

Research on Camus' Philosophy of Rebellion

Mingpei Tang *

Beijing No.4 High School, Beijing, China

* Corresponding Author Email: Tang.mingpei@outlook.com

Abstract. The thoughts of the famous French writer and philosopher Albert Camus are profound. His literary works, imbued with his philosophical ideas, are embodied in characters like Meursault from "The Stranger" and Sisyphus pushing the rock uphill. Camus seeks the meaning of life through the "rebellion" against the absurd, which is fundamental to his philosophical significance. Camus' philosophy of rebellion is influenced by Christian existentialism and Nietzsche's "superman philosophy," among other thoughts. "Absurdity" is the target of Camus' philosophy of rebellion; it is omnipresent and unavoidable. People should acknowledge the "absurd." Camus' philosophy does not aim to prove the absurdity of the world through philosophical speculation but rather to address how one should respond after recognizing the absurd. Evaluations of Camus should consider the century-long debate between Camus and Sartre, Sartre's criticism of Camus, and the subsequent scholarly "rehabilitation" of Camus. These discussions highlight the uniqueness and influence of Camus' philosophy and provide us with valuable insights.

Keywords: Rationality, Absurdity, Rebellion, Freedom.

1. Introduction

Albert Camus, a renowned French writer and philosopher, developed a philosophy of rebellion that reflects both personal contemplation and a reflection on the existential state of modern individuals. While existentialist thinkers often choose to escape an absurd world, Camus, with a unique vision and firm stance, proposed the philosophy of rebellion. This not only challenges the boundaries of traditional philosophy but also offers a proactive coping strategy for people facing irreconcilable conflicts. Camus' philosophy of rebellion is rooted in a deep understanding of the absurd. He perceives the absurd as a conflict between the world and humanity, an irreconcilable and unavoidable fact that humanity must face^[1-3]. In works such as "The Myth of Sisyphus," Camus combines philosophy and literature to explain ways to eliminate the absurd, showcasing the courage of individuals facing an absurd world and providing profound insights for the harmonious development of human society.

2. The Background of the Formation of Camus' Philosophy of Rebellion

2.1. The Social Turmoil in Europe After World War II

Post-World War II Europe was in ruins. Although the smoke of war had dissipated, the scars it left were not easily healed in a short time. The ruins of cities, displaced people, and the distorted values due to the war. The depressed economy led to skyrocketing unemployment rates and a lack of essential living materials, causing people to struggle for basic survival. The former prosperity was replaced by deep despair and material scarcity. In this context, people began to question traditional value systems, and their original beliefs crumbled. The hardships of life led people to doubt all predetermined meanings and purposes, and a sense of absurdity emerged. This sense of meaninglessness and absurdity provided Camus with an opportunity to develop his philosophy of rebellion. He could capture the pulse of the times and, with his pen as his sword, sought to rebuild the spiritual home of humanity amid the ruins, guiding people out of confusion to seek the meaning of life (see Figure 1).

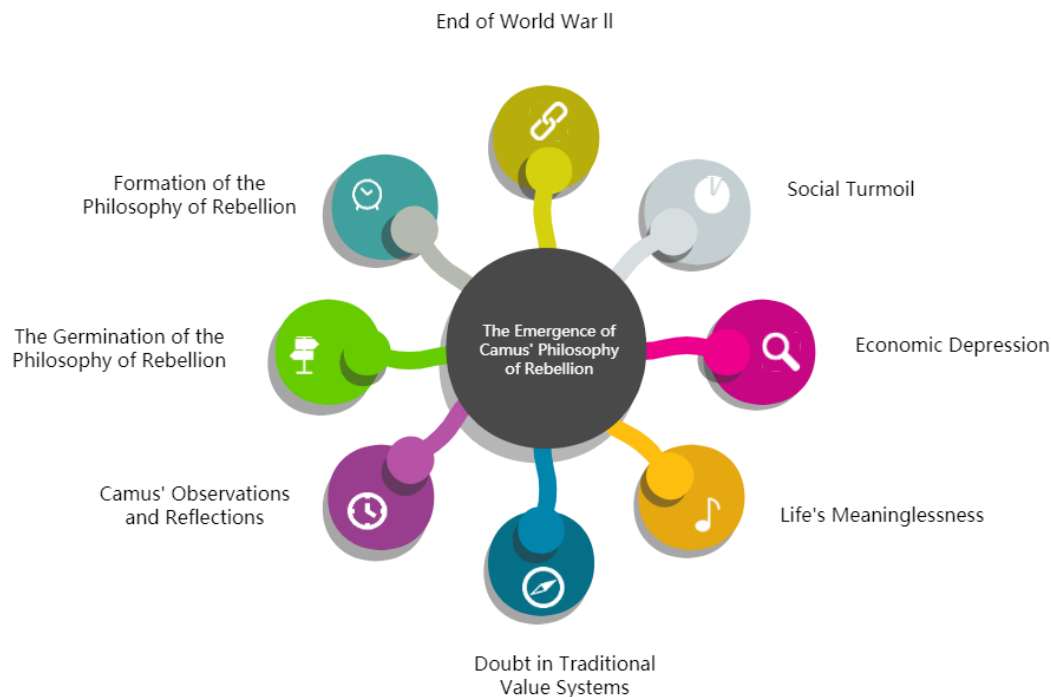


Figure 1. The Emergence of Camus' Philosophy of Rebellion

2.2. The Rise of Existentialist Thought

After World War II, European society fell into profound reflection and reconstruction, leading to the rapid rise of existentialism in the field of philosophy. This thought touched on the impact of the war on the essence of human existence, emphasizing individual free will, the ability to choose, and a sense of responsibility in the face of a nihilistic and absurd world^[4]. Camus, deeply influenced by the spirit of existentialism, inherited its core ideas about individual existence, freedom, and choice. On this basis, he integrated his insights into the absurd reality and the spirit of rebellion, creating a unique philosophy of rebellion. This philosophy enriched the connotation of existentialism and provided strong spiritual support for people seeking self-discovery and taking responsibility in turbulent times.

3. The Theoretical Sources of Camus' Philosophy of Rebellion

3.1. Pascal's "Pensées"

Pascal's views on death are a primary source of nourishment for Camus. In "Pensées," Pascal writes, "Imagine a number of men in chains, all sentenced to death, some of whom are each day butchered in the sight of the others. Those remaining see their own condition in that of their fellows, and looking at each other with grief and despair, await their turn. This is an image of the human condition." This paradox is repeatedly mentioned, suggesting that life is inherently suffering, and every person faces the inevitable reality of death. According to Pascal, this raises the question, "Since we are destined to die, what is the meaning of living?" Camus answers that living itself has meaning. The act of living, although inherently meaningless, is where its significance is found. A person can live aimlessly or live a brilliant life. This is what Camus refers to as feedback, a way to counter life's absurdity.

3.2. The Influence of Christian Existentialism

In the 19th and 20th centuries, Søren Kierkegaard and Karl Jaspers were the most representative Christian existentialists. Kierkegaard, considered the father of existentialism, proposed that "existence precedes essence," opposing the traditional philosophical view that "essence precedes existence." Kierkegaard's thoughts are deeply religious, asserting that human existence is based on the existence and creation of God. He believes that both the existence of the universe and human

existence have inherent value, but this value is bestowed by God^[5-6]. Camus agreed with Kierkegaard's existential views but lamented Kierkegaard's reliance on God for human freedom. Camus found Kierkegaard's stance on God's existence and the meaning of human existence overly extreme and lacking critical spirit. Additionally, Kierkegaard's excessive emphasis on individual freedom overlooked the influence of society and history. Camus thus advocated that, in facing the meaninglessness and absurdity of existence, humanity should emphasize creating their own meaning and value.

3.3. Nietzsche's "Superman Philosophy"

In "The Myth of Sisyphus," Camus quotes from Nietzsche's "Thus Spoke Zarathustra": "When Zarathustra was alone, he spoke thus to his heart: 'Could it be possible! This old saint in his forest has not yet heard that God is dead!'" Nietzsche's philosophy has a strong spirit of rebellion. He criticized traditional philosophy and moral concepts, believing that they restrict human freedom. Additionally, he emphasized individual freedom and creativity, asserting that each person should boldly pursue individual freedom. Only by transcending traditional limitations can one realize their potential and achieve self-development. Nietzsche also opposed the concept of God, believing that Christianity and the idea of God suppress human freedom and should be abandoned. Camus admired Nietzsche's rebellious ideas but did not fully agree with them. He found Nietzsche's philosophy too extreme and authoritarian, which Camus opposed.

4. Core Content of Camus' Philosophy of Rebellion

4.1. Definition and Understanding of the Absurd

The concept of the absurd is an insight into the human condition. For Camus, it is not merely an emotional choice or philosophical concept but the irreconcilable tension between man and the world, illustrated in a concrete form (see Figure 2). Camus believes that humans are inherently rational, forming the basis for our understanding and interpretation of the world. However, in the real world, the irrational breaks the rational framework that people construct, creating an insurmountable gap between expectations and reality. This gap is the source of the feeling of absurdity, leading people to feel powerless and believe that any effort is futile, with all pursuits ultimately turning to dust. But Camus does not stop at revealing the harsh reality of the absurd; the absurd is not the end but a universal predicament of human existence that we must face and rationally contemplate, inspiring us to seek solutions and explore meanings.

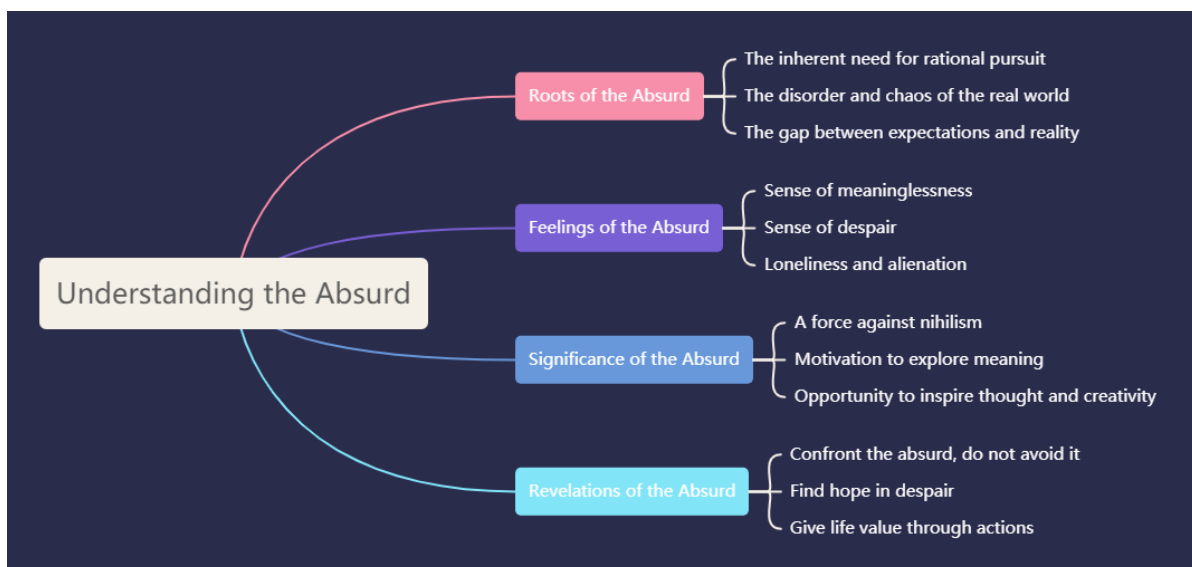


Figure 2. Understanding the Absurd

4.2. The Proposal and Necessity of Rebellion

In Camus' philosophical system, rebellion is a direct response to the absurd reality and a declaration of human dignity and freedom. Confronted with the meaninglessness and absurdity of the world, Camus firmly believes that rebellion is the only way out. This rebellion transcends simple passive resistance or violent confrontation; it is a profound affirmation of life's value and a steadfast defense of free will. Through rebellion, people challenge the constraints of the status quo, creating new possibilities and infusing life with color and warmth.

Rebellion is a deliberate and conscious act that reaffirms one's existence and agency in a world that often seems indifferent or hostile. By rebelling, individuals refuse to succumb to nihilism or despair, instead asserting their right to define their own meaning and purpose^[7]. This active engagement with life, despite its inherent absurdity, fosters a deeper appreciation for the present moment and the relationships that enrich it.

In the process of rebellion, people regain a sense of control over the world, feel the vitality and hope of life, and thus cherish and love each moment more deeply. Rebellion becomes a means of reclaiming one's humanity, of connecting with others on a fundamental level, and of striving toward a collective betterment. Therefore, rebellion is not only necessary but also an indispensable part of life, as it embodies the relentless pursuit of truth, justice, and personal authenticity. It is through this continuous act of rebellion that individuals can navigate the absurd and construct a life imbued with meaning and significance.

4.3. The Essence and Methods of Rebellion

In Camus' view, the essence of rebellion is a symphony of reason and passion, a courageous action taken after thoughtful deliberation. It requires individuals to recognize the absurd reality while maintaining a clear mind, using reason as a rudder to navigate through the fog. This rebellion is neither blind nor impulsive but a sharp sword against despair. For Camus, rebellion begins with the individual's internal acknowledgment of the absurd and a resolute decision to confront it with integrity and courage.

Regarding methods of rebellion, Camus encourages diversity and creativity. Critical thinking, like a sharp scalpel, dissects societal ailments and awakens dormant minds. Intellectual discourse and philosophical inquiry challenge prevailing norms and inspire a deeper understanding of human existence. Artistic creation expresses the soul, showcasing the indomitable human spirit through beauty. Through literature, painting, music, and other forms of art, individuals can convey profound truths and evoke emotional responses that transcend the mundane, offering glimpses of meaning and solidarity in an absurd world.

Social reform directly affects reality, gradually eliminating the soil of absurdity through improved systems and social progress. Activism, policy changes, and community organizing are practical avenues for addressing injustices and fostering a more humane society. These actions aim to create tangible improvements in people's lives, promoting justice, equality, and human dignity.

These methods intertwine to form a magnificent tapestry of human rebellion against absurdity and the pursuit of freedom. By combining intellectual rigor, artistic expression, and social activism, Camus' vision of rebellion becomes a holistic and dynamic force. It unites individuals in a shared struggle against the absurd, fostering a sense of collective resilience and hope. This multifaceted approach ensures that rebellion is not just an act of defiance but a continuous journey toward a more meaningful and liberated existence.

5. Evaluation of Camus' Philosophy of Rebellion

The publication of Camus' "The Rebel" caused a significant stir in the French literary scene. As recorded in "Camus: A Biography," the right-wing expressed sympathy and admiration, with "Le Figaro Littéraire" even claiming it was Camus' most important work and the greatest work of the 20th century. The philosophical critic of "Le Monde" thought that since World War II, no work of such

value had been published. In "The Myth of Sisyphus," Camus reveals the ubiquitous feeling of absurdity in our world and argues that rebellion is the correct response to absurdity. Hence, he devoted himself to studying "rebellion," and "The Rebel" is essentially an answer to the issues raised in "The Myth of Sisyphus," systematically expressing Camus' philosophy of rebellion^[8]. Rebels dare to say no when their values are invaded and must ensure that their rebellion does not infringe upon others' values, maintaining clear boundaries. Sartre did not agree with Camus' concept of rebellion, arguing that if these boundaries are blurred, rebellion cannot be enacted. Sartre saw this as Camus' compromise.

Sartre's critique went deeper than just the concept of rebellion. He believed that Camus' rebellion was too individualistic and lacked a broader social context, which made it insufficient to address the systemic issues that underpin societal absurdity. For Sartre, true rebellion required a collective action that transcends personal boundaries and tackles the root causes of oppression and absurdity in society. This fundamental disagreement highlighted the philosophical rift between Camus' existentialism, which emphasized individual action and moral integrity, and Sartre's existential Marxism, which stressed collective struggle and political engagement.

5.1. The Academic Reversal of Attitudes Toward Rebellion

With the end of the two world wars and the continuation of the Cold War, the ugly face of capitalism gradually emerged, while the Soviet Union's development through revolution towards socialism seemed to be the future direction of society. In a typical capitalist society like France, revolution seemed like the only way out. Camus' limited "rebellion" was seen as a "prince's game" or a "circus trick," and this view had its rationale. In domestic studies of the last and current centuries, views supporting Sartre and opposing Camus became mainstream. However, after the disintegration of the Soviet Union, new meanings emerged in evaluating the debate between Camus and Sartre. Professor Guo Hong'an of Peking University, in his paper "Revisiting the Debate Between Camus and Sartre," pointed out that during the debate, the French Communist Party and the French cultural world were permeated with Soviet-style authoritarianism and power, affecting attitudes toward the Camus-Sartre debate. Time has proven this political atmosphere to be extreme. Therefore, we should re-examine the debate, no longer focusing solely on the weaknesses of Camus' theory and his lack of action but recognizing his rare restraint in such a political climate. This restraint, reflected in his rebellion, shows empathy for others' dignity and respect for individual freedom.

6. Conclusion

In conclusion, an in-depth exploration of Camus' philosophy of rebellion reveals its fundamental quest for a way to face the absurd. After recognizing the absurdity of the world and history, Camus consistently sought concrete ways to respond. He examined traditional rational methods, Christian existentialism, and socialism, finding that none could perfectly address the absurd. Traditional rationality, which encompasses everything and serves as the foundation, directly hinders the pursuit of freedom; Christian existentialism places hope in God, losing human dignity in an era where theology has been toppled. Thus, Camus could only choose his path of rebellion^[9]. Due to the unique political and temporal context, this path was arduous. With the upheaval in Eastern Europe and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the global socialist movement declined, and Camus' rebellion became closer to truth because of its restraint. Although Camus' philosophy of rebellion has limitations, its value should not be denied. We should learn from it and seek the ultimate meaning of life.

References

- [1] Gordon, Mordechai. 2014. "Camus' Struggle with the Absurd: Rebellion as a Response to Nihilism." *10.1007/978-3-319-00834-9_3*.

- [2] Bishay, Basma. 2018. "Rebellion and the Absurd: Reading the Novels of Albert Camus." *American University in Cairo*, Master's Thesis. *AUC Knowledge Fountain*.
- [3] Spence, C. 2020. "Albert Camus: Rebellion Through the Ethical Frameworks of Emmanuel Levinas and Soren Kierkegaard." *Master of Philosophy (School of Philosophy and Theology)*, University of Notre Dame Australia.
- [4] Alsatie, Lynn. 2019. "Absurdity and Metaphysical Rebellion in the Philosophies of Albert Camus and Omar Khayyam." *Undergraduate Honors Thesis Collection*, p. 490.
- [5] Zhang, Bo. 2015. "The Birth and Evolution of the Idea of 'Rebellion' in Camus' Works." *Fudan Journal (Social Sciences Edition)*, vol. 57, no. 5, 2015, pp. 115 - 122.
- [6] Xuan, Qingkun. 2005. "On Camus' Philosophy of Absurd Existence." *Journal of Anhui University*, no. 5.
- [7] Arinze, A., and Onwuatuegwu, I. 2020. "The Notion of Absurdity and Meaning of Life in Albert Camus Existentialism." *Open Journal of Philosophy*, vol. 10, pp. 528 - 538.
- [8] Roig Lanzillotta, L. 2020. "Albert Camus, Metaphysical Revolt, Gnosticism and Modern Cinema." *Gnosis: Journal of Gnostic Studies*, vol. 5, no. 1, pp. 45 - 70.
- [9] AI, Shi-wei, and TIAN, Cun-tong. 2022. "Prometheus and Camus' Ethics of Rebellion." *Journal of Literature and Art Studies*, vol. 12, no. 11, pp. 1104 - 1113.