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pinnacles of power.²⁹

Finally, al-Attas³⁰ describes the West as captive of dualism. The fusion and amalgamation that has evolved have produced a characteristic dualism in the worldview and values of Western culture and civilization; a dualism that cannot be resolved into a harmonious unity. This is because it was issued forth under conditions of conflicting ideas, values, cultures, beliefs, philosophies, dogmas, doctrines and theologies. This altogether forged an all-pervasive dualistic vision of reality and truth “locked in despairing combat.” That dualism abides in all aspects of Western life and philosophy: the speculative, the social, the political, the cultural – just as it pervades with equal inexorableness the Western religion.

ALBERT CAMUS, THE ABSURD AND MARTYRDOM

*Arief S. Arman*³¹

Albert Camus (1913-1960) was an Algerian-French thinker who is heralded for his extensive work on the human experience of 'the now'. The question of existence, of whether there is meaning to life or otherwise is explained with great enthusiasm in his works, *The Plague*, *The Stranger*, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, and *Letters to a German Friend*, among others. This essay seeks to reconcile the incessant search for meaning in human beings with the motivations of martyrs who carry out suicide attacks across the globe, thus arguably justified in their actions. By means of this text, it is with sincere hope that the

²⁹ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 128.

³⁰ Al-Attas, *Islam and Secularism*, 128.

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lessons extracted from Camus' work be used to facilitate act of kindness between people near and far.

As the *Front de Libération Nationale* (FLN) ascended to prominence and discarded the heavy shackles of French rule in Algiers, a renegade thinker by the name of Albert Camus tried to make sense of the resistance created and the experience of significance that ensued. He attempted to rationalize the impact of conflict on the minds of the oppressed, both compelled and willing, to fight for a better Algeria. This fight was necessary in hopes of establishing a sovereign nation, with the emancipation of the colonized at the forefront of a collective consciousness. It is from this juncture that the subjugated is freed from the subjugator, and the governing of one's own land is made a reality. Such is the horizon that Camus was accustomed to, shaping his philosophy around the ontological structure of human experience. Through the lens of Camus' Absurdist projections, I intend to look at the ever-present problem of suicide missions as an offshoot of global terrorism, which is arguably far removed from a narrow conception of '-isms' promulgated by contemporary or mainstream media. At its most fundamental, this essay attempts to reconcile Camus' idea of the Absurd with the intricacies of human sentience and mortality. By linking martyrdom as a prevalent catalyst in acts of terror with an unwavering obsession for meaning, it is my intention to unravel the ethos of sacrificing one's own life as a direct challenge to death. I contend that the legacy supposedly created by the notoriety (whether pejorative or otherwise is not the matter) of 'noble suicide' can be understood as a way of leaving an indelible mark on humankind through ideology, achieved by means of a transcendental permanence after death; a ceasing-to-be of the corporeal body. The fostering of universal empathy and solidarity are possible benefits of observing this phenomenon from the vantage point of lucidity, as espoused by Camus.

First and foremost, it is imperative that we are familiar with the concepts established by Camus in his philosophy. At its core, his thoughts revolve around the Absurd; a notion of the Universe's sheer indifference to the search for meaning, which has driven many to the

abyss of futility.³² Due to the abject failure that meets the seeker in this search, an incipient pessimism begins to take hold of his/her core. For Camus, the root cause of this sense of meaninglessness is “the divorce between human beings and a greater, transcendent reality.”³³ This divorce translates itself as a collision on a metaphysical plane, with the desire in finding meaning on one end and the lack of any apparent meaning on the other. Its impact however, reverberates in the physical world. The question that stems forth from this clash is essentially this: should we consign ourselves to fate, and further resign ourselves to despair? Though this pessimism latches on to the very essence of those in its unfortunate path, its grip is able to be relaxed through a concerted and consistent effort. The starting point of this relaxation is a gradual acceptance of the incomprehensibility of existence.

As with the ticking clock and the flipping calendar, the everyday is shared by everyone the world over. *Jour après jour, tous les jours*. What we make of our days is part of the journey within the Absurd. The tedium nature of the day to day is often seen as the reason why one would want to engage with something beyond it. In a Camusian sense, this ‘something’ is precisely the meaning that we yearn for, yet eludes us all. As much as there is a want of engagement with meaning, a disengagement happens on the surface level of existence. Human beings try as best as possible to move away from the rigidity of the mundane. We are pre-occupied with building a hypothetical future rather than being mentally present in the ‘now’.³⁴ In other terms, there is a mechanical obsession with making certain (by working towards constructed ambitions) what we take as uncertain (the consecutive days after ‘today’). As such, this situation permeates class, gender, race, and other social underpinnings that make up society, albeit in differing contexts pertinent to geographical factors. By extending a Camusian account of death as the most

³² Austin Fowler, *The Major Works of Albert Camus* (New York, United States of America: Monarch Press, 1965), 13.

³³ Ronald D. Srigley, *Albert Camus’ Critique of Modernity* (Columbia, Missouri: University of Missouri Press, 2011), 50.

³⁴ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus (and Other Essays)*, translated by Justin O’ Brien (London, United Kingdom: Hamish Hamilton, 1955), 18.

compelling evidence of the Absurd³⁵, we might be able to come to terms with the reckless bravery ostensibly inherent in martyrs. To revolt against death is to be courageous enough to stare straight into its hollow eyes after accepting the temporality of existence. Whether the meaning we speak of is found through preserving the sanctity of a particular religion or through an act of patriotism i.e., protecting one's own country, the act of martyrdom in this instance conjures a frenzied spectacle on a personal conceptualisation of truth. The reasoning behind such actions will lead us to appreciate Camus' words; "...what is called a reason for living is also an excellent reason for dying."³⁶ In this regard, Camus is aware of the deep-rooted motivation to terminate one's own life (but he surely does not condone it) as all conceptions of truths are mere postulations that is usually derived from culture and religion, implying that there is no innate purpose or *telos* to begin with. However, one will be in a state of error if he/she thinks that life is not precious due to its supposed meaninglessness. This form of thinking is a commitment to a slippery slope, a logical fallacy that Camus intends to move away from. We would do well to remember that actions usually follow some sort of thought or idea that has been combined with intentionality. The dictum of existence preceding essence holds firm here. It is with this notion that the label of 'existentialist' is given to Camus, though he has often refuted the association. On the contrary, because significance eludes us and cannot be reduced to a projection of meaning from us to the world as well as meaning from the world to us, it is what makes life worth living.³⁷ This understanding should always be etched in our minds as the link between martyrdom and the Absurd is made.

An amorphous anxiety fills the lungs of the would-be suicide bomber, and is in this instance that he/she addresses the question of whether life is significant or otherwise. The monotony of custom, habit, and routine are discarded for an eternal projection of awareness, in that one has to die for a greater cause. It is by

³⁵ John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (Oxford University Press, 1960), xii, Introduction.

³⁶ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 11.

³⁷ Fowler, *The Major Works of Albert Camus*, 15.

comprehending this rebellion that we might be able to identify with the martyrs. They plan, decide, and act out of what would normally be deemed an insane act of cowardice, in return for a reward that is not tangible or fixed within the material world. In addition, it is often the case that terrorists have subordinated their personal identity to the collective character of the group that they identify with.³⁸ Given this circumstance, it is understandable that they would go to great lengths towards propagating the ideology which has engulfed their selfhood, akin to active and malignant cancer cells spreading in the body of an unsuspecting host. Their dedication even extends to the point of carrying out suicide missions as a complete submission to what they comprehend as irrefragable logic. Although not suicidal in its intentions, the conspirators of the 1972 Munich Olympics killings (The Black September Organization; *الأسود أيلول منظمة*) managed to gain attention for the liberation of Palestine, which when taken into account, highlights the precarious nature of international politics and its ramifications on the human psyche.³⁹ In addition, the Bali bombings in 2002 and 2005, the London tube attacks (2005), the terror inflicted on Paris (2015), and the mosque shootings in Christchurch (2019), are indicative of the competing interpretations of meaning that stem from the uncertainty of human existence. Such actions are an expression and extension of metaphysical freedom, whereby “a passion to exhaust that which is provided in the present moment”⁴⁰ is allowed by a mind and heart unconstrained by the future. Moreover, by being conscious that the self is the individual’s own end and the only end to which it can aspire,⁴¹ we are able to rationalize acts that are often judged to be irrational by those who are untouched by lucidity.

It is not mistaken to say that martyrdom has consistently been

³⁸ Jerrold M. Post, *The Mind of the Terrorist: The Psychology of Terrorism from the IRA to Al-Qaeda* (New York, United States of America: Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), 8.

³⁹ Simon Reeve, *One Day in September: The Full Story of the 1972 Munich Olympics Massacre and the Israeli Revenge Operation “Wrath of God”* (New York, United States of America: Arcade Publishing, 2011).

⁴⁰ Phillip H. Rhein, *Albert Camus* (New York, United States of America: Twayne Publishers, 1969), 29.

⁴¹ Rhein, *Albert Camus*, 38.

a feature of modern terrorism.⁴² However, it is frustrating to point out that in mainstream media, the framing of acts of terror in general, and suicide attacks in particular, have always revolved around a projection of ‘Us’ and ‘Them’.⁴³ Furthermore, it is often the case that people who engage in suicide attacks are defined in a peculiar way, in that they are portrayed as demented and irrational, frenzied and beyond compromise. There is a modicum of truth to such a construction, but the portrait painted is one that has been tarnished by the brush of blinding arrogance and overzealous presuppositions. With no space for dialogue between opposing sides and a disheartening refusal to stand in the shoes of another, it is almost obligatory for us to use Camus’ philosophy as a framework to move away from the *status quo* to a more lucid state of being. The Manichean mindset thus mentioned (‘either you are with us or against us’) is a proclivity to see the world as being constituted by binaries, which hinders society from embracing the universal nature of Camus’ aphorism; “There is but one truly serious philosophical problem and that is suicide.”⁴⁴ Here, we can see that the notion of suicide is not dealt with from its core, but is only contextualized from its peripheries. As such, new studies on individual terrorists and suicide bombers seek to determine the underlying aspects that compel these individuals to engage in unabashed acts of violence. The justifications include a pathological disposition towards violence, an authoritarian personality, general socialization impediments, an often-deluded hermeneutic concerning religion, revenge for personal suffering, and an overwhelming disdain of other modes of living.⁴⁵ The obvious flaw of this analysis is that the

⁴² Ami Pedahzur, *Root Causes of Suicide Terrorism: The Globalization of Martyrdom* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge, 2006), Preface, xvi.

⁴³ Jürgen Gerhards and Mike S. Schäfer, “International Terrorism, Domestic Coverage? How Terrorist Attacks Are Presented in the News of CNN, Al Jazeera, the BBC, and ARD,” *The International Communication Gazette* 76, no. 1 (February 2014), 5, 11. Accessed June 5, 2016. <http://gaz.sagepub.com/content/76/1/3.full.pdf+html>

⁴⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus*, 11.

⁴⁵ Paul Gill, “A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Suicide Bombing,” *International Journal of Conflict and Violence*, vol. 1, no. 2 (2007), 144. Accessed June 6, 2016. http://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=1030045

considerations are too simplistic, in that it does not attempt to address the issue from the point of the world to the individual, but rather, the individual to the world. In this sense, the person under scrutiny is similar to Meursault, the protagonist in Camus' famous novel, *L'Étranger*, in that the convictions and viewpoints that he/she has is dissimilar to the masses, and therefore, cannot help but feel like a stranger in an unfamiliar world.⁴⁶

The essential core of our individuality is not fashioned from mere opinion and conjecture, nor is it based upon our temperament. The core that we are alluding to here is *a priori*, independent of the aforementioned conditions. The mystics and traditionalists would say that it is ethereal. That discussion however, is not of our current interest. What is of interest is to understand how an understanding of the Absurd impacts the mind, to which we take to be the seat of the intellect. The mind is affected by what it gives attention to. The sense of isolation thus established is further heightened by the impact of technology and mass media on the individual. Through the internet, there is an obvious overload of information made accessible by portable devices. Many are not able to separate falsity and truth-hood since both domains are often intertwined, creating pseudo falsities and pseudo truth-hoods. For the young minds, the bombardment of facts and figures, and of varied claims to truth, can be too much to bear. This is due to the fact that young minds are more susceptible to the dictates of the news, of what is current, of social issues that seem endless. The daily stories on offer often relates to an exaggeration of the Manichean mindset mentioned prior. What can be deduced here is the creation of a society of individuals, as opposed to individuals that make up a society. *We are living in a world with many Meursaults who are forced to pretend to be other than a Meursault.* It is natural for our consciousness to focus on a particular object, a specific moment, or a detailed longing. However, it is impossible for our focus to be at two places at once, as there will always be disregard of other vocations of the mind which remain thereby a secondary presence, in the manner of a backdrop. If this focus shifts and is given a new lease of life by way of mass media, it mutates into

⁴⁶ Albert Camus, *The Outsider*, translated by Stuart Gilbert (United Kingdom: Penguin Books (Hamish Hamilton), 1961).

a fixation. The young minds become ensnared in a battle of wits with itself, and channels that energy externally. This is the very concern that stems from exposure to the cracks and fissures in the world we live in.

The question remains; what are the issues that might arise for the neo-liberal world if we are to conceptualize terrorism in such a way? To be radical (though not for the sake of radicality itself) is often to move away from the norm. It is undeniable that the manufacturing of a distinct ‘Other’ will not be as ubiquitous as it is now, as there will be greater empathy among individuals, societies, and at a larger scale, countries. In addition, if we are to embrace the notion that “hatred and violence are empty things in themselves,”⁴⁷ it is inevitable that our worldview would be modified or reshaped. The assumption is that there would be an amplified appreciation of one another, as well as widespread emphasis on harmony among human beings as we become cognisant of the similarities that bind us and do away with the differences that have divided us for far too long. Camus’ letters to an imaginary German friend indicates the very difficult and intricate nature of having to balance two ideas at once; a form of cognitive dissonance, with pacifist abhorrence towards violence on one hand, and the need to defend the sanctity of France through bloodshed, on the other.⁴⁸ As Camus was quick to point out, this epistemology was what separated the French from the Germans, in that the latter were efficient and ruthless, almost devoid of thinking when obeying orders from its potentates. By truly immersing ourselves within Camus’ philosophy, we begin to doubt the very foundations of society. Previously irrefutable moral doctrines are now scrutinized while once undisputable ecclesiastical explanations questioned with much fervour. If martyrdom/suicide and terrorism are subjected to similar considerations within our neo-liberal reality, humanity would have to answer its harshest and most prevalent critic; itself. The scathing condemnation that ensues is of seeing other people as a means to an end. It would not be a mistake to assert that the manipulation of large segments of society

⁴⁷ Albert Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, translated by Justin O’ Brien (London: Hamish Hamilton, 1961), 6.

⁴⁸ Camus, *Resistance, Rebellion and Death*, 7.

was a common theme in the totalitarian regimes of the 1900s. When understood through Camus' lens, the extensive subjugation of the masses was a moral and intellectual progeny of nihilism.⁴⁹ Moreover, what we see is an interpretation that is detestable, a misappropriation that is dishonest, and above all, an actualisation of the Absurd that is both perverted and repugnant. It would be wise to transition ourselves from this dogmatic slumber to a lucid awakening that sees other people as not being a means to an end, but rather, as an end in themselves. Such a shift should also be expanded to the way we understand global terrorism and its derivatives so as to not remain ensnared by ignorance and moral absolutisms that have become an attribute of mainstream media, and in consequence, a hallmark of the neo-liberal world.

To reiterate, this essay has made clear two philosophical concepts introduced by Camus – Revolt and The Absurd – through an understanding of the intentions and motivations of suicide bombers and its relationship to global terrorism. The metaphysical plane has met, and continues to meet the physical world. Also, I have attempted to point out the link between consciousness of human mortality and the anxiety that follows from being a sentient creature in a meaningless and ultimately, lonely world (this is of course a follow through of Camusian existentialism). An argument against the portrayal of terrorists as irrational has been substantiated by the fact that those who made, and continue to make such claims are bereft of lucidity and in extension, empathy. With this being said, it is imperative that Camus' aphorisms and ideas are taken into consideration. Better still is for such truths to be embraced so as to allow for a more enlightened and sensible humanity to shine forth. In grappling with the intricacies of life, a solidarity of sentience is what we ought to strive for. Admittedly ambiguous, we can perhaps say that the ultimate reason of existing is to devote our lives to living.

⁴⁹ John Cruickshank, *Albert Camus and the Literature of Revolt* (Oxford University Press, 1960), xv-xvi.

TRANSLITERATION TABLE

CONSONANTS

Ar=Arabic, Pr=Persian, OT=Ottoman Turkish, Ur=Urdu

Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	Ar	Pr	OT	UR	
ء	ء	ء	ء	ز	z	z	z	گ	—	g	g	g
ب	b	b	b	ژ	—	—	ʀ	ل	l	l	l	l
پ	—	p	p	ژ	—	zh	j	م	m	m	m	m
ت	t	t	t	س	s	s	s	ن	n	n	n	n
ث	—	—	ṭ	ش	sh	sh	ş	ه	h	h	h ¹	h ¹
ث	th	th	th	ص	ş	ş	ş	و	w	v/u	v	v/u
ج	j	j	c	ض	ḏ	ḏ	ḏ	ی	y	y	y	y
چ	—	ch	çh	ط	ṭ	ṭ	ṭ	ة	-ah	—	—	-a ²
ح	ḥ	ḥ	ḥ	ظ	ẓ	ẓ	ẓ	ال	al ³	—	—	—
خ	kh	kh	kh	ع	‘	‘	‘	—	—	—	—	—
د	d	d	d	غ	gh	gh	ğh	—	—	—	—	—
ڈ	—	—	d	ف	f	f	f	—	—	—	—	—
ذ	dh	dh	dh	ق	q	q	q	—	—	—	—	—
ر	r	r	r	ك	k	k/g	k/ñ	—	—	—	—	—

¹ – when not final

² – at in construct state

³ – (article) al - or l-

VOWELS

	Arabic and Persian	Urdu	Ottoman Turkish
Long	ا	ā	ā
	آ	Ā	—
	و	ū	ū
	ي	ī	ī
Doubled	ي	iy (final form ī)	iy (final form ī)
	و	uww (final form ū)	uvv
	و	uvv (for Persian)	uvv
Diphthongs	و	au or aw	ev
	ی	ai or ay	ey
Short	ا	a	a or e
	ا	u	u or ū
	ا	i	o or ö
	ا	i	i

URDU ASPIRATED SOUNDS

For aspirated sounds not used in Arabic, Persian, and Turkish add h after the letter and underline both the letters e.g. جھ jh گھ gh

For Ottoman Turkish, modern Turkish orthography may be used.

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