

Rebellion in the ‘Woke’ Society: Creating a New Camusian Meridian¹

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Abstract: In *The Rebel*, Albert Camus contends that every act of rebellion is a simultaneous refusal against injustice and an affirmation of a value. However, there is always a danger of rebellion devolving into a self-defeating revolution. Thus, Albert Camus’ philosophical notion of “meridian” becomes crucial in maintaining the humane spirit of rebellious actions. In an age vastly different from the time of Camus, I intend to revisit his notion of rebellion and contextualize it to the claimed “woke culture” that is widespread in various parts of the world. With these ideas in mind, I ask: “Can we still rebel at the meridian given the complexity of the power structures in contemporary societies?” I argue in the affirmative and supplement my response with findings drawn from social epistemology. The paper comprises three main parts. The first part elaborates on Camus’ notions of absurdity and rebellion. The second part succinctly discusses woke culture and its diverse manifestations to describe the current society. In addition, I highlight the similarities and differences between Camus’ time and the society

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that claims to be woke. Then, the third part contests the possibility of rebelling at the meridian given the complexities of contemporary society. This stance is further strengthened through a modification of Camusian philosophical notions.

Keywords: Camus, meridian, rebellion, wokeism

INTRODUCTION

Society continues to evolve and advance in numerous aspects. As technological development, the evolution of sociopolitical ideologies, and the expansion of critical social theories accelerated, highly specialized fields sprang up, and new sensibilities were formed. These developments and concurrent responses lead to configurations that compel us to revisit long-standing philosophical inquiries concerning the legitimacy and ethical-political limits of social transformation, especially in contexts where the pursuit of justice appears complex, given the paradoxical outcomes they often lead to. Given these drastic changes and the complexity of aspirations to resist, this study revisits Albert Camus, a philosopher known for advocating for change while understanding limitations that should be imposed on human actions.

In *The Rebel*, Albert Camus writes, “What is a rebel? A man who says no: but whose refusal does not imply a renunciation.”² In this fine distinction, he posits that rebellion begins with a fundamental “no”—a refusal to accept injustice—and at the same time, it affirms a deeper “yes,” the invocation of an intrinsic human value that injustice violates.³ This dual movement of negation and affirmation distinguishes rebellion from mere revolution. It is not the overthrowing of a system per se that defines rebellion in the Camusian sense, but rather an act and a disposition that seeks to preserve human dignity while opposing violence, oppression, and other forms of injustice. However, there is always a danger of rebellion devolving into a self-defeating revolution.

Camus warns against the degeneration of rebellion into what he terms “nihilistic revolution,” wherein the original values animating the act of refusal are discarded. In this nihilistic revolution, a forced unity is achieved through a total absence of morality and domination through

² Albert Camus, *The Rebel: An Essay of Man in Revolt*, trans. by Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage Books, 1956), 13.

³ *Ibid.*, 13-14.

crimes and wars.⁴ This negative outcome is most evident in Camus’ critique of totalitarian ideologies and revolutionary terror. For Camus, the danger lies in the rebel abandoning limits, leading to the deification of history, ideology, or the self—a transformation he calls “absolute revolution.”⁵ This absolute revolution stems from an overestimation of the human person, expecting an absolute malleability of human nature, and such malleability becomes a justification for oppressive transitions, implying the reduction of humans into mere historical terms. This trajectory turns rebellion into a self-negating force, contradicting its original affirmation of the human that remains irreducibly valuable.

Thus, Camus introduces the philosophical concept of the “meridian”—a principle of moderation and fidelity to human value that tempers rebellion with moderation, humility, and acknowledgment of tensions and contradictions.⁶ This philosophical concept grounds rebellion into a realistic aspiration—not a total resolution of every problem, but at least aims to confront those problems with proper restraints. As Duvall observes, Camus’s meridian is not a literal midpoint but an equilibrium rooted in ideals of measure and moderation.⁷ This concept “suggests an attitude that pursues compromise, bridging, and inclusiveness and that avoids extremes and the terrorism they generate.”⁸ Yet, the contemporary world—a world saturated with new forms of social consciousness, including the contested terrain of what has been termed “woke culture”—presents challenges to the Camusian framework.

Wokeness is often described as a lucidity or awareness concerning various forms of injustices. “Wokeness,” which once emerged from emancipatory struggles, particularly within African-American socio-political movements in the 20th century, has expanded into broader global

⁴ *Ibid.*, 132.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 250.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 297-306.

⁷ William E. Duvall, “Albert Camus against History,” in *The European Legacy*, 10:2 (2005), 145.

⁸ *Ibid.*

discourses and intersectional concerns.⁹ People who are considered woke are those who are purportedly aware and morally protest against the injustices and violence that other people often overlook. While wokeness shares with Camus's notion of rebellion as a moral protest against dehumanizing structures, its current manifestations often take divergent or contradictory forms, ranging from genuine advocacy to performative or authoritarian expressions. For these reasons, this paper confronts this philosophical question: "Can we still rebel at the meridian given the complexity of the power structure within contemporary societies?" This question demands a reassessment of whether rebellion can be sustained without devolving into ideological absolutism or dissipating into mere moral posturing. I argue in the affirmative but with a crucial caveat: reconfiguring Camus's original notion of the meridian is indispensable for rebellion to remain viable in our age.

This inquiry unfolds in three major stages. First, I elucidate Camus' notion of rebellion in the context of a philosophical anthropology that underscores the absurd human condition. Second, I undertake a philosophical interpretation of "wokeness," not merely as a social phenomenon but as a normative posture with emancipatory promise, albeit having internal contradictions. Finally, I explore the limitations within Camus's original conception of rebellion and meridian and propose theoretical modifications grounded in social epistemology that may render the meridian adaptable to contemporary settings. Ultimately, this paper aims to contribute to re-articulating a rebellion that remains faithful to Camus's philosophy while responding to the complexity of the current society. In doing so, I seek to reaffirm the relevance of Camus' philosophy with its fundamental heeding worth echoing in our new age.

⁹ Pierre Valentin, "The Woke Phenomenon: Its Impact and Different Responses," in *The Palgrave Handbook of Left-Wing Extremism*, ed. by José Pedro Zúquete, Vol. 2 (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2023), 313.

CAMUSIAN REBELLION AS A RESPONSE TO THE ABSURD

The Absurd and The Three Possible Responses to It

At the heart of Camusian philosophy lies the acknowledgment of the absurd human condition. This condition pertains to unavoidable confrontation with what Camus calls the absurd, which arises from the juxtaposition between the human being's unsatisfied desire (perceived as a necessity) for happiness, meaning, order, and clarity and the silent, indifferent universe. As Camus writes in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, "The absurd is born of this confrontation between the human need and the unreasonable silence of the world."¹⁰ This confrontation, neither purely subjective nor merely objective, results from a relation: the absurd exists in the tension between the questioning human consciousness and a world that refuses to yield ultimate answers. Within this ambit of distinct reality, Camus explores three principal responses to the absurd human condition: physical suicide, philosophical suicide, and revolt, or what he calls "keeping the absurd alive." Each of these responses represents a fundamental ethical and metaphysical stance, with varying implications for how human life may be conducted in the absence of transcendent meaning.

The first and most immediate response is physical suicide—the act of ending one's life as an escape from the absurd condition. Camus opens *The Myth of Sisyphus* with the statement: "There is but one truly serious philosophical problem, and that is suicide."¹¹ In framing the inquiry in such pressing terms, Camus underscores the existential gravity of absurdity. Whether life is worth living becomes the central question once the naively held "meaning of life" is recognized as no longer having any sense. It is often assumed that meaninglessness is categorically going to

¹⁰ Albert Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, trans. by Justin O'Brien (New York: Vintage International, 1991), 28.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 3.

lead to physical suicide. However, Camus primarily rejects suicide as a legitimate response to absurdity. He argues that suicide is a form of flight, an attempt to escape the absurd without facing it fully. “In a sense, and as in melodrama, killing yourself amounts to confessing. It is confessing that life is too much for you or that you do not understand it,” Camus writes.¹² Suicide, for Camus, is an act of surrender—an abandonment of the very confrontation that gives rise to uncovering the truths of reality that were formerly hidden due to the “meaning” previously being held onto. It forecloses the task of living with the absurd and turns away from freedom rather than embracing it. Scholars such as Roberts and Lamont claim that “Camus provides an existentialist reconceptualization of suicide.”¹³ In limiting the inquiry into suicide and the absurd human condition properly, the misconception about suicide as inevitable is dispelled, especially since other responses to the absurd were identified.

The second response Camus critiques is philosophical suicide—the intellectual equivalent of physical suicide. This response occurs when one, confronted with the absurd, abandons rational inquiry and instead takes refuge in metaphysical or religious overarching systems, beliefs, or worldviews that offer illusory meaning/s. Camus targets a wide range of thinkers in this critique, including Søren Kierkegaard and Chestov, whom he accuses of sacrificing reason in return for clinging to illusory hope. For Camus, philosophical suicide is an act of evasion. It is comparable to:

the act of eluding because it is both less and more than diversion in the Pascalian sense. Eluding is the invariable game. The typical act of eluding, the fatal evasion that constitutes the third theme of this essay, is hope. Hope of another life one must “deserve” or trickery of those who

¹² *Ibid.*, 5.

¹³ M. Roberts and E. Lamont, “Suicide: an existentialist reconceptualization,” in *Journal of Psychiatric and Mental Health Nursing*, 21 (2014), 874.

live not for life itself but for some great idea that will transcend it, refine it, give it a meaning, and betray it.¹⁴

While physical suicide ends the body's engagement with the absurd, philosophical suicide ends the mind's. It retains life but abandons lucidity—the very quality Camus considers essential for estimating truths in an absurd world. This critique has been variously interpreted.

As a short excursus on the matter, most scholars have highlighted the epistemic harm of philosophical suicide, or the existential attitude characterized by unfounded leaps into certainty.¹⁵ However, some scholars contend the viability of some forms of illusion. For instance, Weddington construes philosophical suicide, differing slightly from Camus' vision of lucidity, as unavoidable insofar as a person alternates between lucidity and a form of philosophical suicide.¹⁶ For a different reason, Stoyles reveals the possible acceptability of philosophical suicide as a lesser evil compared to physical suicide.¹⁷ Philosophical suicide is a lesser threat since it can be a means to carry on with life, albeit with possible illusions.

According to Camus, the third and only legitimate response is to live in defiance of the absurd and affirm life in full awareness of its lack of ultimate justification. This disposition of scorn and defiance is neither resignation nor hope but an active and perpetual engagement with the

¹⁴ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 8.

¹⁵ Examples of scholarly works that highlight the negative consequence of philosophical suicide are the following: Simone Thornton, "The educational cost of philosophical suicide: What it means to be lucid," in *Educational Philosophy and Theory*, 51:6 (2018), 608-618; Juan Coetzee and Ananka Loubser, "Philosophical suicide" during the climate crisis: How belief influences the response to climate change," in *Acta Academica*, 56 (2024), 1-20; Simone Thornton, *Eco-rational education: An educational response to environmental crisis* (Oxford: Routledge, 2024).

¹⁶ Hank S. Weddington, "The education of Sisyphus: Absurdity, educative transformation, and suicide," in *Journal of Transformative Education*, 5:2 (2007), 122.

¹⁷ Byron J. Stoyles, "PHILOSOPHICAL SUICIDE," in *Think*, 11:30 (2012), 84.

absurd condition. Camus describes the consequence of this disposition as follows:

All problems recover their sharp edge. Abstract evidence retreats before the poetry of forms and colors. Spiritual conflicts become embodied and return to the abject and magnificent shelter of man's heart. None of them is settled. But all are transfigured.¹⁸

To live the absurd means maintaining a constant tension between the demand for meaning and recognizing its impossibility. This disposition is not a passive form of nihilism but an active revolt. For Camus, keeping the absurd alive requires constantly contemplating life that is absurd.¹⁹ As scholars like Ronald Aronson emphasize, Camus regards revolt as an irreducible starting point, similar to the Cartesian emphasis on cogito.²⁰ In *The Myth of Sisyphus*, Camus hints at the centrality of revolt that was eventually expanded in *The Rebel*.

Three Types of Rebellion

In *The Rebel*, Camus exclaims a Cartesianesque dictum: "I rebel—therefore we exist."²¹ This dictum expresses how rebellion, though springing from an individual's action, is always connected to an acknowledgment of shared humanity. Thus, there is always a simultaneous negation and affirmation in every rebellion. It is always rooted in affirming a value judgment that should not be transgressed and a negation that defies the existing injustices. There are three types of rebellion: metaphysical, historical, and creative.

¹⁸ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 52.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 54.

²⁰ Ronald Aronson, *Camus and Sartre: The story of a friendship and the quarrel that ended it* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2004), 118.

²¹ Camus, *The Rebel*, 22.

Metaphysical rebellion arises from a confrontation not with a particular regime or institution but with the whole of human existence. Specifically, the perceived injustice or absurdity embedded in the human condition is the object of human protest. As Camus writes, this form of rebellion is a “movement by which man protests against his condition and against the whole of creation. It is metaphysical because it contests the ends of man and of creation.”²² Thus, metaphysical rebellion is a rebellion against fate, suffering, death, and the limits imposed by creation. The metaphysical rebel is not merely seeking political change but is attempting to overturn the very order of being.

In other words, a metaphysical rebel defies his unjust human condition and the evils present in creation. The term “inviolable fate,” or the assumed ends or destiny of the human person, is scornfully faced by a metaphysical rebel. In doing so, the metaphysical rebel insinuates and demands deities and fate, taking responsibility into their own hands. In other words, this type of rebellion is a holistic disposition, a resistance against resignation and complacency, leading to a reclamation of freedom in its foundation.

This rebellion is exemplified by mythological and literary figures such as Prometheus, who defies the gods because of his love for humanity, and Ivan Karamazov in Dostoevsky’s *The Brothers Karamazov*, who refuses to accept a world in which innocent children suffer. For Camus, Ivan’s metaphysical rebellion exemplifies the indignation that, despite possibly being wrong concerning God’s existence, he holds on to the assertion that the truth is never worth the cost of doing evil, leading to suffering, or the death of innocents.²³

Despite this ambitious direction of metaphysical rebellion that seeks justice in creation, there is an inherent risk in metaphysical rebellion. This rebellion risks transgressing limits and committing decide—the symbolic or literal destruction of God—and the subsequent

²² *Ibid.*, 23.

²³ *Ibid.*, 56.

desire to become divine oneself. Camus warns that metaphysical rebellion, if unchecked, leads to metaphysical revolution, marked by a transitional moral nihilism, and then totalitarian constructions of meaning that replace one form of tyranny with another. Camus further expounds on the consequences of such a revolution, which led to the recognition of the permissibility of everything and the fact that one's own law is the only one deemed acceptable.²⁴ Thus, what begins as a protest against metaphysical injustice may culminate in a new absolutism where everything is permitted for the ego that has replaced God.

In historical rebellion, the rebel's subversion is directed against the power relation as it is rooted in a specific time and place. Concrete examples of historical rebellion are the uprisings of enslaved people against their masters and the protests of maligned and violated human beings against their offenders. However, if metaphysical rebellion leads to usurping the place of the gods—the main source of inviolable fate—historical rebellion runs the risk of human beings crafting their own deities. In *The Rebel*, Camus notes how historical rebellion turned to historical revolutions, consequently deifying forces and institutions such as History, State, and Terror. Camus proves this deification by analyzing historical revolutions in the West, such as Jacobinism.²⁵ Thus, historical rebellions can be commendable manifestations of creating authentic unity but run the risk of developing totality. Thus, Camus is skeptical of historical revolutions that abandon their original ethical insight for ideological totality, leading to “total destruction or unlimited conquest.”²⁶ He critiques excesses because the promise of emancipation becomes a justification for new forms of oppression. Historical rebellion is necessary for the pursuit of justice in history and to act on what metaphysical rebellion has uncovered and propels toward, but it must avoid replicating the oppressive logic it seeks to dismantle.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 58-59.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, 132.

²⁶ *Ibid.*, 294.

Creative rebellion, the third type, is not explicitly named as such but refers to the consistent reference toward a creative impulse that pure rebellion reflects. It represents Camus's most affirmative vision of rebellion—a form of resistance enacted through art, literature, and aesthetic creation. Camus opines that creative rebellion has a significant relationship with historical and metaphysical rebellion. He describes this relationship as follows:

History may perhaps have an end; but our task is not to terminate it but to create it, in the image of what we henceforth know to be true. Art, at least, teaches us that man cannot be explained by history alone and that he also finds a reason for his existence in the order of nature.²⁷

In other words, creative rebellion becomes a form of re-envisioning, a more proactive approach than historical and metaphysical rebellion. He exemplifies this point through his own life.

Probably no European writer of his time left so deep a mark on the imagination and, at the same time, on the moral and political consciousness of his own generation and of the next ... No other writer, not even Conrad, is more representative of the Western consciousness and conscience in relation to the non-Western world. The inner drama of his work is the development of this relation under increasing pressure and in increasing anguish.²⁸

Through his philosophical and literary writings, Camus demonstrates how art can challenge dominant narratives and assert alternative visions. Another example of creative rebellion is Jose Rizal's literary endeavors,

²⁷ *Ibid.*, 276.

²⁸ Conor Cruise O'Brien, *Camus* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1970), 84.

most notably his novels *Noli Me Tangere* and *El Filibusterismo*. In those novels, Rizal reflects on the predicaments the Philippines confronted during the Spanish colonization. Addressing different audiences, Rizal debunks myths concerning Filipinos, such as being indios (unintelligent) and lazy. At the same time, he offers a vision through his novels of a national community. In this way, Rizal shares a perspective about a possible reformation of the Filipino community through their active participation via political action.²⁹ Also, whether violent actions for the sake of expedient change for the better can be justified has been one of the central questions reflected in his works. These examples showcase creative rebellion as avoiding the excesses of metaphysical revolution and historical totalitarianism by maintaining a space for ambiguity, nuance, and beauty. It affirms limits not by denying value but by presenting possible values that need to be deduced and recognized. Through art, the rebel remains faithful to the dignity of the human condition without turning that fidelity into dogma or a blind force to be followed.

Similar to Camus' observations, the current society continues to rebel, both a positive action that affirms value and a negation of injustices being done. With recent movements being lumped into the term "woke", the next section examines this peculiar concept and phenomenon.

THE SOCIETY THAT CLAIMS TO BE WOKE

Wokeness and Wokeism

In this section, I limit the discussion to a short discussion on woke and what I consider as wokeism. Woke is a term that originated from the African American slang in the 20th century, possibly with the earliest

²⁹ Lisandro E. Claudio, *Jose Rizal: Liberalism and the Paradox of Coloniality* (Switzerland: Palgrave Macmillan, 2019), 41.

usage dating back in the 1940s.³⁰ The term was repeatedly used, including in the 1963 book by James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time*, to describe people who are socially conscious. In the 1980s and 1990s, African-American rappers used the term to refer to a state of being aware of social injustices.³¹ This term gained more widespread popularity, especially during the foundation of the “Black Lives Matter” movement, because of the slogan “Stay woke,” which came to embody a call for an “attitude of mind” that is in constant vigilance against the evil in the world, alluding especially to racist oppressions.³² To this extent, academic philosophers have defined the epistemic dimension of wokeness as a group epistemic partiality, specifically as to how “the woke person gives members of oppressed groups and victims of historical injustices the benefit of the doubt.”³³ Considering the experiences of an oppressed group, the accounts portraying them in a negative light are more rigorously examined before making an informed belief regarding the concerned parties.

However, over the years, this term began to mean more than striving towards racial equality and expanded to encapsulate the intersectionality of various concerns. Thus, the term woke became a culture characterized by movements against various forms of systemic oppression, unfair hierarchical domination, and other injustices. In this expanded usage, it is meant to describe the condition of the individual’s awareness of what is happening, especially the injustices (not just racial injustices) that plague society. Because “woke” became a buzzword, the term has been loosely applied to various instances (e.g., anti-clericalism, radicalization of classic left-wing ideologies, destruction of other normativities, etc.), leading to further confusion about the real essence of

³⁰ J. Spencer Atkins, “Defining Wokeness,” in *Social Epistemology*, 37:3 (2023), 322.

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² Valentin, “The Woke Phenomenon: Its Impact and Different Responses,” 313.

³³ Atkins, “Defining Wokeness,” 321.

wokeness.³⁴ This approach has also been used in marketing campaigns where brands embedded social and political issues in their slogans and took a public stance.³⁵ Thus, this woke brand activism became prevalent, and the discernment of authenticity became another challenge. Thus, the society that claims to be woke sometimes proliferates vicious forms of pseudo-wokeness (hereafter called wokeism), which may be inauthentic and may even be considered opportunistic. To elucidate this point, I focus on two forms of wokeism: the dubious ethical fashion statement and the unrealistic intolerance towards human fallibility.

In the first form, the discourses on aspirations for social justice are retained; however, the paradigm, attitude, language, and actions are counterproductive to what the woke person seeks. An example of this is vividly captured in the eco-woke celebrities who participated in Camp Google, an environmental summit. A total of 114 private jets ferried them, and afterward, the celebrities rode luxury cars and helicopters.³⁶ The facts clearly show how their activities cast doubt regarding their sincerity toward the movement they publicly aspired to support. They claim to advocate for environmental awareness, but the irony lies in the significant carbon footprint they made during the said activities. In a similar instance, Sobande, Kanai, and Zeng highlight the significant contribution of celebrities toward making social justice movements more visible, but risk appearing as “virtue signaling” when their involvement lacks substantial actions.³⁷ This form of wokeism is considered a dubious

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 313-323.

³⁵ Abas Mirzaei, Dean C. Wilkie, and Helen Siuki, “Woke Brand Activism Authenticity or the Lack of It,” in *Journal of Business Research*, 139 (2022), 1-12.

³⁶ Barbara Ellen, “It’s easy to mock eco-celebs: better to give them the benefit of the doubt,” in *The Guardian* (3 August 2019), <<https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2019/aug/03/easy-to-mock-eco-celebs-better-to-give-them-benefit-of-doubt>>.

³⁷ Francesca Sobande, Akane Kanai, and Natasha Zeng, “The hypervisibility and discourses of ‘wokeness’ in digital culture,” in *Media, Culture & Society*, 44:8 (2022), 1579.

ethical fashion statement because people appear to wear labels of “wokeism” instead of an integral ethical principle being lived out.

People exhibit the second form when they become too hypersensitive insofar as transitions are no longer allowed. Social scripts embedded historically and culturally in a specific community may be difficult to uproot. As defined by Bailey, these scripts are “expected performances, attitudes, and behaviors, which reinforce and reinscribe unjust hierarchies.”³⁸ These scripts are reinforced in a socio-political system, thus embedded in society, and can lead individuals to internalize such ways of living at an early age. Because of such internalization, people may be unaware of their complicity. However, becoming aware and “woke” is still possible. In Bailey’s conception, being privilege-cognizant means developing a critically reflective consciousness.³⁹ An individual may become aware of the social expectations, and, like the imagery of the script, one may “go off-script” and betray the social expectations. However, being cognizant does not instantly remove ingrained habits. It may take time for even “woke” people to adapt to their new consciousness regarding the systemic injustices they have consciously or unconsciously perpetuated. Thus, the inclination to “cancel” is what I consider to be tantamount to the second form of wokeism, which neglects the difficult transition between cognition of oppressive social scripts and the capacity to betray such scripts. By cancellation, I refer to the act of total dismissal of a person, group, or institution without any chance for redemption and room for proper transition towards a more just characteristic.

These woke movements—encompassing positive, neutral, and negative forms—have been significantly amplified through technological advancements. Acts of injustice recorded through smartphone cameras and calls for boycotts making rounds on social media platforms are some of the ways the woke culture reverberated and gained global popularity.

³⁸ Alison Bailey, “Locating Traitorous Identities: Toward a View of Privilege-Cognizant White Character,” in *Hypathia*, 13:3 (Summer 1998), 33.

³⁹ *Ibid.*, 36.

However, the role of technology is not unidirectional and actually adds to the complexity of the power structures. As noted by Picarella, woke capitalism co-opted the socio-political causes for maximizing profits.⁴⁰ Thus, social media platforms became avenues for such ideals to be redirected to gain profits. Thus, this aspect is considered when formulating the new Camusian meridian society, which needs to be more authentically woke.

Similarities and Differences Between Camus' Time and the Contemporary Woke Society

Camus published *The Rebel* in 1956, the aftermath of World War II, a period marked by questions about the purging of traitors, the horrors of totalitarianism, and calls for decolonization. The contemporary “woke” society also confronts similar upheavals—widespread digital mediation of experience, globalized power structures, and complex identity politics—that resonate with but diverge from Camus’s milieu. In this section, I focus on comparing rebellion and woke movements.

Camus’ concept of rebellion and woke movements have three significant similarities: preliminary stage, dynamics, and risks. The first similarity is their preliminary stage. Rebellion begins with keeping the absurd alive, leading to lucidity that confronts reality for what it is. In the same sense, woke movements start with cognition or “waking up” and recognizing oppressive social scripts followed by people and societies. Second, they have similar dynamics insofar as they simultaneously affirm and negate something. In the case of rebellion, the rebel affirms a value that must be deduced and recognized while negating an injustice against the said values. In terms of woke movements, the affirmation is directed toward specific causes, identities, dignities, and value judgments while negating actions and scripts deemed oppressive to the specific cause.

⁴⁰ Lucia Picarella, “Intersections in the digital society: cancel culture, fake news, and contemporary public discourse,” in *Frontiers in Sociology*, 9 (March 2024).

Lastly, Camus acknowledges how rebellion can become a self-defeating revolution. Similarly, woke movements sometimes devolve into mere wokeism that only appears to fight for causes. In other words, co-optation and weaponization may occur.⁴¹

The differences between the Camusian rebellion and the woke movements are also gleaned from those similarities. The two differ in terms of their scope, grounding, and their societies. The Camusian rebellion is more general in scope, given that Camus in *The Rebel* mostly focused on humankind. In contrast, woke movements pertain to specific causes, although they sometimes advocate for intersectional concerns.⁴² Thus, their grounding is also different from each other. Camusian rebellion is centered on dignity, which is common to all human beings.⁴³ Compared to this, woke movements primarily bank on the specific group identity, history, and value judgments to rally behind a cause. Looking into the specific societies that affected these two, woke movements are amplified, both positively and negatively, in a more technologically advanced society compared to Camus' milieu. With these in mind, I sketch my proposed new Camusian meridian in the next section.

A NEW CAMUSIAN MERIDIAN

Camus's typology of rebellion offers a rich philosophical anthropology: metaphysical rebellion asserts the injustice of creation, the historical rebellion confronts the injustice of people and institutions, and creative rebellion affirms the value of beauty amid those injustices. Each form has its risks but also its own emancipatory promise. Because of these risks,

⁴¹ For more information regarding the weaponization and the simulation of wokeness, see Staci M. Zavattaro and Domonic Bearfield, "Weaponization of Wokeness: The Theater of Management and Implications for Public Administration," in *Public Administration Review*, 82:3 (2022), 585-93.

⁴² Despite this intersectional concern, the same dimension is co-opted into advertising strategies. See Francesca Sobande, "Woke-Washing: 'intersectional' Femvertising and Branding 'woke' Bravery," in *European Journal of Marketing*, 54:11 (2020), 2723-2745.

⁴³ Camus, *The Rebel*, 18.

Camus's insistence on a meridian that recognizes limits as the essential feature of legitimate rebellion is a critical guiding principle. Camus highlights this point, writing:

Moderation is not the opposite of rebellion. Rebellion in itself is moderation, and it demands, defends, and re-creates it throughout history and its eternal disturbances. The very origin of this value guarantees us that it can only be partially destroyed. Moderation, born of rebellion, can only live by rebellion. It is a perpetual conflict, continually created and mastered by the intelligence.⁴⁴

This emphasis on a form of equilibrium represents what Camus conceptualizes as the meridian. Meridian, as used in *The Rebel*, is the middle path of rejecting the deification of oneself and others. Duvall comments that using the term meridian does not pertain to a specific time (*midi* or noon) nor place (middle geographical location).⁴⁵ Rather, the meridian evokes paradoxical movements of both exile and at-homeness. Practicing moderation (*mesure*) and humility are crucial to sustaining the humane rebellious spirit. This concept is consistently implied in Camus' works, highlighting the possibility of harmony and beauty amid paradoxical tensions that may remain unresolved.

To contextualize the discussion further, I highlight this historical fact: the publication of *The Rebel* led to criticisms against Camus' philosophy, and intellectuals of his time mostly rejected the idea of the meridian, thinking that drastic measures were necessary during their tumultuous time. Many of those criticisms are largely influenced by the acrimonious exchange between Sartre and Camus.⁴⁶ However, in this

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 301.

⁴⁵ Duvall, "Albert Camus against History," 145.

⁴⁶ Jean-Paul Sartre recommended that Francis Jeanson be the one to write the review on *The Rebel*. Then, Albert Camus replied to the review addressed to Sartre and several public exchanges transpired with the different parties mixing *argumentum ad hominem*

paper, I will elaborate on the limitations of Camus' notion of rebellion at the meridian—partly influenced by justified criticisms from scholars—and ways to enhance and present a new Camusian meridian.

Limitations of Camus' Rebellion at the Meridian

While Camus's meridian offers a vital corrective to both nihilistic revolt and totalizing revolution, three main observed limitations in his philosophy and writings are acknowledged: The first limitation is *The Rebel*, in its entirety, has logical assumptions that can weaken the formulation of rebellion at the meridian from an argumentative standpoint. However, this aspect is understandable, given that the truisms Camus presents are reinforced through his other philosophical and literary writings. In analyzing Camus's approach, Patrick Hayden calls it "para-philosophical" writing.⁴⁷ This mode of writing goes beyond the conventional model of philosophy, i.e., purely argumentative and logical in its approach. Particularly, Camus employs para-philosophical reflection and analysis through everyday experiences and societal issues he confronted during his time.

The second limitation is that although Camus supplemented his notions of rebellion, especially in *Exile and the Kingdom*, the hints and depictions made there lack explicit elaboration.⁴⁸ Thus, this limitation will be addressed through a philosophically grounded interpretation from scholars. In this case, the ways to improve rebellion at the meridian are

with valid criticisms and clarifications concerning violence and its limits or lack thereof. For more on this, see David Sprintzen, Salam Hawa, Bernard Murchland, and Adrian van den Hoven, "Historical and Critical Introduction: From Friendship To Rivals," in *Sartre and Camus: A Historic Confrontation*, ed. and trans. by David A Sprintzen and Adrian van den Hoven (New York: Humanity Books), 61.

⁴⁷ Patrick Hayden, "Albert Camus on Revolt and Revolution," in *Brill's Companion to Camus: Camus among the Philosophers*, ed. by Matthew Sharpe, Maciej Kaluza, and Peter Francev (Leiden: Brill, 2020), 349.

⁴⁸ See Albert Camus, *Exile and the Kingdom*, trans. by Carol Cosman (New York: Vintage International, 2007).

exemplified in the short stories—especially in “The Voiceless Ones”—namely the non-binary distinctions (beyond the worker-boss divide, beyond class distinctions, beyond gendered norms, etc.), the world as not just human-centric, and how external actions are not the sole basis for knowing whether it is in line with the humane rebellious spirit.⁴⁹ In other words, the literary stories he crafted add depth to how the nuances of rebellion may be further reflected upon.

Lastly, the nuances of Camus’ philosophical notion of rebellion are also problematic given its inherent relativity. Specifically, identifying the borderline that should not be crossed or the value affirmed in the rebellious act is difficult to accomplish properly. This identification of a line that should not be intruded upon or transgressed is often recognized through a “feeling” of right.⁵⁰ This relativity is rooted in the degree of freedom a rebel espouses. Camus writes:

It is in the name of another value that the rebel affirms the impossibility of total freedom while he claims for himself the relative freedom necessary to recognize this impossibility. Every human freedom, at its very roots, is therefore relative.⁵¹

To this extent, Camus’ notion of rebellion is relative in two aspects. First, the feeling of right begins with recognizing injustice and a line that allows tolerance to a certain extent, determined relative to a person’s given context. However, Camus diffuses the possible misconception that values and the act of rebellion are forms of extreme relativism. What appears to be relative is simply the developing awareness of rights and values that

⁴⁹ Some of these points are covered in another article of mine. See Carl Jayson D. Hernandez, “Overcoming Moral Deterioration in the Workplace: Insights from a Feminist Re-reading of Camus’ *The Voiceless Ones*,” in *Philosophy of Management*, 24 (2025), 269-285.

⁵⁰ Camus, *The Rebel*, 13.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 284.

must be defended.⁵² Second, the relativity of freedom is not a negative aspect, nor is it to an extreme degree, but an acknowledgment of a certain degree of flexibility wherein different compromises may be allowed while retaining aspects that should not be tolerated.

The New Camusian Meridian

Given the comparison I made concerning Camus' rebellion and wokeness and the limitations I observed, I propose the three aspects to re-frame the new Camusian meridian: a nuanced perspective of philosophical suicide, the need for multiple sources of knowledge, and the prudent utilization of technological advancements to amplify acts of rebellion.

First, the root of the rebellion devolving into a self-defeating revolution is the paradigm and disposition akin to one of the responses to the absurd: philosophical suicide. In Camus' elaboration of the term, there are just two senses exuded by this reality: 1) a resigned treatment of reality as "mystery" and 2) an overestimation of one's knowledge as the Truth and disregards anything that does not fit it. The former is represented by thinkers such as Kierkegaard and Chestov, who commit an unfounded leap into illusory hope, sacrificing the intellect in the process.⁵³ This disposition is akin to resignation because reality is no longer being pursued to be known for what it is, and instead is being labeled as a "mystery" that can never be fully known. The later Husserlian phenomenology represents the other extreme of philosophical suicide. Camus approves of the objectives of phenomenology at first glance, given its intention to re-learn how to see reality.⁵⁴ However, eventually, Husserl's proposal commits a leap towards Eternal Reason.⁵⁵ With the

⁵² *Ibid.*, 19-20.

⁵³ Camus, *The Myth of Sisyphus and Other Essays*, 37.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, 43.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, 46.

desire to make sense of the universal essences and particular instances in reality, philosophical suicide emerges in the form of intellectualism.

Camus admits that when he used the term in *The Myth of Sisyphus*, his definition of philosophical suicide was a “convenient way of indicating the movement by which a thought negates itself and tends to transcend itself in its very negation.”⁵⁶ Hence, I contend that a revision must be made concerning adding a recognition of multiple degrees of philosophical suicide and a recognition of philosophical suicide affecting certain portions of the metaphysical worldview—as compared to the all-or-nothing existential attitude formulated by Camus. For instance, a person may be disposed to a form of philosophical suicide in religious matters but remain lucid concerning other matters related to pedagogical matters. I consider this first distinction crucial because the “feeling” of right requires an authentic lucidity that confronts reality for what it really is. To this extent, I relate this to Medina’s idea of “meta-lucidity.” Meta-lucidity pertains to the awareness that oppression has created blind spots in cognitive structures and epistemic practices.⁵⁷ The existential disposition that takes certain parts of reality for granted causes a form of invisibilization, similar to the notions of embedded social scripts discussed earlier. In this manner, the need to rebel is recognized more easily if one resists the temptation to become philosophically suicidal and fosters lucidity and meta-lucidity instead.

The second way to enrich the root of rebellious actions further is to seek multiple sources of knowledge that can help us avoid committing philosophical suicide. Camus distrusted how ideologies used rationalizations to justify prejudices and arrogant actions. Because of this, as Elizabeth Ann Bartlett notes, Camus searched for epistemological bases for rebellion, leading “to other sources of knowledge—to the body, the

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, 41.

⁵⁷ José Medina, *The Epistemology of Resistance: Gender and Racial Oppression, Epistemic Injustice, and Resistant Imaginations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2013), 192.

emotions, the passions, the longings of the spirit.”⁵⁸ Extending this further, by revisiting and debunking false myths surrounding other sources of knowledge (e.g., indigenous knowledge, the experiences of minority groups, etc.), humane rebels will be able to address the sources of injustices and inhumane human conditions creatively. A case in point is how indigenous knowledge may be integrated into sustainable practices such as resource management. For instance, in the qualitative study conducted by Rory D. Griffin, Griffin examines three Wisconsin tribes—the Bad River Band of the Lake Superior Tribe of the Ojibwe Nation, the Menominee Nation, and the Oneida Nation.⁵⁹ He highlights how sustainable practices, such as “sustained yield forestry,” that guide the Menominee in their management of reservation lands, can also be considered.⁶⁰ This sustained yield forestry refers to the practice of only cutting mature, fallen, and sick trees. Furthermore, this land ethic, rooted in indigenous knowledge, has been recognized for being developed further to contemporary conditions and has been integrated into sustainable forest management.⁶¹

Lastly, utilizing technological advancements to amplify historical rebellion is a worthwhile pursuit. Camus often remarked against the alienation and misuse of technological artifacts. I recognize the risks technological advancements pose; however, they also have the potential to modify the power structures that sometimes hamper individuals from expressing their sentiments and sharing their experiences. Given that experiences in the current society are mediated through social media platforms, knowing how to co-opt forms of oppression into resistance can also be applied to algorithmic systems. For example, the insights from the

⁵⁸ Elizabeth Ann Bartlett, *Rebellious Feminism: Camus's Ethic of Rebellion and Feminist Thought* (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), 23.

⁵⁹ Rory D. Griffin, “Indigenous Knowledge for Sustainable Development: Case Studies of Three Indigenous Tribes of Wisconsin” (Master's Thesis: University of Wisconsin, 2009).

⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 86.

⁶¹ Ronald L. Trosper, “Indigenous Influence on Forest Management on the Menominee Indian Reservation,” in *Forest Ecology and Management*, 249 (2007), 138.

book *Algorithms of Resistance* offer ways to gain tactical algorithmic agency.⁶² Tactical algorithmic agency refers to the “ability of the people to actively shape the outcome of algorithmic computation for their own benefit.”⁶³ To this extent, a rebel must be prudently conscious of how technology may be utilized in the different phases of a rebellious action, even when the system seems to be rigged in favor of the oppressors.

Wokeism as “Revolution” that is Devoid of Meridian

The problematic aspects of “wokeism” have clear similarities in relation to identified social ills, such as Camus’ notion of revolution. Through a deeper philosophical examination, I contend that “wokeism” embodies the very dangers that Camus warned against in his critique of revolutions that may have started as faithful rebellions. This claim can be understood through the establishment of three significant connections.

First, “wokeism” exhibits a deification of ideals, echoing Camus’ warning about rebellious actions that become lost in its totalizing force. Camus contended that revolutionaries, in their quest to depose God, merely replaced the divine with new, equally tyrannical abstract forces like “History” or “the State.”⁶⁴ In a similar fashion, the most rigid forms of “wokeism” elevate abstract ideals such as “justice” and “equity” to a supreme and totalizing force. These ideals are treated as unquestionable dogmas, silencing all dissent and refusing any form of compromise or moderation. This is clearly a direct rejection of Camus’ principle of meridian. This uncompromising nature of similar ideologies mirrors the logic of the revolutionaries Camus critiqued, who believed their good intentions authorized the use of evil means. Such a contradictory logic leads to the self-defeating nature of revolutions devoid of meridian.

⁶² Tiziano Bonini and Emiliano Treré, *Algorithms of Resistance: The Everyday Fight Against Platform Power* (Cambridge: The MIT Press, 2024).

⁶³ *Ibid.*, 2.

⁶⁴ See Camus, *The Rebel*, 146.

A case in point is the viral video of Paula Jamie Salvosa. Salvosa’s video is more commonly known as the “Amalayer” fiasco.⁶⁵ In November 2012, a passenger’s video of Paula Jamie Salvosa, then a college student, arguing with Light Rail Transit Authority (LRTA) security guard Sharon Mae Casinas at the Santolan Station of LRT-2 in Metro Manila went viral online. According to GMA News, the video received more than 68,000 shares and 17,000 comments on Facebook at its peak.⁶⁶ Salvosa later explained that the guard had grabbed her arm, contributing to her outburst, a claim Casinas denied, insisting she had only been doing her duty calmly. In the aftermath, Salvosa became the subject of intense cyberbullying, prompting her to deactivate her social media accounts and later speak publicly about the psychological distress of online shaming, specifically leading to her post-traumatic stress disorder.⁶⁷ This example of online public shaming shows how disproportionate the call for “moral superiority” is and how wokeism can become problematic, especially when the “full story” is never understood before making judgment. This example is also relevant to the next connection between revolution and wokeism.

Second, the intolerance and rigidity of “wokeism” can be interpreted as an offshoot of philosophical suicide in the digital age. Camus described philosophical suicide as a response to the absurd, in

⁶⁵ The hashtag “Amalayer” refers to Salvosa’s pronunciation of “I’m a liar.” She repeatedly asked the guard if she thinks she is a liar because when she asked for the guard to apologize to her for grabbing her bag, the apology appeared insincere and Salvosa perceived the apology as a way of twisting the situation to make her seem like the one at fault. For Salvosa’s account of what transpired, you may refer to this video: “Amalayer: The Untold Story | #TSCAThePaulaSalvosaStory Full Episode | December 18 & 25, 2024,” YouTube video, 29:33, posted by The 700 Club Asia, (19 December 2024), <<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dkPHI18OHuM>>.

⁶⁶ Audrey Domasian and Joshua Mark Dalupang, “Girl in viral #Amalayer video speaks up,” in *GMA News Online* (14 November 2012), <<https://www.gmanetwork.com/news/hashtag/content/282308/girl-in-viral-amalayer-video-speaks-up/story>>.

⁶⁷ Vince Nonato, “Amalayer’ Girl, Lao Seek An End To ‘Cancel Culture’ After Being Subjected To Online Shaming,” in *One News* (4 December 2020), <<https://www.onenews.ph/articles/amalayer-girl-lao-seek-an-end-to-cancel-culture-after-being-subjected-to-online-shaming>>.

which an individual overestimates their knowledge as the singular “Truth” and disregards anything that does not fit it. The intolerance of wokeism mirrors this. Instead of engaging with complex, nuanced arguments and the inherent fallibility of human beings, it often resorts to rigid, formulaic responses and dismisses different perspectives as deluded or wrong. Thus, a clear manifestation of this is a similarity to what Miranda Fricker calls testimonial injustice. A testimonial injustice occurs when a hearer, due to prejudice, gives a speaker a deflated or inflated level of credibility.⁶⁸ Wokeism is inclined to become reliant on the speaker’s social position over the weight of the argument. Such dynamics can be considered an intellectual disengagement from the difficult process of critical thinking and rational debate. The result is a false unity of thought and its diminished diversity, thus becoming the antithesis of a healthy, rebellious society.

Finally, “wokeism” often leads to the suppression of the humane spirit. Camus’s core concept of rebellion is founded on the affirmation of a shared human value and the compassionate humanism that arises from it. However, the intolerance of wokeism often leads to the dehumanization of those who fail to adhere to its strict codes. By this very rejection of human fallibility and creating an us-versus-them mentality, wokeism betrays the solidarity towards life that authentic rebellion strives for. Instead of uniting humanity against injustice, it can divide and alienate, turning the rebellious impulse to implode and become antagonistic towards potential allies, as seen in targeting individuals and institutions that, while not fully aligned, could be collaborators in the pursuit of justice. This division is a fundamental betrayal of the communal spirit inherent in a true rebellious act.

⁶⁸ Miranda Fricker, *Epistemic Injustice: Power and the Ethics of Knowing* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007), 17.

Possible Interactions between the New Camusian Meridian and Wokeism

Now, applying the new Camusian meridian in rebellion as a response to wokeism, I highlight two possible interactions between them. First, the new Camusian meridian presents a guiding principle as to how a person may avoid wokeism, a form of virtue signaling that is devoid of consistent integration into one's life. Particularly, meridian anchors the value that people consider worth affirming and preserving. This anchorage is rooted in an embodiment of lucidity, humility, and moderation. If one were then to apply meridian into one's life, there is a consistent desire and action undertaken concerning the search for the means to uphold values (e.g., value of human lives, just treatment of people, etc.); one avoids becoming a moral hypocrite that only seeks to appear "woke" in the eyes of society.

Second, it is possible that wokeism may distort how people gauge the spirit of the meridian that sustains the proper direction of rebellion. Wokeism, serving as a performance, may create a spectacle that can also mislead people into gauging the limits that rebellion should respect. The pitfall of justifying unnecessary violence may become prevalent, especially when influential people embody forms of extreme wokeist tendencies. As argued earlier, past studies have shown how celebrities may have contributed to making movements for social justice more visible; however, the lack of substantial action makes such a rebellious action still ineffective.⁶⁹ Although this work does not completely dwell on the interaction between the two, this preliminary exposition provides a clear justification for the viability of pursuing similar studies, especially in improving existing frameworks for rebellious actions and contending with the recent developments and sensibilities promoted by social justice movements.

⁶⁹ Sobande, Kanai, and Zeng, "The hypervisibility and discourses of 'wokeness' in digital culture," 1579.

CONCLUSION

The philosophy of Albert Camus offers a relevant theoretical framework for having an existentially grounded response to the increasingly complex society we live in. However, due to the multitude of factors – e.g., the inherent flaws in the relativistic tendencies of the philosophical concepts, the ambiguous depictions that lack elaboration, and the untimely death that halted the fruition of the love cycle that was envisioned to be the clear movement beyond the absurd, etc.—Albert Camus’ notion of a meridian, largely derived from the Greco-civilization, requires substantial improvement on multiple fronts.

In this study, I offer three main revisions that primarily affect the concrete realization of the three types of rebellion. Firstly, the recognition of varying degrees of philosophical suicide and multiple human dimensions influenced by philosophical suicide enhances the enactment of metaphysical rebellion. Secondly, historical rebellious actions can be augmented through a careful and effective utilization of technological advancements. Thirdly, revisiting and de-mythologizing other sources of knowledge, especially Indigenous wisdom, can be a source for effective creative rebellion.

Ultimately, authentic human solidarity is an ideal worth approximating. The new Camusian meridian is pivotal to navigating the precarious situation we find ourselves in. Diverging from wokeism and self-defeating revolutions, a modified Camusian rebellion can help us make society more authentically woke.

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