

Theatre of the absurd as the philosophical response to the meaning of life. The case of Camus' The Stranger

Luka Pavkić, Pavao Žitko

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The philosophical tradition clearly distinguishes the philosophy of theatre from the theatre as philosophy. In the present contribution, the second meaning of the term will be mainly considered, since it can be philosophically explained as a real ontological category of the existing reality. The theatre expresses the essence of philosophising as a medium directed towards our tragic internalisation of the theatrical act. The history of philosophy on the subject underlines the importance of the French existentialist tradition in an ontological and anthropological key.

Keywords: Existentialism, Theatre, Camus, Ontology

Introduction

Since the beginning of the existentialist movement, the theatre has been the place of its greatest philosophical expression. The theatre was not just a mode of storytelling, one of many ways of communicating to the wider public. The theatre was the place of the maximum tragic expression of existence, alienated from the surrounding reality and unable to adequately communicate with otherness in all of its forms. The essentialism that the stage requires focuses all of our attention on the subject, its existential environment and the lack of meaning in its life.

The theoretical goal of the theatrical act consists in reliving the tragic condition of the existence. The contemplation then, which is the very presupposition of ontology, problematises the foundation of thinking and acting which becomes the very object of authentic philosophical research.

Existentialism on this front has a lot to say as a doctrine that reformulates the traditional precedence of existence over its essence. In removing the traditionally

understood foundation, existentialism finds fertile ground for sharing the prefix "th" of the *theorein*, with the same initial morpheme of the theatre, thus developing a philosophical theory of the *théâtre de l'absurde*. The absurdity of existence, artistically and philosophically translated into the practical categories of the theatre of the absurd, rests on some strong speculative premisses that enter into the intimate relationship that human beings maintain with the world as its object of experience.

The reality defined as absurd is the consequence of the theoretical syllogism which as a first premise has the philosophical conviction of the removal of the sense of human existence, and as a second premise, the unjustifiability of suicide as the cessation of the manifestation of the foundation understood as *ex-sistere* of existence.

The foundation is existence itself as a source of the possibility of its further definition as concrete. In its concrete experience the world, the existence is realized under the sole assumption of being aware of its nullity. In this illogical consequence of the premises speculatively placed in the argumentative syllogism of the existentialist doctrine, we find the most profound reason for the etymological derivation of the term existence.

One of the best-known examples of the theatre of the absurd translated into philosophical and existentialist terms is the case of Meursault, the protagonist of the award-winning novel *The Stranger*, according to critics one of the founding texts of twentieth-century Western culture. Meursault is alienated from the world and refuses any possibility of meaning entering his life. A subject is therefore senseless, just as the life of existence is senseless when the transcendent ontological foundation is lacking. Through this example, the philosophical assumptions of existentialism as an ontologically relevant philosophical orientation of the 20th century will be analyzed.

1. Camus and existentialism

Camus' problem is primarily epistemological, which is clearly shown through the novel's protagonist; Meursault. Camus is convinced of his inability to understand the world and to know its ontological foundations. Furthermore, his conviction lies in two ideas: that he exists as a conscious being and that he exists

in that world which he can touch, that is to perceive it with his senses.¹ In this sense, Camus is a continuer of cartesian scepticism which through speculation leads one to the certainty of an individual's being and awareness of one's consciousness, that is, awareness of the individual subject attempting to think the world given to him as an object. These two certainties are the reasons why Foley argues that Camus defines absurd as «an epistemological claim addressing an ontological need; that is, a claim regarding the knowledge we can have of the world»².

Without the possibility to know the world and without one's willingness to invest one's meaning of life in that which is transcendent one would argue that a man's life is meaningless and thus not worth living. That is the sole reason why Camus argues against both philosophical and physical suicide. On the contrary, the absurd as the human condition is to be looked at as a potential answer to the meaning of life³. The absurd is to be thought of in a contemplative manner due to the fact that man's very existence is marked by it. If one is to commit suicide of either of the kinds, that very act would be such that it would represent casting away of the only certainty one has, the very fact that one thinks. Rational thought is by no means representative of the absolute truth. Camus recognized the limits of the rational thinking process but utilises it with confidence as long as such thinking provides him with clarity of that which is before his senses; clarity through which he seeks to stand in a sort of epistemological middle path⁴. Thus, suicide would not be an act of realisation of the ultimate freedom, but a rejection of human freedom to be, and to exist despite the absurdity in which one is placed⁵. By choosing to exist, or rather embracing life itself, Camus rebels against the absurdity of the human condition into which man is cast. He bitterly accepts the absurd and the suffering it implies just as Sisyphus embraces his perpetual suffering. It is important to note that the suffering and absurdity of human life do not mean that human life is to be meaningless. On the contrary, we as individuals need to attribute meaning to our lives, and our existence. Only that way are we able to be rebellious against the absurd. In that sense, the absurd holds potentiality for the

¹ J. Foley, *From the Absurd to Revolt*, Acumen Publishing Limited, Stocksfield 2008, p. 7.

² Ivi, p. 8.

³ Ivi, p. 9.

⁴ A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, translated from the French by Justin O'Brien, Vintage Books, New York 1955, p. 27.

⁵ J. Foley, *From the Absurd to Revolt*, cit., p. 10.

evolution of human values, the fact that points out the absurd as a cause for a method rather than the doctrine⁶.

2. *The context of *The Stranger* and the state of the absurd man*

Camus' *The Stranger* (published in 1942 in Paris during the Nazi occupation) illustrates the life of the narrator, an Algerian of European descent named Meursault⁷. Three important incidents pertaining to the absurd are the following: the funeral of Meursault's mother at which he does not show any emotion, Meursault's killing of the Arab at the beach, and his trial culminating in his execution⁸. In *The Myth of Sisyphus* Camus writes how the absurd man when turned towards death feels liberated of all things surrounding him and released of all circumstances⁹. Death, in the case of the absurd man, liberates¹⁰. Absurd man evolves dialectically as time passes, particularly his consciousness is developed through tragic events epitomised in the phenomenon of guilt¹¹. Through Meursault, it is evident that Camus seeks to establish the absurd as a potential answer to the meaning of life, a fact which is evident in Meursault's character through his thought process and actions. Thus, Meursault, according to Camus, is the example *par excellence* of the absurd hero¹². The absurdity is evident to Meursault at the moment of the proclamation of the death sentence to him which, as the trial progresses, is not so much about his nonconformity to social norms, but the lack of tears on his behalf at his mother's funeral¹³. Meursault simply does not wish to conduct himself in a way which is in contrast to his actual feelings, he cannot be false in any regard¹⁴. Societal norms are seen as absurd in the sense that they mark us as false rather than genuine individuals marked by the authenticity

⁶ Ivi, p. 13.

⁷ Ivi, p. 14.

⁸ Ivi, p. 14.

⁹ A. Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, cit., p. 39.

¹⁰ Ibidem.

¹¹ L. R. Rossi, *Albert Camus: The Plague of Absurdity*, p. 400, in «The Kenyon Review», n. 20/3 (2013), pp. 399-422.

¹² Foley, *From the Absurd to Revolt*, cit., p. 14.

¹³ Ivi, p. 14.

¹⁴ Ibidem.

of action. It is rebellion against heteronomous ethics that is advocated by Meursault¹⁵. This unavoidably places the absurd man in juxtaposition with society.

According to Foley, the indifference of the absurd man can be observed in the first lines of the novel: «Mother died today. Or, maybe, yesterday; I can't be sure»¹⁶. His indifference is the cause of his sentence, not the killing of the Arab. He is sentenced for his nonconformity, atheism, and lack of religious remorse or feelings of guilt¹⁷. As such, the story of Meursault is a call for help in the name of all individuals struggling against conformity¹⁸. The novel is a testament to the hero's life and the joy he derived from simple things despite his indifference¹⁹.

3. The absurd man and his deviation from norms

3.1. Meeting death face to face as an absurd man

When Meursault arrived at the Home for Aged Persons he was guided to his mother's body which was placed in a mortuary so as not to disturb other residents of the Home²⁰. This sentiment implies that death is something truly disturbing, highlighting the existential component of the novel and introducing the theme of death as the focal point of the novel. When he is asked if he wishes for the casket to be opened he says „no“ and realises that he probably should not have said it²¹. Again, this incident calls attention to societal norms one is expected to abide by. This simple act is not only about the revolt against society and its norms, but a revolt against death. At this moment, Meursault is unable to face death which makes him a stranger before death²². He is later asked to dine at the refectory and is offered a mug of *café au lait* which he accepts as he is fond of it²³. He enjoys his coffee while he smokes, something he also considered to be maybe inappropriate in his mother's presence²⁴. Later in the novel, Meursault is judged negatively based upon these two acts in greater measure than he is hated for the killing of the Arab.

¹⁵ Ibidem.

¹⁶ A. Camus, *The Stranger*, translated from the French by Stuart Gilbert, Vintage Books, New York 1958, p. 1.

¹⁷ J. Foley, *From the Absurd to Revolt*, cit., p. 18.

¹⁸ Ivi, p. 22.

¹⁹ Ivi, p. 21.

²⁰ Ivi, pp. 8-9.

²¹ Ivi, p. 9.

²² L. R. Rossi, Albert Camus: *The Plague of Absurdity*, cit., p. 405.

²³ A. Camus, *The Stranger*, cit., p. 9.

²⁴ Ibidem.

Meursault understands that drinking coffee at his mother's funeral is a trivial matter and is thus representative of the absurd hero who understands how important life truly is. One might disagree with this claim as after all Meursault kills the Arab. Although it is a legitimate argument against Meursault's lack of respect for life, one also needs to consider the very fact by which Camus marks the absurd individual. Namely, the fact that the absurd hero is shaped by guilt which he endures with a sense of dignity while at the same time being aware of the fact that he has no right to terminate someone else's life just as he himself has no right to commit suicide. An absurd man is aware of his surroundings too, exuding certain meditateness arising from the rebellious attitude he asserts against the world. Life itself and this moment are important and not the number of years one has spent living it. This sentiment is mirrored well in the fact that Meursault is ignorant of his mother's age²⁵. Therefore, Meursault's first encounter with death is marked by the inability to look into death's face. He is not yet truly familiar with the concept of death, but he is gaining awareness of it.

3.2. Relation towards friendship, ambitions, marriage and life

After the funeral, Meursault headed home after his working hours and stumbled upon his neighbour Raymond Sintes. Raymond is not well-liked among other residents due to their suspicions of him being a pimp, not a warehouseman as he claims it²⁶. Raymond invites Meursault to his apartment for a meal and a drink. Meursault agrees and thinks that Raymond has interesting things to say²⁷. While in the apartment, Raymond tells how his lover cheated on him, how he beat her for it and got into a feud with her brother for it²⁸. Raymond likes the fact that Meursault listens to him carefully without judging him and asks Meursault if he would be his «pal» to which he replies positively even though he «didn't care one way or the other»²⁹. Therefore, as an absurd individual Meursault was not only indifferent to his mother's death but indifferent towards friendships in general which he views as an accident to his life and its absurdity. Family and friendly relationships are nothing but mere flashes of happiness which provide life with meaning in this meaningless existence which crumbles itself into death. His

²⁵ Ivi, p. 19.

²⁶ Ivi, p. 34.

²⁷ Ibidem.

²⁸ Ivi, pp. 36-37.

²⁹ Ivi, p. 41.

preoccupation with death is recognised by Raymond who provides him with kind words due to his knowledge of his mother's death. Raymond says that death was inevitable. Meursault agrees and it is this opinion that is his first articulation through which Meursault begins to think of death, to formulate his thoughts about death and mortality, thoughts which will later be revealed in their full potency immediately before his execution at the end of the novel.

It is necessary to mention the moment when Marie asks Meursault whether he loves her: «A moment later she asked me if I loved her. I said that sort of question had no meaning, really: but I suppose I didn't»³⁰. Although Marie looked sad, Meursault feels no remorse due to him being honest. As an absurd hero, he is unable to lie about his feelings, even at the cost of coming out as insensitive.

Marie and Meursault are invited by Raymond's friend to his little seaside bungalow³¹. In this very chapter, Meursault's second romantic indifference surfaces. Marie asks him if he wants to marry her³². Although he is still unrelentingly honest, the moment of the revolt of the absurd man is to be highlighted here. It is the revolt against socio-religious institutions, namely marriage. Meursault cannot think of marriage seriously due to his insights of it as something small, and irrelevant when compared to the immensity of life. Thus, Camus points out the fact that marriage alone cannot make a person's life complete and meaningful, but rather it is the man who can ascribe meaning to his life through marriage only if he wishes so. Initially, Meursault recognises death as a natural culmination of life into old age, then as a consequence of murder, and finally as a death sentence. Meursault encountered old age through his mother, but also through Salamano's (his neighbour) dog with a skin disease, a kind of old age marked by an uncurable disease which cannot be remedied by medicated ointments³³. These encounters with death are a kind of gradation through which the reader is gradually immersed in his mortality, gaining more insight into the nothingness which finally and suddenly consumes him. That is, one is faced with life through gradation which is marked by the gradual fading of youth into old age at the forefront of death.

³⁰ Ivi, p. 44.

³¹ Ivi, p. 50.

³² Ivi, p. 52.

³³ Ivi, p. 58.

4. Absurd man in face of death

4.1. The murdering of the Arab

Meursault, Raymond and his friend Masson who invited them to his seaside bungalow, encounter Arabs among which is the brother of Raymond's ex-girlfriend. After being at the beach, and having lunch, three friends head for a walk along a deserted beach while the «light was almost vertical and the glare from the water seared one's eyes»³⁴. Then Meursault noticed «two Arabs in blue dungarees long way down the beach, coming in [their] direction»³⁵. They walked on until the «distance between [them] and the Arabs was steadily decreasing»³⁶. When they were only feet apart a roughhouse ensued in which Raymond's arm and mouth were cut³⁷. The Arabs back away, and Masson takes Raymond to the doctor while Meursault is left at the bungalow with Marie and Masson's wife to explain what happened³⁸. Raymond gets back from the doctor and is in a bad mood and takes Meursault with him for a walk along the beach³⁹. At the end of the beach, they came to a stream that sprang from a rock, a place where they encountered their two Arabs once again⁴⁰. Everyone stood unmoving⁴¹. Raymond puts his hand in his pocket onto the revolver and asks Meursault whether he should «plug» the Arab who cut him⁴². Meursault tells him not to shoot him in cold blood, except if he gets his knife out⁴³. Meursault encourages Raymond to have a fight with his enemy without any weapons and to give him his revolver just in case the other Arab interferes in their fight⁴⁴. Then, a key moment unfolds which draws Meursault closer to his own death: «The sun glinted on Raymond's revolver as he handed it to me. [...] And just then it crossed my mind that one might fire, or not fire – and it would come to absolutely the same thing»⁴⁵.

³⁴ Ivi, p. 66.

³⁵ Ivi, p. 67.

³⁶ Ivi, p. 68.

³⁷ Ibidem.

³⁸ Ivi, p. 69.

³⁹ Ivi, p. 70.

⁴⁰ Ibidem.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 71.

⁴² Ibidem.

⁴³ Ibidem.

⁴⁴ Ivi, p. 72.

⁴⁵ Ibidem.

Meursault took the revolver and the Arabs vanished⁴⁶. The two friends head back to the bungalow and upon getting there, discouraged by the heat, Meursault decides to return to the small rock and cool stream that sprang from it⁴⁷. When he got there he saw Raymond's enemy who was resting in the shade⁴⁸. Upon seeing Meursault, the Arab puts his hand in his pocket which prompts Meursault to grip Raymond's revolver in his pocket⁴⁹. Meursault wanted to turn and walk away, but «the whole beach, pulsing with heat, was pressing on [his] back»⁵⁰. He remembers his mother's funeral and the heat which caused his veins to burst through the skin⁵¹. Because he could not stand the heat any longer he took one step toward the shade⁵². Then the Arab took the knife out of his pocket and a «shaft of light shot upward from the steel, and [he] felt as if a long, thin blade transfixing [his] forehead»⁵³. At that very moment, he was blinded by the sweat that glazed his eyes in brine, hearing the sounds of cymbals in his head while the light reflected from the blade scared his eyelashes and gouged his eyes⁵⁴. During this sensory attack, every «nerve in [his] body was a steel spring, and [his] grip closed on the revolver. The trigger gave, and the smooth underbelly of the butt jogged [his] palm»⁵⁵. The shot shook off his sweat and the light from the blade disappeared, he had merely «shattered the balance of the day»⁵⁶. Then he shot four shots more into the already unmoving body and «each successive shot was another loud, fateful rap on the door of [his] undoing»⁵⁷. Rossi claims that these five shots fired at the Arab are indicative of «both a fatal, pre-ordained guilt, and an assumption of responsibility on the part of Meursault»⁵⁸. The fact that Meursault pauses after the first shot and the other four shots, is indicative of the fact that he fired the remaining four shots with full awareness⁵⁹. Awareness that he had shattered the balance of the day is

⁴⁶ Ibidem.

⁴⁷ Ivi, p. 73.

⁴⁸ Ivi, p. 74.

⁴⁹ Ibidem.

⁵⁰ Ivi, p. 75.

⁵¹ Ibidem.

⁵² Ibidem.

⁵³ Ibidem.

⁵⁴ Ibidem.

⁵⁵ Ivi, p. 76.

⁵⁶ Ibidem.

⁵⁷ Ibidem.

⁵⁸ Rossi, *Albert Camus: The Plague of Absurdity*, cit., p. 403.

⁵⁹ Ibidem.

also an awareness of how he disturbed indifference within himself. Death and the funeral of his mother were Meursault's first encounters with death towards which he was nothing but a *stranger*, an encounter which had prepared him for the moment of conscience which came to him with the «explosion of the gun»⁶⁰. He realises he is guilty of the murder he committed unconsciously and unwillingly, but with four more shots he assumes responsibility and shoots consciously and willingly⁶¹. Assuming the guilt is thus required of the individual to elevate himself into a higher form of a moral existence⁶².

4.2. Attitude towards God and eternal life

After the killing of the Arab, Meursault is arrested and questioned several times⁶³. He is imprisoned and appointed a lawyer who found out that Meursault had shown «great callousness» at [his] mother's funeral»⁶⁴. At this point, Meursault's humanity and life are reassessed for him to be judged for his apparent callousness at the funeral and absence of tears, rather than the murdering of the Arab. The lawyer asks him whether he had suffered much on the day of the funeral⁶⁵. Meursault says he had been «quite fond of Mother – but really that didn't mean much»⁶⁶. He did not cry at the funeral because «[his] physical condition at any given moment often influenced [his] feelings. For instance, on the day [he] attended Mother's funeral, [he] was fagged out and only half awake»⁶⁷. He would rather that his mother had not died, but according to the lawyer that was not as strong an argument to justify his callousness, which will be used against him in court⁶⁸. Later Meursault is taken to an examining magistrate who primarily wanted to know why did Meursault fire four more shots, a question to which Meursault does not know the answer⁶⁹. The examining magistrate opened a drawer and took from it a crucifix and asked Meursault who that was⁷⁰. The magistrate

⁶⁰ Ivi, p. 404.

⁶¹ Ivi, p. 406.

⁶² Ivi, p. 407.

⁶³ Camus, *The Stranger*, cit., p. 77.

⁶⁴ Ivi, p. 79.

⁶⁵ Ibidem.

⁶⁶ Ivi, p. 80.

⁶⁷ Ibidem.

⁶⁸ Ibidem.

⁶⁹ Ivi, p. 84.

⁷⁰ Ibidem.

told him that «even the worst sinners could obtain forgiveness of Him», but only if one repents⁷¹. Meursault followed his remarks with great difficulty as the office was «so stiflingly hot and big flies were buzzing round»⁷². He comes to realise that magistrate could not come to understand why had Meursault paused before firing a second shot⁷³. Meursault tells him that «he was wrong in insisting on this» as the point was «of quite minor importance»⁷⁴. He is asked whether he believes in God, to which Meursault answers with a resounding «No»⁷⁵. The magistrate thought it was unthinkable as «all men believe in God, even those who reject Him»⁷⁶. Even if Meursault believed in God that would mean he had vested the meaning of his life into a metaphysical concept into which he has no sensory insight. Had he accepted the crucified Christ as his saviour, that would mean he is avoiding responsibility for the murder. Not only that but repenting for his sins would be indicative of his guilt. Meursault shows no remorse for what he did, he is unsettled but not tortured by guilt.

4.3. Of remembering, liberty and social hypocrisy

Without Marie and cigarettes, Meursault was only left with time. He learned to shorten his days by remembering⁷⁷. Memories are of vital importance to the absurd man as they are a doorway to seeing life in its totality while providing it with meaning. He learned that «even after a single day's experience of the outside world a man could easily live a hundred years in prison»⁷⁸. Meursault's trial began somewhere around June of the following year⁷⁹. The day on which the trial started «was one of brilliant sunshine», just as it was on the day of the funeral and the day he murdered the Arab⁸⁰. He explains on trial that he did not return to the stream with the intention of killing the Arab and that their meeting was «a matter of pure chance»⁸¹. He was then asked why did he seem calm on the day of the funeral, but

⁷¹ Ivi, p. 85.

⁷² Ibidem.

⁷³ Ibidem.

⁷⁴ Ibidem.

⁷⁵ Ibidem.

⁷⁶ Ivi, p. 86.

⁷⁷ Ivi, pp. 98-99.

⁷⁸ Ivi, p. 98.

⁷⁹ Ivi, p. 102.

⁸⁰ Ibidem.

⁸¹ Ivi, p. 110.

he does not know what they meant by «calmness»⁸². His calmness was understood in the context of indifference. At that point, he felt «a sort of wave of indignation spreading through the courtroom, and for the first time [he] understood that [he] was guilty»⁸³. His trial revolved around how he conducted himself at the funeral and after the funeral when he got together with Marie and watched a comedy. After the Prosecutor finished his arguments, Meursault's lawyer impatiently asks: «Is my client on trial for having buried his mother, or for killing a man?»⁸⁴. The court giggled at this observation and the Prosecutor said with great passion: «I accuse the prisoner of behaving at his mother's funeral in a way that showed he was already a criminal at heart»⁸⁵. The trial stops at this point and Meursault is taken to his cell⁸⁶.

4.4. *Metaphysical state of the absurd man in face of his mortality*

Meursault is fascinated by the fact that much has been said about him personally than about his crime⁸⁷. The Prosecutor insists that Meursault has «no place in the community whose basic principles he flouts without compunction. Nor, heartless as he is, has he any claim to mercy»⁸⁸. By calling him «this man» the Prosecutor in a way belittles Meursault by refusing to use his name as if he is unworthy of it. In other words, Meursault is considered to be a sort of an inanimate entity, a *case* to be resolved. Not only that, but his lawyer speaks in the first person singular as if he himself was Meursault⁸⁹. The presiding judge passed a sentence on him «in the name of the French people» to be decapitated in a public place⁹⁰. Therefore, Meursault first encounters death as a stranger at his mother's funeral, then he gets closer to it through the killing of the Arab, and finally, through the passing of the capital sentence Meursault is completely facing death and his mortality⁹¹. In this final stage, Meursault makes peace with death and embraces

⁸² Ivi, p. 111.

⁸³ Ivi, p. 112.

⁸⁴ Ivi, p. 121.

⁸⁵ Ivi, pp. 121-122.

⁸⁶ Ivi, p. 122.

⁸⁷ Ivi, p. 123.

⁸⁸ Ivi, p. 129.

⁸⁹ Ivi, p. 130.

⁹⁰ Ivi, p. 135.

⁹¹ Rossi, *Albert Camus: The Plague of Absurdity*, cit., p. 408.

it. In face of death, he is liberated from social constructs and in this liberated state he opens up to authenticity⁹². Thus, an absurd man is an authentic man. Authenticity is cultivated through revolt⁹³. It is absurd that a capital sentence is a form of redemption, and it is a yet greater case of absurdity that one needs spiritual redemption from that principle in which one does not believe. Spiritual redemption is offered to Meursault through the prison chaplain who Meursault refuses to see⁹⁴. If Meursault would feel any remorse that would mean that he is unaccepting of his fatal guilt and the sentence passed on to him⁹⁵. By accepting guilt and the penalty, he becomes innocent and morally above good and evil, right and wrong⁹⁶. He becomes indifferent and sees the world's indifference too. Meursault understands he is guilty but is not a sinner:

«I told him I wasn't conscious of any „sin“; all I knew was that I'd been guilty of a criminal offence. Well, I was paying the penalty of that offence, and no one had the right to expect anything more of me»⁹⁷.

He rejects God because he believes that the existence of evil negates the existence of a divine being⁹⁸. As evil exists, there is no God. Symbolically, he rejects spiritual conventions as they also contribute to the absurdity of life that he has previously recognised in social modes of human conduct. He refuses to disregard the reason and clarity it provides him with because, in his eyes, only himself and the world are real⁹⁹. He is aware that spiritual concepts are out of his grasp and is aware that he cannot know them. After physically assaulting the chaplain he felt as if «that great rush of anger had washed [him] clean, emptied [him] of hope, and, [...] for the first time, the first, [he] laid [his] heart open to the benign indifference of the universe»¹⁰⁰. He did not commit sin as such by killing the Arab, sin as that action which estranges man from God, because he does not believe in God. He is a man of the absurd «which is a metaphysical state of the conscious man»¹⁰¹. That is

⁹² Ivi, p. 410.

⁹³ Ibidem.

⁹⁴ Camus, *The Stranger*, cit., p. 135.

⁹⁵ Rossi, *Albert Camus: The Plague of Absurdity*, cit., p. 411.

⁹⁶ Ivi, p. 412.

⁹⁷ Camus, *The Stranger*, cit., p. 148.

⁹⁸ Herbert Hochberg, *Albert Camus and the Ethic of Absurdity*, p. 90, in «Ethics», 75/2 (1965), pp. 87-102.

⁹⁹ Camus, *The Stranger*, cit., p. 151.

¹⁰⁰ Ivi, p. 154.

¹⁰¹ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, cit., pp. 27-28.

the sole reason why Camus dares to say that the absurd is «a sin without God»¹⁰². Meursault is representative of lucid consciousness which opposes death¹⁰³. That is the reason why Meursault is peaceful at the time of his death. He accepts, at first unconsciously and later consciously that death is a natural intrusion of the absolute which descends into the human experience and looks him in the eye¹⁰⁴.

Conclusion

Camus, through Meursault, speaks out about the worldview of the absurd man whose sole purpose is to be confronted with his mortality. Such confrontation brings about a kind of consciousness that naturally tends to deviate from societal norms and ready-made worldviews regarding one's existence. Through the killing of the Arab and the subsequent trial, Camus shows not only Meursault's mental processes but societal hypocrisy which is evident during the trial. Societal hypocrisy is contrasted against the honesty of the absurd man who speaks what he feels even at the cost of judgement. The consciousness of the absurd man is shaped by tragic events marked by a feeling of guilt. Through guilt and acceptance of responsibility, the absurd man evolves morally, elevating himself beyond good and evil. From such a position, the absurd man makes peace with the indifferent world. Such dialectical evolution is born from tragedy and forces the absurd individual to find meaning. Meaning is not something to be vested in a metaphysical principle, but the meaning is to be found within the individual. Thus, the meaning of life is life itself. Therefore, Camus's absurd man is both his own metaphysical principle and worldly reality which cognises itself and its surrounding through the senses. Life is empty of meaning and as such, it is up to us to provide it with meaning; be it memories or else. Remembering in particular is Camus' answer to the problem of meaning and a solution against the absurd. The absurd as the metaphysical state of man's consciousness is an affirmation of life. Therefore, the absurd provides an answer and is an answer to the question of meaning.

¹⁰² Camus, p. 28.

¹⁰³ H. Gaston Hall, *Aspects of the Absurd*, p. 31, in «Yale French Studies», 25 (1960), pp. 26-32.

¹⁰⁴ John K. Simon, *The Glance of Idiots: The Novel of the Absurd*, p. 114, in «Yale French Studies», 25 (1960), pp. 111-119.