

# *Analysis of the Existential View of Freedom in Camus' The Stranger*

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**Abstract:** Camus' *The Stranger* is a classic literary work that portrays an existentialist view of freedom. The protagonist of this book is not bound by social and moral constraints. He views the world and his own existence with a detached attitude. The theme of this paper is to study the connotation of existential freedom in *The Stranger* and its expression in literary works. The text interpretation method is adopted to conduct a deep analysis of the behavior, language, and thoughts of the protagonist in the novel. At the same time, it also referred to the theory of existentialism to further elaborate on the connotation of existential freedom. Through analysis, this paper concludes that the existentialist view of freedom in *The Stranger* is reflected in the protagonist's independent and free understanding of the self and the objective world. This view of freedom contrasts sharply with traditional morality and values, showcasing a detached attitude towards life.

**Keywords:** Camus, existentialism, liberty

## 1. Introduction

The existentialist view of freedom stems from a unique understanding of human nature. They believe that human existence is free and has no predetermined purpose or destiny. Existentialists emphasize that everyone must decide their own way of life and be responsible for their actions. This concept of freedom had a profound impact on the fields of philosophy, literature, and art in the 20th century.

Camus' *The Stranger* is a world-renowned philosophical novel that showcases the author's unique understanding of freedom through the description of the protagonist Meursault's life experiences. Therefore, this study will mainly elaborate on *The Stranger* from three aspects: the essence of freedom, freedom and choice, and the non freedom of responsibility caused by freedom.

In the future, as people continue to delve deeper into the novel *The Stranger*, they can further explore its value and influence in other fields, thereby helping us make some progress in other fields. For example, in the field of psychology, studying the existentialist view of freedom in *The Stranger* can provide insights into the treatment of modern people's mental distress. In the field of education, exploring the concept of freedom in *The Stranger* can guide educators to better understand students' individual needs and free choices.

## 2. The Essence of the Concept of Freedom

Many philosophers in the history of philosophy have put forward their own opinions on the idea of freedom. For example, Aristotle believed that freedom is a voluntary choice of behavior. Kant believed that freedom is human freedom, and self-discipline in the will becomes the most important part of his concept of freedom. In Hegel's view, freedom is directly related to necessity, and freedom is the understanding of necessity. In many cases, freedom refers to the freedom of one's own will, and in the eyes of existentialist philosophers, freedom itself also has a unique meaning.

The earliest founder of existentialism was the philosopher Heidegger, and Sartre had a more profound impact on the development of existentialism. Sartre's idea of freedom occupies an important position in his philosophy. In his view, the existence of human beings reveals the nature of their freedom, and existence is the freedom of human beings themselves [1].

It can be carried out that in Camus' philosophical concept, freedom is an essential attribute of human beings and a proactive right to one's own destiny. He expresses through the role of Meursault in *The Stranger* that freedom is an inherent right that cannot be deprived of. In the face of various difficulties in life, Meursault always adheres to his position of freedom and holds an indifferent attitude towards all moral norms and values. Camus believed that only by adhering to a position of freedom can one truly become their own master.

In Camus' *The Stranger*, the essence of freedom is deeply reflected. Camus, with his unique brushstroke, depicts how the protagonist Meursault, in the absurd world, persistently pursues freedom with a cold and lonely attitude.

Camus' view of freedom is reflected in Meursault's response to the absurd world. Absurdity is the core of Camus' philosophical thought, manifested in Meursault's life as a disregard for any norms or morals [2]. He does not care about the meaning of the world, nor does he seek redemption or transcendence. His behavior, whether regarding the death of his mother or his interactions with his girlfriend, appeared cold and rational [3]. He is like an eternal stranger, always maintaining a sense of alienation from the world.

However, this alienation does not mean that Meursault is not free. On the contrary, his freedom is reflected in this alienation. Although his behavior may seem absurd to strangers, his heart is completely free. His behavior is not driven by any external norms but rather by his own understanding and reaction to the world. His freedom is his existence, his actions, and his thoughts.

The embodiment of Camus' concept of freedom in *The Stranger* has led us to re-examine the definition of freedom. Freedom is not just without constraints. It is also how people face and understand the world. Absurdity and alienation may be experiences that every one of us has, but that does not mean that people are not free. True freedom is the ability to persist in ourselves and make free choices within ourselves when facing an absurd world.

In terms of style, Camus' writing is concise, cold, and full of philosophical depth. His sentence structure is simple and his words are precise, which makes his writing highly readable. His sentences are filled with a deep understanding of human nature and a deep insight into life. His narrative style is direct, objective, and without any emotional color, which gives his works a unique appeal.

Overall, Camus' *The Stranger* showcases the essence of freedom by delving into human freedom and absurdity. His writing, with its unique style and in-depth thinking, has given us a new understanding of freedom.

## 3. Freedom and Choice

Freedom and choice are inseparable. In *The Stranger*, Meursault faces many choices, and his choices are always based on the simplest and most direct logic. Camus believed that choice is an individual's self-determination when facing the world and a confirmation of their own existence. Meursault's

choice may seem absurd, but it is actually a commitment to individual freedom. He chose the simplest way to deal with the complexity and uncertainty of the world, in order to maintain his own freedom.

In 20th century French literature, Albert Camus won worldwide acclaim for his unique expression and deeply ingrained work style. His representative work, *The Stranger* is even more beloved by readers. Through the portrayal of the protagonist, Meursault, Camus cleverly presents the profound themes of freedom and choice.

Meursault is a character carefully crafted by Camus, who is a stranger who wanders beyond social laws and human emotions [4]. Through his perspective, Camus profoundly portrayed the struggle between existence and nothingness in modern people, as well as the importance of free choice when facing the world.

Camus' concept of freedom is fully reflected in *The Stranger*. He emphasizes human freedom and non essentiality, believing that humans constantly shape and choose themselves in existence. In Meursault, people see a manifestation of this freedom, as he refuses to accept the established rules and moral standards of society and adheres to his own way of life and values. Camus' view of freedom deeply influenced later existential philosophy.

Meanwhile, Camus also explored the issue of choice in *The Stranger*. He believes that due to people's skepticism and questioning of the free world, an irreparable sense of exile can generate a stranger at any time [4]. He also believes that human freedom of choice has moral significance, and people must make their own choices when facing the diversity and possibilities of the world. Meursault's choice reflects his unique understanding of life, as he refuses to accept moral judgments imposed on him by society and instead lives his own way. As some free will skeptics reject this sort of moral responsibility [5].

Camus' writing style is known for its directness, conciseness, and objectivity. He did not make too many value judgments in his works, but instead allowed readers to think for themselves about the meaning of freedom and choice through the role of Meursault. This objective writing style endows Camus' works with high aesthetic value, while also leaving readers with broad room for interpretation.

Overall, Camus' *The Stranger* is a literary work that deeply explores freedom and choice. Through Meursault's image, it can be observed people's free choice when facing the world and the impact of this choice on themselves and others. Camus' views on freedom and choice not only influenced existential philosophy, but also provided profound insights into our understanding of ourselves and life.

In the 21st century, people have the right to choose and should be brave enough to face the challenges of life and live up to their own life values.

#### **4. The Non Freedom of Responsibility Caused by Freedom**

Although freedom is an essential attribute of human beings, it also brings responsibility [6]. In *The Stranger*, Meursault's freedom creates a sense of distance between him and others, preventing him from fulfilling his social responsibilities. This sense of distance made Meursault excluded from society, which in turn strengthened his resistance to social norms. Camus attempted to remind us through this phenomenon that freedom is not only a right, but also a responsibility. Individuals must take on corresponding responsibilities while pursuing freedom; otherwise, it will lead to their own non freedom [6].

In Camus' classic work *The Stranger*, the themes of freedom and responsibility run throughout. The protagonist, Meursault, as an image indifferent to social rules, lives in his own world and seems to have freedom. However, his freedom comes at the cost of neglecting the responsibilities of others and society, reflecting the essence of non freedom.

In Camus' writing, Meursault is a character who is incompatible with society. He is not concerned about the impact of his own behavior on others, nor does he care about his social evaluation. His

behavior may seem free, but this freedom carries a sense of loneliness and isolation, implying his evasion of social responsibility.

For example, in the novel, Meursault adopts a seemingly indifferent attitude towards his mother's death. He neither showed signs of grief nor reflected in any way on his mother's death. This indifferent attitude seems to indicate that he has the right to decide his emotional life and the freedom to choose whether to express sadness. However, his freedom overlooked his responsibility towards his mother and his exploration and expression of the emotions that arose from her death.

In another example, when Meursault faced his own trial, he refused to defend his actions and also refused to show remorse. His behavior may seem to be defending his freedom, but in reality, he is evading his responsibility. He refused to explain his behavior to society and refused to accept its evaluation. As a result, he became isolated and unable to integrate into society.

Camus' brushstrokes are sharp and delicate, revealing the relationship between freedom and responsibility through Meursault's image. Meursault's freedom is actually a form of non freedom, as he is unable to take on his own responsibilities and establish connections with others. [5]Although his behavior may seem free, it has plunged him into a state of loneliness and isolation.

Overall, *The Stranger* portrays the complex relationship between freedom and responsibility through Meursault's image. A person's freedom is not simply self-expression, but rather needs to be achieved based on respect for others and social responsibility. Neglecting responsibility, although it may seem like freedom has been gained in the short term, can lead people into a non free situation in the long run. This is because only when people take on our responsibilities can people truly establish connections with others and society, and gain true freedom.

As Camus revealed, our freedom is not an isolated concept, but rather needs to be achieved through connections with others. When people choose to evade responsibility, people are actually cutting off our connection with others, thus losing true freedom.

In the process of reading *The Stranger*, people not only saw Camus' profound understanding of freedom and responsibility, but also saw how he revealed the essence of this non freedom through words. In his writings, every indifferent behavior and every opportunity to evade responsibility reveal how people lose their freedom in the process of neglecting responsibility.

It can be argued that true freedom is not achieved by avoiding responsibility, but by bravely facing responsibility and sincerely establishing connections with others. Every choice has its own freedom and limitations, and true freedom lies in how people find their place in this world, how people take on our responsibilities, and how people establish connections with others.

In *The Stranger*, Camus uses his unique writing to show us the complex relationship between freedom and responsibility, and also to realize that only by taking responsibility can people truly achieve freedom. His work is not only a masterpiece that reveals the depths of human nature, but also an important inspiration that guides us to think about freedom and responsibility.

## 5. Conclusion

Camus' *The Stranger* is a profound philosophical novel, with the most prominent theme being the protagonist Meursault's view of freedom. Through the description of the protagonist, Meursault, Camus cleverly reveals the alienation and absurdity of modern human existence, as well as people's pursuit of freedom and truth.

Firstly, Meursault's attitude towards life reflects his concept of freedom. His attitude towards the world is neither enthusiastic nor indifferent, but he rather faces it in a seemingly indifferent but actually deeply sympathetic way. His actions, whether dealing with the death of his mother or his own love, demonstrate a unique view of freedom, that is, despite the absurdity and incomprehensibility of life, people can still freely choose how to face it.

Secondly, Meursault's concept of freedom has not been dispelled by the absurdity of modern society. Although he appears out of place with the people around him in behavior, he always adheres to his own stance in spirit. He refused to lie, even when facing the threat of the death penalty. His persistence undoubtedly reflects his concept of freedom, that is, human freedom does not lie in the environment, but in whether one can hold onto their own inner selves.

Camus' *The Stranger* not only reveals the dilemma of modern people's freedom, but also provides us with a unique view of freedom. His view on freedom is neither traditional liberalism nor negative freedom, but a freedom that upholds itself and bravely faces the absurd world. This view of freedom provides us with profound insights into the state of freedom in modern society.

Overall, Camus' *The Stranger* reveals the survival state of modern people with his unique perspective on freedom. His concept of freedom not only provides us with a profound understanding of modern society, but also an unique attitude towards life.

However, there are some shortcomings in the study of the concept of freedom in this novel. For example, there is a relative lack of comparative research between Camus' view of freedom and that of other philosophers. In order to improve our research people can examine *The Stranger* within a broader philosophical context. For example, it is possible to explore the relationship between Meursault's view of freedom and existentialism, Nietzsche's view of freedom, and so on. In addition, people can compare the concept of freedom in *The Stranger* with other literary works to gain a more comprehensive understanding of Camus' creative ideas and literary style. Finally, interdisciplinary research methods can be used to comprehensively analyze Morso's views on freedom from different perspectives, such as philosophy, literature, and psychology, in order to gain a deeper understanding of the essence of this novel.

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