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# A Comparative Analysis of The Ideas on The Human Problem in The Existentialism of Jean-Paul Sartre And Albert Camus

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Received: 22 November 2024 Accepted: 24 December 2024 Published: 30 January 2025

## ABSTRACT

Existentialism is one of the most significant movements in 20th-century philosophy, focusing on the place of the individual in life, their freedom, and moral choices. Prominent representatives of this philosophical trend, Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, paid special attention to the problems of human existence, examining them from different perspectives in their works. This article provides a comparative analysis of Sartre's and Camus's philosophical views on humanity. The aim of the study was to identify the similarities and differences in the ideas of these two authors to shed light on the complex issues.

**Keywords:** Existentialism, Jean Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, absurd, rebellion, freedom, French existentialism.

## INTRODUCTION

The intellectual atmosphere in the years following the world wars, along with concepts of the absurdity of human existence, alienation, despair, and pessimism, highlighted the necessity of restoring faith in human dignity and brotherhood. The struggle for ideologies and ideas in the realm of political movements left individuals attempting to preserve their own existence, seeking the essence of human existence, and re-examining the paradigms that society had formed over long historical periods. The skepticism towards social norms, morality, and religion concerning the essence of human existence, as well as the sense of alienation from them, laid the foundation for a new form of philosophical thought.

Although existentialism and absurdism trace their roots back to the ideas of ancient philosophers, their fundamental principles were fully shaped in the philosophical perspectives of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. These ideas have since evolved into a philosophy of self-care, enabling modern individuals to defend their dignity, freedom, and human subjectivity.

## Literature Review

For the comparative analysis of the views of the French existentialists Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus on the issue of the human problem, their primary works can be directly utilized. The primary sources of this study include Jean-Paul Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism", "Being and Nothingness", and "Nausea", as well as Albert Camus' "The Stranger", "The Myth of Sisyphus", "The Plague", and "Caligula".

## METHODOLOGY

The methodological foundations of the research are based on objectivity, impartiality, systematicity, theoretical-deductive reasoning, analysis and synthesis, historicity and logical consistency, hermeneutic analysis, and comparative analysis. The theoretical significance of the study lies in its potential use for expanding socio-philosophical thought, fostering independent thinking, and promoting a positive attitude towards the history of philosophy and French existentialism.

## RESULTS

Existentialism, as a philosophical movement that emerged in the late 19th and early 20th centuries, focuses on the individual's experience of existence and the search for meaning in a seemingly indifferent world. Rooted in the works of thinkers such as Søren Kierkegaard, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Jean-Paul Sartre, existentialism emphasizes subjective experience, freedom of will, and personal responsibility in shaping one's existence.

Absurdism, a philosophical concept popularized by Albert Camus, offers a distinct perspective on the human condition. It asserts that the search for intrinsic meaning in life is futile, as the universe is inherently irrational and indifferent to human concerns. Absurdism suggests accepting the meaninglessness of existence while simultaneously rebelling against the absurdity of the universe. Although Camus never explicitly identified himself with existentialism, it can be argued that absurdism falls within the broader influence of existentialist thought. In this sense, existential absurdism is a philosophical concept that highlights the meaninglessness of human existence. While both existential absurdism and nihilism acknowledge the absence of inherent meaning in life, they differ in their attitudes and approaches toward this realization.

It is possible to observe how existentialism and absurdism converge around one of the most fundamental philosophical questions: "What is the essence of human existence?" However, Camus denies that there is an answer to this question, rejecting any scientific, teleological, metaphysical, or human-constructed conclusion that claims to provide a definitive response. While acknowledging humanity's inherent drive to seek meaning in life, Camus adopts a skeptical position, arguing that nature, the universe, and human actions remain silent regarding any ultimate purpose. Because existence itself lacks intrinsic meaning, we must learn to endure the unresolvable void. Thus, the paradox between our impulse to seek ultimate answers and the impossibility of obtaining any adequate response is what Camus defines as the absurd. His philosophy of the absurd explores the consequences arising from this fundamental paradox.

Sartre, in his existential philosophy, acknowledges the meaningless and absurd existence that Camus describes but approaches it differently by asserting that existence precedes essence. This principle serves as the foundation

of his teachings. He argues that individuals are absolutely free and responsible for giving meaning to their existence. In this sense, Sartre's position may appear close to nihilism, but it differs in a crucial way: nihilism tends to absolutize human freedom while discarding responsibility, whereas existentialism upholds both.

Existentialism and absurdism both begin by rejecting all pre-established meanings, stepping into what can be described as a "philosophical desert." This desert represents the common ground where both philosophies meet. However, their paths diverge in the steps that follow.

Existentialism revolves around several core principles, the most significant being a belief in personal freedom and responsibility. Sartre famously stated that humans are condemned to be free, meaning that in a world devoid of inherent purpose, individuals must create their own meaning and values. Authenticity and personal responsibility hold a central place in existentialist thought, emphasizing the importance of living in accordance with one's values and beliefs.

In contrast, absurdism rejects the pursuit of personal meaning in an irrational universe. Instead of falling into despair, it promotes the acceptance of life's absurdity. According to absurdist philosophy, recognizing the fundamental absurdity of existence should lead individuals to rebel against meaninglessness and find purpose in the mere act of living. Absurdism suggests that individuals can justify their existence and achieve a sense of purpose through acts of defiance and engagement in an indifferent universe.

Existentialism advances the idea that existence precedes essence, meaning that human beings are born into the world as individuals without any preordained meaning or purpose. As a result, they are tasked with creating their own essence through their choices and actions. Existentialists emphasize the importance of subjective experience and personal authenticity in the search for meaning. By embracing their freedom and living authentically, individuals can fill their lives with purpose and significance.

In his work "Cahiers pour une morale" ("Notebooks for an Ethics"), Sartre characterizes violence as an act of bad faith, particularly when a violent person justifies their actions by claiming they are merely using force rather than engaging in violence. However, at a certain point, Sartre

paradoxically justifies violence and bad faith. In his 1946 essay "Materialism and Revolution", he defends revolutionary violence as a necessary means to overthrow an oppressive regime, arguing that such violence is essential for securing human freedom and replacing a dehumanizing system with a new, unified one.

This belief in revolutionary struggle led Sartre toward communism, where he saw the working class as the force capable of dismantling oppressive societies. Marxist philosophy views violence as an inevitable tool in the fight against tyranny, considering revolt against oppression a necessary means to achieve political goals. Thus, Sartre appears to justify violence as a means to an end, aligning with the idea that bad faith can be necessary for greater revolutionary objectives.

However, at that time, Stalin was in power, and reports of Soviet totalitarian crimes were becoming increasingly widespread. Despite this, Sartre never openly addressed or criticized these atrocities.

For Camus, rebellion as a means to achieve a goal is only justified if it serves an absolute purpose—meaning that it ensures the problem will never be repeated. However, for Sartre, a rebellion carried out by the Communist Party does not guarantee such an absolute goal [3;56]. Camus refused to justify this type of rebellion because, in his philosophy, rebellion is fundamentally a protest against murder [4;116].

Camus believed that rebellion against injustice must acknowledge the existence of a limit that should be respected—the value of human life. If a rebel disregards this limit and resorts to murder in order to achieve their goal, they become a hypocrite. Indeed, violence as a means to an end can be used to justify numerous horrific crimes. History provides evidence of this, as the Nazis exploited this logic, using the pretext of protecting Europe from the so-called "evil of Judaism" to justify the Holocaust during World War II.

Camus accused Sartre of losing his authenticity by aligning himself with the Communist Party, seeing it as a betrayal of existential integrity.

Camus' play "Caligula" (based on the historical Roman emperor of the same name) portrays a man confronted with the inevitability of death. In response, he unleashes random violence against the patricians of the empire, as he sees no

meaning in life. As a powerful man, he believes he can do whatever he pleases without concern for the consequences. However, not all people can act according to their own desires, as demonstrated in a conversation between Scipio and Caligula:

CALIGULA: ...Otherwise, they would bring divine tragedies upon every person and realize that it is fitting for a man to become a god. You just need to harden your heart.

SCIPIO: Perhaps you are right, Gaius. But if that is true, I believe you have done what was necessary so that one day, the legions of human gods around you, in turn, will become ruthless and drown your fleeting divinity in blood. [5;59]

Indeed, this idea of "human gods" had already been mentioned a year earlier in Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*, published in 1943, while Camus' play was published in 1944. Sartre famously wrote: "To be human is to strive to be God."

This suggests that *Caligula* aligns with Sartre's perspective—the play may, in fact, be Camus' response to Sartre's ideas. Presenting this concept through the words of a bloodthirsty dictator highlights the profound issue shared by both Camus and Sartre: they both explore the human condition through the lens of the aspiration to become divine.

In the play, Caligula declares:

"This world is meaningless, and whoever realizes this attains freedom. You are not free, and that is why I despise you. In the entire Roman Empire, only I am free. Rejoice, for at last, an emperor has come to teach you freedom. Go, Cherea. And you too, Scipio, for friendship is ridiculous to me."

This statement reflects Sartre's ideas, emphasizing the notion that recognizing the meaninglessness of existence leads to absolute freedom. However, Scipio represents the voice of reason in the play and, in a sense, serves as Camus' own voice.

Caligula rejects rationality and attempts to transform himself into a god-like figure—a form of philosophical suicide, as described by Camus in *The Myth of Sisyphus*. For Camus, suicide is the only true philosophical problem, as it represents a rejection of the absurd and an unwillingness to confront life's inherent meaninglessness.

Instead, he argues for rebellion against absurdity by choosing to live as long as possible, despite the lack of meaning.

Camus defines philosophical suicide as a denial of the absurd, which in Kierkegaard's case leads to ignoring the absurd that has illuminated existence thus far and instead deifying irrationality as the only remaining belief. Caligula does not physically kill himself, but his attempt to become a god-man and his refusal to rebel alongside his peers signify his rejection of the absurdity of existence.

## CONCLUSION

Camus and Sartre faced a fundamental disagreement regarding the necessity of violence and the role of human beings in an absurd world. For Camus, violence should never be justified as a state-enforced measure or as a tool serving the interests of a totalitarian regime. After witnessing the horrors of Nazism, Camus recognized that any justification for violence must be met with immediate and unequivocal opposition.

Sartre, on the other hand, believed that violence was a necessary response to other acts of violence—that fire must be fought with fire. This ideological divide ultimately ended their friendship, confirming Camus' concerns about Sartre's alignment with the Communist Party during Stalin's rule.

Their differing views on existence in an absurd reality also reflected their stances on violence. Sartre argued that mere existence is not enough—one must actively create meaning and purpose. However, Sartre's philosophy contained contradictions and potentially dangerous principles, which Camus had foreseen and criticized.

For Camus, a person living in an absurd world must acknowledge its limits and contradictions in order to find happiness and appreciate life. In his own words, "We must imagine Sisyphus happy."

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