The Glittering Void: Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil and Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus on Success as Existential Illusion

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***Abstract*—Modern life pushes people toward achievement with the same force that leaves them emotionally underfed. Society teaches us to accumulate titles, awards, applause until success becomes less a personal journey and more a public performance. This paper turns to Nietzsche's Beyond Good and Evil and Camus' The Myth of Sisyphus not to repeat their philosophy, but to hold today's ambition against their sharper light. Nietzsche warns that when a person mirrors the world too perfectly, they forget to hear their own voice. Camus shows how the struggle itself becomes heavy when it serves nothing beyond repetition. Both thinkers quietly ask the same unsettling question: what if our triumphs are draining rather than filling us? The argument here does not grieve over emptiness; it studies its architecture. The glitter that surrounds modern success is fragile its shine comes from comparison, it's worth from spectators, its meaning from outside rather than within. But the same collapse that shows how empty things are also meaningless opens a rare door. When applause stops working, a new rhythm starts: work chosen for its honesty, and goals set not by what others expect but by what you need. Nietzsche calls this self-legislation; Camus calls it defiance. Instead of running after recognition, both urge a return to self-authorship being accountable to one's own becoming rather than to an impatient world. If there is heartbreak beneath achievement, it is because people are taught to win before they are taught to live. When the noise of ambition settles, what remains is not loss but the chance to rebuild purpose without imitation.**

***Index Terms*—imitation, purpose, achievement, force, awards, journey, performance**

Success today is less a destination and more a performance. People move through careers, social milestones, promotions, and curated accomplishments with impressive speed, yet carry a quiet sense that something essential is slipping out of reach. The world rewards appearance how full the schedule looks, how well one performs achievement while the inner life falls into a kind of unattended silence. Nietzsche and Camus become relevant not because they reject ambition, but because they name the faint ache beneath it. In Beyond Good and Evil, Nietzsche warns that society trains individuals to aspire in ways that have very little to do with their inner voice. He notes that one learns to value what the crowd values and to chase goals inherited rather than chosen (Nietzsche 67). What begins as enthusiasm slowly hardens into compliance. A person becomes efficient, productive, admired and curiously disconnected from their own longing. This disconnect is not dramatic; it appears in ordinary ways: a career that looks impressive but feels airless, a success that photographs well but holds no pulse.

Camus, in The Myth of Sisyphus, frames this modern fatigue through the figure of repetition. Sisyphus pushes his stone not because there is meaning at the summit but because the act has become his identity (Camus 108). The repetition mirrors contemporary ambition meet the target, meet the next one, remain moving, remain visible. The world applauds the movement without ever asking whether the movement nourishes the person making it. Camus does not condemn the labour; he simply asks what happens when achievement continues but significance does not. Both thinkers arrive at a similar turning point: the problem is not striving itself, but striving that forgets to ask why. When accomplishment becomes a shield against emptiness rather than an expression of inner desire, the self-retreats. People smile at their own success yet feel strangely absent inside it. This paper argues that the crisis is not failure but misalignment running toward goals that never belonged to one's own

heart. To examine ambition through Nietzsche and Camus is to learn that purpose cannot be borrowed. Success, if it is to feel alive rather than glittering and hollow, must return to something quieter and more personal: the right to choose one's path rather than merely fulfil it.

Modern success is often celebrated as proof of intelligence, discipline, and social worth. Yet, behind this glittering display lies a quieter truth: people are achieving more and feeling less. The world demands motion, productivity, and visibility, while interior life becomes a muted participant. Nietzsche and Camus, along with Kierkegaard and Sartre, help uncover why the modern individual feels hollow despite outward triumph. Their texts do not simply analyse ambition; they listen to the ache beneath it. Nietzsche, in Beyond Good and Evil, exposes the subtle training through which society teaches ambition. What we call desire is frequently only obedience in disguise. He writes that humans "follow a path long mapped before they learned to walk it" (Nietzsche 92). The ordinary person becomes a carrier of expectations family goals, institutional definitions of achievement, cultural standards of worth. A promotion or degree may look victorious, but Nietzsche hears the inner fatigue of someone performing excellence while quietly unsure of who they are. Camus approaches the same crisis differently. In The Myth of Sisyphus, he interprets the eternal repetition of pushing the stone uphill not as punishment but as recognition of how modern striving feels (Camus 105). Motion becomes identity. The stone is updated: deadlines, targets, curated success, endless electronic validation. Camus' insight is not that effort is meaningless, but that effort without inner grounding becomes indistinguishable from despair. The modern figure does not collapse outwardly; they collapse inwardly, under the weight of continual progress.

Kierkegaard captures this collapse with striking clarity. In The Sickness Unto Death, he describes the modern self as one that "fears nonbeing yet rushes toward it in imitation" (Kierkegaard 41). People copy success templates stable careers, visible reputation, unquestioned goals so completely that they lose the ability to desire freely. The tragedy is subtle: one succeeds publicly while disappearing privately. Kierkegaard does not condemn ambition; he mourns the soul that goes missing inside it. Sartre adds a final layer. In Existentialism is a Humanism, he insists that individuals are "condemned to be free," meaning they cannot escape the responsibility of choosing their own life (Sartre 29). But modern systems dull that responsibility by offering ready-made meaning. A person no longer asks Who am I becoming? but Am I impressive enough? Sartre warns that this substitution the world's gaze replacing inner judgment creates a self that is busy but not alive. These thinkers show the main conflict: ambition only becomes harmful when it no longer belongs to the person who is pursuing it. Modern success makes people feel empty not because trying hard is wrong, but because trying hard has lost its closeness. Nietzsche encourages self-creation rather than performance. Camus gives us revolt, not failure. Kierkegaard emphasises inwardness rather than imitation. Sartre asserts the necessity of individual responsibility in one's development, rather than the passive acceptance of societal narratives. The answer is not to turn down success, but to change where it comes from. When success comes from being clear on the inside rather than from outside pressure, it feeds you instead of draining you. The glittering surface of accomplishment then becomes secondary to the quiet fact of personal authorship. Modern individuals do not need more milestones; they need meaning that can breathe.

The inner collapse beneath modern success becomes clearer when read alongside Samuel Beckett's Waiting for Godot. If Nietzsche, Camus, Kierkegaard, and Sartre expose the invisible exhaustion inside ambition, Beckett reveals what happens when striving itself runs out of direction. Vladimir and Estragon are not executives, scholars, or achievers, yet their waiting mirrors the emotional posture of the modern ambitious person moving, hoping, performing, yet perpetually suspended in a state where meaning never arrives. Godot becomes the symbol of the promised fulfilment that never materializes: recognition, peace, completion, applause. The characters are not simply idle; they are faithful to a hope they do not understand, just as many individuals remain loyal to goals they never chose. Camus' image of Sisyphus pushing the stone finds a theatrical echo in Beckett's stage, where the men repeat gestures, words, and expectations without progress. The repetition is not tragic because nothing happens; it is tragic because they expect something to happen soon. Beckett writes a world where desire and emptiness share the same space, and where human beings remain loyal to a future that

refuses to speak (Beckett 45). This suspension reflects modern achievement: continuous preparation for a fulfilment that keeps its distance. Promotions, awards, and visibility promise meaning, but the promise postpones itself.

Nietzsche's fear of imitation of living a borrowed ambition appears in Estragon and Vladimir's inability to stop waiting. They could walk away. They could build a life. Instead, they stay, as individuals today stay within systems that exhaust them without nourishing them. Godot becomes the social script: success, recognition, final clarity. Beckett seems to whisper that the script has no author. The characters obey an appointment they never scheduled, much as people obey expectations they never questioned. Kierkegaard's insight into despair finds an unsettling home in the play. He defines despair as the self that cannot be itself (Kierkegaard 62). Estragon and Vladimir do not know if they believe in Godot, yet they cannot imagine themselves outside the waiting. Their stagnation is not laziness but existential entrapment. They wait because not waiting feels like identity collapse. Modern individuals remain in careers, ambitions, and performances for the same reason: without the next achievement, who would they be? What Beckett adds that the philosophers only hint at is tenderness. Despite the emptiness, the two men stay together. They quarrel, repeat jokes, threaten to leave, cling to each other, and begin again. Beckett suggests that if meaning is uncertain, companionship is not. The play does not resolve the crisis of purpose; it softens it. Perhaps the answer to success that fails to satisfy is not withdrawal nor grand revolt, but a smaller human truth someone to share the waiting with.

If the diagnosis is that modern success feels empty, the next honest question is simple and difficult: what now? It is easy to expose the hollowness of restless ambition; it is harder to imagine a way of living that does not collapse back into the same pattern. Yet existential thinkers and later clinicians and researchers who drew from them do offer something that looks like a path, not as a formula, but as a set of orientations a person can practice. A first step is to admit that meaning cannot be imported. No promotion, relationship, spiritual slogan, or social role can permanently secure it. Nietzsche, Camus, Kierkegaard, Sartre, Beckett each in different language pushes us toward the same uncomfortable freedom: meaning is something we make rather than something we receive. That realization is frightening because it removes excuses. But it is also the point where the individual stops being only a performer in a script and begins to become a writer of it.

Viktor Frankl, working out of the horror of the concentration camps, argued that a person's deepest need is not pleasure or power, but meaning. He noticed that those who could still locate a "why" a task, a love, a responsibility, a creative project was more resilient than those who could not, even when both groups suffered equally (Frankl 111). His work quietly confirms what the existential writers intuited in more literary ways: the problem of the modern human is not that life is hard, but that life is often hard for no felt reason. Any genuine solution has to help people rediscover a "why" that belongs to them. Practically, that begins with subtraction. A life overcrowded with noise cannot hear its own questions. Modern ambition keeps individuals flooded with targets, notifications, obligations, and comparisons. One way to resist is deliberately small: reclaiming pockets of time where nothing is performed walking without headphones, sitting with a notebook instead of a screen, letting boredom arrive without immediately numbing it. These are not aesthetic lifestyle choices; they are acts of refusal. They refuse to let the self be constantly edited by the gaze of others.

From that quieter ground, the second step is inquiry. Existential therapy often returns to a few uncomfortable but fertile questions: What genuinely moves me? What am I unwilling to lose? Where do I feel most alive, even if no one is watching? These questions are not answered in one evening. They are lived with, argued with, revised. Over time, patterns emerge: perhaps teaching, or caring, or building, or making art, or protecting the vulnerable, or understanding difficult ideas. The content varies. What matters is that the person starts to sense a through-line in their own experience that cannot be reduced to "I should." Camus' figure of rebellion is helpful here. For him, the point is not to erase the absurdity of existence the fact that life has no guaranteed, pre-written meaning but to stand up inside it. The rebel is not a dramatic revolutionary in the street; often, it is the quiet person who refuses to live mechanically, who chooses awareness over numbness, who decides to carry their stone on purpose rather than by default (Camus 89). This "on purpose" is where modern healing happens. The job may stay the same, the

family responsibilities may not change, but the relationship to them shifts from blind obedience to chosen engagement.

Another layer of solution comes from relationship. Waiting for Godot suggests that even when meaning is uncertain, companionship can be real. Modern life isolates people inside their own curated identities, yet most research on well-being points to the same simple truth: meaningful connections buffer despair better than individual achievement. Sharing doubts, fears, and unfinished thoughts with someone who does not demand a performance is not a luxury; it is a corrective to the loneliness that fuels the crisis of meaning. When another person knows us beyond our résumé, the self no longer feels so dependent on external measures. A further step is creative responsibility. Existential writers consistently emphasize that human beings are not just responders to life; they are also makers within it. Creation does not necessarily mean art; it can be a way of doing one's work, raising children, tending a garden, mentoring students, designing a lesson, writing a page each day. The point is to move from merely fulfilling tasks to shaping them, however modestly, so that they reflect one's values. Even small acts—a more honest conversation, a fairer decision at work, a kind refusal, a piece of writing that no one may read—begin to thicken the texture of daily existence.

Finally, any honest solution must accept that meaning will never be finished. There is no final state of "now my life is meaningful forever." Instead, there is an ongoing rhythm of losing and finding, of drifting and returning, of questioning and recommitting. This can sound discouraging, but it is strangely relieving: one is not failing when the old "why" wears thin; one is being invited to deepen it or reshape it. So, the answer is not a single technique, but a different way of standing in the world: less dazzled by the glitter of achievement, more attentive to the quiet pulse of what feels real; less obedient to borrowed scripts, more loyal to the slow work of self-authorship; less alone in silent striving, more willing to share the weight of the human condition with others. The modern man or woman may still chase goals, but those goals will no longer be empty trophies they will be traces of a life that, while unfinished and imperfect, finally feels like their own.

The crisis of modern success does not arise because human beings aspire, but because aspiration has been severed from inner truth. We chase momentum, visibility, and validation with great discipline, yet very little tenderness toward the self that must carry these ambitions. What Nietzsche, Camus, Beckett, Sartre, and Kierkegaard collectively reveal is not a world without meaning, but a world in which meaning cannot survive without conscious protection. Achievement alone no longer assures dignity, purpose, or identity. It merely fills time, consumes energy, and decorates life with symbols that do not always touch the soul. The deeper work now is not to abandon striving, but to reorient it. Success must return to being a personal act rather than a public performance. Ambition must remember its origin not the gaze of others, but the quiet interior voice that existed long before applause. The modern individual does not need fewer goals; they need goals that do not hollow them out. They need spaces where they can be more than efficient, more than impressive, more than endlessly available.

This study suggests that meaning is not found in the summit but in the way one climbs, listens, chooses, and creates. Companionship, small joys, interior rhythm, deliberate quiet these are not soft alternatives to success but the conditions that allow success to feel real. The glittering void cannot be closed by more glitter, but only by depth: by a life shaped from the inside rather than arranged from the outside. If modern existence feels restless, it is because humans are ready for a different measure of worth. Not productivity, but presence. Not validation, but voice. Not spectacle, but self. In returning to these quieter foundations, the modern individual does not become less ambitious; they become whole.

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