

**Sisyphus's Quest of Nirvana**  
A critical note on

**“SISYPHUS AS A TRAGIC HERO AND THE KARMIC PHILOSOPHY: A RE-INTERPRETATION OF THE EXISTENTIAL PROTOTYPE”, by Dr Jernail S. Anand and Prof. Manminder Singh Anand**

by  
**Dr. Aprilia Zank, Professor at Munich Univ. Germany**

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Albert Camus's essay “The Myth of Sisyphus” and its impact on the development of the philosophy of absurdism has been dealt with extensively – so much so that at a certain point the question arises whether anything new can be said about it at all. The article by Dr Jernail S. Anand and Prof. Manminder Singh Anand confirms that novelty of perspective is always possible.

In their approach, the authors focus on a little dealt with issue: the parallelism between Camus's philosophical attitude as illustrated by his myth of Sisyphus, and the Karmic philosophy. In their view, Sisyphus's perpetual action of pushing up the boulder which regularly rolls back again resonates with the philosophy of Karma propounded by Lord Krishna, in which man is doomed to life after life and suffering after suffering in the cycle of life and death. But whereas Sisyphus is aware of his condition and his revolt turns to acceptance as the only possible 'strategy' to bear with the absurdity of his existence, the Karma believer is, according to the authors, “unaware, unawakened, a fused bulb which cannot house the electric current, and light up.” Paradoxically, Sisyphus seems to get closer to Nirvana (remember Camus's statement “One must imagine Sisyphus happy”), than the Karma believer.

In Jernail S. Anand and Manminder Singh Anand's view, the fate of both Sisyphus and those Indians who believe in the Karmic principles is the direct result of punishment inflicted by God or gods in general, but whereas the Greek mythology accounts for the circumstances of Sisyphus's punishment, the reasons for the penalty in the Karmic philosophy is, according to the authors, still in need of philosophical enquiry. Their perception of the 'tragic hero' condition deviates at this point from the traditional interpretation in that they see the reasons for suffering solely in man himself: he, and not fate, is responsible for his actions and as such for his pains:

“Thus, it can be safely argued that the trap Sisyphus is in, makes him a tragic hero, because, much less than being a sentence, it is a self-inflicted punishment. If it is suffering, it is never unmerited.”

To my mind, this view, while fully complying with the original Greek myth, tends to contradict Camus's conception of the absurd since it postulates a reasonable, logical cause-effect relationship, whereas the absurdity of Sisyphus's existence and action lies precisely in its meaninglessness.

In Jernail S. Anand and Manminder Singh Anand's approach, the parameter of time plays a main part. The past appears to them of utmost significance. It is the only certainty in the life of man who struggles with the volatile present and the even more indeterminate future:

“Certainty belongs only to something that has stopped evolving, that has been, and is now placed on a table, beyond any further modification. Or in other words, it can be called past.”

This is without doubt an original point of view which nevertheless requires further argumentation. Since I am not proficient enough in the Karmic philosophy, I will consider only the more or less traditional European perspective on this issue. The received interpretation of Camus's comprehension of time is rather that of a time continuum than of a strict division in past, present and future. There is certainly no final consensus or definition as to what the 'absurd' time really is, but, as Laurent Bove mentions in one of his articles, Camus, as well as Sartre, looks upon the 'absurd man' as one who perceives time as a sequence of moments making up “un présent qui est le présent même de la *présence*”\* (a present that is the very present of the *presence*”).

It goes without saying that all these ideas can be enlarged upon or met with counter-arguments, but it is the special merit of Dr. Jernail S. Anand and Prof. Manminder Singh Anand to have launched this intercultural approach and posed truly challenging questions to scholars, writers and more.

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\*Laurent Bove, “Le «temps» de l'*insistantialisme*”

L'énergie et l'histoire

(dans Revue internationale de philosophie 2011/4 no. 258, pp. 9 - 32)