

Research paper

Fidelity to Existence: An Examination of Camus' *The Stranger* through Heideggerian Philosophy

Mohammad Exir

Department of English, Bu.C., Islamic Azad University, Bushehr, Iran

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*corresponding author: mohammad.exir@iau.ac.ir

Abstract

This paper examines the existential themes in Albert Camus' *The Stranger* through Martin Heidegger's philosophy, focusing on concepts such as *Being*, *authenticity*, and *Being-toward-death* from *Being and Time*. It explores how Meursault, the protagonist, challenges societal norms, reflecting Heidegger's notion of authenticity while confronting the absurd. By contrasting Heidegger's existential ontology with Camus' absurdism, the study highlights their convergences and divergences. Heidegger emphasizes authenticity as acknowledging one's finitude, while Camus promotes rebellion against life's absurdity as a path to meaning. The paper explores Heidegger's ideas of thrownness, anxiety, and the "They," showing their resonance with Meursault's alienation. Meursault's ultimate confrontation with death becomes a defining moment, reflecting both Heideggerian authenticity and Camusian acceptance of absurdity. This synthesis provides insights into their philosophical intersections, particularly regarding responses to mortality and societal conformity. While both Camus and Heidegger critique inauthenticity, their approaches to meaning diverge: Heidegger seeks ontological grounding, while Camus focuses on existential defiance. By addressing these complexities, the paper offers a nuanced understanding of existentialism and its application to literature, contributing to broader discussions on Being, freedom, and the human condition.

Keywords: Being; Camus; Existentialism; Heidegger; The Stranger

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Introduction

Nietzsche and Kierkegaard assert that nihilism represents a profound loss of meaning and direction, culminating in a state devoid of any values. Heidegger shares a similar perspective on nihilism. Philipse notes that Heidegger engaged with Nietzsche's analysis of the modern age, which he characterized as marked by the emergence of nihilism. Heidegger supported Nietzsche's interpretation of nihilism as a process that leads to the devaluation of values, resulting in a profound disintegration of human existence (2000, 251). According to these philosophers, nihilism signifies a condition in which values cease to exist, leading to a disarray in our lives. In the preface to *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus asserts that it is feasible to discover pathways to transcend nihilism, stating, "In all the books I have written since, I have attempted to pursue this direction" (Camus, 1991, p. v).

While some critics categorize Camus as an Existentialist, he himself rejected and critiqued the philosophy. Although he maintained a close friendship with Sartre, their relationship was marked by disagreements and conflicts regarding Existentialism. Doubrovsky observes that:

Both writers have often been associated as the main co-proponents of "existentialism" in France. Yet apart from the fact that Camus himself rejected the appellation and attacked existentialism as a philosophy, it would be a complete mistake, in our opinion, to believe that Sartre and Camus are bound together by a *doctrine*. (Doubrovsky, 1960, p. 85)

Heidegger's concept of *Being, Authenticity, and Being-toward-Death*

Martin Heidegger's philosophical framework, articulated in *Being and Time* (1927), centers on the notion of "Being" (Dasein), which he characterizes as the fundamental nature of human existence. Dasein encapsulates the human ability to contemplate existence and its significance. Heidegger posits that a true comprehension of Being necessitates an awareness of its temporal and

limited characteristics, highlighting that human life is intrinsically influenced by its connection to time and the inevitability of death (Heidegger, 1962, p. 47).

Heidegger's concept of Dasein

Heidegger introduces the concept of Dasein, which serves as a cornerstone of his philosophy, asserting that all philosophical inquiry begins with this idea. He articulates the term as follows: “We therefore say: the Being of humanity is, in the strict sense of the word, ‘Being-here’ (‘Dasein’)” (Heidegger, 2000, p. 219). Heidegger perceives Dasein as an intrinsic and unblemished entity, yet he contends that it must validate its existence. Dasein must reveal itself to affirm its being, seeking various avenues for expression. He posits that many of our actions stem from Dasein's quest for self-expression. Our way of life, behaviors, and all our activities—whether falling in love, watching television, listening to music, or assisting others—are driven by Dasein. These endeavors aim to ascribe meaning to our inherent nothingness. Consequently, all our actions can be deemed artificial and, in Heidegger's framework, inauthentic. While Dasein is authentic in its essence, this authenticity emerges only prior to its self-expression.

Heidegger posits that human beings are inherently thrown into the world, leading to an inescapable state of inauthenticity. This condition of being thrown results in a predetermined fate for our Dasein, which becomes surrounded by various subjects that seek to impart meaning to it. In this state of thrownness, individuals find themselves enveloped by the influence of the "They." Heidegger articulates that "everyone is the other and no one is himself. The 'they', which supplies the answer to the question of the 'who' of everyday Dasein, is the 'nobody' to whom every Dasein has already surrendered itself in Being-among-one-another" (cited in Mulhall 2005, p. 68). He contends that the "They" consists of individuals who compel us to conform. Their essence is

inauthentic, as they too engage in imitation. The "They" submits to societal norms, standards, and accepted behaviors to derive meaning. Ultimately, the "They" is a construct that does not truly exist, yet humans are inevitably drawn into the dynamics of the "They" and the act of imitation.

Heidegger's concept of *Authenticity*

Authenticity, a pivotal concept in Heidegger's philosophy, pertains to the pursuit of one's genuine self instead of yielding to societal expectations. He examines the impact of the "They" (Das Man)—the social framework that pressures individuals to conform to established roles, thereby stifling their uniqueness. Authenticity is realized when individuals embrace their existence and acknowledge their duty to mold their own lives, liberated from societal distractions (Heidegger, 1962, p. 220).

The concept of *Being-toward-death* is central to Heidegger's examination of human finitude. He differentiates death from a mere biological conclusion, presenting it instead as an existential reality that highlights the limited nature of human existence. Heidegger posits that death represents "the possibility of the impossibility of existence," urging individuals to acknowledge their mortality (Heidegger, 1962, p. 294). This acknowledgment fosters authentic living, compelling individuals to make choices that resonate with their true selves. In contrast, evading this awareness results in inauthenticity, as one becomes ensnared in trivial routines (Frede, 1996, p. 58).

Heidegger's investigation into Being, authenticity, and Being-toward-death prompts individuals to confront their mortality and accept the inherent fragility of life. By embracing this reality, one can rise above societal distractions, live with authenticity, and develop a more profound understanding of oneself.

Heidegger's concept of *Anxiety*

Anxiety is another concept referenced by Heidegger. He describes it as a state in which individuals experience a sense of threat, fear, and foreboding. Although this definition may appear ambiguous, its significance is rooted in this very ambiguity and lack of foundation. Stephen Mulhall asserts that:

Anxiety is often confused with fear. Both are responses to the world as unnerving, hostile or threatening, but, where as fear is a response to something specific *in* the world(a gun, an animal, a gesture), anxiety is in this sense objectless. (Mulhall, 2005, p. 111)

The anxious, inauthentic individual, according to Heidegger, becomes ensnared in the realms of everydayness and forgetfulness, which are significant themes in his philosophical discourse. The concept of the "They" constructs a framework of everydayness that individuals inhabit. Heidegger posits that our existence is situated within this everydayness; moreover, it is within this context that being experiences a sense of fulfillment, as desires are satiated. Consequently, the essence of being is overlooked, leading to a state of forgetfulness. Dorothea Frede asserts that:

There is the forgetfulness of our everyday understanding, which does not even try to gain any authentic comprehension but takes over the ready-made interpretations that it finds in its environment, the explanations and evaluations of one's own society and time. (Frede, 1996, p. 57)

This condition ensures our contentment throughout our lives. The individual perceives itself as alive; however, it is, in fact, devoid of authenticity. In this context, being "dead" signifies a lack of genuineness, filled instead with imitation. The essence of being is too pristine to be tainted by imitation, and if it is, it signifies a decline for humanity.

At first glance, the inquiry may appear trivial, as there are notable parallels between the narrative elements and the philosophical ideas of Heidegger. For example, the concepts of temporality and time, which are central to Heidegger's seminal work, *Being and Time*, resonate

with Meursault's preoccupations in the novel. Longstaffe asserts that "Meursault's greatest problem is that of making sense of *time*" (Longstaffe, 1990, p. 63). However, how does Meursault respond to the concept of time? What indications of anxiety are present in his existence? Does he perceive time in a manner akin to Heidegger? Is he genuinely inclined to become entangled in the mundanity of life? If that is the case, what motivates his act of killing the Arab? Furthermore, what are his societal roles? Is he evading responsibility, or does he simply wish to embrace his true self? Is he committed to remaining faithful to the truth?

Review of the literature

Nihilism

Nihilism is frequently understood as the denial of intrinsic meaning in existence, serving as a significant thematic link between Albert Camus and Martin Heidegger. Heidegger explores Friedrich Nietzsche's concept of nihilism, characterizing it as a phenomenon that emerges from the erosion of values in contemporary society (Philipse, 1998, p. 251). Camus acknowledges the influence of nihilism in his writings but underscores the possibility of overcoming this emptiness. In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus expresses his determination to confront nihilism, positing that the absurdity of life can provoke defiance against hopelessness (Camus, 1991, p. v). Despite their differing approaches, both Heidegger and Camus concur on the necessity of confronting nihilism as a fundamental existential issue.

Authenticity and the absurd

The concept of authenticity is a central theme in Heidegger's philosophy, representing a way of being in which individuals acknowledge and pursue their distinct potential instead of yielding

to societal pressures. Heidegger critiques the "They" (Das Man) as a mechanism that perpetuates inauthentic existence through conformity (Heidegger, 1962, p. 220). Similarly, Camus' absurdism resonates with this critique by emphasizing how societal conventions often impose superficial meanings that obscure the individual's connection to the absurd. In *The Stranger*, Meursault's dismissal of traditional values exemplifies a quest for authenticity, achieved not through active defiance but rather through a sense of indifference (Camus, 1946, p. 11).

Dasein and Thrownness

Heidegger's notion of Dasein, or "Being-there," encapsulates the human ability to contemplate existence. He presents the concept of thrownness, which describes the condition in which individuals find themselves embedded in an already established world without the power of choice (Heidegger, 1962, p. 174). This situation imposes certain constraints while simultaneously encouraging individuals to authentically shape their own existence. The character Meursault in *The Stranger* illustrates this concept of thrownness, as his apathetic attitude reveals his struggle with the absence of intrinsic meaning in his life (Camus, 1946, p. 41).

Being-toward-Death

Heidegger's concept of Being-toward-death underscores the human engagement with mortality as a means to achieve authentic existence. In contrast to fear, which is aimed at particular entities, Heideggerian anxiety (Angst) emerges from the recognition of death as the ultimate potentiality of life (Mulhall, 2005, p. 111). Meursault's acknowledgment of his impending death in *The Stranger* reflects this idea, as he discovers a sense of freedom in accepting the absurd and rejecting

the false promises of immortality propagated by religious and societal conventions (Camus, 1946, p. 79).

Discussion

The notion of anxiety

Indeed, it influences the overall ambiance of the narrative, and Mersault embodies this sentiment as he recounts his experiences. At one point in the story, Mersault visits Raymond to assist him in composing a letter. Following their farewell, Mersault continues to narrate the events:

After closing the door behind me I lingered for some moments on the landing. The whole building was as quiet as the grave, a dank, dark smell rising from the well hole of the stairs. I could hear nothing but the blood throbbing in my ears, and for a while I stood still, listening to it. Then the dog began to moan in old Salamano's room, and through the sleep-bound house the little plaintive sound rose slowly, like a flower growing out of the silence and the darkness. (Camus, 1946, p. 26)

An additional illustration clarifies the concept. Following the funeral, Meursault finds himself at home during the night. In this segment, the manifestations of genuine anxiety become evident in a distinctly Heideggerian manner. Meursault states:

As I was coming back, after shutting the window, I glanced at the mirror and saw reflected in it a corner of my table with my spirit lamp and some bits of bread beside it. It occurred to me that somehow I'd got through another Sunday, that Mother now was buried, and tomorrow I'd be going back to work as usual. Really, nothing in my life had changed. (Camus, 1946, p. 8)

The precision of the concept may not be entirely evident; however, these emotions closely resemble what Heidegger refers to as anxiety. Furthermore, the ambiguity associated with Heideggerian anxiety is reflected in the novel, manifesting as a persistent sensation within the human psyche that, unlike fear, lacks a specific target.

Mersault's *Thrownness* into society

When Heidegger refers to thrownness, he denotes a condition that compels individuals to lead a life devoid of alternatives. This state of thrownness instills a sense of unease regarding meaning, existence, and mortality. It embodies the existential angst experienced by Meursault, despite his apparent indifference. Meursault confronts this feeling of thrownness as he navigates his interactions within society and among those around him. Many of his actions lack a specific purpose, intention, or rational basis. In essence, he finds himself thrust into the world without any premeditated desire to harm the Arab or to engage in an attack.

Meursault articulates the circumstances as follows:

I waited. The heat was beginning to scorch my cheeks; beads of sweat were gathering in my eyebrows. It was just the same sort of heat as at my mother's funeral, and I had the same disagreeable sensations—especially in my forehead, where all the veins seemed to be bursting through the skin. I couldn't stand it any longer, and took another step forward. (Camus, 1946, p. 41)

There is no justification for him to shoot the Arab five times. Undoubtedly, there exists a more profound reason beyond the oppressive heat, the relentless sunlight, and the perspiration on his brow, which he himself acknowledges. Heidegger's concept of thrownness may serve as a plausible explanation for Meursault's actions within the narrative. Meursault appears to lack agency in his existence, resembling a puppet manipulated by the forces of fate, though this comparison is not entirely accurate. Social and natural elements intertwine and influence one another, lacking any clear hierarchy or distinction. The social realm is merely a facet of the natural world. There exists a singular, cohesive present, where the realm of routine is entirely natural and unavoidable for him. Furthermore, when Meursault is interrogated in the magistrate's office, he struggles to provide answers. This may stem from the ambiguity of his responses or the tenuous reasoning he possesses. He has committed an act, yet he remains unaware of the underlying

motivation. We approach a deeper understanding when he reveals his conversation with the examining magistrate:

“Why did you fire five consecutive shots?” I thought for a bit; then explained that they weren’t quite consecutive. I fired one at first, and the other four after a short interval. “Why did you pause between the first and second shot?” I seemed to see it hovering again before my eyes, the red glow of the beach, and to feel that fiery breath on my cheeks—and, this time, I made no answer. (Camus, 1946, p. 46)

Meursault and obeying the “They”

When Heidegger refers to the term "they," he is alluding to the individuals in our environment who influence our behaviors, actions, and social conduct. These individuals serve as models to emulate, authorities to whom we submit, and ideals to revere. The concept of "they" is essential for our existence. In this context, authenticity is compromised, as individuals adopt a mode of behavior predetermined by those around them. Consequently, the "they" create a network in which everyone is susceptible to entrapment.

A thorough examination of Meursault's personality, traits, and conduct reveals that he is distinctly different from those around him. He possesses a unique way of living, a specific attitude, and a particular approach to societal norms. This individuality is evident in various circumstances, including his mother's passing, his relationship with Marie, and his perspective on work. He is unlike anyone else; he follows no one and his concerns diverge significantly from those of others or the collective "they." At the funeral, the grieving women surround him, anticipating that he will mourn alongside them, yet he remains indifferent. He is acutely aware of their judgments regarding him, as he articulates:

On sitting down, they looked at me, and wagged their heads awkwardly, their lips sucked in between their toothless gums. I couldn’t decide if they were greeting me and trying to say something, or if it was due to some infirmity of age. I inclined to think that they were greeting me, after their fashion, but it had a queer effect, seeing all those old fellows

grouped round the keeper, solemnly eyeing me and dandling their heads from side to side. For a moment I had an absurd impression that they had come to sit in judgment on me. (Camus, 1946, p. 11)

His conduct in this scenario does not align with Heidegger's notion of the "they" and, in fact, stands in opposition to it. Regardless of external opinions, he acts according to his immediate feelings. A Heideggerian interpretation of Meursault in this context would suggest that he should express grief and sorrow like others, or the "they," in order to appease societal expectations. Meursault remains an outsider to what are generally regarded as conventional social values and norms. He is also alienated from the "they" who serve as societal evaluators. During his trial, his divergence from typical individuals is once again highlighted. He is aware that he could face execution by guillotine, yet he remains indifferent. He illustrates the moment when he converses with a policeman, prior to the judge's presence in the courtroom, as follows:

One of my policemen told me the judges hadn't arrived yet, and offered me a cigarette, which I declined. After a bit he asked me if I was feeling nervous. I said, "No," and that the prospect of witnessing a trial rather interested me; I'd never had occasion to attend one before. (Camus, 1946, p. 55)

This moment, rather than evoking interest in the court and its ambiance, must represent a time of obscurity, melancholy, and despondency for him. Generally, one would expect to feel anxious and appear terrified prior to a trial. However, Meursault's situation is distinct, as he has liberated himself from all conventional expectations.

Authenticity of Meursault's behavior

Authenticity represents a state in which an individual is closest to their true essence. It signifies that one acts in the most sincere manner possible. Heidegger posits that authenticity is characterized by purity, free from any constraints or dependencies. Furthermore, an authentic

individual is indifferent to notions of good and evil, right and wrong, instead acting in accordance with their immediate feelings and sense of existence. Consequently, no external factors can obstruct the process of decision-making or behavior. In the novel, Meursault's choice to kill the Arab exemplifies one of the most authentic actions, as there is no inherent rationale or justification for his act; he kills the Arab instinctively, as if performing a simple and natural task. For example, he shows indifference to Sunday as a holiday, contrasting sharply with the perspectives of other clerks or workers. An examination of one of his Sundays illustrates this point. He explicitly states that:

When I woke up, Marie had gone. She'd told me her aunt expected her first thing in the morning. I remembered it was a Sunday, and that put me off; I've never cared for Sundays. So I turned my head and lazily sniffed the smell of brine that Marie's head had left on the pillow. I slept until ten. After that I stayed in bed until noon, smoking cigarettes. I decided not to lunch at Céleste's restaurant as I usually did... (Camus, 1946, p. 18)

Authenticity for Meursault may stem from his inherent thrownness into existence. As previously noted, he finds himself ensnared within a world governed by routine. Nevertheless, even within this confinement, an individual like Meursault can possess sovereignty, autonomy, and independence—qualities that signify authenticity. He navigates his life despite the numerous challenges he encounters. He acts in accordance with his true essence, even in the face of unavoidable circumstances. Meursault illustrates that true freedom lies in one's concern for their own existence, which he expresses by rejecting the influences of his environment.

In a different context, prior to the commencement of the funeral, Meursault observes those around him with a keen eye, highlighting his growing detachment from them. This serves as evidence of his status as an outsider, as he remains disconnected from the customs and lifestyles of others. While those around him conform to societal norms, he stands apart in his authenticity, having not confined himself within the conventional cycles of life:

The old people, Mother's friends, were coming in. I counted ten in all, gliding almost soundlessly through the bleak white glare. None of the chairs creaked when they sat down. Never in my life had I seen anyone so clearly as I saw these people; not a detail of their clothes or features escaped me. And yet I couldn't hear them, and it was hard to believe they really existed. (Camus, 1946, p. 11)

The study of Dasein in *The Stranger*

Dasein denotes the existence of a human being and can be interpreted as being-there. It manifests through various pathways that connect it to concrete possibilities such as identity, responsibilities, and life roles. Although Dasein is fundamentally an abstract concept, it remains hidden until it endeavors to reveal itself through these avenues. The inquiry into being, regarded as a fundamental question, is posed by humanity, particularly by Dasein, which relentlessly seeks its own realization.

Meursault, as an individual, searches for his existence within the world, with his Dasein striving to find a means of expression. In this struggle, the more his Dasein longs to emerge, the more he must explore new avenues. The events that transpire in Meursault's life represent the methods through which his Dasein attempts to assert itself. His Dasein is accountable for all occurrences in his life, including his relationships, employment, and conduct. Meursault acts in the most authentic manner possible, living unencumbered and liberated from the various constraints that bind others. However, his Dasein must assert itself at all costs. Meursault's Dasein manifests itself in various ways throughout the narrative. Many of his seemingly arbitrary actions can be viewed as attempts by his Dasein to assert its existence. A notable example of this is his superficial relationship with Marie, whom he claims to love. As previously noted, Dasein is constantly striving to affirm its presence. Consequently, Meursault's interactions with Marie are no exception to this pattern. His relationship with her appears to serve merely as a means for his

Dasein to validate itself. While this dynamic leads Meursault to a certain belief in his own existence, he does not exhibit a deep fascination for her. He appreciates her company, yet simultaneously lacks the empathy necessary to sustain their relationship. Even during his time in prison, he acknowledges a desire for female companionship, but he recalls other women rather than Marie.

I was plagued by the desire for a woman—which was natural enough, considering my age. I never thought of Marie especially. I was obsessed by thoughts of this woman or that, of all the ones I'd had, all the circumstances under which I'd loved them; so much so that the cell grew crowded with their faces, ghosts of my old passions. That unsettled me, no doubt; but, at least, it served to kill time. (Camus, 1946, p. 52)

Meursault's Dasein continues to seek a means of expression, indicating that there is no variation in how Dasein fulfills its desires. Although Meursault appears indifferent to this notion, he rationalizes his behavior as a way to pass time in prison. The faces he encounters in his cell are, in fact, projections of his Dasein rather than reflections of his apathy towards Marie.

Nonetheless, the distinction between Meursault and his Dasein is not entirely apparent, as he often remains closely aligned with it. Dasein exists in its purest form until it seeks expression, and Meursault embodies a character free from external dependencies. Previous examples have significantly illustrated this point, demonstrating that Meursault does not allow societal norms or conventions to influence his behavior. He coexists with these orthodoxies, seemingly embracing life in a unique manner. This may indeed be the most suitable approach for his character. He strives to remain true to his essence, which accounts for his distinctiveness. His existence is rooted in his authentic self rather than in the collective "They." His primary endeavor is to connect with his pure being, which Heidegger refers to as Dasein, while simultaneously asserting his existence and freedom within the world. This freedom encompasses the ability to make choices and act according to one's desires, even when such actions contradict social norms or institutional expectations.

Following his arrest and subsequent imprisonment, the absence of freedom becomes acutely palpable:

I've no wish to exaggerate and I suffered less than others. Still, there was one thing in those early days that was really irksome: my habit of thinking like a free man. For instance, I would suddenly be seized with a desire to go down to the beach for a swim. And merely to have imagined the sound of ripples at my feet, the smooth feel of the water on my body as I struck out, and the wonderful sensation of relief it gave brought home still more cruelly the narrowness of my cell. (Camus, 1946, p. 51)

Meursault is indeed a human being; however, he differs from others in significant ways. The avenues through which Dasein expresses itself encompass behavior, lifestyle, relationships, and a multitude of cultural or social phenomena. In contrast to the majority, Meursault remains largely unaffected by these societal conventions. He exists within the framework of these norms but does not find them captivating. He cannot be ensnared by anything, as his actions, deemed trivial by others, contribute to the preservation of the purity of his existence.

Meursault vs. falling and everydayness

Meursault remains firmly anchored in his authentic existence, consistently engaging with the reality of his Dasein. In contrast, many characters within the novel experience a disconnection from their true selves. They navigate through the mundanity of daily life, often mistaking it for genuine living. This notion of disconnection bears a resemblance to the themes explored in Camus's other work, *The Fall*. While Meursault does not experience a philosophical decline, others perceive him as having done so. This perception stems from their own inauthentic stance, which is rooted in the trivialities of everyday existence. Individuals such as Marie and the boss exemplify this mindset, striving to persuade Meursault to conform to a life devoid of authenticity.

Characters like Meursault often find themselves marginalized in society, as they pursue their desires and reject the constraints imposed by conventional norms. When Meursault seeks to introduce Raymond, it becomes evident that he is distinctly different from those around him:

Just then another man who lives on my floor came in from the street. The general idea hereabouts is that he's a pimp. But if you ask him what his job is, he says he's a warehouseman. One thing's sure: he isn't popular in our street. Still, he often has a word for me, and drops in sometimes for a short talk in my room, because I listen to him. As a matter of fact, I find what he says quite interesting. So, really I've no reason for freezing him off. His name is Sintès; Raymond Sintès. (Camus, 1946, p. 22)

Raymond also exhibits a sense of ordinariness that aligns him with others. This ordinariness manifests in the thoughts of individuals who aspire to share similar perspectives. Salamano consistently mistreats his dog in public. Given that this behavior is widely regarded as morally unacceptable, the general consensus is that it is wrong to harm a dog. In this regard, Raymond is no different. Meursault becomes aware of this when he recalls, "He, too, once said to me, referring to Salamano, that it was 'a damned shame,' and asked me if I wasn't disgusted by the way the old man served his dog. I answered: 'No.'" (Camus, 1946, p. 22). Unlike the other characters, Meursault remains connected to his existence and does not conform to the notion of ordinariness.

Meursault's reaction to temporality

Heidegger's concept of temporality does not imply a restriction to the confines of time. He asserts that "we are, as are all other things, confined to time, nor that we have a sense of time, but rather we exist as three temporal dimensions at once: it is being ahead of ourselves in the future, drawing on our past, while being concerned with the present that constitutes our being" (Frede, 1996, p. 64). In essence, we are not imprisoned by time, nor do we lack an awareness of it. Temporality can be understood as our being or Dasein, as it encompasses a comprehensive

awareness of all aspects of existence. Consequently, Heidegger posits that "we shall point to *temporality* as the meaning of the Being of that entity which we call 'Dasein'" (cited in Mulhall, 2005, p. 19).

The narrative emphasizes the absence of both past and future, with Camus directing attention primarily to the present. Nevertheless, the use of the past tense is evident in the storytelling process, serving to inform the reader of Meursault's experiences leading up to his death.

For Meursault, the present holds the utmost importance. He is concerned solely with existence as it manifests in the current moment. The essence of his actions is rooted in the authenticity of his being in the present. He shows no interest in planning for the future, as his past consists solely of moments that have already transpired. Consequently, there is little to reference from the past.

Even in his final moments, Meursault does not contemplate his impending death. Instead, he remains anchored in the present, viewing it as a time to truly live. He reflects on his previous life with a sense of fortune, having remained true to his existence through a stance of indifference toward the world. When he acknowledges that he once led a fulfilling life, he takes pride in his approach to living.

Forgetfulness of *Being*

A pervasive forgetfulness characterizes our daily comprehension, which fails to seek a genuine significance in the elements that encompass it. Nearly all the characters within the novel exhibit this forgetfulness and, in line with Heidegger's philosophy, elevate their existence to universal norms. Consequently, it is expected that all individuals adhere to the same beliefs, and those who espouse differing values are often deemed eccentric or immoral. During his imprisonment, a priest

visits Meursault and inquiries about his belief in God. Meursault's response is negative, which provokes irritation in the priest. Meursault proceeds to elaborate:

That was unthinkable, he said; all men believe in God, even those who reject Him. Of this he was absolutely sure; if ever he came to doubt it, his life would lose all meaning. "Do you wish," he asked indignantly, "my life to have no meaning?" Really I couldn't see how my wishes came into it, and I told him as much. While I was talking, he thrust the crucifix again just under my nose and shouted: "I, anyhow, am a Christian. And I pray Him to forgive you for your sins. My poor young man, how can you not believe that He suffered for your sake?" I noticed that his manner seemed genuinely solicitous when he said, "My poor young man"—but I was beginning to have enough of it. The room was growing steadily hotter. (Camus, 1946, p. 47)

Meursault exhibits a remarkable resistance to conformity, even while incarcerated. He remains committed to his true self. The priest remarks that he has never encountered anyone as obstinate as Meursault. He notes that numerous criminals have confessed to him and have willingly engaged in prayer for their transgressions. Referring to Meursault as a "poor young man," the priest expresses pity solely due to Meursault's atheism and his refusal to engage in prayer. This passage highlights the stark contrast between Meursault and others who lead inauthentic lives, opting for a superficial existence devoid of meaning.

Nihilism in the novel

Camus explores the concept of transcending nihilism in a chapter titled "Beyond Nihilism" from his work *The Rebel*. This perspective is particularly evident in the character of Meursault in *The Stranger*. By moving past nihilism, an individual can achieve a greater sense of elevation. Meursault, in contrast to the collective "they," acknowledges the inherent meaninglessness of nihilism but seeks a deeper understanding. Should he adopt a purely nihilistic viewpoint, he risks losing everything of significance.

Meursault's distinct choice exemplifies Camus's philosophy of overcoming nihilism. In *The Rebel*, Camus states, "he who dedicates himself to the duration of his life, to the house he builds, to the dignity of mankind, dedicates himself to the earth and reaps from it the harvest that sows its seed and sustains the world again and again" (Camus, 1956, p. 302).

Meursault appears to embody the central character in Camus's narrative. He commits himself to the essence of existence and the inherent dignity of humanity. One might question the nature of Meursault's crime, as the act of taking a human life, irrespective of nationality or race, fundamentally contravenes the principles of human respect and dignity. However, Camus deliberately selects murder as Meursault's transgression, which ultimately results in his imprisonment. It is important to note that Camus does not advocate for the act of killing in any form. He illustrates that Meursault possesses a profound awareness of the nihilism that surrounds him; the absence of meaning is evident to him. He perceives no significance in the world and is disinclined to attribute meaning to it. Yet, during his time in prison, he experiences a sense of realization in his solitude that can be interpreted as transcending nihilism. In these solitary moments, he discovers a value inherent in his existence. This value is, in essence, his life itself, which is continuous, unending, and infinite. He comes to understand that his life must be lived in the most fulfilling manner possible. He recognizes that he has lived beautifully and continues to do so. As death approaches, he increasingly grasps the significance of life.

A transformation occurs in Meursault's existence as he moves beyond the nihilism he acknowledges. He reflects on his mother, who aspired to forge a new life from the experience of death. Meursault concludes the narrative by candidly depicting the final moments of his life:

And I, too, felt ready to start life all over again. It was as if that great rush of anger had washed me clean, emptied me of hope, and, gazing up at the dark sky spangled with its signs and stars, for the first time, the first, I laid my heart open to the benign indifference of the universe. To feel it so like myself, indeed, so brotherly, made me realize that I'd been happy, and that I was happy still. For all to be accomplished, for me to feel less lonely,

all that remained to hope was that on the day of my execution there should be a huge crowd of spectators and that they should greet me with howls of execration. (Camus, 1946, p. 79)

Meursault comes to the understanding that his existence mirrors the world's indifference. Furthermore, he reflects on the fact that he has experienced happiness throughout his life without desiring anything in particular. He contemplates the possibility of beginning anew, despite the awareness that his execution by guillotine is imminent. This realization encapsulates the essence of life for him.

Convergences and divergences

Martin Heidegger and Albert Camus both examine the human condition, yet their philosophical methodologies diverge considerably. In his work *Being and Time*, Heidegger addresses the ontological inquiry of Being (Dasein) and underscores the importance of authenticity, which is attained through the recognition of one's limitations and the confrontation with death as the ultimate possibility (Heidegger, 1962, p. 294). For Heidegger, the journey toward meaning is rooted in living authentically, liberated from the pressures of the "They" (Das Man), a concept that signifies societal conformity (Heidegger, 1962, p. 220).

Although Heidegger and Camus exhibit thematic similarities, such as their critique of societal conformity and recognition of human limitations, their philosophical perspectives are fundamentally distinct. Heidegger pursues an ontological inquiry into *Being*, whereas Camus concentrates on the absurd and the individual's reaction to it. This distinction emphasizes their differing views on authenticity: for Heidegger, authenticity is achieved through the acceptance of one's Being, while for Camus, it arises from a rebellion against the inherent absurdity of existence (Frede, 1996, p. 57).

Camus, in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, emphasizes the concept of the absurd, highlighting the tension between humanity's quest for meaning and the universe's indifference (Camus, 1991, p. 3). He dismisses conventional ideas of inherent meaning and instead promotes a life that confronts the absurd. This act of rebellion entails accepting the absurdity of existence without falling back on false hopes or transcendental explanations (Camus, 1991, p. 54).

While Heidegger interprets death as a pathway to authentic existence, Camus views it as the definitive affirmation of life's absurdity. Heidegger's philosophy aims for ontological grounding, whereas Camus concentrates on existential resilience. Their fundamental difference lies in their approaches to meaninglessness: Heidegger seeks authenticity within Being, while Camus discovers freedom in recognizing and opposing the absurd.

Conclusion

This paper has examined the connections and distinctions between Martin Heidegger's existential philosophy and Albert Camus' absurdism, particularly in relation to Camus' work, *The Stranger*. By analyzing Heidegger's ideas regarding Being, authenticity, and Being-toward-death, in conjunction with Camus' exploration of the absurd, the study has revealed significant philosophical tensions and synergies between these two intellectual figures.

Heidegger's emphasis on Dasein and its genuine engagement with death provides a framework for comprehending existence as a temporal and finite journey that necessitates personal accountability and introspection. His concept of authenticity emerges from liberating oneself from the inauthenticity dictated by societal norms, referred to as the "They," and embracing one's limited existence. This viewpoint offers a valuable perspective for interpreting Meursault's experiences in *The Stranger*. Meursault's apathy towards societal norms and his eventual

acceptance of his destiny reflect Heideggerian authenticity, despite the fact that his motivations differ from Heidegger's ontological foundations.

Camus' philosophy, in contrast, underscores the inescapability of absurdity, which arises from the clash between humanity's quest for meaning and the universe's indifference. Meursault's defiance of false hopes, whether they be religious or societal, illustrates Camus' assertion that one should live fully and authentically within the framework of the absurd. Unlike Heidegger, who seeks meaning within the concept of Being, Camus finds significance in confronting the absurd through deliberate existence. Meursault's acceptance of death at the end of the novel represents his final reconciliation with the absurd, a theme that is pivotal to Camus' philosophy.

The comparative examination highlights notable distinctions in the ways Heidegger and Camus tackle the fundamental existential inquiries of life. Heidegger's ontology is fundamentally concerned with the investigation of Being and the prerequisites for authenticity, whereas Camus dismisses the quest for intrinsic meaning, promoting instead a life that stands in defiance of absurdity. Although both philosophers critique conformity and inauthentic living, their proposed solutions are markedly different. Heidegger perceives an authentic life as one that acknowledges mortality and seeks one's ontological truth. Conversely, Camus advocates for a conscious acceptance of absurdity and the rejection of illusions, prioritizing freedom through rebellion over existential grounding.

Meursault serves as a distinctive representation of philosophical concepts where the existential ontology of Heidegger intersects with the absurdism of Camus. His dismissal of societal conventions resonates with Heidegger's critique of the "They," yet his emotional detachment aligns more closely with Camus' interpretation of the absurd than with Heideggerian notions of

authenticity. Meursault's eventual acceptance of death illustrates a synthesis of these philosophical perspectives, providing a complex understanding of existence, freedom, and mortality.

This analysis has illuminated the intricate relationship between Heidegger's existentialism and Camus' absurdism within the framework of *The Stranger*. By contrasting these philosophical viewpoints, the study highlights the multifaceted ways literature can engage with essential inquiries regarding life, death, and the quest for meaning. The results underscore the lasting significance of both Heidegger and Camus in modern existential discourse and their unique yet overlapping contributions to comprehending the human experience.

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Bio Data: Mohammad Exir is an Assistant Professor in English Language and Literature at Islamic Azad University, Bushehr Branch, Bushehr, Iran. His main research interests encompass a wide range of literary and critical perspectives, with a focus on Comparative Literature, Interdisciplinary

and Cultural studies. With a Ph.D. in English Literature and over 25 years of academic experience, he has extensively contributed to literary studies through his publications and conference presentations at both national and international levels. Currently, he serves as the Head of the English Language and Literature Department at IAU, Bushehr Branch.