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Existential Literature

Living Idealistically through Pragmatism

Ideally, life would consist of a planned and consistent schedule that does not suffer from the constraints of time. An idealist functions within a softly padded and comfortable boundary of utopian perfection, one that fits the vision they have created beforehand. Therefore, the narrow path the idealist fits themself into may enable a content emotional state; negatively, however, a dejected emotional state may cultivate because their set goals become difficult to come into fruition. The possibility of change, for instance, tests this dichotomy by either disrupting the state of stagnance or the established plan. The idealist then must choose to embody either Apollo, the God of the Sun, who signifies stability and truth, or Dionysus, the God of Earth, who signifies renewal and irrationality. The irrationality of time is then accompanied with precision of time, a process to regularize a constantly fluctuating world. Therefore, creating a predetermined and timed blueprint of the future coincides with the idealist’s vision, yet places them a very unidealistic world. Embodying a union of an idealistic and realistic mindset maintains a happy medium and balance within the human condition because the outcomes of life are ever changing, yet uncontrolled by time.

Examining one of the outcomes of life, death-unannounced and rapid- illuminates the complexity of life and the erratic human condition. A person disappearing, vanishing and existing no longer astounds a living person who feels underprepared for the severity of death. Experiencing death creates a feeling of detachment from the assumed and sugar- coated plan of eternity. Life previously revolved around ourselves-our family friends, education, love life, etc. However, what previously seemed to be the way life worked quickly halts. Instead, death shifts our awareness to the inevitable truth: death undoubtedly occurs to every living being. This may or may not match our predetermined idea of life.

An unconscious part of myself quickly became conscious after loosing my aunt and grandmother a week apart from one another. My insight into the irregularity of life enabled a new anxiety inside me, an itch that disabled me from living and rather, forced me into a life of surviving. Survival mode cultivates a persona that is immensely hyperaware of time and its limitations. Furthermore, as a person who previously lived with ease, survivors yearn to get back to a place of stagnancy by creating goals for the future. While these aspirations may be courageous, bold and motivating, they can also initiate narrow-mindedness and utter dejection when they do not come into actualization.

Here, the idealist comes into conflict with death’s similar inevitability: life is irregular and forever changing. Therefore, living life with expectations of specific outcomes renders a dangerous way to live; living in accordance to idealism rejects the inherent fact that life is unpredictable. In fact, a person with such a deeply-rooted idealist mindset may not only feel that they can avoid certain outcomes that do not match their own fantasized ones, but that these separate outcomes will just not happen all together. The outcomes imagined by the idealist begin with the notion that there is no universally accepted way of life. For instance, Tanzanian students are accustomed to being canned-slapped by a stick- for misbehaving in anyway. However, it is not only illegal to preform corporal punishment in the U.S, but also highly looked down upon. Furthermore, because there are no factual tasks that society requires to uphold, the pressure is left to the idealist to bind themself to a plan, fitting their wants and needs, of course. Herman Hesse illustrates the forced nature of societal norms beautifully in *The Steppenwolf,* when the conscious persona of Harry, named Hermine justifies her ambitions, saying, “It was life and reality that were wrong” (150). Hermine’s independence from society’s boundaries may seem liberating, yet does not address the self-inflicted pressures an idealist puts on himself or herself. This dichotomy between living without societal restrictions yet obliged to living within personal boundaries exemplifies a portion of the idealist’s struggles.

Returning to the rising feelings of anxiety and incessant concern that lingers after experiencing death, it is most *ideal* to separate ones self from the inevitable and create an unrealistic, picture-perfect horizon to look out to. My older sister unknowingly tested this side of me as a todler, by hiding behind a corner in my house and frightening me with scary faces. My immediate reaction was not to run away and cower at the unknown, but rather to run towards her in order to stop the unknown from appearing. As a result of the shock that two family deaths had on me, her act of silliness was not conducive to my thought out and pre-established plan to shut myself off from fear and sadness. A similar blockade followed me for years, shutting down the unknown possibilities that loomed around me and placing me in a bubble of selfish and subjective safety. When plans changed, when a family member came over unannounced or when there was not enough time in the day to fit everything in, an immediate heaviness impeded on my chest.

Exemplifying my inability to come to terms with the inherent absurdity of time, up until recently, I did not realize the impact that this heaviness had on me. My choice to stay unaware of time’s irregularity made me determined to navigate life in my own self-involved way. As a result, I grew immensely frustrated with change, for the weight grew heavier and heavier on me. In *Steppenwolf,* Hermine speaks to Harry about his similar negatively idealist and narcissistic mentality: “You have a picture of life within you, a faith, a challenge, and you were ready for deeds and sufferings and sacrifices, and then you became aware by degrees that the world asked no deeds…” (150). Hermine’s awareness resonated with me for its reiteration of the inconclusive, sporadic and spontaneous nature of humanity. Therefore, Camus’ assertion of life’s absurdity further illustrates the irrationality of the human condition and the necessity to accept the unavoidable; for Sisyphus was unable to live authentically without recognizing the absurdity of constantly rolling a rock up a hill for it to continuously fall back down again.

It is ludicrous that humans have to face sickness, war, starvation, racial injustice, illiteracy and more, especially when it occurs without notice. However, it is significantly more ridiculous to live unrealistically as an escapist, without being aware of the possibility that these incidents may occur. The human condition cannot be defined singularly because of life’s uncertainty; however, recognition of its inability to be defined leads to the true understanding of the complexity of the human condition.

Works Cited

Hesse, Herman. *Steppenwolf.* New York: Picador, 1963. Print.