

Forging Humanity In The Void: A Comparative Analysis Of Radical Freedom And Absurdist Revolt In The Philosophies Of Sartre And Camus

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Received: 03 September 2025; **Accepted:** 02 October 2025; **Published:** 01 November 2025

Abstract: Background: The philosophical contributions of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus represent a critical nexus in 20th-century existentialism. While often grouped together, their views on the fundamental nature of human existence diverged significantly, creating a rich and enduring debate that continues to inform contemporary thought.

Objective: This article provides a detailed comparative analysis of the concepts of human nature in the philosophies of Sartre and Camus. The study aims to move beyond common generalizations to meticulously dissect their foundational differences regarding freedom, consciousness, ethics, and revolt.

Methods: The study employs a comparative textual analysis of key philosophical and literary works by both authors. The analytical framework is structured around three core thematic pillars: (1) the ontological starting point of human existence (Sartre's "nothingness" vs. Camus's "the absurd"); (2) the characteristic human response (Sartre's "radical freedom" vs. Camus's "revolt"); and (3) the resulting ethical frameworks (Sartre's "authenticity" vs. Camus's "limits" and "solidarity"). The analysis is supported by relevant secondary scholarship [e.g., 1, 2, 3, 5, 11, 12].

Results: The analysis demonstrates that Sartre posits a human nature defined by "existence preceding essence," which condemns individuals to a radical and unbound freedom to create their own meaning and values. This freedom is accompanied by the peril of "bad faith." In stark contrast, Camus argues that the universal experience of the absurd gives rise to revolt, an act that reveals an inherent and shared human nature. This revolt establishes intrinsic moral limits, best summarized by his axiom, "I rebel, therefore we are."

Conclusion: While both Sartre and Camus champion human dignity in a meaningless universe, they offer profoundly different paths. Sartre's humanism is rooted in absolute individual responsibility and self-creation, while Camus's is a humanism of moderation, shared dignity, and solidarity born from a common condition. This fundamental distinction holds critical implications for contemporary ethical and political discourse.

Keywords: Existentialism, Jean-Paul Sartre, Albert Camus, Human Nature, Absurd, Revolt, Ethics.

Introduction: The intellectual landscape of the mid-20th century was irrevocably shaped by the philosophical currents of existentialism, a movement that captured the profound sense of dislocation, anxiety, and questioning that pervaded post-war society. Emerging from the crucible of two world wars, the fall of traditional institutions, and the rise of ideological certainties that demanded total commitment, existentialism offered a language to articulate the human condition in a world seemingly stripped of transcendent meaning. As a broad philosophical orientation, it found expression across

Europe, from the German foundations laid by Heidegger and Jaspers to the unique Christian existentialism of Marcel and the atheistic variants that would become most famous. At the heart of this latter development, particularly in France, stood two towering figures: Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus. Though their names are often uttered in the same breath, and their paths crossed in the vibrant intellectual circles of Paris, their philosophical trajectories were profoundly and, ultimately, irreconcilably different. General introductions to modern existentialism often present them as twin

pillars of the French movement, highlighting their shared concerns with freedom, responsibility, and the search for meaning in a godless universe [6, 9]. However, this grouping, while convenient, obscures a fundamental schism in their thought that goes to the very core of their respective projects: their conceptualization of human nature itself.

The central problem this article addresses is the persistent oversimplification of the Sartre-Camus relationship, which frequently papers over their deep-seated philosophical disagreements. While both thinkers begin from a rejection of classical essentialism—the idea that humans possess a fixed, pre-ordained nature or purpose—the alternatives they construct are not merely different in emphasis but diametrically opposed in their ethical and social implications. Sartre's famous dictum, "existence precedes essence," launches a philosophy of radical, unconditioned freedom where the individual is a void, a "nothingness" (néant) condemned to create a human identity from scratch through ceaseless, ungrounded choices [11]. Camus, conversely, begins not with the individual consciousness but with a shared, universal condition: the absurd [12]. For Camus, the absurd is the unbridgeable chasm between humanity's innate longing for clarity, reason, and unity, and the universe's cold, silent indifference to this desire. Their starting points—the solitary, self-creating consciousness versus the universal, shared confrontation with meaninglessness—dictate every subsequent step of their philosophical journeys. This article challenges the notion of a monolithic "French existentialism" by dissecting these core differences as they manifest in their theories of freedom, consciousness, revolt, and, most critically, ethics.

This article argues that while both Sartre and Camus reject a pre-ordained human essence, Sartre's philosophy champions a human nature defined by the radical, unbounded freedom of a self-creating consciousness, whereas Camus posits a shared human nature that is discovered through collective revolt against the absurd, thereby establishing inherent moral limits and human solidarity. For Sartre, human nature is not something to be discovered but something to be perpetually invented; it is the sum of one's actions, a project without foundation or guarantee. For Camus, human nature is not invented but revealed. In the moment of revolt against the indignity of the absurd condition, the individual says "no" to oppression and "yes" to a value that transcends them—a shared human dignity that connects them to all others. This "yes" is the discovery of a common nature that provides the very basis for morality and sets the limits on action.

To substantiate this thesis, this analysis will proceed in a structured, comparative manner. The first section will establish the conceptual framework, outlining the method of comparative textual analysis and the primary and secondary sources that inform the study. The second section, the core of the analysis, will delve into the results of this comparison, structured along three thematic axes. It will begin by contrasting their ontological starting points: Sartre's philosophy of nothingness and Camus's philosophy of the absurd. It will then examine their prescribed human responses to these conditions: Sartre's concept of radical freedom and the flight into "bad faith" versus Camus's theory of "revolt." Finally, it will explore the divergent ethical implications of their systems, comparing Sartre's ethics of absolute responsibility and authenticity with Camus's ethics of moderation, limits, and solidarity. The discussion section will then synthesize these findings, analyzing the profound differences in their respective forms of humanism and their conflicting views on political violence, before concluding with the enduring relevance of their philosophical tension for contemporary debates.

METHODS (Conceptual Framework)

To conduct a rigorous examination of the divergent concepts of human nature in the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, this study employs a comparative textual analysis. This qualitative approach is ideally suited for juxtaposing complex philosophical arguments, allowing for a deep and nuanced exploration of the core tenets, logical structures, and ethical implications of their respective worldviews. The method involves a systematic deconstruction and comparison of their key ideas, moving beyond surface-level similarities to expose the foundational logic that underpins their disagreements. The analysis is not merely descriptive; it is interpretive and critical, aiming to reconstruct their arguments in a way that illuminates their points of departure and the consequences of their differing premises. By placing their concepts in direct dialogue, this method facilitates a clearer understanding of each thinker's unique contribution to existentialist thought [7].

The analysis is grounded in a careful reading of the primary philosophical and literary works of both authors, which serve as the principal data for this study. For Camus, works such as *The Myth of Sisyphus*, *The Rebel*, and his literary explorations of philosophical themes, like the play *Caligula* [4], are essential. *Caligula*, in particular, serves as a powerful illustration of a character who takes the logic of the absurd to its nihilistic extreme, thereby demonstrating Camus's core argument for the necessity of limits [5]. For Sartre, the foundational texts include *Being and Nothingness*,

Existentialism is a Humanism, and his literary works that dramatize existential choice, such as the play *No Exit*. This study is further informed by a curated selection of key secondary scholarship that provides critical context and deeper analysis of their specific concepts. This includes scholarly examinations of their conflicting views on violence [1, 2], which became a central point of their public and personal rupture. It also draws on analyses of Camus's concept of revolt as a foundation for human nature [3] and Sartre's specific formulation of humanism [11]. Finally, broader works on existentialism [6, 9] and the human condition [12] provide the wider intellectual context, while explorations of moral philosophy help frame their ethical divergence [10].

The comparative framework of this article is structured along three core thematic axes, designed to move logically from foundational ontology to practical ethics. This structure ensures a comprehensive and systematic comparison that builds progressively toward the article's central thesis.

1. The Ontological Starting Point: Sartre's "existence precedes essence" versus Camus's "the absurd." This first axis examines their fundamental premises about the nature of being and consciousness. It contrasts Sartre's focus on the individual consciousness (*pour-soi*) as a "nothingness" that must define itself, with Camus's focus on the absurd as a relationship—a confrontation between human rationality and a silent universe.

2. The Human Response: Sartre's concept of radical freedom and "bad faith" versus Camus's theory of "revolt." Building on their ontological starting points, this axis analyzes the characteristic human action that follows. It juxtaposes Sartre's vision of a terrifying, absolute freedom and the psychological temptation to flee this responsibility through "bad faith," with Camus's theory of revolt as a positive, value-affirming act that establishes human dignity.

3. The Ethical Implications: Sartre's ethics of authenticity and absolute responsibility versus Camus's ethics of moderation, limits, and solidarity. This final axis explores the moral consequences of their philosophies. It contrasts Sartre's individualistic ethics, where authenticity means embracing one's groundless freedom, with Camus's communitarian ethics, where revolt itself discovers and imposes moral limits on action, thereby creating a foundation for human solidarity and a principled rejection of absolute ideologies.

By proceeding along these three axes, this study aims to provide a clear, structured, and compelling analysis of one of the most significant philosophical debates of

the 20th century.

RESULTS (Thematic Analysis)

Section 1: The Foundation of Being—Nothingness vs. The Absurd

The profound chasm that separates the philosophies of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus opens at their very starting points—their fundamental conceptions of the human situation. Before one can speak of freedom, ethics, or revolt, one must first understand the ground upon which the human subject stands. For Sartre, that ground is a terrifying void of its own making. For Camus, it is the rocky, uneven terrain of a shared confrontation.

Sartre's "Existence Precedes Essence": The Burden of Self-Creation

At the heart of Sartre's philosophy lies one of the most iconic phrases of 20th-century thought: "existence precedes essence." This is not merely a clever slogan but the bedrock of his entire ontology, articulated most systematically in *Being and Nothingness* and popularized in his lecture, *Existentialism is a Humanism*. To understand this principle is to grasp the radical nature of his vision of humanity. Sartre begins by drawing a distinction between two fundamental modes of being. The first is "being-in-itself" (*l'en-soi*), which is the being of objects. A stone, a table, a tree—these things are what they are. They are dense, solid, and fully realized. Their essence (their defining characteristics, their purpose) is fixed. They possess no potentiality beyond what they already are.

Human consciousness, which Sartre calls "being-for-itself" (*le pour-soi*), is entirely different. It is not a thing. It is, in his stark terminology, a "nothingness" (*le néant*). This does not mean it is literally nothing, but rather that it has no pre-determined essence, no fixed nature, no given identity. Consciousness is a pure, spontaneous activity of projection, intention, and awareness. It is defined by what it is not. When I am conscious of the table, I am not the table. My consciousness is precisely this separation, this distance from the world of objects. This "nothingness" is the source of human freedom. Because we are not a fixed essence, we are free to create our own. As Sartre famously states, man first exists, encounters himself, surges up in the world—and defines himself afterwards. At birth, we are nothing. It is only through our choices, our actions, our projects, that we build an essence for ourselves. This makes the human being a unique entity in the universe: a being whose existence comes before its essence.

This leads to the cornerstone of Sartrean humanism: man is nothing else but what he makes of himself [11]. This is a philosophy of absolute and terrifying

responsibility. There is no God, no human nature, no deterministic force to fall back on. Every choice we make is a creative act, not just for ourselves but, in a sense, for all of humanity. In choosing to be a certain way, we are affirming that this is how a human being ought to be. We are, each of us, legislators for mankind. This is the source of the existential "anguish" (angoisse) that Sartre describes. It is the dizzying realization that we are "condemned to be free"—condemned because we did not create ourselves, yet free because, once thrown into the world, we are responsible for everything we do. The human being is a project, a constant forward-striving, and this project is defined by its complete lack of an external or internal foundation. Human nature, for Sartre, is therefore not a given but a perpetual, and solitary, invention.

Camus's "Confrontation with the Absurd": The Universal Condition

Camus begins from a different place entirely. His focus is not on the internal structure of consciousness but on the nature of its relationship with the world. His foundational concept, meticulously explored in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, is "the absurd." The absurd is not, as is often misunderstood, simply the meaninglessness of the world itself. Nor is it a property of the human mind alone. For Camus, the absurd is a divorce, a confrontation, a clash. It is born from the collision between two forces: on one hand, the deep, innate human need for meaning, clarity, reason, and unity; on the other, the "unreasonable silence of the world" [12]. The universe offers no answers to our ultimate questions. It is irrational, indifferent, and opaque. The absurd is the feeling of being a stranger in one's own world, the recognition of this unbridgeable gap between our desire and reality.

Unlike Sartre's "nothingness," which is a feature of the individual consciousness, the absurd is a universal condition. It is the shared starting point for all humanity. We are all, by virtue of being human, thrown into this confrontation. Camus identifies the feeling of the absurd in moments of profound dislocation: when the routine of daily life is shattered and we ask "why?"; when we feel the alienating density of nature; when we are struck by the otherness of another person; or when we face the finality of our own death. In these moments, the stage set of our ordinary lives collapses, and we are left face-to-face with the raw, unmediated reality of our condition.

This has a crucial implication for the concept of human nature. Whereas Sartre sees human nature as something to be created individually, Camus sees the absurd as the very definition of the human condition, a shared nature that precedes any individual choice. Our

"nature" is to be creatures who demand meaning in a meaningless world. This is not a void to be filled but a tension to be lived. The central question for Camus is not "what shall I create?" but "how shall I live with this truth without escaping it?" He identifies several forms of escape. The most common is what he calls "philosophical suicide"—the leap of faith taken by religious or ideological systems that posit a transcendent meaning (e.g., God, History, Reason) to resolve the tension. This, for Camus, is a betrayal of the absurd's core truth. The other escape is literal suicide, which he rejects because it annihilates one of the terms of the confrontation (the human subject), thereby eliminating the absurd rather than facing it.

The only honest response, for Camus, is to live in a state of permanent revolt, freedom, and passion. This means keeping the absurd alive by lucidly acknowledging the conflict without resignation. Sisyphus, condemned to eternally push a boulder up a hill only to watch it roll down again, becomes the absurd hero. He is heroic not because he hopes to succeed, but because he is fully conscious of the futility of his task and yet continues anyway, finding a strange and tragic victory in his scorn for the gods and his dedication to his fate. For Camus, the human condition is Sisyphean. Our nature is to be meaning-seeking beings in a meaningless world, and our dignity lies in embracing this tension without flinching. This shared condition, this universal confrontation, is the foundation upon which Camus will build his entire ethics of solidarity and limits.

Section 2: The Nature of Response—Radical Freedom vs. Principled Revolt

Flowing directly from their divergent ontological starting points are their prescriptions for the proper human response. For Sartre, the response to being a "nothingness" is to exercise the radical freedom this condition entails, a task so daunting that it often leads to self-deception. For Camus, the response to the absurd is revolt, an act that is not one of solitary creation but of collective affirmation.

Sartre's Anguish of Freedom and the Escape of "Bad Faith"

If "existence precedes essence," then the human being is terrifyingly free. This is not the simple, liberal freedom of choosing between options A and B. It is a much deeper, more unsettling freedom: the freedom to define what A and B even mean. It is the freedom to create values themselves. Because there is no pre-ordained human nature or divine command, there is no objective justification for any choice. Every action is a leap into the void, an affirmation of a value that has no foundation other than the choice itself. This is the "anguish" of freedom. It is the weight of knowing that

you, and you alone, are responsible for what you are, and in choosing for yourself, you are choosing for all humankind.

This burden is so immense that, according to Sartre, there is a powerful and pervasive temptation to flee from it. This flight from freedom is what he famously terms "bad faith" (*mauvaise foi*). Bad faith is a unique form of self-deception. It is the act of treating oneself as an object, a "being-in-itself," in order to escape the anxiety of being a free "being-for-itself." It is an attempt to pretend that one's essence is fixed, that one's choices are determined by external factors or an internal nature. The waiter in the café who performs his role with an exaggerated, mechanical precision is a classic Sartrean example. He is playing at being a waiter, reducing his free consciousness to the determined essence of "a waiter." The woman on a first date who leaves her hand inert in her suitor's, neither accepting nor rejecting his advance, is treating her body as a mere thing, separate from her consciousness, to avoid the moment of choice.

Bad faith is a lie to oneself, a denial of one's own freedom. Critically, this act of self-objectification has profound ethical and political consequences. By denying one's own freedom, one implicitly denies the freedom of others. This is the psychological root of much human cruelty and oppression. As Ronald Santoni argues, the logic of bad faith can be extended to understand the nature of violence. To commit violence against another person requires, in some sense, reducing them to an object, a thing to be manipulated or eliminated. It is a denial of their status as a free, conscious subject. In this way, violence can be seen as an extreme manifestation of bad faith, an attempt to assert one's own freedom by annihilating the freedom of the other [1]. Sartre's framework thus presents a stark choice: either the authentic acceptance of one's terrifying freedom and total responsibility, or the inauthentic escape into bad faith, which carries with it the seeds of objectification and violence.

Camus's "I Rebel, Therefore We Are": The Discovery of Value

Camus's prescribed response to the absurd is revolt (*la révolte*). While Sartre's freedom is a metaphysical condition of the individual, Camus's revolt is a concrete, historical, and fundamentally collective act. In his seminal work, *The Rebel*, Camus makes a crucial distinction between revolt and revolution. While revolution aims to overturn a system and install a new one (often leading to new forms of tyranny), revolt is a more fundamental human movement. It begins with a "no." The slave who has accepted orders his entire life

suddenly says "no." This "no" is not just a negation. In saying "no" to the master's command, the slave is implicitly saying "yes" to something within himself that he deems worthy of respect. He is affirming that there is a line that cannot be crossed, a limit beyond which the master cannot go.

This is the moment of discovery. In that act of revolt, the individual transcends his own solitude. He is not just fighting for himself. The value he defends—dignity, justice, freedom from oppression—he recognizes as being common to all people. As Camus famously writes, "I rebel, therefore we are." The movement of revolt gives birth to a collective identity. It reveals a shared human nature that was previously obscured. This nature, for Camus, is not a biological or metaphysical essence, but a value-laden one discovered in the act of standing up against that which denies it. The concept of revolt, therefore, serves as a direct response to the problem of human nature [3]. It is through this act that we discover we are part of a community of fellow sufferers who share a common dignity.

This has profound implications for freedom. For Camus, freedom is not the absolute, ungrounded freedom of Sartre. It is a freedom that is born of and limited by the freedom of others. The very act of revolt that establishes my own dignity simultaneously establishes the dignity of my fellow human beings. This creates an immediate ethical boundary. My freedom ends where the dignity of another begins. This is why Camus was so critical of what he saw as the excesses of absolute ideologies, both fascist and communist. He believed that any philosophy that posits an absolute end (like a future classless society) that justifies absolute means (like revolutionary terror) is a betrayal of the very principle of revolt.

The play *Caligula* serves as a powerful literary exploration of this idea. The Roman emperor Caligula, after the death of his sister, is struck by the absurd truth that "men die and they are not happy." He decides to live this truth with absolute logical consistency. If there are no ultimate values, then everything is permitted. He proceeds to terrorize his subjects with arbitrary cruelty, murder, and humiliation, seeking to teach them the lesson of the absurd. He embodies a kind of Sartrean radical freedom, unconstrained by any pre-existing limit. But Caligula is a monster. His project of absolute freedom leads only to nihilism and destruction. He demonstrates, through negative example, Camus's central point: the absurd, when not tempered by revolt and its inherent limits, becomes a license for tyranny [4, 5]. Revolt, unlike Caligula's nihilism, is not a demand for total freedom but a demand for a "relative" freedom that respects the shared dignity of all.

Section 3: The Moral Compass—Authenticity vs. Solidarity

The final and most critical point of divergence between Sartre and Camus lies in the ethical systems that emerge from their philosophies. Sartre's ethics are rooted in the solitary individual's struggle for authenticity in the face of absolute freedom. Camus's ethics are born from the collective experience of revolt and are grounded in the principles of solidarity and moderation. This difference ultimately led to their famous and bitter public split over the question of political violence.

Sartre's Ethics of Authenticity and Absolute Responsibility

For Sartre, if there is no God and no fixed human nature, then there can be no a priori source of moral values. We cannot look to a sacred text, a universal reason, or a natural law to guide our actions. We are, in a word, "forlorn." This does not, however, mean that anything is permitted in the sense of moral nihilism. Rather, it means that we are absolutely responsible for the values we create through our choices. The moral life, for Sartre, is the authentic life. Authenticity means fully embracing our condition as free beings, accepting the anguish of our groundless choices, and living without the excuse of bad faith.

An authentic choice is one made with the full awareness that in choosing for oneself, one is creating an image of humanity as one believes it ought to be. This imbues every action with an immense weight. If I choose to marry and have children, I am not just making a personal decision; I am committing all of humanity to the value of monogamous family life. If I choose to be a pacifist, I am legislating pacifism for the world. This sense of total responsibility is the foundation of Sartrean ethics. There is no external guide; the only moral compass is the lucid recognition of one's own freedom and its universal implications.

This framework, however, presents significant challenges, particularly when it comes to political action. Sartre's emphasis on radical freedom and the creation of values led him, at various points in his life, to endorse revolutionary movements that employed violence. His logic, in simplified terms, was that in certain oppressive situations, the act of revolutionary violence could be an authentic choice—a necessary means to overthrow a system that systematically reduced human beings to objects and to create a new future where freedom could flourish. He could justify this violence as a "terrible necessity" in the project of human liberation, a creative act to bring about a new set of values. This willingness to subordinate the individual to a future historical goal, even through

violent means, placed him in direct opposition to Camus.

Camus's Ethics of Limits, Moderation, and Solidarity

Camus's ethics are, in almost every respect, a direct refutation of this Sartrean position. For Camus, moral values are not created from nothing by the individual will; they are discovered in the act of revolt. As established, the moment of revolt ("I rebel, therefore we are") reveals a shared human dignity that is the primordial value. This value is not an abstract invention but a concrete reality felt in the shared struggle against oppression. Because this value is common to all, it cannot be selectively denied to anyone. This is the source of Camus's core ethical principle: the ethics of limits.

Revolt itself draws the line. The rebel fights for dignity, but if in that fight he employs means that deny the dignity of others—such as indiscriminate terror, concentration camps, or state-sponsored murder—he contradicts the very principle that motivated his revolt in the first place. He becomes the oppressor he sought to overthrow. This is the tragedy of many 20th-century revolutions, which, in the name of an absolute future justice, practiced absolute injustice in the present. Camus's ethics are therefore an ethics of moderation (*mesure*). He champions a "relative" utopia, one that seeks to reduce suffering and increase justice without sacrificing the present generation for a hypothetical future. He insists that the means must be justified by the end, and that certain means (like the direct killing of innocents) can never be justified, no matter how noble the end.

This fundamental disagreement over violence and limits was the crux of the public dispute between the two men. When Camus's *The Rebel* was published, Sartre and his circle savaged it, accusing Camus of being a bourgeois moralist, afraid to get his hands dirty for the cause of justice. They saw his insistence on limits as a betrayal of the oppressed. Camus, in turn, saw Sartre's position as a dangerous justification for tyranny [2]. For Camus, the process of "moral selection" was not about choosing an abstract historical goal, but about making concrete choices in the present that affirmed human dignity and refused to treat any human being as a mere means to an end [10]. His humanism was not one of a future, abstract "Man," but of living, breathing people in the here and now. The ultimate moral law for Camus is rooted in solidarity—the recognition that we are all bound together by our shared condition and our shared revolt against it. Any action that shatters this solidarity in the name of an absolute ideal is a betrayal of our common humanity.

DISCUSSION

The comparative analysis of Sartre's and Camus's philosophies reveals a fundamental and irreconcilable opposition in their understanding of human nature, freedom, and ethics. While both begin by confronting a universe devoid of transcendent purpose, the paths they chart from this shared starting point lead to vastly different destinations. This discussion synthesizes these findings, explores the distinct forms of humanism they propose, acknowledges the study's limitations, and considers the enduring implications of their debate.

Synthesis of Findings: A Tale of Two Freedoms

The core of their disagreement can be summarized as a series of dichotomies. First is the dichotomy of individual creation versus collective discovery. Sartre's human is a solitary artist, a *pour-soi* condemned to paint his own essence onto the blank canvas of existence. Human nature is the final, never-finished portrait. For Camus, the human is an explorer who, in the act of rebelling against the hostile environment of the absurd, discovers a hidden continent of shared value—human dignity. Human nature is this discovered land, which provides the resources and sets the boundaries for the community that settles there.

Second is the dichotomy of unbound freedom versus freedom within limits. Sartrean freedom is absolute, terrifying, and foundationless. It is a metaphysical state of being that precedes all values. Camusian freedom is relative, concrete, and born of revolt. It is a political and ethical achievement, defined and constrained by the equal freedom and dignity of others. As Madison notes, Camus is fundamentally a "philosopher of limits," one who understands that human endeavors, including the pursuit of justice and freedom, must recognize boundaries to avoid becoming monstrous [5]. Caligula's nihilistic rampage is the ultimate cautionary tale against a freedom that recognizes no limits.

Third, and most consequentially, is the dichotomy of revolutionary violence versus principled moderation. Sartre's philosophy, with its emphasis on creating new values and its focus on a future-oriented project, could be bent to justify the "dirty hands" of revolutionary violence as a necessary, if terrible, means to a radically new end. Camus's philosophy, grounded in the immediate, discovered value of human dignity, insists that the means must be consistent with the end. Revolt, for Camus, dies the moment it resorts to the very tactics of objectification and murder it rose up to oppose. This is not an argument for passivity, but for a constant, vigilant struggle that refuses to sacrifice the present for a hypothetical future, a position that has been characterized as both ambiguous and deeply principled in its treatment of violence [2].

Two Forms of Humanism

Ultimately, both Sartre and Camus were profound humanists, but they championed two different kinds of humanism. Sartre's is a humanism of the self-legislator. It is a proud, defiant humanism that places the full weight of meaning-creation on the shoulders of the individual. Man is the future of man. He is the sole source of value in the universe. This is a humanism of absolute responsibility and Promethean ambition [11].

Camus's is a humanism of shared dignity and compassion. It is a more sober, tragic, and fraternal humanism. It finds value not in a radical act of creation but in the shared recognition of our common plight and our common revolt against it. It is a humanism that finds its highest expression not in the solitary hero but in the community of rebels, in the doctor fighting a plague, in the slave who says "no." It is a humanism of solidarity, moderation, and an unwavering commitment to the concrete, living individual over any abstract ideology.

Limitations of the Study

It is important to acknowledge the limitations of this analysis. This study has focused specifically on the philosophical divergence in their concepts of human nature, primarily through an examination of their core philosophical texts. It has not attempted to provide a comprehensive overview of their entire literary oeuvres, their complex political engagements over several decades, or the full biographical context of their relationship. Furthermore, while drawing on key secondary sources, it does not engage with the vast and ever-growing body of scholarship on both thinkers. The aim has been depth and clarity on a specific, foundational disagreement, rather than exhaustive breadth. A fuller picture would require a more detailed historical analysis of their interventions in the political debates of their time and a closer reading of how their philosophical ideas are dramatized and complicated in their novels and plays.

CONCLUSION

The philosophical tension between Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus is more than a historical curiosity; it is an enduring and vital framework for navigating the most pressing ethical and political questions of our time. They present us with two powerful, competing visions of what it means to be human in a world without divine guarantees. Does our dignity lie in our absolute freedom to create ourselves anew, even if that creation requires a violent break with the present? Or does it lie in our recognition of a shared nature, a common dignity that imposes limits on our actions and binds us to one another in solidarity?

The debate between the unbound freedom of Sartre and the measured revolt of Camus continues to resonate in contemporary discussions about individualism versus community, the ethics of political action, and the search for a moral compass in a secular, pluralistic age. Their arguments force us to confront the ultimate questions: What is the source of our values? What are the limits of our freedom? And to whom are we ultimately responsible? In a world still grappling with the allure of absolute ideologies and the challenges of forging a common good, the profound and principled disagreement between these two giants of existentialism remains as relevant and necessary as ever. They offer no easy answers, but in their powerful, conflicting visions, they provide the essential tools for the ongoing, and necessary, human task of defining ourselves.

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