PCAS International Journal for Multidisciplinary Research (PCAS IJMR)
ISSN (Online): 3108-2807 Volume 3, Issue 1, Jan-Mar 2026

Towards an Authentic Existence: Albert Camus' *La révolte* and Jean-Paul Sartre's *Mauvaise Foi*

C. Jerin Rachel
Assistant Professor of French
Patrician College of Arts and Science
Chennai

Abstract

Drawing on Blaise Pascal's comment on *deux infinis*, this paper traces the evolution of philosophical thought from René Descartes' certainty "*Je pense donc je suis*" to Gilles Deleuze's critique of the "image of thought." Within this conceptual framework, the study analyses the existential tension between meaning and meaninglessness through a comparative analysis of Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre. The paper investigates Camus' philosophy of the absurd through his concepts of revolt and rebellion, and his assertion that "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" as a form of resistance to existential meaninglessness. In contrast, it examines Sartre's concepts of '*mauvaise foi'* (bad faith) and '*le regard'*, emphasising the moral complications of radical individual freedom with critiques by Alvin Plantinga and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The paper re-evaluates the moral and situational dimensions of Sartrean freedom.

Key Words: Ethical authenticity, Bad faith, Self-deception, Absurdity, Moral freedom, Radical freedom, and Situatedness.

Blaise Pascal, in his *Pensées, "Disproportion de l'homme*," gives an interesting term for 'La pensée,' the thought, as *deux infinis* (double infinities). This paradigm can be used to describe the evolution of French philosophy through quotations from René Descartes and Gilles Deleuze. From their *"Je pense, donc je suis"* – "I think therefore I am" (Part IV) to **"***Une image de la pensée, appelée philosophie, s'est formée historiquement, et elle empêche effectivement les gens de penser"* – "An image of thought called philosophy has been formed historically, and it effectively stops people from thinking" the philosophers reach their *deux infinis* of thinking. This is an existential crisis often discussed and interpreted by most Existential philosophers.

This research paper will analyse the distinctiveness of the fine lines drawn by the existentialist philosophers Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre in the above context. Albert Camus throws in absurd, revolt, and rebellion, while Jean-Paul Sartre barges in the "who is more existential?" door with his ideas of "existence precedes essence," *mauvaise foi* – bad faith, *le regard* - the look. By drawing a connection between Camus' 'one must imagine Sisyphus happy' and Sartre's '*le regard*' and '*mauvaise foi*,' one can deduce the conclusion the paper withholds.

Albert Camus' philosophy often centres on the inherent conflict between humanity's need to find meaning in life and the universe, which serves as a beacon of apparent meaninglessness. It speaks of dealing with the absolute silence from the universe, a complete absence of cosmic expectations. Although he acknowledges the absurdity, he says "one must imagine Sisyphus happy," from his well-known essay "*Le Mythe de Sisyphe*" – "The Myth of Sisyphus," which is a resistance towards the absurd itself. He arrives at a focal point, projecting the ease to view life with less pressure, waiting for life to make sense. The revolt and the rebellion described are both a refusal to accept what is unjust and an affirmation of human worth, rejecting any justification of cruelty or tyranny.

Jean-Paul Sartre, though not an absurdist like Albert Camus, shares a similar moral and atheistic foundation and advances his philosophy of 'radical freedom.' He speaks of freedom as a condemnation because it is inescapable. Not choosing to be free is a choice, he says. '*Le regard*' as described in Sartre's play *Huis Clos* - *No Exit,* is the unease to a person's freedom because of *le regard,* the gaze of society. The *mauvaise foi* translated as bad faith, means self-deception. Albert Camus and Jean-Paul Sartre share a common point of departure in their recognition of existential meaninglessness, expressed through Camus' notion of the "Absurd" and Sartre's formulation that "existence precedes essence."

Both existentialists maintain that meaning arises through a deliberate transformation of one's actions and that an awareness of the absurd makes possible the conscious choice of a way of being. '*La revolte'* is a preference to exist with human dignity and with actions focused on lucidity and fidelity as described by Camus. '*L'engagement,*' which is the complete freedom to become who one is, with choice of actions being personal with no moral limits. These propositions can be justified by the quote, "*L'homme n'est rien d'autre que ce qu'il se fait"- "*Man is nothing else but what he makes of himself," and "*Ce que c'est que l'homme, un être que refuse d'être ce qu'il est*." – "What man is: a being who refuses to be what he is."

Many philosophers question, "Is revolt more ethical than radical freedom?" One such Philosopher Alvin Plantinga, who in *An Existentialist's Ethics* (1958) argues that Sartre's theory of freedom is inconsistent with morality because it denies absolute values. He talks about 'No wrong choices.' Plantinga argued that because Sartre posits that "my choice defines value," it becomes impossible to make a wrong choice, as any action, if chosen, becomes the "right" choice. He further criticises Sartre's support for people whose choice creates value. Sartre says that by choosing something, a person thinks it is good not just for themselves but also for humanity. To Plantinga, Sartre does not do justice to the moral and social construct and argues that it could lead to moral relativism pushed to the extreme. There exists no objective moral basis upon which one can criticise an action as wrong.

Although a contemporary, Maurice Merleau-Ponty, in *The Critique of Situatedness*, argues that Sartre neglected the "situatedness" of human existence. He avers on the 'Neglect of Constraints.' Merleau-Ponty criticises Sartre for failing to acknowledge that freedom is often constrained by external factors, making the "absolute" nature of Sartre's freedom un-situated and, therefore, ethically tenuous. Sartre's concept suggests that freedom is not determined by the actual conditions of one's environment, but is fundamentally unsituated. It risks blaming individuals for things beyond their control. This can lead to moral harshness in blaming victims for their situation.

Both Plantinga's and Ponty's views can be challenged by examining Sartre's concept of 'bad faith,' revealing that his theory of freedom is not morally empty or socially blind. Plantinga's argument that Sartre's idea, "choice creates value," eliminates the possibility of wrong choices and leads to extreme moral relativism. This, however, is a misinterpretation because Sartre does not claim that all choices are equally valid. On the other hand, in *Being and Nothingness,* he introduces 'bad faith' which occurs when an individual denies his or her freedom, or avoids responsibility for their actions. Such choices seem inauthentic and therefore can be termed ethically deficient. From this, it can be deduced that not all choices are right; a choice made in bad faith lacks genuine value; and ethical judgment is based on authenticity and responsibility. This affirms that Sartre retains an ethical evaluation that is 'Authentic' and ethically meaningful. So, contrary to Plantinga, Sartre allows one to criticise actions, not by external moral laws, but by whether they are made honestly and responsibly. Ponty criticises Sartre as "absolute" and detached from real-world constraints. So, against Ponty, Sartre does not ignore real-world constraints.

Perhaps, compared with Sartre, Camus' philosophy of absurdism does not end up being positive with his "One must imagine Sisyphus happy." In Camus' philosophy, Sisyphus's happiness is grounded in truth and awareness of his life's situation and not in denial of it. He defends him as being aware of the futility. Camus' Sisyphus seems to take comfort in illusion. His happiness is the result of a conscious acceptance of the absurd condition, of rolling the massive boulder uphill, only for it to roll back down each time he neared the top. This endless cycle symbolised his punishment for defying the gods. Over the years, this myth became a powerful symbol of human struggle, and Camus represented Sisyphus as a figure of human endurance and confrontation with meaninglessness. His happiness lies in his conscious acceptance of his absurd condition and defiant inner revolt against it, which grants him a sense of freedom. It can therefore be stated that Sisyphus is not a victim of '*mauvaise foi,'* in 'bad faith' according to Camus. For Sartre, it meant denying one's freedom or reality, a self-deception, pretending something as meaningful when it is not.

Meursault in Camus' *The Stranger* seemed to push the rock endlessly like Sisyphus, to achieve his sense of indifference to society. He ends up in a prison of his own mind to dodge feeling anything close to irrational or subjective. Meursault does not exhibit the expected grief at his mother's funeral or excitement about his relationship with Marie. He is more concerned with the physical sensations of the present moment than with emotional attachments or plans. Meursault's way of living could be argued as "unaffected" by the failed attempts of the societal catalysts to provide perturbation to his individual mind. This attempt was clearly successful and embodied in Sartre's characters, Ines, Estelle, and Joseph Garcin, in his play *Huis Clos*.

The ideology of Camus' Sisyphus can be identified in the modern human condition and its fixation on the culturally prescribed idea of a 'happy life.' Human existence is structured around a sequence of so-called "milestone achievements" of birth, formal education, professional jobs, high pay, marriage, and parenthood. Society normalises and reinforces this cyclical pattern in which individual aspirations are listed under expectations and responsibilities. A mechanical routine to fulfil the requirements becomes the order of living. Defying it results in being categorised as a revolt against freedom of existence. The repetitive and seemingly futile nature of human existence, perpetuated by generations, reflects Camus' myth of Sisyphus and his assertion "one must imagine Sisyphus happy." Such a position invites a reconsideration in human thought. It raises the question of whether the imposition of happiness amidst absurd living obscures

resistance, revolt, and refusal within the human condition.

If Sisyphus says "I'm happy," he would not be in rebellion; instead, he would take his acceptance to be soothing. Rebelling against the '*mauvaise foi*' could lead to a passionate life which benefits *soi-meme*, oneself, and a mindful life which aids *Les autres*, the society, for an ethical way of living. The pessimistic idea of accepting the absurd, an absurd where there is a fundamental harmony between finding a purpose and the universe providing a plate full of ironies, apparent meaninglessness provided in the Camusian sense, can bring an illusion of peace. But it is vital to adopt a mindful pessimism that does not destroy oneself and one's alter ego.

In his book *Being and Nothingness,* Sartre clearly underlines the importance of the choices the self holds and the influence of those in society. One cannot escape the consequences of his actions, for any attempt to do so would mean to act in bad faith or self-deception. It would make his actions hold no value and thus lose authenticity in his being. While Camus advocates a conscious acceptance of life's repetitive and meaningless structures, Sartre's existentialism offers a more dynamic framework. In a social context where life appears predetermined by institutional expectations, Camus' notion of "imagining Sisyphus happy" may risk normalising passivity under the guise of philosophical resilience. Sartre, by contrast, argues that human beings are always capable of transcending given conditions and are responsible for reshaping their existence. This appropriates what Viktor E. Frankl writes in *Man's Search for Meaning:*

> And there were always choices to make. Every day, every hour, offered the opportunity to make a decision, a decision which determined whether you would or would not submit to those powers which threatened to rob you of your very self, your inner freedom; which determined whether or not you would become the plaything of circumstance, renouncing freedom and dignity to become molded into the form of the typical inmate. (75)

To conclude, the Sartrean concept is better for living. It conforms to the notion that, even within constraints, one is free in how one responds. Each one is responsible for the meaning one gives to situations in life. 'Bad faith' becomes crucial here. One should not blame everything on circumstances, as this allows individuals to evade responsibility and thereby deny their radical freedom. Denying constraints is a denial of reality. One is shaped by circumstances, but not controlled by them. Authentic existence lies in balancing both, recognising limits and accepting responsibility. Sartre does not ignore the situation; he warns against using it as an excuse. The

analysis proves that freedom is not morally empty, not all choices are justified, and individuals are accountable both to themselves and, implicitly, to humanity. Sartre offers an ethics grounded in authenticity, responsibility, and conscious choice and not in external rules. Sartre ultimately calls for being human in the most authentic way possible without encroaching upon others.

Works Cited

Deleuze, Gilles and Parnet, Claire. *Dialogues II*. Translated by Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam, Columbia University Press, 2007.

Descartes René. *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting the Reason, and Seeking Truth in the Sciences*. 1637.

Frankl E. Viktor. *Man's Search For Meaning*. Penguin Random House, 2008.

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy. "Gilles Deleuze." Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy, https://iep.utm.edu/gilles-deleuze/

Maurice Merleau-Ponty. "Is Sartre's Notion of Radical Freedom Coherent?" *Academia.edu*, https://www.academia.edu/16740142/Is_Sartres_Notion_of_Radical_Freedom_coherent

Pascal, Blaise. *Pensées*. Translated by A. J. Krailsheimer, Penguin Classics, 1995.

Plantinga, Alvin. "Jean-Paul Sartre." *PhilArchive*, https://philarchive.org/archive/AKIJSE

Sartre, Jean-Paul. *Being and Nothingness*. Translated by Hazel E. Barnes, Washington Square Press, 1992.

---. *Existentialism Is a Humanism*. Translated by Carol Macomber, Yale University Press, 2007.