



## God's Kindness in Human Suffering in the Perspective of Albert Camus' Thought

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**Abstract:** The focus of this article is to discuss the discourse on the goodness of God in the reality of human suffering. This discourse aims to examine cases of human trafficking in NTT critically. We employed a qualitative descriptive method. In the first part, We discussed human trafficking cases in NTT. In the second part, we examined Albert Camus' thoughts about the absurdity of human life. In the third part, we reflected on the relevance of Camus' view concerning the suffering of victims of human trafficking. It led us to a new finding that human suffering, such as victims of human trafficking, does not negate the goodness of God in the world, as happened in Camus' reflection.

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## INTRODUCTION

East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Province is one of the provinces located in eastern Indonesia, which consists of islands and has a diverse population with different backgrounds. Based on its geographical location, this province is an archipelago. The location and geographical conditions result in a dry climate. Poverty, unemployment, and school dropouts are common in NTT. In line with what Winadya said in his journal, poverty and inadequate education bring people into suffering. In this situation, people can no longer think clearly (Winadya, 2019: 1040).

NTT is one of the provinces that adheres to patrilineal culture. This perspective positions the male as the head of the family and prioritizes continuing education to a high level. According to tradition, girls who do not continue their education will be married off. To avoid this, women in rural areas generally prefer to work outside the region or abroad (Farhan, 2019:21).

Culture is one of the reasons why the province of NTT is said to have the highest number of cases of violence, especially cases of human trafficking. This culture also indirectly discriminates against women from the social life of the community. Inwardly, they feel pressured so that when brokers come to recruit workers, they accept it without thinking about it anymore.

In general, the United Nations, in the *Human Rights Protocol* Article 3, defines human trafficking as:

“Human Trafficking in persons shall mean the recruitment, transportation, transfer, harboring or receipt of persons, through the threat or use of force or other forms of coercion, of abduction, of fraud, of the abuse of power or of a position of vulnerability or of the giving or receiving of payments or benefits to achieve the consent of a person having control over another person for exploitation.”

Human trafficking is an organized crime to exploit fellow human beings. In the phenomenon of human trafficking, a human being is nothing more than an object that can gain economic benefits for others. Human life in human *trafficking* becomes a commodity that can be sold. Therefore, *human trafficking* is a crime against humanity that causes prolonged suffering and trauma. The real impact of trafficking victims is mental disorders due to psychological trauma (Daniel, 2016:21). In addition, this crime also brings long-lasting suffering to those who become victims. This fact is the reason why the crime of human trafficking is an extraordinary crime.

The Ministry of Social Affairs of the Republic of Indonesia reported that the problem of migrant workers in NTT had reached a chronic condition, so handling steps have become a common urgency. In general, the number of migrant workers from NTT is not the largest compared to other migrants from various regions in Indonesia. However, it seems that the number of human trafficking cases from NTT, according to data from the National Police Criminal Investigation Unit, is the highest in Indonesia.

According to data recorded by the East Nusa Tenggara (NTT) Regional Police (Polda), 1,667 prospective female workers (TKW) from NTT were sent out of the region illegally. The prospective TKWs were planned to be sent by some human trafficking networks to work in Medan and Malaysia. According to data from the Institute of Resource Governance and Social Change (IRGSC), from January to December 2015, there were 941 victims, allegedly seven networks of companies and individuals involved. In 2015, 1,667 migrant workers from NTT were victims of human trafficking. Meanwhile, in 2016, from January to July, there were around 726 migrant workers who had problems or indications of human trafficking practices.

Since February 2014, human trafficking cases have become a ‘flashpoint’ for civil society protests in NTT. Then, the government tried to study this phenomenon through legal institutions. However, it seems that the crime of human trafficking in NTT is an organized crime that involves civil servants as well. Therefore, efforts to eradicate human trafficking in NTT remain in the spotlight by various groups.

This crime is also one of the extraordinary crimes because it is considered an organized crime for the purpose of exploiting fellow human beings. In the phenomenon of human trafficking, a human being is nothing more than an object that can gain economic benefits for others. Human life in human trafficking becomes a commodity that can be sold. Therefore, human trafficking is a crime against humanity that brings prolonged suffering and trauma. In addition, this violence is also contrary to the nature of human beings as creatures with dignity.

It is the main purpose of this paper, which is to try to see God’s goodness in suffering. I have tried to reflect on it by looking at the phenomenon of human trafficking violence that occurred in NTT. The phenomenon of violence that occurs in NTT always raises the same

question from many people, namely whether God exists in human suffering. This question is not easy to answer with human reason or common sense. This question must be answered with faith through deep reflection on daily life experiences, especially experiences of suffering. This paper attempts to answer the discourse: Is God present in the suffering of victims of human trafficking in NTT? I have tried to examine this case from Albert Camus. Both seem to have the same concept of human “rationality” as an effort of humanization. Still, both are contradictory in seeing God’s existence in the experience of human suffering.

Under these circumstances, there is a question, “Where is God?” This question is not wrong. Throughout history, in every age, this question has been a sentiment expressed by every human being. The Israelites once asked this question during their exile in Babylon. The same question is also always present in the long treatises of Albert Camus when witnessing the child victims of World War I-II in Europe. The question is also the heart of the victims of human trafficking in NTT to this day. Their identity as human beings has been turned into an economic commodity. Therefore, another question follows: Can we be sure of God’s goodness in such a situation?

## METHOD

This research uses a descriptive qualitative approach. We explored the character’s thoughts to give meaning to contextual experiences related to the research theme. We traced the character’s life history and the background of his thoughts. Then, we presented the main points of his thoughts. To deepen, we distributed a Google Form questionnaire containing statements 1-5 corresponding to the first issue of whether human trafficking violence is bad, statements 5-10 to answer the question of why human trafficking occurs and statements 11-15 to answer the question can we be sure of God’s presence in such situations? Finally, we make the relevance of the character’s thoughts to the research theme.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

The data we obtained from the *Google form* helped me to answer this question. Almost 100% of respondents say that God is in human suffering, including the suffering of human trafficking that occurs in NTT. The data helped us in finding something new in this paper. The new thing is that human suffering, such as victims of *human trafficking* in NTT, does not actually negate the goodness of God in the world as it happens in Camus’ reflection, but only by realizing the presence of others as fellow sublime creations of God will humans be free from suffering caused by the evil of their fellow man.

Albert Camus was born in Mondovi, Algeria, on November 7, 1913. His birthplace during his lifetime was a poor place. He grew up as a writer/philosopher in post-World War II France. Because of this, he is also often included as one of the French existentialist figures. He died in a car accident in Villeblevin on January 5, 1960.

In his work, Albert Camus often combines literary writing and philosophical thought. His writings are often made in the form of short stories, novels, and essays, and some of them

are filmed. In the following, I present a synopsis of three of his most famous works and the references for our paper, namely *L'Etranger*, *La Peste*, and *L'Homme revolte*.

Camus depicts human beings who are often based on what he calls the Mite of Sisyphus. This thought became the basic foundation of his "absurd" ideas in his work on *L'Etranger*. Camus saw man as Sisyphus. He is endlessly punished but remains happy and dignified for having beaten his stone. He is also subjected to punishments that were once considered horrific but are now commonplace and even enjoyable. Human beings are formed from habits that are not used at first, but because they are continuous, the habits are then accepted and lived.

Camus depicts absurdity in the novel *La Peste*. A plague affects the entire population of Oran. No one could explain the tranquility of Oran. Suddenly, the city's inhabitants are disturbed by an outbreak of pestilence. No one can explain why the pestilence is affecting the city of Oran. The pestilence came suddenly and made the whole city anxious. However, the townspeople seemed to be unable to do anything about it and could only accept it as fate. For Camus, this problem is absurd because pestilence is not the result of a cause.

Moreover, this disease also kills innocent children. Therefore, for Camus, the suffering that exists in this world is increasingly incomprehensible, especially when the victims are innocent little children. In his work entitled *Rebel*, Camus questions the origin of human evil. In this work, he makes a claim/indictment against a created world where innocent people suffer and die.

In the three descriptions above, it is clear that for Camus, life is a journey into the absurd. Man is born, then he lives in suffering or with a little happiness. Then, he grows old and tries to learn to be wise and law-abiding. Finally, he dies, finished! In the end, not only does life physically become dirt, but the meaning of life is also lost with death. It is the absurdity of human life. What is the meaning of human life if all beings die at the end?

Albert Camus once wrote: People die, and they are not happy. Because if God existed, there would be no need for people to be thrown into the world like a river. There is no reason to suffer, let alone to die. Everything is absurd. Albert Camus often declared himself a philosopher who did not believe in God or an atheist. For him to believe in God in the midst of suffering, human evil is absurd. Why is that?

On the one hand, human life always leads to the future, and on the other hand, the future brings humans closer to death. Faced with this absurdity, humans often resort to "escapism." He escapes to a certain religion or ideology or also commits suicide.

Albert Camus lived through two of the most horrific world wars in world history, World Wars I and II. When he saw these phenomena, he seemed to 'fret' and tried to rack his brain to think: Where did all this come from? And what can stop it? Reflecting on this phenomenon, Camus then wrote in satirical form in his book *L'Homme revolte*:

In today's world, only the philosophy of eternity can justify *nonviolence*. Against the deification of history, against the creation of history, and the historical situation, it will question where it comes from. Finally, it will place the responsibility of justice in the hands of God, and this will mean ordaining injustice. In turn, the answer will be equally insistent on the basis of conviction. The objection could also arise from the evil and paradox of something all-powerful

and spiteful or something all-good but barren, namely God. The choice will remain between elegance and history, God or the sword.

For Camus, the world of his time was a field of relentless evil. It is what makes the world suffer. Camus saw the source of evil in the envy of others. To free humans from the circle of violence can only be by philosophizing. Apparently, Camus emphasized human reason as the basis for his actions in the world. Camus again criticizes the escape into the embrace of the divine. It reinforces the evil that has been established in history through religious institutions that sometimes present God in drawn swords.

Albert Camus once wrote: The suffering in life is all the more incomprehensible if the sufferers are innocent little children. In his novel *La Peste*, he confronts the protagonist Marsault with a priest. Marsault rejects the priest's arrival when he comes to "sort of" give her the "last oil" of her life. This rejection occurs because of Marsault. The priest's actions are also absurd. He comes before death. In contrast, during his difficult and suffering situation, God sort of "doesn't care about him." Camus describes:

But suddenly, he raised his head and looked at me, "Why?" he asked: "You refused my visit?" I said that I felt no need to question him: I thought it was an equally unimportant matter. In a manner that seemed almost as if he was not speaking to me, he said that sometimes people feel confident, but in reality, they are not. He looked away, still without changing his seat, and asked me if I said this because I felt so desperate. I explained that I was not desperate. I was just afraid, which was natural. "Then God will help you." He explained, "Everyone I know who is in your situation turns to Him." I recognized that it was their right. It also proved that they had the time. As for me, I don't want to be helped, and in fact, I don't have much time to be interested in what doesn't interest me.

Here, absurdity can be defined as man's inability to give purpose and meaning to his life, as well as man's inability to seek answers to his experience of suffering. Looking solely to God for answers is the act of a lazy person who wants to find the easy way out. Belief in God is the easiest escape to solve problems, but it does not get to the heart of the matter, so it is also ineffective as a way out. Suffering and disappointment make the world absurd. In addition to proposing the concept of contradiction above, Camus is also actually trying to find a resolution to human suffering beyond the escape to God. In "The Rebel" he writes:

If every human being is able to introduce unity into the world as a whole that belongs to him, if he establishes a government by his own decision, with sincerity, purity, and justice, then he is his own God. The rebellious man is the man who says "yes" to life but at the same time welcomes "no," i.e., rejects suffering, grinding injustice, and other adversities. Rebellious people always value life and consider that human life has a noble value. This nobility comes from individual human freedom and responsibility.

From this quote, it can be seen that man can escape from his suffering by relying on himself, not on revelation, but on rational laws in accordance with his nature. For Camus, by fighting for these rational values, he can achieve his true existence without running into doctrines that shackle him. Then how does Camus describe death at the end of human suffering?

How..." repeated the doctor, then he still hesitated while looking at Tarraou attentively. "Someone like you can understand that, right?" Since the world is governed through death, perhaps it is better for God if people do not believe in Him, so that people struggle mightily against death..."

The quote above is Camus' description in "La Peste" of a doctor named Rieux in the presence of his best friend's death. Rieux is an experienced doctor in dealing with his patients. Still, it

seems that Rieux is not always right in predicting the situation. Rieux eventually has to admit that death is difficult to know when it will come. With so much passion and hope, he had to accept the death of his friend Tarrow as a bitter experience.

Camus seems to have a very partial concept of human suffering. On the one hand, he advocates the deification of rationality in order to free humans from myths and religious doctrines. For Camus, believing in God adds to human suffering. Because it seems God can do nothing in the face of human suffering, especially the innocent children of history. But on the other hand, he seems unable to provide a solution to that suffering. Instead, he easily claims that life is absurd. Isn't this an expression of despair? In this case, Camus' rationality does not change anything. The term absurd is just a new escape from the sense of defeat and loneliness.

Rationality must always be balanced with a life of faith. Rationality is necessary so that humans can criticize their way of life. Rationality reveals man's relationship with himself, the world, and his God. By combining these elements, rationality, relationality, and faith in God, the fullness of life will occur.

## CONCLUSION

Human trafficking is an extraordinary crime. It is said so because this crime brings prolonged suffering. This kind of crime is very easily found in NTT. It is because NTT is a province with a very high rate of human trafficking cases today. One of the causes of human trafficking in NTT is bureaucratic corruption. It happens when corruption makes it very easy for people to turn others into commodities to be bought and sold. They are no longer able to see others as dignified beings. Apart from bureaucratic corruption, poverty and low moral education are other reasons for *human trafficking* in NTT. It is this reality that makes people resort to committing this crime.

The suffering experienced by victims of human trafficking in NTT often leads them to experience boundaries and solitude. Here, they may question the existence of the God they believe in. It is because when suffering and pain become critical, often that is when some humans curse their life history. Why is life like this and that? Some people blame God for the existing suffering without being balanced by changing their self-concept about the presence of others around them. People are always easy to blame. Therefore, people are invited always to see God's work as a whole. It means that he cannot only accept goodness but, at the same time, must also accept the reality of his suffering. In the end, only God is able to pull him back from various sufferings that exceed his abilities. It presupposes that man believes and always hopes in God. Because by believing in God's presence in his suffering, he crosses over every bitter experience. He still has hope and a better future.

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