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Life can often confront us with absurdity in its plentiful of options to make, and paths to take. Yet all these “mini-absurdities”, encountered by individuals in specific moments of their lives, are all encapsulated in the mega absurdity; existence itself. While it takes an apparent “co-incidence” to encounter a “situational absurdity” life’s omnipresent absurdity is always there lurking and awaiting to amaze us, and often also to frustrate us. While absurd occurrences are coincidental, facing life’s grand absurdity is somewhat of a choice, and those who choose it are often called philosophers. In the following essay, Hannes Wendler takes us on a philosophical time journey to meet Camus asking his question of questions and electing to carry on with this life despite all its absurdity and existential angst. Hannes managed to convince me of the general “cup of coffee “ choice, albeit I am going for a green ice tea lemonade in this summerly weather.

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A letter from a philosopher

Hannes Wendler

Should I Kill Myself or Have a Cup of Coffee?

Camus Philosophy of the Absurd and a Threefold Argument for Having a Cup of Coffee.

„There is only one really serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide“ (MS, 3). The answer to this problem entails all further problems, insofar one needs to be alive to formulate a philosophical problem. Why pose the question of suicide anyway? Following Camus, it is because life is absurd and suicide tempts us as a natural response to the *conditio humana*. The notion of absurdity is concerned with fundamental, existential frustrations: the inevitability of death, the meaninglessness of life and the absence of an afterlife. Thus, Camus identifies the notion of absurdity with the feeling elicited by mankind’s perpetuated struggle to go beyond the immanence of existence in the face of a silent universe. Man can either end his life or continue in its triviality. Along these lines one begins to understand the

significance of the question: 'Should I kill myself or have a cup of coffee?' Regarding this very question, I will give a threefold argument against suicide and for life, or, as I may say, for having a cup of coffee.

(I) *God is dead and yet, life is beautiful.* Besides the meaninglessness of life Camus takes the absence of an afterlife as a self-evident fact which can be asserted rather than be argued for. Still, man inherently wishes to escape pure immanence and seeks out religion, ideology and philosophy as refuge. Giving in to this tendency can be framed as choosing illusions rather than confronting life as it is. And dangerous illusions these are, for they minimize life on earth and strip it down to nothing more than a preparation for an afterlife, which will never come. Hence, by confronting that 'god is dead' our life on earth is radically gentrified and accepted as all there is. Intensely embracing the present, enjoying sensual experiences and learning how to live life is enough to fill a man's heart. Therefore, one neither has to give up oneself nor mask one's truths. Embracing life, one is at leisure to delightfully take a first sip of a cup of coffee.

(II) *Life is meaningless and yet, it is mine.* Camus takes a rather Wittgensteinian approach when it comes to the intelligibility of the world, asserting, "This world in itself is not reasonable, that is all that can be said" (MS, 21). Human intelligence does not suffice to overcome the mysteries and paradoxa of existence and Camus' position can be taken as one that rationally tries to delimit rationality itself. Consequently, he uses metaphor and allegory instead of argument to *show* what cannot be rationally *said* about the world. Sisyphus, for example, embodies what can be called absurd heroism: fully aware of the frailty of his existence, he continues his nonsensical task without resignation. "One must imagine Sisyphus happy" (MS, 123), Camus says, because his fate belongs to him and him alone. Also, he is strong enough to face it without illusion. The same goes for Meursault, who does not wish for salvation but for a big crowd at his execution, so he does not have to feel alone (S, 140). The common theme of those stories is the preference for an unreconciled death, which must come against their will. Camus advises for a radical non-resolution of the tensions of human existence – so there should be enough time to dwell over some coffee.

(III) *Suicide is an option and yet, I can live.* I take Camus notion of absurdity to be of pragma-emotional character, i.e. an (atmospheric) feeling that manifests in ways of acting. For this reason, one cannot really 'argue' for or against the meaninglessness of life, the absence of

an afterlife and whether to commit suicide. A proper argument rests on propositions as premises from which some conclusion is inferred in a truth-conservative manner. On my account, when Camus states “The world is beautiful, and outside there is no salvation” (N, 103), he actually utters pseudo-propositions. That is, he gives a way of experiencing life and acting in it a propositional form. Other examples would be: “There are physical objects” (OC, 36) or “Cats do not grow on trees” (OC, 282). Such pseudo-propositions delimit what can and cannot meaningfully be said and done (TLP, 6.124), but originally, they refer to a way of acting. For Camus, believing that or acting like ‘there was a god’ and ‘there were no physical objects’ are both equally illusionary and therefore nonsensical. So, what does this have to do with suicide at all? It is precisely the pragma-emotional character of an Sisyphusian ‘Anyways!’, which *shows* itself in writing a newsletter, giving a TEDx talk or drinking a cup of coffee. Thus, I am *aware* that I could kill myself, *but* I would rather drink a cup of coffee *anyways*.

Literature

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Unquoted:

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