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Existentialism can be a challenging philosophy to embrace, especially for those who wish to see themselves as valuable in the eyes of their peers. However, the existentialist approaches life as independent endeavors and rejects reliance upon others. Kafka warns against letting oneself become too reliant on others who ultimately will reject anyone other than themselves, and Camus explores the liberating nature of not letting oneself be reliant on outside forces. Gillon suggests that their “common background of misery and alienation” leaves them with a profound capacity for “introspection” that leaves them capable of observing the “absurdity of [man’s] condition” (3). Kafka and Camus both use this capacity to explore what it truly means to be alone, and their explorations come to the same conclusion. If one is accepting of their fate and willing to act within it, they will have the truest control over themselves.

Through the unifying factor which Gillon proposes, a reader of Kafka and Camus can witness the profoundly intense loneliness that led the two men to their realizations. The protagonist in each work presented to the class was objectively lonely. From Sisyphus to Samsa, all of them were immensely lonely individuals, and it is from their loneliness that they derived their suffering or triumph. Kafka’s Doctor is a man alone to himself despite the presence of the maid, only able to finally realize this one chance at connection after it is already lost (“A Country Doctor” 61). In “The Myth of Sisyphus”, part of his punishment and existential redemption is that he must perform his task alone, and in that solitary space he is ultimately able to become one with the stone (377-378). In a similar fashion, both Meursault and Samsa

live the lives of isolated men. Meursault lived alone, not really interested in making stronger ties with other individuals with only a slight exception in Marie, and even that was for the most part sexual for him ("The Stranger" 20-21). Meanwhile, Samsa may have wanted a closer relationship with his family, but his actions and job as a travelling salesman were an active deterrent to him achieving any degree of closeness, thus leaving him utterly to his loneliness ("The Metamorphosis" 7). The solitary nature of these protagonists therefore exhibits the closeness of Kafka's and Camus's works and ideals. Through this binding quality then, it is apparent that the loneliness that an individual must confront is the strongest base from which they can construct their own fate.

Though the realization of loneliness as a solid base for self-control of one's own fate is a good starting point, one must then come to acknowledge and accept that loneliness to be able to make full use of it or face the destruction of that which one holds dear. Kafka is focused on the dangers of staring down this fact and blinking. In "A Country Doctor", he presents his readers with a surreal loss of control. The Doctor seems incapable of turning away people despite the raging of the storm and the risk of everything that he might have considered dear (60-61). Because of this surrendering of control, he is swept away by the horses, stripped of his clothes, ridiculed, shamed, and ultimately left to flee endlessly into the night (61-65). This terrifying and fruitless endeavor is Kafka's attempt to show the reader the loss that can happen beyond simply oneself if a person were to abandon all control for the sake of others. This is further emphasized in his work "The Metamorphosis", in which the protagonist, Gregor Samsa, awakens to find himself transformed into a man-sized bug (7). This madness is one that Samsa doesn't want to inconvenience his family or employer with, and so does nothing beyond

attempting to get back to the daily routine (7-18). By not advocating for a change, he is once again becoming a non-actor in his own life, much like the Doctor before him. He was unable to grasp the full scale of the situation in which he had been placed because he was unwilling to take a hard look at the severity of his own situation. Through this inaction, Samsa's emotionally distant family becomes ever more so, until the point where his previously caring sister comes to the realization that there is nothing to be done, so long as Samsa was to wallow in his isolation and resignation (27-29). These two fables come with the warning that loneliness and isolation need to not be paired with inaction. The resignation of the self to the will of others is the surest way to deny oneself the capacity to master one's fate, and in so doing deny oneself life.

However, if witnessing one's loneliness and then not acting on that loneliness is a certain way to Kafka's personal doom, then taking control of the self with acceptance of one's fate is the surest way to live life completely. Whereas Kafka sought to warn against inaction, Camus provides a degree of clarity to how liberating it can be to accept fate and act within and even around it. The most literal example of this comes from his "The Myth of Sisyphus" wherein he engages with this concept of personal liberation. Sisyphus is in an eternal punishment, having to forever roll a boulder up the same hill before the boulder rolls back down to the base from whence it came (375-376). However, Camus posits that because this punishment is eternal with no reprieve and that Sisyphus is an incredibly wise man, there is no punishment at all. By rolling the boulder eternally, he becomes one with the task and can experience the full human experience within the bounds of this fate ("The Myth of Sisyphus" 376-378). In a similar fashion, Camus tells the story of Meursault and his adaptability to any fate. Meursault describes himself as a man who could get used to anything because the mind of a man is truly his realm,

and “a man who had lived only one day could live a hundred years in prison” (“The Stranger” 78-79). He is therefore a man truly unto himself, and he is proven time and again capable of acting and accepting the results of all his actions. In the conclusion of “The Stranger”, Meursault accepted the refusal of his appeal for life and is ready to die for the crime he knows he committed, and in doing so is taking charge of the last day of his life, rather than leaving it up to a false hope (114). In fact, in a show of control over his fate, he throws out the priest who would try to disturb his chosen peace with prayer and hope (120-122). By having Meursault and Sisyphus free themselves from their punishments through acceptance and action, Camus demonstrates for his readers the true liberation of the mind that is at the root of existentialism.

Through the exploration of what it means to be human, and the loneliness involved within that endeavor, Kafka and Camus demonstrate the core tenants of what it means to live life through an existentialist lens. By witnessing one’s own loneliness, a person takes the first step. Then by acting within the capacity of that solitary position while avoiding being moved by others, one can truly gain mastery over whatever their fate may be.

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