**Rebellion and Authenticity**

**The Artist and the Emergence of Meaning from Absurdity:**

**An Aesthetic Examination of Sartre and Camus**

“An artist may make a success or failure of his work. He may make a success or a failure of his life. But if he can tell himself that, finally, as a result of his long effort, he has eased or decreased the various forms of bondage weighing upon men, then in a sense he is justified and, to some extent, he can forgive himself.”

- Albert Camus

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**October 2018**

**Abstract:** This thesis aims to explain why art is the ideal agent for overcoming the *absurdity* and the meaninglessness of existence. The focus is Camus’ *Rebellion* in conjunction with Sartre’s notion of *Authenticity.* Together they provide an adequate answer to the fundamental questions of human existence. Together Camus’ *rebellion* and Sartre’s *authenticity* provide the necessary foundations for the overall *authenticity* of art, facilitating the emergence of purpose from the abyss of *absurdity.*

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7. **Introduction**

Both Camus and Sartre sought to complete treatises on the nature of aesthetics and its relation to man[[1]](#footnote-1). However, both failed to achieve such work before their deaths. For Camus, it was due to his untimely passing. For Sartre, it was a preoccupation with his socio-political views that shifted his interests away from what once was an integral part of his philosophical oeuvre. Though both philosophers failed to produce comprehensive works on the topic of art, their essays and lectures are filled with studies of aesthetics that are heavily intertwined with their socio-political ideologies. Many philosophers since have attempted studies in order to produce a refined outline of their aesthetic thought, but few have adequately managed such a study utilizing both philosophers as dialectical interlocutors striving for the same goal: an emergence of meaning, no matter how brief, in the dismal abyss of human absurdity.

In reading much of the work of Sartre and Camus all roads point to art as the key to finding solace in the world, albeit they approach the value of art and the existential ethical dilemmas associated with the artist from different referents, but insist that in art above all else can a truly substantial approach to living be reconciled. This combination of Sartrean *authenticity* and Camus’ *rebellion* are the most effective notions to achieve the profound existential effects of aesthetics on mankind.

1. **Foundations for a Theory: Camus & Sartre**
2. **Sisyphus & Absurdity**

To end or begin with The Myth of Sisyphus is an ideal starting point for Camus’ affirmations on art and the unyielding effect of the absurd on mankind. The Myth of Sisyphus originates Camus’ concept of the *absurd.* Later it’s transformed with Camus’ more matured work[[2]](#footnote-2). In returning to it, after wading through his more developed conceptions of existentialism, one realises that all the answers were already in their genesis with Sisyphus, they were just difficult to find. Condemned to carry the eternal weight of a boulder uphill, Sisyphus is the example that an infinitely unsatisfying life must equate to being *absurd.* There is no eradicating the *absurdity* of living. Those seeking the alleviation of existential struggles are seeking assuagement in vain: their dissonance can only perpetuate suffering.

Camus is wary of all formal establishments granting eternal life, the forgiveness of sin, or a utopian future (religion, Marxism etc.). So, despite the *absurdity* of eternally pushing a boulder uphill with no rest nor praise, Sisyphus perseveres, not because there is no difference whether he is at the bottom or the top, or because he has succumbed to nihilism, but because there is brief respite in reaching the top. He chooses to perceive success where success is possible. The suffering is eternal, and his plight to reach the top is not optional, but the way in which he shoulders the stone and the mentality with which he conditions himself, gives him the strength to repeat his condemnation for eternity. He is faced with a choice, and everywhere there is choice there is in some sense freedom. Sisyphus is aware of this and understands that “if the descent is thus sometimes performed in sorrow, it can also take place in joy” (Kaufmann, 1989, p. 377). In this respect, it is not entirely different to Nietzsche’s infamous *amour fati* or *love of fate,* which itself is oft mistaken for a modernist interpretation of nihilism, but both Camus and Sartre only use “nihilism in the broadest sense” (Duvall, 1999, p. 41)[[3]](#footnote-3). It is no surprise that the message in Sisyphus bares likeness to *amour fati,* seeing as Nietzsche was a huge source of inspiration for the early Camus. But Camus’ Sisyphus is more formidable, more empowering than the Nietzschean ideal, for Sisyphus controls his fate by focusing on the hill’s crest after each climb as symbolic for something that he has achieved. And despite the absurdity of his existence, just like our own, his *will* to persevere reflects the *will* of the human condition to *rebel* in the face of unconditional and unrelenting *absurdity.*

To those that engage with it, art integrates true freedom. Camus asserts that “the aim of art, the aim of a life can only be to increase the sum of freedom and responsibility to be found in every man in the world” (Camus, 1960, p. 240). It translates suffering and happiness into universal language. *Rebellion* of the *absurd* is not merely an individual plight. It cannot be wholly chosen by the individual for he is a product of his time and is one of all men. For these reasons the purpose of art is inseparable from morality. This idea is echoed by Jeanson who states regarding Sartre, that conceptualisations of art as with “imagining for its own sake, consciousness encounters only the slaves of its own creation; they are unresponsive and unsuited for confirming consciousness in the value of its own existence” (Jeanson, 1980, p. 74). Jeanson asserts that the work of art must engage solidarity in society at large. Thus, the artist is accountable for conveying experience *authentically.* We cannot rid ourselves of the *absurd,* but like Sisyphus, we can find freedom within it by being painfully aware of the suffering and beauty of reality whilst reflecting and subjugating it at once. As true as it is for Camus, it is true for Sartre that “the worlds *absurdity* in fact only has significance in the sense of being a point of departure.” (Wittman, 2009, p. 107)

1. **The Profundity of Rebellion**This condition of embracing the reality of an *absurd* existence generates power into art, but the condition of *absurdity*, like we find in Sisyphus, is not enough alone to guarantee beauty and profundity in art. We require Sartrean *authenticity* to bolster the magnitude of the artist’s expression. The profundity of *rebellion* is relative to the basis of the human condition in both art and politics. The power of art unites political ideology with the individual. *Rebellion* in art and politics is at once a revolt from the same source, both exercise the *will* to redesign a vision with the nature of reality. The *rebel* in political terms never accepts his situation. For Camus, “he must be fully aware of the dramas of his time and that he must take sides every time he can or knows how to do so” (Camus, 1960, p. 238). Instead he is always striving for an ideal. This is not dissimilar to the *rebel* at odds with the *absurdity* of our existence. Through it we must “create dangerously” (Camus, 1960, p. 251). And we must create honestly, or, more aptly, with *authenticity.* The achievement however, is unyielding, as one loses the legitimacy of *rebellion* as action once it morphs into *revolution*. *Revolution* is an end. The oppressed become the oppressors, no matter the content of their proclamations or the optimism of their promises. This discloses the message to the artist that one mustn’t create a whole new world, but a world that overlaps with our own. For an entirely new world loses its potency and can no longer acutely embrace the *absurd.* “Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it (Camus, 1951, p. 224). It requires *rebellion* against our sufferings, not *revolution*, just as with Sisyphus accepting the condemnation of his reality to allow himself some form of happiness, bleak as it may be, Camus asserts we cannot turn our back on the *absurd*, we must bask in it with solidarity. This is the magnanimous plight of the *rebel* that follows him irresolute. The necessity for solidarity elevates him to heights beyond the Nietzschean drive of a *will to power*. “In every rebellion is to be found the metaphysical demand for unity, the impossibility of capturing it and the construction of a substitute universe” (Camus, 1951, p. 221). The *rebel* does not seek to *revolutionise,* for to do so he would become a part of an order that his existence challenges. To *revolutionise* would be to forcibly and impossibly deny the *absurd* in order to overcome it. There is no overcoming the *absurdity* of existence, but there is empowerment in staring into it and facing the *absurd* head on like Sisyphus. This is what Camus demands of the artist. The *absurd* must bleed into all creation so to imbed the artistic content in the reality of human existence. Camus faces this horror head on and moves beyond it in a sociopolitical context. For *rebelling* against the enforced political agendas of ones situation is half the fight. For Camus “the artist’s *rebellion* is already against reality, which is automatically suspect to the totalitarian revolution” (Camus, 1951, p. 221). The artist *rebel* is at once the political *rebel*, but not the other way around. For the dilemma before each of them is the human right to live *freely*.

Thus, the call for *rebellion* is answered best by the artist who “reconstructs the world to his plan” (Camus, 1951, p. 221) reflecting the properties of his time. The *revolutions,* which the artists will always challenge as dubious establishments, are better left to the political adversaries of the time as “an ideologies demands can become a trap for art.” (Wittman, 2009, p. 123)
2. **Bad-Faith & Good-Faith**As stated previously, the *rebel* must acknowledge the absurd if he is going to create with integrity. The great meaning of art and life stems from acknowledging our absurd situation *authentically.* Though Sartre later condemned Camus publicly for his rejection of Socialism in ‘The Rebel ’it becomes profoundly clear that they remained thinkers of the same ilk long after their rift. The Sartrean concept of *authenticity* shares commonalities with Camus’ *rebellion* via the mode of *bad-faith* - a state constantly impressed upon us. *Bad-faith* is permanently reoccurring despite constant efforts to shake it off. Sartre claims it is a natural state that one clings to shield oneself from the *absurd* reality of existence or man’s *absurd* predicament. Thus, it is the antithesis to *rebellion.* The most commonly cited example of *bad-faith* is Sartre’s description of the waiter. He notes that “all his behaviour seems to us a game” (Sartre, 1992, p. 101). The waiter understands he is not merely a waiter, he understands all the aspects of being a waiter that he seemingly accepted within the role of such, but he is nonetheless playing, “but what is he playing at? We need not watch long before we can explain it: he is playing at being a waiter in a café” (Sartre, 1992, p. 102). All examples Sartre offers are of people playing a role that is essentially *being-for-others.* If one is acting as a waiter one cannot be *authentic.* Not only are they in *bad-*faith but they are shying away from their inner *rebel*. To know one is intrinsically more than what they are acting as is still an instance of *bad-faith.* The waiter is always played by someone acting as they suppose a waiter to act, and thus “I am not he: I am separated from him as the object from the subject, separated by *nothing,* but this nothing isolates me from him. I cannot be he, I can only play at *being* he.” (Sartre, 1992, p. 103). For Bell, those in *bad faith* are “denying the ambiguous connection within themselves of being *in-itself* and being *for-itself,* trying to be an unproblematic identity which they are not and cannot be” (Bell, 1989, p. 73). If we ignore the constraints the natural world places on our freedom we ignore the *absurd* situationthat we as individual beings are thrust into. Bell examines the restraints on our freedom that we must be wholly responsible for, for it is in this examination of our freedom that our *radical freedom* resides*;* the mentality that one may find in imagining Sisyphus happy. For Sartre, man must be in complete awareness of his time and *situation* to refrain from lapsing into *bad-faith*. For Sartre, our *situation* is whatever is currently occurring within our initial realm. E.g. I must be completely aware of all that is taking place in my life within this room and how I am conducting myself, as well as the people I am communicating with at the time, but it is not a part of my *situation* to be aware of what President Otto Pérez Molina of Guatemala had for breakfast. One’s *bad-faith* is a constantly occurring predicament as one is always being confronted with a new *situation* in which to be decisive. The decision is how to be within the *situation*. Our actions come from how we exist in a *situation*, thus when we act on a whim, it is how we have previously posited ourselves in the *situation* that we are wholly responsible for.
From understanding the complexities of *bad-faith* we can understand its polar-opposite - *authenticity,* not *good-faith*, for *good-faith* is reversible into *bad-faith* due to its being a hopeless end – an ideal. Within *good-faith,* we find a positive assumption that essentially disarms itself. “The ideal of *good-faith* (to believe what one believes)[[4]](#footnote-4) is like that of sincerity (to be what one is), an ideal of being *in-itself”* (Sartre, 1992, p. 115) *.*For Sartre, the issue here is that belief is to not-believe because “belief is a being which questions its own being, which can realize itself only in its destruction, which can manifest itself to itself only by denying itself” (Sartre, 1992, p. 115). A prime example of this occurring is for Sartre, “at the moment when I wish to believe myself courageous I know that I am a coward” (Sartre, 1992, p. 115). *Good-faith­* is an instrument that runs parallel to *bad-faith,* in that it is a conflict of belief where one wants to believe oneself as not being a coward, when they must at the origins of this belief be cowardly. The opposite to *bad-faith* is thus closer to *authenticity* as both these *absurd* realities are admitted true to oneself simultaneously – wanting to not be cowardly but being aware that in possessing this desire one must in truth be cowardly, thus both feelings of cowardice and the desire to not be cowardly are simultaneously true. For Sartre, here we require an action in order to engage with *authenticity* because in action we are engaging with the world and its truth. So, being aware of one’s cowardice and bravery at once enables an *authentic* engagement with the world.

In the overwhelming awareness of *authenticity,* we have achieved a *conversion* in which *good-faith* fails on its own, because it cannot be of action in the way that *authenticity* can. *Authenticity* accepts the implications that the world imposes. Santoni explains the difference well when he says, “Sartre makes it clear that the *conversion* involves ‘refusing the quest for being’ that marks the *bad-faith* ‘natural’ attitude, and adds that *authenticity* (not *good-faith)* will consist in ‘maintaining the tension’ of the ‘break in being’ of the non-coincidence of *for-itself”* (Santoni, 1995, p. 113)*. Good-faith* is not a process. Sartre views it as spontaneous determination of being. The actual *conversion* is not *good-faith,* but *authenticity*. It is here that *conversion* takes place. For Sartre, there is no proper *conversion* into *good-faith*, and thus no action, no genuine interaction with the world because “*authenticity* not *good-faith,* constitutes for Sartre ‘deliverance’ from *bad-faith.”* (Santoni, 1995, p. 113)

The force of *rebellion* refusing *revolution* is akin to Sartre’s *Authenticity,* being an action that refuses the inactivity of *good-faith*. Like *rebellion,* one cannot have a wholesome engagement with reality without *authenticity* and so both Philosophers are fighting against a common enemy, demanding that the artist must deliver work fearlessly to the world by engaging *authentically* with it*.* This means being painfully aware of our *absurdity*. As we see for Sartre, this takes place with *conversion* - the process of shifting from latching onto a thing that keeps one afloat in the world, to swimming freely in bold acceptance of the depths of *absurdity*. This bears the burden of a moral decision, for if we are not living *authentically,* we are dishonest to the lives of ourselves and the lives of others. We become possessed by *alienation* – the acute feeling of being detached from ourselves due to our *bad-faith* and being lost in the abyss of *absurdity,* instead of having possession of it. Understanding *conversion* as a process of action is paramount of *authenticity* and may itself be an act of *rebellion.* “The *conversion* through ‘purifying reflection’ from corrupted consciousness to lucid recognition and acceptance of freedom constitutes for Sartre – the ‘moralization’ of human consciousness; that is, the advent of *authenticity* and individual morality.” (Santoni, 1995, p. 173)

1. **The Discussion**
2. **Two Absurd Conceptions**Camus and Sartre both assess the concept of the *absurd.* Having formulated a strong friendship founded on similar ideologies in their early years and sharing criticisms of each other’s novels and philosophies they came to disagree upon issues only later that were political in nature. From the outset, the *absurd* reality of human existence was a theory they shared closely. It is the basis for Sartrean phenomenology and Camusian ethics, and presents theories of *rebellion* and *authenticity,* the two focal points of this thesis. Understandings of the *absurd* bearing different meaning for Camus and Sartre are due to misinterpretations of both philosophers, mainly Camus. Camus is often seen as more of an artist than a technical philosopher, and Sartre the other way around. This however should not taint Camus’ magnificent critical thinking and proposition of *rebellion.* Aronson notes that “by temperament the one was primarily a philosopher, absorbed with theories and general ideas, the other primarily a novelist, most comfortable tackling concrete situations” (Aronson, 2005, p. 16). This difference aided their dialectics in the realm of metaphysics and aesthetics. Both insisted on being painfully aware of the condition of the *absurd* and where Sartre utilised its acknowledgment to avoid lapsing into *bad-faith* with the help of *conversion* to *authenticity,* Camus sought refuge in the notion of *rebellion* to create and unify mankind in *absurdity.*

This said, Cooper believes there is great differences between both philosopher’s concepts of *absurdity*. He understands it as submitting to the chaos of the world. “Camus’ outlook is not all that of the existentialist. Reality is irrational, for Camus, because it is ‘chaotic’ and shot through with antinomies and paradoxes. No such thought, however, is to be found in Heidegger, Sartre or Merleau-Ponty” (Cooper, 1999, p. 141). He assumes Camus hopeless – not aiming to overcome *alienation*, but to revere it similarly to *bad-faith.* “Existentialism starts with an attempt to ‘overcome’ people’s sense of *alienation* from the world. But it is precisely the sense of ‘divorce’ between ourselves and the recalcitrant world in which Camus positively revels” (Cooper, 1999, p. 141).Cooper supposes that Camus submits to *alienation,* but in asserting this he also shows his misreading of Sartre’s *good-faith.* If he understood Sartre’s concept he would realise the sustained belief to overcome something or do away with something that is a true facet of our reality, e.g. that life is *absurd,* would be exercising this postulation in *good-faith,* instead of embracing with acute awareness of our *situation,* the nature of *absurdity,* and with *conversion* moving beyond it into a state of *authenticity* as Sartre proposes*.* Having established that *good-faith* can only but relapse into *bad-faith* ­due to it being a persevering idea that one belief is true over another instead of both facets of the instantiated belief having being true, as we encountered with the problem of cowardice. Camus states it similarly to Sartre, without the philosophical aptitude, but nonetheless his *rebellion* shares this genealogical character. *­* Cooper assumes Camus’s *absurd* to be grounded in the inability to achieve a whole-unity and logical sense of reality because the world is presumably chaotic, thus, one finds it *absurd.* Under Cooper’s interpretation *bad-faith and authenticity* are not static experiences but indicates that “some people, the *authentic* ones – himself [Sartre] included, presumably manage to avoid it” (Cooper, 1999, p. 141). This echoes a sentiment dissolved of the unity between *authentically* embracing the *absurd* and moving beyond it, which is what Camus and Sartre go on to achieve. Sartre insists is that “human reality is in perpetual flight toward what it can never be. This is the human condition (Santoni, 1995, p. 105). Santoni’s reading of *bad-faith* is salient because unlike Coopers understanding that *bad-faith* can be overcome permanently, Santoni does not give in to what would be a belief of *good-faith* – and idealised belief that a *revolution* can be sustained. Cooper goes on to assert that Sartre has a completely different concept of the *absurd* embedded in the striving for pure freedom or to become an ‘authentic one’ (despite it being an impossibility), and refraining from nihilism unlike he concludes of Camus, who allegedly gives in to the nihilism of *absurdity* through *alienation*. For Cooper, “life as such cannot be absurd on the above count if some of us manage to resist the temptation of bad-faith” (Cooper, 1999, p. 141). But we cannot overcome *absurdity,* and *bad-faith* is not permanently avoidable.It is only in coming to terms with this through the unifying prospects of *rebellion* in creativity that we can experience reality without the crippling feeling of *alienation.* Cooper frames Camus as nihilistic believing Camus revels in our sense of divorce from the world, but Camus issue is how to avoid this. Camus acknowledges the escalation of *absurdity* as nihilism when he says, “If one believes in nothing, if nothing makes sense, if we can assert no value whatsoever, everything is permissible and nothing is important. There is no pro or con; the murderer is neither right nor wrong.” (Camus, 1951, p. 13)The misrepresentation of Camus’ *absurd* being something that cannot be overcome is a persistent issue that Sartre avoids. Satrean *absurdity* is also not something to overcome. If we overcame the reality of our *absurd* existence we would be ignoring it and thus lapse into *bad-faith.* The *absurd* for both philosophers is something that can be surpassed, or at least the agony of its reality can be reshaped without lapsing into nihilism, by instead embracing *rebellion* and *authenticity.* Carroll posits that Camus “admitted as early as 1955 that he has already ‘progressed beyond’ its [the *absurd’s*] propositions” (Carroll, 2007, p. 53). Hence Camus moves beyond the *absurd* in ‘The Myth of Sisyphus’ and addresses it later in ‘The Rebel’ indicating *rebellion* as the ideal source for combating the issue of *absurdity.*Duvall, explains Camus’ philosophy of the *absurd* acts merely as a stepping stone for what is essentially an optimistic outlook. Camus overcomes any traces of nihilism beyond Sisyphus, because he focuses on reality and is free to *rebel* against it. *Rebellion,* like artistic creation, takes place between the real and the imaginary, between what we want and what is. Duvall acknowledges the tendency Cooper attaches to Camus in succumbing to nihilism in his paper on the Camus/Nietzsche relationship in 1995, focusing on Camus’ condemnation of Nietzsche in ‘The Rebel’ for the atrocities of WWII when previously Camus had always revered Nietzsche as a mentor. revered as a mentor. Duvall says, “I find Camus’ condemnation of Nietzsche disturbing. It is always a questionable affair to hold a thinker accountable for a later political movement, even if that movement claimed the thinker among its ancestors – especially when there is good text-based reason to argue that the thinker would have found the movement on all counts an abomination” (Duvall, 1995, p. 547). This rejection of Nietzsche, Duvall finds lapses Camus into modernistic nihilism. In this paper, Duvall sees Camus to deny truth in Nietzsche in order to “separate himself from Nietzsche” (Duvall, 1995, p. 550). Duvall however, writes another paper in 1999 exploring the same concept in order to correct himself and assert that Camus was not in fact nihilistic in his rejection of Nietzsche, but had to distance himself to move beyond him and surpass the origins of his philosophy of the *absurd.* This *moving beyond* does not mean the rejection, or necessary overcoming of the *absurd,* rather it means facing it and embracing it in order to *rebel.* Without the *absurd* there is no profundity of *rebellion.* It lapses into *revolution* and thus negates continuous progress. In Duvall’s 1999 essay he says of Camus’ “his geneology of rebellion has emplotted modern *revolutions* as tragedies; over and over, rebels have fallen from their affirmations. Their stories have lacked positive resolution, however, and have ended in nihilism” (Duvall, 1999, p. 44). In Duvall’s closer readings of Camus, he sees a distancing from modern nihilism and a more life-affirming outlook that embraces the *absurd* in order to utilise it positively through the medium of art, an action that shares more in common with Sartrean *conversion* than not. “Camus wished for the modern novel to embody a similar tension, like tragedy, to unify and elevate” (Duvall, 1999, p. 44). Camus had to move beyond Nietzsche to escape the confines of nihilism, not to assert his own nihilistic rejection. Nietzsche did not project the positive and communal agony of existence in the way that Camus sought as a tool for unity, instead the “solitary man of mountain tops, the keen analyst and liberator, was for Camus the philosopher of servitude par excellence” (Duvall, 1999, p. 50).

Following Coopers work on separating Camusian *­absurdity* from Sartre’s, Bennett-Hunter insists that Camus’ *absurd* focuses solely on *alienation* because of the repeating themes of *alienation* throughout his oeuvre. He lumps Sartrean *absurdity* and Camus’ *absurdity* into two very simple groups, stating that their philosophies rest “between two very different meanings of the term *absurd:* between its sense as the condition of human existence (which following Sartre, I call *Primary Absurdity*) and as the lucid awareness which some people obtain of this condition and which, for Camus, takes the form of Alienation” (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 48). For Hunter, the difference is, one is “abstractly independent of the human mind, the other as experienced by it” (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 48). *Alienation* is the effect by which the *absurd* negates one’s facticity from itself asserting profound meaninglessness. It stems from lapsing into Sartre’s *bad-faith.* Hunter seems to have forgotten Camus had ‘moved beyond the *absurd* in 1955.’ Having found *rebellion* as the course of action to dispel the discomfort of the *absurd,* the idea that it instigates *alienation* is misinformed. He acknowledges artistic creation in *rebellion* as a way that Camus tries to overcome *absurdity,* but goes on to misinterpret the purpose of artistic creation for Camus saying, “rebellion, [is] an act of pre-emptive defence against alienation which would otherwise result from humanity’s absurd condition” (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 49), and then follows, “a novel for instance, implies a sort of rejection of reality’ in that it presents a world in which, unlike the absurd world of reality, its characters *can* and *do* meaningfully engage with the world and with each other and are not plagued by the perpetual experience of alienation” (Bennett-Hunter, 2009). The ‘sort of rejection’ Hunter disfigures is intended to be exactly that - a ‘sort’ of rejection, as we will see with further clarity in chapter (IV)(ii) explaining the balance between *reality* and *imagination* in art. Hunter attempts to manipulate Camus’ text into a display of escapism from the *absurd* or in his words ‘*alienation,’* a reoccurring problem that Hunter applies to Camus’ work by use of his own dividing concepts of *absurdity.* He paints Camus’ perspective as one running to the imaginary world of art seeking shelter from *alienation.* A “practice [that] theoretically accepts *Primary Absurdity* in the real world but denies that this inevitably results in *alienation* since artistic practice consists in the creation of fictional worlds, into which we escape, in which there is no *Primary Absurdity”* (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 50)*.* He states that “this renders the artistic flight into an imaginary world, in the end, unsustainable” (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 50), but Camus never asserts an escape into the imaginary world, instead “the artist seeks neither to escape nor simply to record but to ‘stylize’ reality” (Duvall, 1999, p. 44). Hunter shapes Camus as a nihilist by assuming the *absurdity* of reality is something to be escaped. Sisyphus is a prime example where an *absurd* reality is faced head on with *rebellion,* “the struggle itself toward the summit is enough to fill the heart of man” (Hanna, 1958, p. 43). It is evident Hunter’s essay focuses on Camus’ fictional texts to attempt to divide Sartre and Camus’ *absurdity.* Hanna clarifies of Camus that he “suffers great misunderstanding at the hands of those who know only his literary productions and are content to infer from this the philosophical position” (Hanna, 1958, p. 44). If Hunter had read Camus’ geneology he may have realised that great art for Camus, “maintains an equilibrium between reality and man’s rejection of reality, each forcing the other upward in a ceaseless overflowing, characteristic of life itself at its most joyous and heart-rending extremes” (Camus, 1960, p. 265). Hunter opposes artistic merit surmounted by Camus and instead believes “the absurd creator (and for Camus there is no other kind) is committed not only to the exigency of aesthetic creation but also to the negation of its value” (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 50) asserting that for Camus everything is simply *absurd* and devoid of meaning. Hunter introduces criticisms by Sartre that are unclear out of context, such as Sartre suggesting Camus’ description of a man on the phone behind a pane of glass “creates a sense of *absurd humour* just as if one described a rugby match in the following terms: ‘I saw adults in shorts fighting and throwing themselves on the ground in order to send a leather ball between a pair of wooden posts” (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 53). This quote instils a sense of *absurdity,* not *alienation,* and does not create a rift in between the conceptualization on the *absurd* between Sartre and Camus. Hunter thinks Camus is stumped at how to give an *absurd* life meaning by ignoring Camus’ theories of *rebellion* for art and unity. For Camus, this is the ‘being engaged’Hunter speaks of when he says that Sartre and the phenomenologists sought to find a vision of the “world in which human beings are inescapably and meaningfully *engaged”* (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 53)*.* Hunter acknowledges that “Sartre argues, we experience not ‘signs’ which refer us to things by a subsequent mental act of interpretation but ‘things’ *already* imbued with meaning” (Bennett-Hunter, 2009, p. 54), and in this he is quite right. But this alone does not segregate Camus from Sartre with the propensity he attempts to convey. Camus’ *rebel* is one *engaged* with the *absurd* despite Hunter’s claims. But as to how one can remain engaged whilst truly *rebelling* and not succumbing to *revolution* or creating disingenuously with too much imagination and too little reality or the other way around, we require the work of Sartre on *authenticity* to put the Camusian ideal in motion. This would not work if their concepts of the *absurd* were wholly differentiated.

The final direct oppossition to the assertion proposed by Cooper and Hunter that Camus and Sartre’s conceptions of the *absurd* are essentially different comes from Hanna, who paying great attention to Meursault in ‘The Stranger’ identifies Camus’ acute explanation of the feeling of the *absurd* to Sartre’s understanding of it. For Hanna, the feeling is of such importance because without recognising the *absurd*, one cannot be accepting and knowing of it. Hanna points out that for this reason Sartre commends Camus for ‘The Stranger’ claiming that it is an ideal representation of the philosophical principles of the *absurd,* and quotes Sartre directly*,* “’The Stranger’ is a classic work, a work of order, written about the *absurd* and against the *absurd*” (Hanna, 1958, p. 50). Sartre’s approval thus runs clear and Hanna follows saying, “Camus clings to the beauty of this world, which is strange, fascinating, and conquering, and from which we are snatched up by the ‘dark wind’. ‘The Stranger’ and ‘Noces’ belong to that authentic thrust of Camus’ philosophy, which after passing through the experiment of the *raisonnement absurde,* rediscovers its channel and the fuller development in the philosophy of revolt” (Hanna, 1958, p. 64). There is hardly room left for Cooper and Hunter’s claims. Instead, clearly relayed to us is how both philosophers are united, rather than forced apart.
3. **Reality vs Imagination**In line with Duvall’s latter work, Hanna insists that Camus’ thought matures into the form of *rebellion* focusing on aesthetics. Its force creates a world where there is unison of reality which cannot be met without imaginative interference. For Hanna, the novel, for example, refuses reality but does not flee it. A combination of both elements of realism and imagination are integral to *authentically* embracing the *absurd*. Hanna explains this as “the two extremes which Camus suggests of formal art and realist art. The former attempts a total negation of reality and the latter attempts its total acceptance, both of which are impossibilities” (Hanna, 1958, p. 186). Hanna explains where Camus refuses the all too real novels of American authors of his time because they confide in *the real* too discriminately without *rebelling* against it, depicting *the real* as mere meaningless acts. This ‘over-realism’ for Hanna negates what he finds so important for Camus, that of acknowledging the unity mankind brings to art through imagination and reality. The essential component that Hanna contends to be for Camus, is his maturation from his commonly misinterpreted ‘Myth of Sisyphus’ to his integrity to revolt and *rebellion* in reality. “The world is no longer strange and intractable; it is now capable of transformation. And, more importantly, man does not hold his nostalgia for unity in defiance of the world, but, in revolt, he now aggressively seeks to transform the world in the image of revolt’s value” (Hanna, 1958, p. 187). Only in reading Camus’ latter works are the origins of his misinterpreted earlier philosophies revealed with definitive clarity.

This interpretation is supported by Adele King, who associates Camus’ *rebel* with the artist in seeking to transform the world, not merely in developing a new one as a means of escaping *absurdity.* King takes this notion further and focuses on the metaphysical unity that Camus sets out to achieve through the *rebellion* of art, stating that the importance of art being grounded in *the real* is a means of *rebelling* against it. A whole new world would not achieve the metaphysical unity in question, but a novelist[[5]](#footnote-5) can create characters that “can live through a metaphysical idea to its logical end” (King, 1964, p. 44). There is no escapism here, only logical exploration when achieved poignantly. King notes Camus’ explanation echoed by Hanna previously, “Camus says that the novel should be midway between formalism and realism[[6]](#footnote-6). By this he means that the novelist should strive for a rigorously controlled form and that he should consider the whole realm of human experience as his subject-matter” (King, 1964, pp. 42-43). King sees the *rebel* to embrace all the world’s beauty and suffering and reorder it, providing courage to face reality with acute situational awareness. Like Sisyphus, the artist perseveres despite no absolute salvation, teaching him he is not a God, but human – a motif similar to Sartre’s *authenticity*.

Imagination naturally runs the risk of rekindling the attitude of *­bad-faith* if we are to imagine a false self-identity or suppose a created world of novelty. To avoid this, according to Wardman’s interpretation of Sartre, we must remember where there is creation there is *humanism*. He adds that some creation is more moral than others. This is a judgment of *authenticity.* Wardman sees in Sartre the God-like position of the artist because one has set out to rectify the world. But like Hanna, despite a work of art being a world in-itself with ends set in place by the artist, *authentic* creation *humanises* the artist because it is a repossession of this world, or *the real*. It does not lead to an *alienation* from reality, because reality is being experienced and reflected in art*.* It is out of beauty, where Wardman speculates Sartre’s source of optimistic freedom resides, and out of pessimism, where we are guaranteed suffering, that *authentic* art is created. Like Camus, Wardman notes Sartre has a predisposition for *the real.* In ‘L’Imaginaire’, “the imagination is a state in which we can be enchanted or conjure up visions, although what we conjure up is inevitably less rich than reality” (Wardman, 1987, p. 335). For Sartre’s artist, it is necessary to create with *authenticity –* to be wholly aware of one’s *situation.* Like the *rebel,* Wardman finds Sartre to empower the viewer/experiencer of the artistic experience through his imaginative interaction. It is for this reason that for Sartre, though the end goal of art as a singular and separate world may seem plausible, the process of *authenticity* does not command the domination of our own. “Life can be made into art if one escapes from the contingency of life by realizing all of one’s unrealized potentialities by refashioning that life in writing” (Wardman, 1987, p. 337).
When we adhere to the imaginary over the *real* we lapse into *bad-faith*. The same goes with too much of the *real* over the *imaginary*. Camus acknowledges that “to reproduce the elements of reality without making any kind of selection would be, if such an undertaking could be imagined, nothing but a sterile repetition of creation” (Camus, 1951, p. 235)*.* So, it is here that “the necessary character of an *imaginary* creation can relieve us of the feeling of existence, which is the indispensable starting point of any grasp of oneself” (Jeanson, 1980, p. 72)*.* This is like the *conversion* from *bad-faith.

Bad-faith*, according to Joseph S. Catalano, is convincing ourselves of our lies in ignorance of facticity. He explains that “the human can maintain itself in *bad-faith* because it is simultaneously facticity and transcendence” (Catalano, 1980, p. 82). This is a continual denial of facts of ourselves through ignorance and believable behaviours exactly like being ignorant of the *absurdity* of our existence, thus a synthesis must occur in order to firstly, face the *absurd* and secondly, in our acute awareness of our *situation, convert* from *bad-faith*. In *bad-faith* we cannot adequately re-create the *real* artistically, for we are preoccupied with perpetrating an *imaginary* artwork from an *inauthentic* self and an *inauthentic* world. *Authenticity* must be rooted in the combination of *the imaginary* and *the real*. *Good-faith*, as previously mentioned is not simply the polar-opposite of such, only *authenticity* can possibly take heed as *bad-faith’*s opposite. *Good-faith* is an ideal, for that reason it inevitably slips back into *bad-faith*. Catalano interprets Sartre as justifying *authenticity* as an action, just as he does with consciousness. “Consciousness is pure activity” (Catalano, 1980, p. 77) because it is always trying to be in synchronisation with itself between the ‘*for-itself*’ or being for others and the ‘*in-itself*’ or being for oneself. The action described of our consciousness is much like Camus’ *rebellion,* accepting the *absurd* and defying it by using it and refraining from something like a total *revolution* which would be for Sartre, very much like the notion of *good-faith*. Both Camus and Sartre depend on a relationship between the *real* and the *imaginary* to create, as “half-way between the two lies art.” (Camus, 1951, p. 238)

Dustin Stokes has sought to further explore the relationship between imagination and reality in art. *The real* requires imagination to process and to comprehend the work itself, not just to fill in blanks and assert empathy, or to give text meaning, or a mediocre sentence longevity. The concept of the *imaginary* here both ‘happens to’ the viewer/experiencer and is ‘done by’ the viewer/experiencer. It is suggested that art requires the imagination to be able to process *the real*. “Imagination is fundamental to all of cognition since it is fundamental for grasping meaning” (Stokes, 2014, p. 180). Without the aid of imagination, conceptuality would be negated and simple tasks such as learning a new skill could not be achieved. Learning tasks and applying a concept might require minimal creativity, but what Stokes calls *rich imagination* is akin here to Sartre’s requirements of *authentic* art. The spectrum of imagination starts with ‘weak’ imagination and ends at ‘novelty’. *Novelty* is similar to Camus’ *revolution* in that it takes *rebellion* against *the real* too far and jeopardizes its *authenticity*. One of the key studies Stokes offers is in ‘Enriching the Cognitive Manipulation Role where he explains there are five key features that typify a creative process:

“*Identify a cluster of typifying cognitive features. To identify this cluster of features is to enrich the cognitive manipulation role. In terms of explanation, it is to identify desiderata for any theory of creative cognition, features that on balance should be explained by mechanisms posited or invoked by the theory. And if one type of cognitive faculty best serves this role, then that faculty is plausibly necessary of much if not all of creativity”* (Stokes, 2014, p. 168)
This indicates that the imagination in the sense of producing a work is absolutely integral and cannot be wholly rejected. Where the line is drawn is another issue, but we can ascertain that “the form and style of the novel, Camus believes, show the artist’s protest against the world. The greater the classicism and control, the more effective this protest will be” (King, 1964, p. 43). And of Sartre, that “while realistic work can reveal a certain amount of truth, Sartre writes, it nonetheless addresses the reader’s imagination, precisely because the work is evoking something that does not exist or is absent” (Wittman, 2009, p. 20). Thus, we require *the real* and *the imagination* to conclude *authentic* art in the face of the *absurd.* “To create beauty, he [the artist] must simultaneously reject reality and exalt certain aspects of it. Art disputes reality, but does not hide from it.” (Camus, 1951, p. 224)
4. **Rebellion as Unity***Rebellion* has always been a question of ethics for Camus, as “revolt aspires to intelligibility even if it does not yet know how to establish it; and as such it is in flat denial of the founding insight of the *absurd,* according to which sense is what humankind both must and cannot live” (Davis, 2007, p. 111). Colin Davis notes that critics, after the very publicized split between Camus and Sartre, took one side or the other, either proposing Camus’ thought to be inconsistent and siding with Sartre for a more intellectual dialectic or siding with Camus for his strong egalitarian values. Davis gives supports the *rebel* being one who must take a moral stand in the face of *absurdity* when he says, “the key term of Camusian ethics is the given value of human life. Consequently, any act of authentic revolt must simultaneously reject all that violates human dignity and affirm the worth of all human beings” (Davis, 2007, p. 111)*.* But, Davis finds this Camusian assertion problematic despite agreeing with Hanna and Duvall, in saying that the passivity of the *absurd* is accepted but transformed with *rebellion* into an issue of morality. Davis admits that “it is, to say the least, odd that an argument that begins in the frustration of rationality through the experience of the *absurd* ends by endorsing a form of universalist rationalism as it insists that I extend to all human beings the values which I assert as valid for myself” (Davis, 2007, p. 111). Camus notes that to go on living means placing value on one’s life, and in valuing one’s life, one should value all others. Davis acknowledges Sartre’s disagreement with Camus’ proposal that valuing *oneself* one must value all others because though “Camus insists on clarity as an antidote to violence, his own argumentative discourse is bullying and coercive; and he associates ambiguity with murder, whilst his texts are ridden with unresolved interpretative tangles” (Davis, 2007, p. 114). This dialectic that Camus puts forward is profoundly humanistic, but it lacks the cognitive technicality of Sartre. Therefore, we require *authenticity* to fill the gaps. Davis affirms that the essence of Camus’ *rebellion* seeks out solidarity, but Davis fails to see that solidarity is nowhere better found than in *rebellion,* as its values require the consideration of all men. Hanna puts it beautifully, “revolt affirms the complicity of all men around a common value and against a common oppression. It affirms a value which all men possess, even the oppressor himself. It carries man toward all men, showing that the solidarity of men is metaphysical.” (Hanna, 1958, p. 98)
5. **Authenticity as Responsibility**Santoni builds on Catalano’s interpretation of *bad-faith* and *good-faith*. He develops the theory from Catalano that *authenticity* is the ultimate human freedom. “To be *authentic,* Sartre has told us, ‘is to realize fully one’s being-in-situation, whatever this *situation* may be” (Santoni, 1995, p. 92). It is an awareness of our existence in the world as being essentially without purpose or justification. It is a confrontation of ourselves and our *bad-faith*, thus negating our disposition to always revert to *bad-faith* because we have awareness of it. This is not to say that once the hyper-awareness of *authenticity* is achieved that we do not slip unconsciously back into *bad-faith* as Cooper assumed. We are permanently faced with *situations* that rupture our *authenticity* and pull us backwards. “Nothing from *authenticity* of the present ‘moment’ protects me from falling into *inauthenticity* in the next” (Santoni, 1995, p. 93)*.* After all, Sartre affirms that *bad-faith* is a natural and habitual state. It lures us with ideas of comfort, dragging us away from the despair of *absurdity* when freedom is only possible by facing it. Solace, however can be achieved in artistic *rebellion* as “the only dictate conveyed by art is that of freedom” (Wittman, 2009, p. 19)*.* So, like Camus, we must accept and persevere through *absurdity* to achieve freedom from *bad-faith*. Just as Davis interprets Camus, in claiming that all men to be free they must be moral, Santoni realises that the being of the other is in the interest of everyone. We share the world of the artwork through our shared interpretation and we instantiate our reality and imagination in order to interact with it. He opposes Hunter’s point that art creates a totally different universe. Rather, Santoni postulates that Sartre, like Camus, believes the artist remoulds the world with *authentic* reflection in action – *conversion* from *bad-faith* into the acutely painful awareness that unites mankind. Thus, it cannot but take on a severely moral antecedent if “I accept and affirm my freedom; I pass beyond my ‘natural’ attitude to a moral attitude, yet without disowning my ‘natural’ ontological tendency” (Santoni, 1995, p. 105). Santoni concludes that *inauthenticity,* like *bad-faith,* is an immoral venture, and so Sartre claims, just as Camus does, that it is our moral duty to create *authentically*. “Ambiguity and tension of opposites are part of the human condition, yet the effort to harmonize and unify the unharmonious and disparate may well be vital to human striving, especially, as we have seen, to *authentic* striving.” (Bell, 1989, p. 165)

A profound link between *rebellion* and *authenticity* that leads one to the methodology of artsitic creation comes from Jeanson, whom received Sartre’s unequivocal praise regarding *authenticity*, “You have so perfectly followed the development of my thought” (Santoni, 1995, p. 104). In the introduction of ‘Sartre and the Problem of Morality’ Jeanson is undertood as “arguing that while radical *conversion* must ‘start with’ a reflection on the individuals own natural *bad-faith,* its only chance of moving away from this attitude lay in a ‘realism’ which requires simultaneous engagement in a project of social liberation” (Jeanson, 1980, p. xi) – Here *rebellion* joins the dots.

To explain the responsibility placed on *authenticity* to enrich the lives of our existence we must understand it in terms of the great effect that it carries in relation to art. Sartre’s usage of the *imagination* is directly interwoven with freedom as we have previoulsy witnessed. This integrates the audience/viewer as an integral role to conducting *authenticity* expressed by the artist. For Sartre, the work alone is no good unless it is engaged with the *imagination* and *reality* of not just the artist as *rebel,* but the audience too. Both utilise *imagination* in order to connect with the work and engage themselves, and both utilise *realism* to fence-in rational form and the political qualities that cannot be subjugated from the art itself – “all *authentic* art is created ‘for its time,’ even if it is the work itself that distinctively reveals the possibilities of that time” (Baugh, 1988, p. 482). Jeanson aptly explains the freedom, and thus moral repsonsibility of art’s balance between *imagination* and *realism* associated with its *authenticity* when he says, “the work of art challenges contingency. It is a rigourous forming of our various negations of the *real.* It affords a confrontation between the world and this necessity which it issues exclusively from our own freedom” (Jeanson, 1980, p. 66). This echoes the sentiment that for Camus, “art requires the capacity to deduce essential insights from certain *situations,* not to concur unconditionally with every human *situation* and not to welcome all of man’s revolts” (Wittman, 2009, pp. 97-98).

Baugh directly applies Sartrean *authenticity* to art, proposing that “artworks should be judged according to the ‘moral’ or existentialist sense of *authenticity”* (Baugh, 1988, p. 478). The great existential philosophers have always been drawn to art, and obsessed over creating genuine and *authentic* literature, plays, etc. For Sartre, this was woven into his desire to attain freedom from the *absurd,* Transformation takes place in art, thanks to the *authentic* artist, in a more accessible way than violent political *rebellion* or the contemplation of our metaphysical *authenticity.* The artist, for Baugh is in action if he is *authentic*, due to the Sartrean concept of *authenticity* obtaining its reality in *conversion.* The implications are that “action is not mere movement: one must be pursuing some goal. This means that actions prime condition is freedom” (Jeanson, 1980, p. 77)*.* This could not be further from the notion of fleeing a situation by creating a world in which to immerse oneself. Instead it signifies the severity of freedom associated with art. The artist reveals the genuine experience of the world, achieving *authenticity* because of embracing the *absurd*, and in being *authentic*, struggling for art. A world is created that is made up of our own, yet extends into our own once again if it is *authentic* and an audience perceives it through an *authentic* lens. Further moral implications arise when we consider “works of art are capable of not only of transforming the way in which we regard other works of art and artistic practices, but other aspects of our existence, such as culture, history and nature” (Baugh, 1988, p. 484). It is thus inseparable from socio-political matters and forever interwoven into the human experience. This unity thus has moral implications for the *authenticity* of a work.

**(V) Conclusion**Having explained and explored the similarities between the forces of *rebellion* and *authenticity*, their differing interpretations and their synchronization, it becomes clear how the two theories when working in conjunction, lead to a balanced overcoming of the *absurd* that they cannot adequately achieve alone. Camus’ theory of *rebellion,* though insightful and humanitarian at heart lacks the phenomenological conviction of Sartre’s *conversion* to *authenticity. Authenticity* alone does not suffice as moral responsibility without Camus’ profound assertion that “artistic creation is a demand for unity and a rejection of the world. But it rejects the world because of what it lacks and in the name of what it sometimes is. *Rebellion* can be observed here in its pure state and in its original complexities. Thus, art should give us a final perspective on the content of *rebellion”* (Camus, 1951, p. 219)*. Authentic* art is a *rebellion* that achieves a metaphysical unity of humankind and freedom from the *absurd*, offering purposeful assuagement in the face of a meaningless existence more effectually than any other mode of communion, despite absolute relief being unattainable. Like *bad-faith*, the emphatic proclivity of *authenticity* ebbs and flows throughout our existence. It is like the eternal struggle of Sisyphus that pertains to the beauty of the world. To live *authentically* is an action of morality, expressed best through the *rebellious* medium of art as “history and art do not cancel out the world’s *absurdity;* but both will broaden man’s experiences, knowledge and powers of expression and confirm his *will* to assert himself; they are expressly formulated here as an answer to the world’s *absurdity”* (Wittman, 2009, p. 107). It does not *revolutionize* the *absurd* – it powerfully transforms it – a conclusion sought by both Camus and Sartre, who may have clearly achieved it had politics not driven them apart.

*“The consciousness of others is the medium in which man can and must become what he is”*

*-Jean-Paul Sartre*

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1. As stated in (Wittman, 2009, p. 151) [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. (Duvall, 1999, p. 40) [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. When discussing Camus and Sartre, Duvall states that to approach them accurately we must acknowledge that they are utilising the term ‘nihilism’ in its broad terminology of there being no meaning to existence. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Round brackets within quotations are never my own. Square brackets within quotations are my own. [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. The aesthetics explored are not limited to writing and literature alone. Literature is merely the esteemed artistic medium that Camus and Sartre prefer. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. Formalism in this sense refers to things of an abstract or highly imaginative nature [↑](#footnote-ref-6)