The central concern of *The Myth of Sissyphus* is what Camus calls….

Camus says….

1. There is a CONFLICT between
   1. What we ***want*** from the universe
   2. What we ***find*** in the universe
2. We will never find in life itself the meaning that we want to find, so we have two choices:
   1. We can place meaning in a God beyond this world
   2. We can conclude that life is meaningless
3. If we conclude that life is meaningless—and is, thus, not worth living, we must either
   1. Take a leap of faith
   2. Commit suicide
4. But, Camus wants to pursue a third possibility…

He suggests that we can

c. accept and live in a world devoid of meaning and purpose.

The absurd is a contradiction that cannot be reconciled.

Any attempt to reconcile this contradiction is an attempt to escape from it. Existentialists, says Camus, confront the contradiction and then try to escape from it. They try to find some sort of transcendence or meaning in the meaningless world.

Rather than try to escape the fundamental contradiction of the absurd, Camus says we can face it AND we can maintain constant awareness of it. Facing the absurd does not invite suicide, but on the contrary, allows us to live life to the fullest.

**Story of Sissyphus**

Sissyphus is condemned to roll a rock up to the top of the mountain, only to have the rock roll back down to the bottom every time he reaches the top. His punishment is to endure an eternity of hopeless struggle.

Camus says that is the archetypal absurd hero.

Camus thinks about Sissyphus’s state of mind in that moment after the rock rolls away from him at the top of the mountain.

1. As S. heads down the mountain, he is briefly free from his labor.
2. He is conscious and aware of the absurdity of his fate. He consciously recognizes during that reprieve that while he is pushing his rock up the mountain, there is nothing for him but toil and struggle. And he knows that this toil and struggle will continue forever and will get him nowhere.
3. His fate is tragic because he understands it and has no hope of changing it.
4. Yet, his clear understanding and acceptance of his fate can place him above his fate. With tragic awareness, we fully acknowledge our fate and our limitations; thus, we accept who we are and what we are capable of.
5. Yes, his moments of sorrow come when he looks at what he’s left behind or when he hopes for happiness. Tragic fate seems horrible in contrast to the hope for something more.
6. If Sissyphus accepts his fate, however, the sorrow goes away. If he is AWARE that there is no hope---and does not dream of more out there that is worth aiming for, his fate is not terrible. If he does not hope, the gods have nothing to punish him with.
7. When he acknowledges the “crushing truth,” such acknowledgment causes the eternal, futile fate to be less crushing. He might, then, even approach his task with joy.
8. Happiness and the absurd are closely linked. When we discover that our world and our fate are *our own*—when we realize that there is no hope and that life is purely what we make of it, then we can be happy. If happiness is real, we must be able to find happiness without relying on hope or faith that goes beyond immediate experience.

THE ABSURD HERO

1. Sees life as a constant struggle, without hope.
2. Lives life with full awareness of the absurdity of his position.
3. Does not attempt to avoid or deny the struggle and the hopelessness.
4. Accepts that there is no preferable alternative to his fate; thus, he accepts his fate without horror.
5. Can fully appreciate life because he is accepting his fate without reservations.
6. Sees that individual human experience is the only thing that is real.
7. Shows that individuals can be happy based on their experience, not on their denial of experience.

Meursault is an ABSURD HERO

On a figurative level, Meursault, who is condemned to death and awaiting execution, is a metaphor for the human condition.

On a literal level, M. perfectly exemplifies the absurd characteristics of…

1. **Revolt**—He refuses to follow society’s customs and revolts against any attempt to place restrictions on his life.
2. **Freedom**—He does what he wants to do at any given moment—smoking, showing indifference at his dead mother’s vigil, going to the beach and sleeping with Marie the day after his mother’s funeral, forging a letter for Raymond (thug/pimp)
3. **Passion**—He pursues pleasures of the senses and pursues new experiences—there is evidence that he loves being alive…
4. **Ironic detachment**—He prefers observing events to getting directly involved; for example, he spends an entire day sitting on his balcony watching people passing on the street below. He tells Marie he doesn’t love her and that it makes no difference if they get married or not. He seems to be watching himself shooting the Arab, rather than actually doing the shooting himself.
5. **Awareness of the world’s meaninglessness**
6. **Awareness of the existence without hope**
7. **Acceptance of his absurd position in the universe—**He concludes that he is happy.