



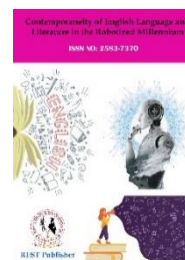
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The Ethics of Pleasure: Camus and The Search for Meaning

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ABSTRACT: *"The Happy Man" by Albert Camus: An Unconventional Interpretation through a Hedonistic Lens. This research paper aims to explore "The Happy Man" by Albert Camus from a hedonistic standpoint. Albert Camus' novel A Happy Death portrays the meaning of happiness and freedom. The protagonist, Patrice Mersault, earns his fortune and kills Roland Zagreus for money. Zagreus cannot live his life because he feels life is too much for him, so he has written a note of his death wish. It is also Zagreus' existential choice that only two men live their lives to the fullest, rather than both living unhappily. Death is Zagreus' ultimate freedom of choice because he has experienced his life perfectly. After killing Zagreus, Mersault leads a life of travel, hedonism and leisure but feels happiness is the only way of escaping. His health is uncertain, but his wallet is full. Through the analysis of various enigmatic situations of the protagonist throughout the novel, this paper argues that Mersault's failure to gain happiness is his inability to recognize that true happiness emerges from the outside.*

Keywords: Hedonism, happiness, death, choice.

Hedonism is a school of thought that argues pleasure and happiness are the primary or most important essential goods and the aim of human life. Modern philosopher Michel On fray concisely summarizes the quintessence of hedonism, emphasizing that it places pleasure and happiness at the forefront of human existence. Happiness, in the reduced, emotional sense in which we recognize it, is a problem of the economics of the individual's libido. Freud, the founder of analysis, integrated hedonistic elements into his theories. He suggested that the pursuit of pleasure and the fulfillment of one's desires were fundamental to understanding human behavior. While Camus is more commonly associated with existentialism and absurdism, this paper will analyze this novel to identify elements that could be seen as hedonistic in nature. This involve examining the protagonist's pursuit of pleasure and happiness in the story, as well as his attitude towards life.

Albert Camus's philosophical works have often centered on existentialism and absurdism, challenging traditional hedonistic ideals. "The Happy Death" introduces us to a character, Patrice Mersault, who embarks on a journey driven by pleasure, which may be seen as a form of hedonism. This paper will explore how elements of hedonism are intertwined in Mersault's character and his pursuit of a happy life in a universe devoid of inherent meaning Human Happiness and Freedom in the novel that happiness is never easy to acquire and to define it in a general term due to its meaning, which may be strange for every individual. In most situations, the novel's protagonists, Patrice Mersault and Roland Zagreus, also endure different appetites for happiness. Zagreus is a disabled man who cannot use his property and money for his improvement and happiness. Zagreus encourages Mersault to live his life to its fullest because of his physical incapability, which never allows him to enjoy the life he lacks. Albert Camus does not draw a clear picture of happiness and death, but he leaves some of the traces that can be obtained in the innocence of the heart. Hedonism emphasizes the pursuit of sensory pleasures as a path to happiness. In "The Happy Death," Patrice Mersault is portrayed as man who embraces life's pleasures, whether they be emotional, physical, or intellectual. He seeks joy in sensuous experiences.

"He wanted to live life to the fullest, tasting every pleasure, savoring every joy."

"He felt alive and filled with the joys of life."

"He had discovered the great secret of life – to live in pleasure." (Page 45)

Zagreus could always feel the empty side of happiness when he gets others' help to be alive. So, he drank very little, preferring to urinate only once a day. Happiness requires the wholeness of existence, like day and night, sun and rain, life and death. Every time, money comes as a necessary condition of happiness. Money does not ensure happiness, but it buys time and allows the possibility of happiness. Money can be the source to buy certain material objects but can not buy the depth of true happiness which emerges from within. Happiness has no historical background; it is rooted before the invention of money.

Money emerges in the certain ladder of human civilization and covers the tiny space of happiness for the human race. We find Zagreus' clear motive when he defines the relation between money and happiness for certain classes. Zagreus explains it in the following way: "Don't think I'm saying that money makes happiness. I only mean that for a certain class of beings, happiness is possible, provided they have time, and that having money is a way of being free of money" (36).

Money can buy time, but it has no connection with happiness. A traveller without a penny has a stronger sense of happiness than a wealthy prince. Happiness never expects any requirement for its strength; existence is enough for it. Money can only buy the time, giving us the space to be happy. According to Zagreus, money buys time, and time is the only reason for happiness. But money alone can't do it. Mersault himself embraces a will to happiness, which seems that Camus is not taking happiness as a particular achieved state. The will to happiness is the willingness to embrace the situation and accept one's world, no matter what it is.

Mersault's character can be seen as accepting this lifestyle, as he unrepentantly seeks indulgence and joy in various aspects of his life. Mersault's pursuit of pleasure often leads him into morally ambiguous situations. He is willing to sacrifice traditional moral values for the sake of immediate gratification. This moral ambiguity is exemplified in several instances throughout the novel. Mersault's affair with Florence, even though knowing that Florence is married, he engages in an affair with her, disregarding the moral boundaries of loyalty. His indifference to consequences: Mersault's actions are driven by his immediate desires, and he often neglects the moral cost of his choices. For example, he shows no repentance or guilt when his actions result in harm to others. Mersault's moral ambiguity underscores the novel's exploration of the conflict between hedonistic pursuits and conventional moral values. His actions challenge the idea that the pursuit of pleasure can coexist with a strong moral compass, and it raises questions about the ethical implications of such a hedonistic lifestyle. "He loved the pleasures of existence, he enjoyed them in excess." (Page 72)

On the other hand, Mersault's will to happiness is such a limited aim. The episode of Zagreus' murder is confusing. It seems that Zagreus strongly suggested his murder to Mersault and wants Patrice to have the happiness he cannot achieve. Yet this is ambiguous. Camus defines happiness as an ever-present consciousness, and there must be a minimum of ignorance to perfect life in happiness. Happiness emerges from the innocence of the heart. So, we must live the easiest life form by not forcing ourselves. Even preparing our mind to be happy is the wrong concept that we must choose to be happy, but every existential choice seems to be necessary for happiness. Camus comments on the choices which his protagonist, Patrice Mersault, makes in this way:

You make the mistake of thinking you have to choose, that you have to do what you want, and that there are conditions for happiness. What matters all that matters, really- is will to happiness, a kind of enormous, everpresent consciousness. The rest – women, art, and success are nothing but excuses. A Canvas waiting for our embroideries. (91)

"A Happy Death," Mersault's quest for happiness and pleasure can be seen as a unique response to the absurdity of life. He does not engage in a philosophical battle with the meaninglessness of existence but instead focuses on the pleasures he encounters. Patrice Mersault whose hedonistic tendencies are pictured in the novel. He persistently seeks sensory pleasures, emotional satisfaction, and intellectual indulgence. His hedonism is marked by a commitment to savoring life's pleasures.

Mersault's thirst for happiness makes him experience happiness by spending time with three girls in Prague or The House above the World, then in an ascetic solitude in the Chenoa, mitigated by visits from his wife Lucienne or the three friends. He has conquered the happiness and retains it in death by evoking Zagreus.

Mersault's conditions of the singular happiness he sought were getting up early every morning and taking a regular swim- it's a complete conscious hygiene. For Mersault, loving life is not going for a swim. It's like living in intoxication intensity. Mersault failed to realize the true nature of happiness and spent his time in pleasure-seeking activities only to feel happiness. Mersault also felt how close happiness is to tears, caught up in the silent exaltation

that waves human life's hopes and desperation together. Mersault's desire for happiness is a happy death, which makes him away from the world where he murders Roland Zagreus and seeks happiness in the House above the world.

Mersault's hedonistic routine also leads to existential detachment. He often appears disconnected from the world and its moral and existential concerns. This detachment is a central theme in Camus' works, reflecting the existential philosophy of the absurd, where individuals deal with the inherent meaninglessness and indifference of the universe. Mersault's indifference to societal norms he rejects societal expectations and norms, such as the traditional concept of marriage, and follows his hedonistic desires. This existential detachment is evident in his paying no attention to societal conventions. The pursuit of pleasure as a response to the absurd: Mersault's hedonism can be seen as a way to cope with the absurdity of existence. Instead of confronting the meaninglessness of life directly, he embraces immediate pleasures and distractions.

Mersault's existential detachment is a manifestation of Camus' exploration of the absurd. In a world that lacks innate meaning, Mersault turns to hedonism as a means of escaping or navigating the existential crisis that plagues him. Ultimately, Mersault has realized his warmth for wealth and power, and his uncommitted actions for happiness. Suppose every individual makes it his objective to lead a happy life according to man's evolutionary, emotional structure. In that case, it is evident that all of humanity, every individual in the world, would be happier and happier. Concentrating on enhancing our happiness is more important than searching for a nonexistent purpose in life or wasting our lives trying to make others happy. It did not matter if you existed for two or twenty years; happiness was that you had existed. Zagreus deserves the wisdom of his happiness and uses his choice of freedom. Zagreus finds happiness in his death because he has already tasted his life, which is too much to endure. For Zagreus, Death is destiny. It has to be so because it is the origin—You come from death and go to death. Life is just a moment between two nothingness, just a flight of birds between two states of non-being.

Zagreus, who seeks pleasure above all else. He rejects traditional values and norms, choosing to follow his desires and impulses. His ultimate goal in life is the pursuit of happiness through pleasure, making him a quintessential hedonist. Zagreus fully immerses himself in sensory experiences. He indulges in sensual pleasures such as love affairs, alcohol, and exotic travel with a fervor that knows no bounds. This hedonistic approach is evident in his insatiable appetite for all that life has to offer. By rejecting Conventional Morality, Zagreus often disregards the moral and ethical boundaries that society imposes. His hedonistic lifestyle leads him to make choices that may be considered immoral or selfish. He pursues his desires without concern for the consequences, which sets him apart from the moralistic constraints of the world around him. The Pursuit of For Zagreus, hedonism is a means of achieving personal freedom. He believes that true happiness comes from escaping the confines of society and living life on his terms. This quest for autonomy is a core element of his hedonistic philosophy. While Zagreus embraces hedonism, he grapples with the repercussions of his choices. His journey is a search for a "happy death," a life lived to the fullest, but it also involves a reflection on the meaning and consequences of one's actions. This dichotomy reflects the complex nature of hedonism, where the pursuit of pleasure can lead to both liberation and existential contemplation.

As the novel progresses, Zagreus comes to understand that the pursuit of pleasure alone may not lead to a satisfying life. His hedonistic lifestyle, while liberating in some aspects, also brings about a sense of emptiness and despair. This tragic realization highlights the potential downfall of extreme hedonism. In "A Happy Death," Camus uses Zagreus to explore the tension between hedonism and the quest for a meaningful existence. Zagreus represents the hedonistic individual who seeks happiness and freedom through the unrestrained pursuit of pleasure. His character serves as a thought-provoking study on the consequences of living a life solely dedicated to hedonistic desires, raising questions about the true nature of happiness and the price one may pay for such a lifestyle.

If death has destiny, as it is, then the whole life becomes a preparation, a training for it—a discipline in how to die rightly and totally and out rightly. The whole life consists of learning how to die. Man has taken death as an enemy of life, as if death is there to destroy life, as if death is against life. If this is the conception, you have to fight death, and life becomes an effort to survive. Then you are fighting against your origin; you are fighting against your destiny, something which will happen. The whole fight is absurd because death cannot be avoided. If consciousness becomes meditative and you accept death, death is nothing but you. Then, you accept death as a response, a final relaxation. Zagreus accepted death because he recognized his happiness and achieved the knowledge of cosmic consciousness.

Everybody is afraid of death for the simple reason that we have not tested life yet. The man who knows what life is is never afraid of death but embraces and welcomes death. Death is the ultimate crescendo of life. Those who have known death from the inside lose all fear of death, like Roland Zageus.

Zageus' death is the Philosophical suicide for Mersault, even though he committed it himself. By Zageus' death, Meursault reveals his secret countenance that he conquered his disease and confronts a happy death. The idea of death makes one aware of one's life, one's vital being – that which is impermanent and will one day end. When this vitality is appreciated, one feels free, for there is no urgency to perform some act that will cancel the possibility of death, as though there is no such act. In this sense, all human activity is absurd, and the real freedom is to be aware of life in its actuality and totality, of its beauty and its pain. Happiness doesn't intrinsically fit with absurdity. The absurd man has to find a way to be happy despite his beliefs. Longstaffe says, "Meursault was rationally against the value of living, but emotionally for it" (64). One can only derive perverse or negative happiness by drawing pleasure from its absurdity. This is perhaps why revolt is the highest value Camus promotes in this novel, because it has a negative, rebellious quality. Therefore, the happiness Meursault finds at the end of *A Happy Death* seems to be built on unstable ground. If one probes too deeply, it is illogical.

As Craig says, with this worldview, one must choose between consistency and happiness (65). Camus seems to choose inconsistency. The existentialists, Camus included, did not place a high priority on reason. Sartre says that for Camus, "the world is neither completely rational nor irrational" (25). Cruickshank further claims that the absurd is "antirationalism" (50). Therefore, inconsistencies in logic are not a major concern. The primary objective is to evoke the feeling of the world's absurdity and show a possible response. In this, *A Happy Death* succeeds. It gives a stark picture of the life of a man who embraces the absurd and still manages to find some form of happiness. In conclusion, Mersault's character in "A Happy Death" represents a complex and often morally confusing form of hedonism. His quest for pleasure and escapism from pain led to moral compromise and existential disconnection. These characteristics challenge traditional moral values and reflect the existentialist theme of confronting the absurdity of existence. Through Mersault's character, Camus invites readers to grapple with the consequences of hedonism in the context of a world that offers no intrinsic meaning or purpose.

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