, and other physical aspects of his environment. For example, Meursault is more distressed by the heat during the funeral procession than by the prospect of burying his mother. The sun on the beach torments Meursault, and during his trial, he even admits that his agony under the sun was the reason he killed the Arab. Meursault's narrative style shows his interest in the physical. Though he uses brief, basic descriptions to skip over emotional or social events, his descriptions become vibrant and ornate when he discusses nature and the weather.

## **THE PLAUGE**

### *Exile and Separation*

The issue of exile and separation is represented by two characters, Rieux and Rambert, who are both separated from the ladies they love. The concept is also prevalent in the many other nameless citizens who have been separated from loved ones in neighboring towns or who were out of town when Oran's gates were locked. In another sense, the entire town seems exiled because it is utterly isolated from the outside world. As the narrator, Rieux recalls what exile meant to them all: "That sensation of a void within which never left us, that irrational longing to hark back to the past or else to speed up the march of time, and those keen shafts of memory that stung like fire." Some, like Rambert, are exiles in two ways: they are cut off from individuals they wish to be with, and they do not have the luxury of being in their own houses.

The sensation of exile causes several changes in attitudes and behaviours. People initially engage in illusions about the missing person's return, but soon they begin to feel like prisoners, drifting through life with nothing left but the past, because they have no idea how long their experience will last. And the past exudes remorse and unfinished business. Living with a sense of abandonment, they are unable to explain their private sadness to their neighbours, and discussions are often superficial. Rieux returns to the issue near the end of the novel, after the plague has passed, when the depth of the sentiments of exile and deprivation is shown by the overwhelming delight with which long-separated lovers and family members rejoin each other.

For some citizens, exile was a more difficult experience to define. They merely wanted to be reunited with something they couldn't describe but thought was the most desirable thing on Earth. Some dubbed it "peace." Rieux includes Tarrou in this category, despite he only discovered it after his death. This view of exile argues that the term has deeper, metaphysical meanings. It refers to the loss of the concept that humans live in a rational

cosmos where they can realize their dreams and desires, find meaning, and feel at ease. As Camus wrote in *The Myth of Sisyphus*:

**A world that can be explained by reasoning, however faulty, is a familiar world. But in a universe that is suddenly deprived of illusions and of light, man feels a stranger. His is an irremediable exile. Because he is deprived of memories of a lost homeland as much as he lacks the hope of a promised land to come. This divorce between man and his setting truly constitute the filling of Absurdity.**

### *Solidarity, Community, and Resistance*

The ravages of the epidemic in Oran powerfully depict the absurdist viewpoint that humans dwell in an indifferent, incomprehensible environment with no rational meaning or order, and no transcendent God. The epidemic strikes at any time and without warning. It is arbitrary and capricious, leaving humanity in a situation of anxiety and uncertainty that can only result in death. In the face of this fundamental truth, how should individuals respond? Should they submit themselves to it, accept it as unavoidable, and seek solace as individuals, or should they band together and fight back, even if they know they will lose? Camus' answer is plainly the latter, as exemplified by the characters Rieux, Rambert, and Tarrou. Rieux's position is clarified in Part II during a conversation with Tarrou. Rieux contends that one would have to be insane to willingly succumb to the pandemic. Rather than embracing the natural order of things, which includes sickness and death, he feels it is necessary to battle against them. He understands the requirements of the community and does not live solely for himself. When Tarrou points out that "[his] victories will never be lasting," Rieux concedes that he is embroiled in a "never-ending defeat," yet this does not deter him from continuing the effort. Rieux also understands that striving for the greater good entails sacrifice; he cannot anticipate personal happiness. This is the lesson Rambert learns. At first, he maintains that he does not belong in Oran, and all he wants is to return to the woman he loves in Paris. He is mainly concerned with his own personal happiness and the unfairness of his condition, but he eventually recognizes his membership in a greater human community, which places expectations on him that he cannot ignore. Finally, he understands he cannot face his lover as a coward.

Tarrou follows an ethical code that requires him to act in ways that benefit the entire community, even if it means risking his life in the process. Later in the text, when Tarrou informs Rieux about his existence, he expands on the phrase 'Plague'. He sees it as more than merely a specific disease or the presence of an impersonal evil outside of humanity. Tarrou defines plague as the destructive instinct within every individual, the intent and capacity to cause harm, and it is everyone's responsibility to protect against this propensity within themselves lest they infect someone else with it. He tells Rieux what he believes is natural: the microorganism. Everything else, including health, honesty, and purity, is the result of human will and unwavering vigilance. The decent man, the man who infects few people, has the fewest lapses of concentration.

### *Religion*

In times of tragedy, people frequently turn to religion, which Camus investigates in his novel. In contrast to Rieux, Rambert, and Tarrou's humanist ideals, Father Paneloux's severe Jesuit sermons provide a religious perspective. Paneloux, unlike the other key characters, believes there is a rational explanation for the plague epidemic. Paneloux's first sermon, delivered during the first month of the plague, characterizes the epidemic as the "flail of God" through which God separates the wheat from the chaff, the good from the evil. Paneloux emphasizes that God did not intend the calamity: "He looked on the evil-doing in the town with compassion; only when there was no other remedy did He turn His face away, in order to force people to face the truth about their lives."<sup>5</sup> Paneloux believes that even the awful suffering produced by the epidemic eventually works for good. Even in the most disastrous tragedies, the divine light can be seen, and everyone is given Christian hope. Paneloux's argument, based on his expertise in St. Augustine theology, is widely accepted by the town's residents, including the magistrate, Othon. However, it does not satisfy Rieux.

Camus deliberately manipulates the plot to highlight the issue of innocent suffering. Paneloux may claim that the plague is a punishment for sin, but how can he square that belief with the loss of a child? The child in question is Jacques Othon, and Paneloux, along with Rieux and Tarrou, witnessed his tragic demise. Paneloux is struck with sympathy for the kid, and he addresses the issue of innocent suffering in his second sermon. He contends that because a child's suffering is so horrific and difficult to explain, it forces individuals to face a critical test of faith: either we must believe everything or we must deny everything, and who, Paneloux asks, could stand to do the latter? We must submit to the divine will, he argues; we cannot select and accept only what we comprehend. However, we must continue to do what good we can (like Paneloux does as a volunteer fighting the epidemic). Paneloux's second sermon, however, seemed to have undermined his faith. Unable to reconcile his convictions with the child's death, Paneloux grows ill and refuses to be treated. His condition does not correspond to plague symptoms, and the mysterious nature of the illness led Rieux to classify him as a "doubtful case". He surrenders his fate to God and dies clutching to his cross and the vestiges of his convictions. The implication is that Paneloux's loss of faith causes his death. Paneloux's demise contrasts with Tarrou's, who battles heroically against death when his turn comes. Tarrou's fight against death is a metaphor for the fight against the epidemic and the absurdity of the universe. Paneloux is criticized for having lost confidence in humanity, as opposed to Tarrou. Instead, he chooses to cling to a fake ideal in which he no longer believes, and unlike Tarrou, his death brings him no peace. Camus clearly sympathizes with Rieux and Tarrou in this philosophical disagreement.

## **THE GUEST**

### ***Morality***

Daru is caught in a moral quandary when he is asked to turn in the Arab. Morality, like all of the narrative's topics, is treated ambiguously. Daru's choice of action puts him in moral peril: he is unsure whether the Arab deserves to be punished or released, and he lets this ambiguity to consume him. He makes no decision, leaving the Arab to choose between freedom and trial. Daru's subsequent moral despair must be interpreted in light of Camus' theory. Camus felt that once a decision was made, it should be followed, and that the ability to select one's own actions provided value to human life. Daru clearly knows that turning in the Arab was wrong, yet he refuses to just release the prisoner. He fails to make a decision, leaving him in full moral solitude.

### ***Solitude***

There are two types of solitude in *The Guest*. Throughout the novel, Daru experiences physical isolation in a distant place with little change. Daru's physical solitude is not a negative state; he has accepted his living conditions and feels at home in them. Despite the fact that the terrain is unfeeling and merciless, Daru finds solace in it. Daru, on the other hand, eventually finds himself in a state of moral loneliness. His failure to act in response to the Arab's fate has alienated him from himself. He stares at the harsh landscape that was once his home and sees only his inability to choose. The strange writing on the chalkboard best symbolizes this moral seclusion. If he composed it himself, it reflects his anguish and estrangement from himself; he has compromised his own beliefs by letting the Arab to pick punishment. If someone else wrote it, it's a blatant threat. Daru, who failed to exercise judgment, will now be condemned by people who do not understand him. Thus, his predicament is one of great isolation from human comprehension.

### ***Freedom***

*The Guest's* central theme is freedom, which is inextricably linked to the human right to select a course of action. Camus thought that by acting independently, one might discover meaning in life. The narrative exemplifies this idea. Daru's decision to reside in the plateau region is inspired by what Camus would term an understanding of the 'absurd'. Any human being needs to belong somewhere, and the harsh plateau region represents a form of home for him, despite its bleak climate. Camus believes that we must all construct our own homes in an essentially uncaring universe. We make this home via individual decision. However, the ability to choose is conversely an obligation. When we refuse to make a choice, we become victims of the universe's inherent harshness and ambiguity. Indeed, we cannot choose not to choose; we must choose in order to maintain our freedom. Daru wants

to transfer his task to choose to the Arab. However, when the Arab decides to turn himself in, Daru faces the consequences. Daru should've made a decision and stuck to it. Instead, he discovers himself in a situation of acute moral difficulty.

### **Limits of Human Knowledge**

Everyone in *The Guest* has a limited understanding of the events of the story. Balducci has no idea why the Arab killed his cousin or why Daru must take the Arab to the police; he merely has orders and obeys them. Daru is unsure if the Arab should be released or punished, but he is continually seeking information about why the Arab committed murder - if he did. Meanwhile, the Arab is perplexed when Daru asks him challenging questions and explains his decision to flee to the south or give himself in to the police. The reader, too, has a constrained view point. We never find out if the Arab deserves punishment or freedom. We never find out who scribbled the statement on the chalkboard at the end of the story. Camus denies us critical information, putting us in the same position as Daru or any other person forced to make decisions based on a limited perspective. And, fact, we all must do so on a daily basis, but rarely in the dramatic setting Camus creates in *The Guest*. If we let this fact plague us, as Daru does, we risk moral despair. However, if we make decisions and accept responsibility for them, we may prevent feelings of hopelessness. Daru becomes distracted with his knowledge's limitations and consequently fails to pick the option of opening the door to despair.

### **The Absurd**

Camus sees the universe as mute and indifferent. Despite their disdain, humans must survive. Despite the fact that such goals are unrealistic, they continue to seek significance and assurance. The juxtaposition of a godless, uncaring cosmos and human ambition creates what Camus refers to as 'the absurd'. He puts it this way: "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."<sup>6</sup>

Although it may appear sad to live in an unavoidable state of 'the absurd', Camus believes that this is the only way we can exist. Even if the universe does not care whether we live or die, we must continue to strive for, choose, and pursue freedom. Daru's ability to find comfort in the harsh plateau temperature bodes well for his ability to survive in ludicrous surroundings; yet, his unwillingness to respond to the moral quandary offered by the Arab eventually crushes him. In the face of ambiguity and uncertainty, one must act with extraordinary confidence. Regardless, one must make a choice. Daru fails to do so, which leads to despair.

### **THE FALL**

#### ***Justice and Judgment***

Much of *The Fall* is about humans' dread of being judged by others, as well as our desire to evaluate everyone, even ourselves. The narrator of this fake confession states that we despise the entire judicial procedure. Meanwhile, our main character, Jean-Baptiste, obtains power from criticizing others, which he justifies by also judging himself. The novel also places a strong emphasis on justice. *The Fall* implies that true 'justice' is elusive, if it exists at all, in a world where everyone is culpable and hypocritical.

#### ***Guilt and Blame.***

*The Fall* is based on the notion that everyone is guilty. This is a classic Camus argument, but the novel's narrator goes so far as to claim that all men are murderers, even if it is by mistake or neglect. This is an especially painful argument given that the work was written just after WWII. This type of 'universal guilt' renders any attempt at judgment entirely hypocritical. A guilty man denouncing another man's guilt is ludicrous by definition.

#### ***Religion***

In *The Fall*'s universe, God has died. The narrator contends that because there is no longer a God to direct our actions, we must seek out another 'master' to take his place. Men have essentially assumed the position of God because we are fully capable of subjugating and judging each other. Who needs God if we can accomplish everything ourselves? The narrator considers religion to be absurd and hypocritical; we distort, pervert, and bastardize Jesus' actual intentions, he contends.

#### ***Freedom and Confinement***

The Fall depicts a man who lives in isolation, owing to his belief that all relationships are restricting. The issue is one of responsibility: when you interact with others, you are constrained not only by their expectations of you, but also by the reputation you publicly establish. Despite this, he preaches a slave-based mentality. He says, "Give up your freedom; it is too heavy a burden." The weight comes from having to repeatedly prove your innocence in order to remain free. Having to prove as much implies being judged, which the narrator wants to avoid at all costs. His answer is to admit wrongdoing, give up freedom, and accept life in slavery.

### ***Innocence***

The Fall defies the concept of innocence. In the universe of this tale, everyone is guilty, including Jesus Christ. The narrator's philosophy consists of admitting your own guilt in order to avoid judgment and sentencing oneself to a life in prison. In his opinion, being imprisoned suggests you are guilty, whereas being free implies you are innocent. The fundamental cause-and-effect relationship has been reversed; we are condemned as criminals because we find ourselves in shackles, not because we are thrown in them.

### ***Power***

The Fall argues that power and subjection are necessary in the world.

In an uncertain world, only authority can decide the truth with certainty. In the case of the novel's narrator, power is gained by judging others and asserting God-like control over them. Power is also linked to physical position, as shown in geographical summits. For example, living on a mountain means being above others and thus having authority over them. Finally, forgiving others yields power in the same way that criticizing them does.

### **THEME OF PHILOSOPHICAL VIEWPOINTS:**

#### ***The Absurd***

The Fall delves into Camus' theory of the ridiculous. The most obvious illustration is of Camus' argument that all men are guilty of something. We are accountable for both our deeds and inactions. Crimes we fail to prevent are just as much our responsibility as those we commit ourselves. The work also delves into existential concepts such as Sartre's 'poor faith' and Kierkegaard's 'dread.' The novel's method and storytelling incorporate the concept of doubt and universal ambiguity, in addition to its subjects.

#### ***Transformation***

The Fall examines man's transformation from the comfortable ignorance of self-serving hypocrisy to the internal turmoil of self-judgment and awareness. This shift is less about learning new information and more about being willing or able to confront what is already known. Truth, innocence, and freedom are reassessed in the fresh light of self-reflection. Interestingly, this transition causes a change in thinking rather than a change in action, raising questions about the legitimacy of the shift.

#### ***Truth***

The Fall exemplifies the existentialist view that there is no objective truth.

What we regard as fact is a collection of beliefs. Indeed, the narrator's shaking of those ideas is the source of the novel's fundamental conflict. The narrator then concludes, almost cheerfully, that truth is overrated. For starters, it's dull. It's also not that beneficial. According to the narrator, "truth" as we understand it isn't always as illuminating as lies.

#### ***Mortality***

The quest for immortality motivates much of the fighting in The Fall. The narrator is self-obsessed and fears his own mortality. He is straining to deal with a series of paradoxical facts, including the following: men will never take you seriously until you are dead, and once you are dead, you cannot stay to enjoy it. According to the narrator, death is an excellent method to convey your point, but men are likely to misinterpret the reasons for your heroism, implying that you died in vain. The narrator seeks immortality in a number of ways, including sex and booze. He says that debauchery is when you are most free of your own mortality.

## CONCLUSION

To summarize the argumentative dispute on Camus, the belief that Camus cannot be fixed inside the limitations of existentialism or any other philosophy. His ideas are much beyond the extremes of existentialism, socialism, communism, or any other such 'ism'. He looks to be an existentialist, with an interest in man's existential predicament. Camus, however, becomes anti-existentialist by rejecting both the concept of the ludicrous God's absoluteness and that of history. He emerges as an absurdist with his investigation into the Sisyphean truth of human life, but he also transcends the absurd sphere and reaches the realms of rebellion with his willingness to revolt against the ludicrous. Once again, he denies the absoluteness of revolution. He admires Communism for its ideals for the benefit of the proletariat, but he opposes its deification of history in the service of these values. He strives for national emancipation but willing to go beyond nationalism in pursuit of a more deep internationalist goal. He promotes the democratic values of liberty and fairness, but denies their absoluteness. As a result, Camus' philosophy is cosmopolitan, practical, and relative, rejecting extremism while respecting boundaries.

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