

THE REBEL, POET, AND PROPHET: EXPLORING CAMUS, GOETHE, AND NIETZSCHE

R.S. Ambika Prasad

Research Scholar, Dept. of Philosophy

Utkal University Vani Vihar,

Bhubaneswar, Odisha, India

Email: ambika4144@utkaluniversity.ac.in

Abstract

This paper talks of Goethe's Faust that engages through human striving, its metaphysical conditioning, and its finite interest in knowing the infinity. But Nietzsche reestablishes the notion of will to power, by rejecting the metaphysical chamber of thought, and talks of radical scrutiny of fate. While Camus speaks about the human condition dipping it with the sauce of absurdity and strikes to revolt against it without wearing the glasses of illusions. This paper will start its journey from metaphysical ambition, travel through the lands of lucid rebellion, and end its journey with secular creativity. This trajectory will provide a vision of humans who can feel inspired to negotiate meanings, ethics, and responsibility.

Keywords

Faust, Overman, Sisyphus, absurdism, Nihilism, Existentialism.

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R.S.Ambika Prasad

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Introduction: - “And life itself, confined this secret to me: ‘Behold’. It said, ‘I am that which must always overcome itself’¹. In modern philosophy. The first character Faust happens to hold the central thought and addresses the major problems of humans and their ambition. The will to gain more experience, power, knowledge, and meaning has been the domain quality of the man. So did it lead to all the negotiations with the Mephistopheles with the mortgage of the soul. Deep questions on the limitation of being happen to be the soul thrust of the plot. A metaphysical way to transform finitude.

But coming to the modern philosophical moment, thinkers like Camus and Nietzsche happen to question and reinterpret the metaphysical plot that stands hidden with such strivings. Nietzsche with his concept of the Overman, will to power, and eternal recurrence has given a strong revisit to metaphysics. Camus has made a journey through the human conditions and reflexes towards the failure of metaphysics. He has minutely understood human yearning and the bond of race with the absurdity. But with the understanding of the critical condition, he has never served despair but rather he insisted upon revolt and that too with all the clarity on the ethics of refusal.

This paper is segmented into four different parts. The first part lies in the analysis of Goethe’s Faust and human conditioning in its view. Then the second part deals with Nietzsche’s interpretation. Then the third part deals with Camus’s absurdism and revolt. The fourth and last part would deal with the trajectory of the philosophers where there would be a comparative stream of thought. Then follow up with the result of secular ethics and feed modernity its solution. **I**

Faust happens to be a drama but it turns out to be the ocean of multiple coral essences, to name a few knowledge, love, temptation, despair, betrayal, transcendence, etc. Learning of the manly classical literature has absolutely drained its value for Faust. He has started questioning everything may that be his religion or his human limitation; the list is endless here. But to keep a pace with striving human efforts he has brought all the efforts to venture into the knowledge beyond the accessible. The novel has never been limited to literature rather philosophy has asked for its own share inside it.

Addressing the crisis of modernity, loss of meaning, blind worship of advancement, and taking technological sight to a high-rise building happens to be the major concern of the literature. “But now I curse all things that have the soul in check by lure and illusion, this banish her to this sad cave by powers of blinding and deception. Cursed by every big Idea”². Taking this we can say that he has been the person who has lost all his affirmation towards the existing form of knowledge and seems to reevaluate that and break that established cognitive wall built all around.

He happens to lust for empirical experience to tame the established knowledge and make room for the forbidden one. This made Faust to seal the deal with Mephistopheles, the antagonist of the tale, trading his soul for unlimited experience. There came repetition with Faust, he fell into the paradox of freedom and his freedom started to shed off its old skin and started surrounding itself with a new layer of it. But that skin does not allow freedom to shed off the identical self of Faust. His thirst for power and wealth could not quench his internal self and there was no water that could quench his thirst. Again illusion bound him up with itself and started the reflexes to stimulate towards uncertainty.

“Faust’s paradox of freedom reflects the plight of the subject in the modernity. We might take it as the same coin where one side is engraved with the rationality that asserts humanity with the ability to transform the world around. Contrarily on the other side we crave for rationality which focuses on reason, logic, and an empirical approach towards the science which builds the fort of scepticism to defend the ruptures of the belief in god”³. The term rationality traps the man in the cage of his thought and that exactly happened with Faust where he held new shackles that trapped him in his pursuit of freedom. This constant cycle happens to be a metaphor for the problem of modernity.

“What you inherit from your fathers, earn it in order to possess it. What is not used is a heavy load, only in use do you make it your own.”⁴ Goethe in a very passive way addressed that freedom in the true sense is unattainable, there is a bondage of every aspect that holds onto freedom. May that be a material object, a person, or feelings everything comes with a price which has to be evaluated. The “greater self” in Faust renounces the ego by giving up his scholarly identity to subscribe himself to transcendence and go beyond the remorse. The very thought of the of “heavy load” stays intact with the term freedom. The idea of the approach runs in denial, and the truth is perceived from the failure. But the idea of “free choice” reincarnates itself with the “self-deception” of Faust and that leads to the new construction of self in the shade of denial and truth to be achieved even through the lens of failure. That ultimate thought fuels the fire of Existentialism and that decorates Faust’s ‘self-deception’ to the existentialist’s venture of ‘free choice’. Goethe’s character as Faust plays existentialist thought, in a constant juggle with identities and goals anew. Though every choice tastes of failure but that’s what authentic character looks like in existentialism. Strive to create meaning in a meaningless world.

II

“Man is a rope, fastened between the animal and the overman – a rope over an abyss. A dangerous going-across, a dangerous wayfaring, a dangerous looking–

back, a dangerous shuddering and staying still. What is great in man is that he is a bridge and not a goal; what can be loved in man is that he is going – across and a down-going.”⁵ He has taken into account that man happens to be the medium and subject that follows up all the changes and is one to adapt to changes. Every small detail happens to be innate with the man travelling on the rope over the abyss, a pure psychological entity. The rope that binds the two ends happens to be the road with three entrances and the last part remains the battlefield to fight the great dragon “Thou Shalt”⁶. Zarathustra came all the way down to society to interact. But finding the mental collapse in between the people and their acceptance has tilted Zarathustra. Taking all the reports into account he came down with the solution ‘overman’. The evolved overman. “In Zarathustra, the overman makes his first important public appearance – together with the eternal recurrence and will to power”⁷ which leads all its way to the rope and its gate of three metamorphoses. The gate of choice and the same gate of endurance. The rooted idea claims the psychological discipline to elevate the common man and inspire him to overcome man.

The journey starts with the first gate of the camel, then the second gate of the lion from the camel, and the third gate of the child from the lion. Passing through it to the battlefield to fight the great dragon (Thou Shalt) with all the bravery and endurance. “Some reach their peak as characters, but their spirit is not up to this height, while with others it happens the other way around.”⁸ The peak characters are always in demand to fight the dragon.

The first gate of camel, like a camel walks in a very difficult terrain and goes through all the adversity of food and climatic conditions yet ensures its destination “Or is it this: to feed upon the acorns and grass of knowledge and for the sake of truth to suffer hunger of the soul?”⁹ Those trouble makes a man aware of all the real-life problems. It accepts the struggle and pain for the duty’s sake and the purpose with higher importance. After going through these next gates path goes through a lion. Who directly symbolizes power, courage, self-assertion, and destruction of oppressive values or the great dragon. Whatever it takes, it leaves behind the imprint of dictatorship and the force is very innate and unstoppable, this power thought which seconds resilience is anyway the budding step for authority. We know that power is very corrupting and it cannot be the builder spirit. “To create new values – even a lion is incapable of that: but to create itself freedom for new creation – that the might of a lion can do”¹⁰. Then comes the third gate which will pass through the past with sheer experience of the present and the idea of maturity the metamorphosis of a child. Playfulness, innocence, and a new start are the prime characteristics of the child.

So, “Why must the preying lion still become a child?”¹¹ Because “The spirit wills its own will, the spirit sundered from the world now wins its own world”¹² then he can only be guided by his own ethics and embrace affirmation of life. Question himself because he is free from guilt and further creates values out of play and spontaneity which remains the symbol of self-creation. so that he can continue to go through the three metamorphosis times and again. Deceived through the power he can he can rebuild himself and walk through the rope to the abyss. This other side of the rope would amalgamate man with overman and transit through the herd mentality to master morality.

Tested with all the difficulties, recreated with a new ideology and set of principles, and made more acknowledged to lead the race. “Will to fight against the comfortable satisfaction of the self-achievement. To refuse the slow death taking place for others, who are moving in a herd. Breaking the established values and moving forward towards self-overcoming. But this war has enemies all around. Both outward and inward. But this fight may not shed blood but definitely its sword stabs the moral senses, kicks the herd choice and establishes the self-authority, increases courage, and transforms the striver. This fight could be called a true fight as it possesses the sweat of ethical labor, breaks the glass of old idols, exposes false identical crisis, and clears space for the sun of a new horizon in the society designed by the fighter”¹³.

III

Taking into account Camus’ rebellion “It should be coated and controlled by the realm of ethics as there is a possibility if rebellion loses the sense of limits, then it could become absolutely destructive”¹⁴. ’s world in itself cannot fulfill the basic wants of a man and leaves a man searching for his security in his being. When going through this Camus found a certain ontological connection between man and the world. In a larger form world according to man stands out to be unreasonable and meaningless. But can man find absurdity and even if he finds the real question arises, can man go on living?

Rebellion stands out to be a psychological solution and a voice raised among the individual to challenge the mis happenings without passing down its originality to nihilism or some power blow or some destructive mental violence. In other words, he has ensured a proper difference between Rebellion and Revolution. An establishment of a totalitarian regime or even an autocratic dictatorial oppressive form of rule. This includes bloodshed or a verbal cold war. But in rebellion it is aimed to achieve justice and dignity by means of internal thought and realization. Camus advocates a world where there would be justice and freedom without

destroying the existing lifeforms. Camus while describing the presence and realization of the existence of absurdism said.

“All great deeds, and all great thoughts have a ridiculous beginning. Great works are often born on a street corner or in a restaurant’s revolving door. So, it is with absurdity.... Rising, streetcar, four hours of work, meal, sleep. Monday Tuesday Wednesday Thursday Friday and Saturday according to the same rhythm – this path is easily followed most of the time. But one day the “why” arises and everything begins in weariness tinged with amazement. “Begins”-this is important. Weariness comes at the end of the acts of a mechanical life, but at the same time it inaugurates the impulse of consciousness. It awakens consciousness and provokes what follows. What follows is the gradual return into the chain or it is the definitive awakening. At the end of the awakening comes, in time the consequence: suicide or recovery.”¹⁵

Camus focuses on three consequences which can be sensed after understanding absurdity is individuals’ revolt, their freedom, and lastly their passion. Revolt stands for the ongoing struggle a man goes through and this keeps on creating rigidity between the world that offers anything and man’s aspiration which could be considered as a reflexive resistance to absurdity. Secondly, when a man goes through the freedom and treats it as a ray of hope and chooses his own fate without any interference of God or any other transcendent being. Therefore, Camus writes “The absurd does not liberate; it binds. It does not authorize all actions. ‘Everything is permitted’ does not mean nothing is forbidden”¹⁶. But many a times it’s personal choices that create all the distress and it cannot be taken as a limitless license. So, the third and last man’s passion comes to play which is the major strike to understand absurdism and realize that man has only this present life as certainty and no metaphysical matter has any control over the individual. So, one can understand freedom and make life to be lived without any terms and conditions. “Man is certain of only this life and the future has no power on him and the present is something that is expected to exhaust.”¹⁷

Rebel here is the absurd man who lives by his personal experience. He does not long for a reason but he also does not lack any respect. He does not seek any further venture beyond this present life. He rebels against death and for life and does nothing for the eternal. The idea is to live without any complaint and get along with what life has provided him with and next he is made to realize his limitation and make him understand this temporary dwelling freedom, which is devoid of future and of his moral consciousness. That is his field and that is his action, which guards him from his own action. A greater life cannot mean another life to him. Thus, “this observation may immediately rouse the charge of subjectivism or even

solipsism”¹⁸, but we can see that in Camus – largely because of his dialectic – that such a charge is unwarranted even though the rebel’s ethic can be understood as self-authenticating.

IV

Fate is ultimate, but Faust remains as a myth of Human striving and redemption. While Nietzsche directs the theme to self-creation. Camus faces the lash of metaphysical collapse and reorients ambition to rebel against the established tradition with all lucidity and integrity. Together they frame modernity and dialectic subjectivity. All from the metaphysical yearning to artistic affirmation and ends with lucid rebellion. Engaging them helps us to frame a human guidebook to live meaningfully in the secular ruleless disenchanted world.

Remaining in the pride of everything might displace human understanding of every happening all around. But humans in the end should evolve and bring up all the established and yet sleeping values to reconstruct and reconnect with everything to the core. There is no denial of fate but there is refurbishing and reconstructing of self to face all the themes to the core.

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