

Imagining Sisyphus Happy: Happiness and the Absurd in the Godless Universe of Albert Camus

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For many individuals who are familiar with the work of Franco-Algerian philosopher Albert Camus, the idea of *le bonheur Camusien* seems absurd in itself. Known for his typically dour disposition and writing style, Camus was about as happy as Leo Tolstoy. Camus, like Tolstoy, was what American psychologist William James might have labelled as a sick soul. Yet the theme of happiness is in several ways central to many of Albert Camus' writings. Pierre Nguyen-van-Huy, writing a doctoral thesis on the topic of metaphysics and happiness in Camus' thought, distinguishes three different levels of happiness in Camus' works. The first level, which he baptises 'physical happiness', is largely hedonistic, referring to pleasures derived from sensual experience, and is developed in texts such as *Noces* and *L'Été*. The second level is humanistic happiness, dealing with joy derived from the individual's relationships with other people around him or her and with the world in itself. This idea finds its shape in Camus' works entitled *La peste* and *Les justes*. The final form of happiness, and perhaps the most interesting in an existential context, is metaphysical happiness. While Nguyen-van-Huy suggests that these three forms of happiness develop simultaneously throughout Camus' works and are essentially inseparable from one another (Nguyen-van-Huy 1968, 7), it is this last level of metaphysical happiness that is emphasised in *L'homme révolté* and *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. It is in this highest plane of joyful existence that the concept of the absurd comes to the fore, marring the individual's relationship with metaphysical 'forms' such as justice and peace. This level belongs to the individual who tries to grant meaning to a life that is devoid of God.

Le mythe de Sisyphe itself, published in Paris by Gallimard in 1942, can be viewed as a self-contained handbook to happiness. Combining both theory and practice, the text seeks to provide an avenue for happiness that goes beyond mere speculation or contemplation, but that is rather

put into practice itself by Sisyphus in the myth. If we as readers must imagine Sisyphus happy, it is because he has managed to realise and overcome the absurdity in his own life. Yet, how does Camus define this elusive entity called happiness?

Seeking to refute the Manichaean definition of evil in his *Catholic and Manichaean Ways of Life* (*Mores Catholicorum et Manichaeorum*), Saint Augustine suggests that before asking where evil comes from, as was the Manichaean custom, one must first seek to firmly define evil. Indeed, a wise suggestion and one equally applicable to this task. A solid definition of happiness should preclude any investigation into the topic. So what does happiness mean for Albert Camus? According to Camus scholar David Ellison, "Happiness is not a frivolous contentment, but rather the deeper pleasure one attains in understanding one's fate and in achieving an intellectual mastery over the physical conditions that seemed at first to be all-encompassing and all-constraining" (Ellison 1990, 72). Quickly put, "the happiness of the absurd individual begins and ends with a life of self-awareness and realisation" (Sagi 2002, 107). Already at this early stage one is able to identify several elements important for Camus' investigation. Happiness is a 'deeper pleasure', going beyond the simple hedonism Nguyen-van-Huy defines in his first level of happiness. There is more to happiness than sensual pleasure, even in a world without God. Happiness becomes a question of mastery, of reclaiming for oneself elements of fate and destiny that humanity traditionally hands over to the divine. The key to this mastery, as will soon be clear, is self-awareness.

Camus begins his discussion of happiness in *Le mythe de Sisyphe* by asking one important question: what is the life worth living? "Il n'y a qu'un seul problème philosophique vraiment sérieux: c'est le suicide" (Camus 1942, 15). Why should one choose to continue to live when life itself often appears so meaningless and cruel? Without the ultimate comfort of religion, the individual must see existence for what it really is. No veils remain to hide the truth. As Camus explains, "Le suicide c'est avouer qu'on est dépassé par la vie ou qu'on ne la comprend pas" (Camus 1942, 18). Again, Camus uncovers his seemingly depressing starting point, that life is an essentially meaningless endeavour. Yet, despite this, he refuses to advocate suicide as a proper solution. Life is not *so* hopeless that one should throw in the towel and resign oneself to his fate. Life is, therefore, ultimately worth living.

Of course, to say that life is worth living is fruitless unless Camus begins by pointing out what is wrong with life in the first place. University

of Toronto philosophy professor Mark Kingwell explains that any formulation of happiness must be preceded by a concept of pain and suffering (Kingwell 1998, 21). This identification of suffering and despair is of great value, for “there is no love of life without despair about life” (Cruickshank 1959, 29). Camus postulates that anyone who truly loves life must always be haunted by an element of pessimism and tragedy concerning his or her existence. Happiness cannot find shape without its polar opposite, and is largely experienced only in contrast to pain and suffering. An individual who is constantly happy could not, by Camus’ definition, know any happiness. Similarly, to love life and be in a state of happiness is to constantly fear the loss of that state, knowing all too well the mutable nature of life itself. The state of affairs changes so quickly that every moment of happiness must be appreciated. To truly love life, to have a passion for existence, is to be in a constant state of despair, constantly feeling pressed to make the most of life. “Heightened despair about life is related to heightened passion for life” (Cruickshank 1959, 31). While this idea may seem to make happiness impossible, Camus sees it as actually making happiness all the more enjoyable. Despair is an homage to life, for indifference indicates that life is expendable, that true happiness is elsewhere.

Despair is not the finish line, however, but only a starting point. It motivates change. Yet the general absurdity of life makes despair a necessary stage. This concept of the absurd is central to several of Camus’ works, and is also key to his pursuit of happiness. Camus considers the idea that humans perceive the world as absurd as an absolutely given fact. The absurd is not a property of this world, but rather of the individual’s perception of the world. The world is not absurd in itself, yet humans see it as absurd. Camus perceives this absurdity in a multitude of places. Humanity feels attracted to the beauty of nature but, not considering itself to be part of nature, it is existentially alienated from natural beauty. Workers dedicate themselves in great part to their work; yet as Marx would suggest, this work is completely separate from them (Camus 1942, 28). For Camus, “ce qui est absurde, c’est la confrontation de cet irrationnel et de ce désir éperdu de clarté dont l’appel résonne au plus profond de l’homme” (Camus 1942, 37). The individual yearns to understand the world around him, but this is in many ways beyond his abilities. His desire to know and to perceive is defeated by the world around him. He wishes to live forever, yet he knows he cannot. This constant contra-

diction between reality and desire contributes to general unhappiness. As Servan-Schreiber puts it, “Nous flottons au hasard de l’existence, nous nous heurtons à des inconnus qui sont tout aussi désorientés que nous, nous nous engageons par des choix arbitraires dans des voies qui déterminent tout le cours de notre vie, et nous finissons par mourir sans avoir eu le temps de comprendre ce que nous aurions dû faire autrement” (Servan-Schreiber 2003, 248). This seems to be the very definition of meaninglessness and unhappiness. Yet Camus does not consider the absurd to be the cause of unhappiness. It is simply a fact of human existence that must be endured. Happiness and unhappiness result from the attitude one takes towards this concept of the absurd.

People are unhappy when “they fail to recognise the absurdity of the human condition” (Kamber 2002, 10). Clearly, if this absurdity is a fact of life for Camus, happiness comes through its acceptance. Yet humanity in general “is predisposed to want and expect the world to be intelligible” (Kamber 2002, 52). In this sense, the absurdity of the world is not as obvious to every individual as it perhaps should be, for the recognition of the absurd demands an investigation that is contrary to natural human predispositions. Camus sees it as requiring an enlightened individual to perceive just how absurd the world really does appear to be and to take the subsequent actions demanded for happiness. This makes happiness much more difficult to achieve than it was originally thought to be. Thus happiness in relation to the absurd is to be achieved through “a relationship [with the world] in which the individual accepts the eternal antagonism between his desire for life and the inevitability of his death” (Cruickshank 1959, 39). However, this acceptance must go beyond the natures of life and death to the acceptance of the absurd in general. The antagonism between life and death is only a small part of the problem for Camus. So, the question remains: How is this acceptance to be achieved?

Logically, if unhappiness is grounded in the individual’s relation to the absurdity of life, the easiest way to produce happiness is to change the harmful relationship with the absurd. This is exactly what Camus proposes. The individual must revolt against the absurd. This does not mean to ignore the reality of the absurd, but rather to embrace it. Camus explains, “Insistons encore sur la méthode: il s’agit de s’obstiner” (Camus 1942, 75). *S’obstiner*, that is, not against the absurd, but against the position traditionally taken when faced with the absurd. “Confronting the meaninglessness of existence squarely without flinching is to invite the only profound inquiry into life, whether or not

it should continue" (Kingwell 1998, 24). Unhappiness comes about when individuals surrender to the absurd, when they let it consume their lives. Those who yearn to live forever yet know that they cannot will be deeply disappointed and unsettled as long as they foster this impossible hope. Such views uphold the absurd as an obstacle to the individual's goals. Camus suggests that one accept the limitations of the absurd and strive to live life to its fullest within these limitations. The revolt is defined as "a perpetual confrontation of man and of his own obscurity. It aspires to nothing and is completely without hope" (Thody 1957, 22). Why must it be hopeless? Hope, for Camus, is a form of narcotic used to battle the absurd. In hoping, one in essence puts off living to a later time. But the goal of confronting the absurd is to live in the moment, as if every day were the last. "Il existe un fait d'évidence qui semble tout à fait moral," explains Camus, "c'est qu'un homme est toujours la proie de ses vérités. Un homme devenu conscient de l'absurde lui est lié à jamais" (Camus 1942, 50). This, of course, is undeniable, considering Camus' definition of the absurd. It is a fact of life, but one that must be recognised through a sort of individual awakening. Once this awakening has taken place, the absurd becomes a pervading force, and either a source of immense joy or one of terrible suffering. Camus concludes that "il y a ainsi un bonheur métaphysique à soutenir l'absurdité du monde. La conquête ou le jeu, l'amour innombrable, la révolte absurde, ce sont des hommages que l'homme rend à sa dignité dans une campagne où il est d'avance vaincu" (Camus 1942, 127).

To understand this statement is to consider Camus' idea of God, or rather lack thereof. If humanity is *d'avance vaincue*, this is only true in comparison to the religious ideal of hope. Humanity is only conquered in the face of eternity, and many of Camus' statements that appear dubiously pessimistic (such as the call to abandon all hope, for example) are largely meant to refute their religious counterparts. In fact, Camus' whole theory is largely a reaction against Christian existentialists such as Kierkegaard. The idea that the world is essentially absurd is not unique to Camus, but was bred in the schools of the Christian existentialists. They, after recognising the absurdity of the world, labelled this absurd as 'God', making it a force to be embraced, in many ways similar to Camus' proposition. Yet, for them, the absurd is only to be embraced with the knowledge that one will be free from it in the afterlife, thereby placing hope and longing for future bliss as central. It is this final point that Camus is striving to rebel against. The

absurd, for him, is a fact of this world, existing in everyday perception. It is not something to be called 'God' and 'Other'. Furthermore, Camus criticises the Christian existentialists by saying that there is no logical reason to involve God in any definition of the absurd, but rather that this leap was taken only through faith. Camus, conversely, is not prepared to make this leap of faith.

In fact, Camus is heavily critical of religion as one of the primary sources of unhappiness. "People are skilful and persistent in deceiving themselves about the true [intelligibility] of the world" (Kamber 2002, 55). Religion thus becomes a simple anaesthetic, dulling the pain of this *valle lacrimarum* until true happiness can be found in the next life. Camus' call is rather to see the world *sub specie aeternitatis* but still realistically, allowing one to perceive the absurdity of the world and face it without recourse to divine intervention.

With this in mind, the revolt triggers several changes within the individual that facilitate happiness. Revolt first and foremost produces a change of consciousness. As explained earlier, once one awakens to the presence of the absurd, a change becomes necessary. "Un jour, le 'pourquoi' s'élève et tout commence dans cette lassitude teintée d'étonnement" (Camus 1942, 27). It is this moment that the character of Meursault in Camus' *L'Étranger* experiences, the moment where one suddenly spies the meaninglessness of daily routine, begins to question why he persists in it and to yearn for something that moves beyond this repetition. This awakening to the absurd brings about a phase of self-examination and recognition of this new life truth, the reality of the absurd. Socrates famously stated that the unexamined life is not worth living (Kingwell 1998, 21). The principle here is the same. As the individual awakens to the reality of the absurd, he finds himself examining himself and his desires in an attempt to justify his existence. Kellogg describes the conclusion that this individual will reach: "The reason for holding on to life was what Camus called 'lucidity': . . . the development of a clear recognition of his condition" (Kellogg 1975, 93). The recognition of this new truth is therefore liberating in its own way, and it is this liberation, from past desires, from the abhorred routine, that paradoxically provides new hope in life. The individual, leaving behind the unhappiness of the routine, finds himself free of his old life and ready to start anew in a revolt against the absurd.

This new liberation is based in Camus' ideas of union and acceptance. Absurdity can, to a certain extent, be characterised by separation. The individual is striving for goals that are impossible

in this existence, such as Camus' polyvalent example of eternal life. Union is therefore impossible. This separation is grounded largely in consciousness: "Qu'est-ce qui fait le fond de ce conflit, de cette fracture entre le monde et mon esprit, sinon la conscience que j'en ai?" (Camus 1942, 74). This also means that the reality of this relationship is bound to change once one acquires knowledge of the absurd. Happiness is to be found in union (Nguyen-van-Huy 1968, 9). This is not to say that physical reality changes with the acknowledgement of the absurd. Eternal life does not suddenly become possible simply because one has recognised the absurd as a source of unhappiness. However, if union remains impossible, the second best option becomes one of acceptance. By seeing the absurd, one gains the ability to recognise how and why these wishes are impossible and, by identifying with the element of revolt instead of these fruitless desires, one can achieve a state of happiness regardless. If the absurd makes it impossible to unify with anything in real life, then the revolted person attains unity by identifying with his revolt against the absurd itself. One cannot underestimate the effects of such a revolt on the individual. "The discovery of the absurd is liberating. It frees us from our precious illusions, but the price is high" (Kamber 2002, 56) in that it inevitably leads to a search for meaning in life, a meaning that can only be found in revolt itself.

While Camus initially presents these ideas very abstractly, he seeks to demonstrate that such a revolt is possible and gives it shape in the myth of Sisyphus itself, which concludes his essay entitled *Le mythe de Sisyphe*. Sisyphus personifies the idea of revolt perfectly. Already at the beginning of the myth, Sisyphus has awoken to the absurdity of life and has embraced it. Camus portrays Sisyphus as the ultimate pagan hero, one who displays a zest and passion for life that is completely contrary to the elements of the Christian faith. "Sisyphus is an absurd hero because of his passion, his torment, his scorn of the gods, his hatred of death and his love of life" (Amoia 1989, 83).

The fact that this is a pagan myth benefits from the pagan view of the gods, one which Camus seems to be endorsing throughout his philosophy. Sisyphus sees the gods as beings of provocation that are feared not because of any respect that they are due, but simply because of their divine power and the harm they can thereby bring about. Sisyphus is condemned to his punishment for "quelque légèreté avec les dieux" (Camus 1942, 161). He delivered their secrets to humanity, much as Prometheus did with the Olympian fire. He also promised

to tell Aesop, whose daughter Jupiter had kidnapped, where he could find his child, if the father promised to deliver water to the city of Corinth (Camus 1942, 161). In this example, one clearly sees that Sisyphus has chosen the necessities of life over his love for the gods. He has refused to postpone or sacrifice his existence for the benefit of divine beings that show no real concern for him. As Camus explains, “Aux foudres célestes, il préféra la bénédiction de l’eau” (Camus 1942, 161–162). Camus further elaborates that, in Homeric myth, Sisyphus is renowned for having chained Death, allowing everyone to continue living forever, enjoying the delights of the earth. Brought to the underworld as punishment for his deeds, Sisyphus begs Pluto to be allowed to return to the earth to see his wife one last time. But “quand il eut de nouveau revu le visage de ce monde, goûté l’eau et le soleil, les pierres chaudes de la mer, il ne voulut plus retourner dans l’ombre infernale” (Camus 1942, 162). It is this love for life and nature that is so essential to Camus’ *homme révolté*, yet which seems so contrary to the absence of hope Camus described earlier. Clearly, this happiness is genuine, regardless of the pessimistic tone that immediately overwhelms some of Camus’ readers.

For refusing to return to the underworld, Pluto condemns Sisyphus to an eternal punishment: he must push a large boulder up to the top of a hill, only to see the boulder roll back down again. As Camus explains, the gods rightly thought that “il n’est pas de punition plus terrible que le travail inutile et sans espoir” (Camus 1942, 161). It is clear that Sisyphus’ case is only tragic because he is conscious of it (Camus 1942, 164). In those moments while the rock is rolling back down the hill, Sisyphus is painfully aware of his punishment, and has no one to blame but himself for ending up in such a situation. This is the absurd at its cruelest. He yearns to return to the world he loves, yet is trapped beneath it for all eternity. These very realisations are enough to make most individuals reading the myth pity Sisyphus. Ironically, it is from these realisations that Sisyphus draws his strength and subsequent happiness. He has shaped his own eternal destiny. If he is to find happiness in it, he must do so through his attitude or perception of the situation. To say that the absurd exists only through human perception is to say that human perception can overcome the unhappiness that the absurd causes. And this is exactly what Sisyphus does.

The rock acts as a symbol of Sisyphus’ destiny. Every time that he decides to restart pushing the rock, “à chacun de ces instants où il quitte les sommets et s’enfonce peu à peu vers les tanières des dieux,

il est supérieur à son destin" (Camus 1942, 163). It is a matter of scorn. The gods have placed him in this situation to break his spirits, to torment him eternally for having defied them. If he allows them to win, Sisyphus would be condemned to unhappiness. The goal is to keep going, to embrace his destiny, knowing that he made it himself and that, by continuing on when many others would simply give up, he is conquering the gods despite his physical circumstances. His spirit is rising above his punishment. By removing this concept of destiny from the hands of the gods and returning it to the hands of humanity, Sisyphus is taking ownership of the rock.

This is a purely metaphysical, or eudaimonistic, level of happiness, drawn from the realisation that one's existence is serving a purpose in defying others. "Sisyphé s'estime heureux parce qu'il s'unit avec son idéal révolté" (Nguyen-van-Huy 1968, 10). Sisyphus obviously represents an extreme case, and his actions may seem to many readers difficult to replicate. Indeed, it is almost impossible to realistically picture oneself in Sisyphus' position. His situation simply appears too tragic. However, as Camus makes it clear, "Il n'y a pas de soleil sans ombre, et il faut connaître la nuit" (Camus 1942, 165). Happiness is largely to be found in lifting oneself out of the darkness. The sense of satisfaction this brings is happiness itself. In a world without meaning, one must give life its own importance by revolting against the very meaninglessness of life. For any meaning at all is an improvement on the complete lack of meaning. "La lutte elle-même vers les sommets suffit à remplir un cœur d'homme" (Camus 1942, 166).

At this point, the nagging voice of Sigmund Freud comes to mind: is a happy man necessarily reduced to a libido-serving animal? Is he a slave to his passions? There is a case for wondering this very thing in regards to Sisyphus. His passion for life, his embracing of temporality, his yearning to enjoy the carnal delight of his wife: is the individual who forsakes eternity reduced to serving his or her passions in the present? This would seem to be a little too hasty a presumption in Sisyphus' case. The call to find meaning in this realm, without recourse to eternity, can be answered without regressing to pure hedonism. Nevertheless, there is no real mention of ethics anywhere in *Le mythe de Sisyphe*, leading one to wonder whether *tout est permis* to the individual who seeks happiness in the world.

Similarly, Nguyen-van-Huy suggests that "pour l'homme absurde, la vie n'est qu'une compétition entre lui-même et les autres" (Nguyen-van-Huy 1968, 73). Indeed, this too seems unfair to the spirit of

Camus' version of happiness. Despite the desire to live in the world, the goal is not to live more carnally than one's neighbour. To have passion for life does not mean that one must outlive everyone else. Camus is not so hedonistic. True happiness is to be found in granting a meaning to that which previously had none. His endeavour is profoundly eudaimonistic, with happiness largely to be found in different forms of mental satisfaction: knowing that one has overcome the absurd, knowing that revolt grants life a purpose. It is much closer to the happiness of a New Age hipster than that of a megalomaniac.

If these critiques have been directed towards Camus it is largely because of the place the concept of time occupies in his formulation of happiness, since it becomes difficult for many individuals to fathom living eudaimonistically within a *carpe diem* type of philosophy. Yet this is exactly what Camus proposes. He constantly complains that "nous vivons sur l'avenir: demain, plus tard, quand tu auras une situation, avec l'âge tu comprendras" (Camus 1942, 27). This idea is linked closely with the idea of hope described earlier, such that living for the present means doing away with hope to a great extent. This concept of time also explains why Camus was so fixated on the idea of death: "[L'Homme] appartient au temps et, à cette horreur qui le saisit, il y reconnaît son pire ennemi" (Camus 1942, 28). The meaninglessness of life partly derives from the fact that one cannot live forever. Consequently, many are pushed to deliver their destiny into enemy hands, placing their faith in the thought that something better is to come. The solution then, for Camus, is "de vivre seulement avec ce qu'il sait, de s'arranger de ce qui est et ne rien faire intervenir qui ne soit certain" (Camus 1942, 76). Time is part of the absurd and must also be embraced through revolt. If the present has no space or place, as Augustine said, it is only because individuals constantly live for tomorrow. To live in the present is to create a space for it. As Camus puts it, "L'absurde m'éclaire sur ce point: il n'y a pas de lendemain" (Camus 1942, 82).

Nguyen-van-Huy also addresses this idea considerably. He defines the absurd as "ce qui jaillit de la comparaison entre un état de fait et une certaine réalité, entre une action et le monde qui le dépasse" (Nguyen-van-Huy 1968, 31). If "l'absurde est essentiellement un divorce" (Nguyen-van-Huy 1968, 31), this is true only because the goals that one sets must necessarily involve a temporal factor. That which one has already accomplished is not a goal. Goals necessarily require living for tomorrow. It is this fact that leads to unhappiness.

Sisyphus revolts by forgetting about his eternal torment and instead focusing on the rock one trip at a time (Nguyen-van-Huy 1968, 35). The absurd person therefore becomes “celui qui, sans le nier, ne fait rien pour l'éternel” (Nguyen-van-Huy 1968, 35).

The practical problems with this philosophy are glaringly obvious. This may work well for Sisyphus, who is trapped in his torment eternally, but for the average individual living without regard for the future it would quickly lead to bankruptcy and divorce. Camus' point, however, albeit in a mitigated form, is still useful. The harm in setting goals can occur when one lives only for that goal, disregarding other important aspects demanded by a balanced lifestyle. The call to live in the present does remind certain individuals that a one-track pursuit of anything can be as equally harmful as not living for eternity at all.

Eternity can also be taken to mean, not a point in one's lifetime two years down the line, but rather actual eternity as in a religious context. In this case, Camus' idea of time clearly relates to his view on religion, such that time spent in religious niceties designed to secure a spot in eternal bliss is wasted and only serves to waive the individual's responsibility for his own situation. “To live in [life's] full majesty is to live for its own sake” (Kamber 2002, 59), making life an end in itself and not a mean to an end. As Camus explains further, “Cette révolte n'est que l'assurance d'un destin écrasant, moins la résignation” (Camus 1942, 77). Revolt will not change the nature of existence in itself, but will allow the individual the joy of self-determination, knowing that he has made his own destiny and is not at the hands of a merciless deity.

This call to life is equally a call to activity. “L'absurde est la tension la plus extrême, celle qu'il maintient constamment d'un effort solitaire, car il sait que dans cette conscience et dans cette révolte au jour le jour, il témoigne de sa seule vérité qui est le défi” (Camus 1942, 78). To see the truth beyond the absurd is to live that truth, namely *la révolte*. To abandon hope for the future is in a sense to cram as much living as possible into every moment of life. The revolted man is faced with a choice—“he can yield to the nothingness or he can decide to live in the universe and draw strength from it, refusing to hope, entertaining only indifference toward the future, and cultivating a passion for the exhaustion of everything the world has to offer” (Amoia 1989, 82). Passivity is the bane of those who have yet to awaken to the absurd. Realisation of the absurd necessarily calls the individual to action. This is clear again in the myth. Upon returning to earth, Sisyphus seeks to live every moment to its fullest, enjoying temporal pleasures, never

knowing when Pluto will come to fetch him for his punishment. The same is true in the underworld. Sisyphus finds happiness by losing himself in the task he has been given, focusing on it and making it an extension of himself to forget the eternity of his punishment. He lived his punishment in the same way he had lived his life. Together with Nietzsche, Camus thus maintains that "what is important is not eternal life but eternal animation" (Amoia 1989, 83).

Finally, one may see the large place that the emotional and the non-rational occupy in Camus' philosophy. There is no real logical reason whatsoever to revolt, aside from perhaps the resignation that things cannot possibly become any worse. "Revolt is unreasoned and emotional, originating in a primitive feeling of human solidarity and dignity" (Thody 1957, 23). It is driven by the ego and fuelled by the desire to make a stand for existence in a world that could care less whether any given person lives or dies.

Slade develops this concept further. He explains that "the recognition of the absurd in life is merely the discovery that sooner or later rational logic breaks down to admit the non-rational" (Slade 1970, 170). It is a necessary corollary of humanity's limited intellect that is to be embraced in revolt. Blaise Pascal explains that he who denies that reason can ever fail will inevitably be led into pessimism. Camus reflects this idea, admitting that happiness is impossible until the absurd, the irrational element of existence, is acknowledged.

Yet Camus is harmed by this emotional aspect of his work. Thody remarks that "the myth of Sisyphus suffers from the fact that it is a representation of an emotional experience in supposedly rational and philosophical terms" (Thody 1957, 94). This seems only to be half-true. Room must be made for emotion in any philosophical work, and Camus' other works clearly show that he places a great emphasis on the non-rational in general. Still, it is difficult to consider *Le mythe de Sisyphe* as a philosophical work. It is a presentation of Camus' experience and views on happiness within a justified metaphysical framework which perhaps should not be called philosophical. This makes it no less valid as a view on happiness, however, which is a difficult topic to treat philosophically even for the best thinkers.

Camus' formulation also suffers from his own pessimism. He is, of course, a man of his times, having lived through the Second World War and, as an Algerian, the French occupation. His ideas are often presented in pessimistic terms, using superlatives that may not

necessarily be faithful to the attitudes he is representing which, once considered, are not that pessimistic at all.

He does, however, begin from the existential foundation that life is meaningless and absurd. This is perhaps the most debated point of contention. While a popular philosophical idea, especially in Camus' time, it may be difficult for many today to see just how absurd life is, thereby making it impossible for them to rely on a formulation of happiness grounded in the absurdity of the world. Every formulation of happiness seems to fail in some way to reach out to the entirety of the population, simply because opinions on human existence tend to vary as greatly as views on happiness do. Nevertheless, Camus' development of the idea of time in relation to happiness, as well as the emphasis placed on emotion and irrationality, provide interesting insights into the topic of happiness. Once the distinction between the eudaimonistic pleasure to be found in living in the moment and its hedonistic counterpart of living for the flesh are carefully distinguished, one may see that Camus engages many of the topics common to past philosophers who have discussed happiness.

So the question remains: why must we imagine Sisyphus happy? Here, the *must* should not be taken as an imperative, but as a term of logical exclusivity—considering the arguments presented, Sisyphus is clearly happy. Why? He has taken control of his life and though he suffers at the hands of a merciless universe, he knows that his burden is his own and that he has the strength to face this task day in and day out. How many of us can say the same?

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