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5 **Abstract**

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7 *Index terms—*

8 **1 I. ESSAY**

9 This essay is an analysis of Christopher Nolan's Memento, and particularly of its main character Leonard, through  
10 the lens of Camus's The Myth of Sisyphus. I argue that Leonard is a Sisyphean character because of the endless  
11 nature of his task and the way in which both Leonard and Camus's Sisyphus embrace absurdity.

12 In order to defend that thesis, I will argue that memory is not essential to goal setting because Leonard still  
13 has a persistent aim in life, which is to take revenge. He sticks to this aim through recognizing the absurdity of  
14 a life in which many of his actions are manipulated by those around him and even by his past self. But what  
15 makes the protagonist's persistent goal possible is the fact that he is able to carry certain information across  
16 episodes through his system of leaving notes for himself. This way of remembering is not considered a form of  
17 memory with regards to this essay because "memory" is defined as a continuous form of internally recalling past  
18 events, at least partially. For example, when we retrieve information that we do not remember from a diary, we  
19 would not consider this to be a form of memory. We would expect someone with a normal memory to have no  
20 significant gap in between their memories. However, John Locke would consider memory to be essential for goal  
21 setting because memories allow us to be considered as a person. With Locke's argument, Leonard would not be  
22 considered as a person as he is unable to formulate memories, so the main character cannot have a goal in life.  
23 After comparing Sisyphus with Leonard, I will consider this Lockean objection. I ultimately conclude that this  
24 argument can be undermined by the fact that under the current legal code we would judge that he ought to be  
25 held accountable for his murder because his past self is not a completely different person to his present self.

26 In Memento, Christopher Nolan depicts Leonard, as a person whose life is centered around taking revenge for  
27 his wife. According to the protagonist, his wife was raped and killed by a man called John G. During this event,  
28 Leonard was knocked out on the head by the assassin, which led to his development of anterograde amnesia.  
29 This condition causes him to be unable to form any memories after his wife's death. As he is unable to have any  
30 short-term memories, he developed a system of remembering, which consists of tattooing clues for finding John  
31 G all over his body, taking polaroid of people who are involved in his life and writing down notes of mundane  
32 chores. Through creating his way of "recalling" the past, he is still able to gather evidence for his revenge on  
33 John G, which he ultimately believes to be a man named Teddy.

34 We, as human beings, look for values and meaning in the universe, because it gives us a sense of purpose and  
35 happiness, and provides us with a direction to achieve greater good in life.

36 Memento demonstrates this with an extreme case: Leonard's whole life revolves around his goal. Albert Camus  
37 believes that there is an absence of value in the world and we should experience London Journal of Research in  
38 Humanities and Social Sciences disquiet about the lack of value, which he labels as "absurdity." This reasoning  
39 stems from his belief that one can only obtain freedom and gain meaning in life when they recognize and embrace  
40 absurdity. We gain insight into Leonard as a character and, through the protagonist, humanity as a whole by  
41 considering Memento alongside the work of Camus.

42 In the Myth of Sisyphus, Camus states that "there is only one really serious philosophical question, and that  
43 is suicide." ?? He claims that people are acting in bad faith when they perform suicide, because they are rejecting  
44 freedom of the world. Those who commit suicide see no hope or need to continue living in a meaningless world,  
45 which Camus believes to be a natural response to the absurd reality of the world. However, he argues that it is  
46 essential for us to revolt against the lack of value despite the fact that our lives are meaningless because there  
47 is a lack of freedom in the also absurd afterlife and revolt allows us to affirm a better existence through finding

## 1 I. ESSAY

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48 "values, dignity, and solidarity." ?? In Greek mythology, Sisyphus is famous for his eternal punishment in the  
49 underworld, where he is condemned to roll a rock up a mountain continuously despite the fact that it would  
50 fall back down again when it reaches the summit. Thus, he was presented with a task that will never be able  
51 to be accomplished. Albert Camus uses Sisyphus' story to explain the reasons behind the presence of absurdity  
52 in the universe. In the story, we are able to tell that Sisyphus' life is absurd because he is assigned with an  
53 unaccomplishable task as his punishment. However, he does not perform "suicide", which means giving up in  
54 this context, in spite of the acknowledgment of the reality of the world, where he is never able to roll the rock  
55 to the top of the mountain. Instead, he embraces the absurd punishment and revolts against the lack of value  
56 in the universe. This intense action of revolt, according to Camus, is considered as a triumph: "his scorn of the  
57 gods, his hatred of death, and his passion for life won him that unspeakable penalty in which the whole being  
58 is exerted toward accomplishing nothing." ?? Therefore, he advocates Sisyphus to continue to revolt, because  
59 absurdity brings about happiness. This is demonstrated by Camus' claim that "happiness and the absurd[ity]  
60 are two sons of the same earth. They are inseparable," suggesting that people acknowledge absurdity as means  
61 of life and accept human frailty when they revolt, which are all components to keep us fully alive. Sisyphus  
62 demonstrates happiness in his punishment because it is the struggle to get the rock to the top of the mountain  
63 which completes one's heart. This implies that Sisyphus is happy. ?? I will argue that Leonard shares three  
64 similarities with Sisyphus in regards to goals. First, both Leonard and Sisyphus live in absurd worlds because  
65 they have unachievable goals. For Sisyphus, it is through the punishment of the underworld and for Leonard, it  
66 is through the manipulation performed by other characters in the film. They recognize Leonard's condition and  
67 use this to their advantage by tricking the protagonist into believing that he is finding John G when he is merely  
68 performing dirty tasks for others. This is demonstrated by the scene when Natalie uses Leonard to eliminate  
69 Dodd. Leonard was persuaded to beat Dodd up and drive him out of town because he believes that Natalie was  
70 assaulted by Dodd and she was providing useful clues about John G. In reality, it was Leonard who hit Natalie  
71 because she purposely angered Leonard in order for him to help her with Dodd. 5 A similar situation occurs for  
72 Teddy in using the protagonist to catch criminals. This indicates that the main character is being manipulated  
73 because others are using his condition to their own advantage.

74 In addition, Leonard manipulates himself by controlling his future thoughts and actions through noting down  
75 his feelings towards people. When he does not desire to remember certain opinions, he writes it in a different  
76 handwriting, which is shown in the case of Teddy telling him to not trust Natalie. 6 Similarly, if he does not  
77 want to remember certain events, he simply burns the polaroid taken in the aftermaths of the real John G's  
78 and Natalie's boyfriend's deaths, whilst saying, "Can I just let myself forget what you made me do?" 7 Leonard  
79 experiences all kinds of absurdity London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences in this film,  
80 because he is constantly being manipulated. As he is unable to remember, he is coerced into living in a world  
81 where his life is meaningless and irrational with no power to escape because he is not able to act in his own  
82 interest and his own values.

83 Secondly, Sisyphus shares a similar value to Leonard in that they both embrace absurdity. Sisyphus  
84 demonstrates this through accepting the fact that he is performing a meaningless act that will never be  
85 accomplished. Likewise, Leonard does not note down that he had already killed John G when Teddy informed  
86 him about this information, which indicates that he would not be able to remember it, so he will continue to be  
87 manipulated because of his condition and his belief that he is yet to find the assassin. When there is no meaning  
88 in life due to absurdity, Leonard sets out a goal to create a life that is worth living for because he has a persistent  
89 aim. The protagonist follows Camus' logic of "living is keeping the absurd alive" closely by leaving his chest  
90 empty for a final tattoo. 8 This tattoo is going to indicate that he accomplished his goal. So by deliberately  
91 leaving it blank despite already completing this task, he is embracing absurdity. This is because he is accepting  
92 others' manipulation and allowing it to continue. Only through manipulation could he fill a sense of meaning  
93 because he believes his actions are contributing to his goal, which gives him a sense of purpose. In addition, the  
94 backward ordering of scenes further enhances the fact that embracing absurdity is enough to have a goal because  
95 the audience does not possess the background information of Leonard when we acknowledge his aim for life at  
96 the beginning of the film. Thus, suggesting that remembering past events is not essential to formulating a goal.  
97 Therefore, through keeping absurdity alive by contemplating it in the form of manipulation, Leonard is able to  
98 revolt and avoid suicide.

99 The last similarity between these two stories is that both characters revolt in order to find happiness and "gives  
100 life its value" in their absurd worlds. In the story of Sisyphus, he continues to push the rock up the hill despite  
101 acknowledging the fact that he will never be able to reach the summit. This act is an example of revolt because  
102 he does not give up. Also, Camus states that we should consider Sisyphus to be happy because "the struggle  
103 itself toward the heights is enough to fill a man's heart." 9 Similarly, Leonard does not give up finding John G  
104 despite knowing the fact that he will never remember that he had accomplished his goal. This is because the  
105 goal of finding a person to take revenge on gives him a sense of purpose and happiness because his last piece of  
106 memory is of his wife being sexually abused and then killed. Through constantly seeking to accomplish this aim,  
107 he feels satisfied and happy because he loves his wife greatly and the aim fulfills him by taking revenge for his  
108 wife all the time. Therefore, it can be concluded that Leonard is using his condition to help him sustain a goal of  
109 life, which allows him to avoid suicide and to become happy. However, some may argue that the protagonist does  
110 not have a goal and therefore cannot be a Sisyphean figure because his life does not have the kind of continuity

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111 required for that to make sense. For instance, John Locke states that one's "consciousness always accompanies  
112 thinking, and 'tis that, that makes everyone to be, what he calls self." 10 This would suggest that Leonard in  
113 the present is a different person to Leonard in the past because they do not share the same consciousness, so the  
114 main character can neither have a persistent aim nor embrace absurdity. Therefore, they would believe that the  
115 comparison between Leonard and Sisyphus to be incorrect.

116 John Locke defines a person as "a thinking intelligent Being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider it  
117 self as itself, the same thinking thing in different times and places." 11 This supports the argument that Leonard  
118 is not a person because Locke's way of thinking requires a person to have the ability to define his present self. In  
119 the film, Teddy accuses Leonard of only being able to define his past self, but of being unable to present himself as  
120 he is now because all of his recent actions are forgotten. Therefore, he cannot be considered as a person because  
121 he does not fulfill all of Locke's requirements. If Leonard is not a person, the comparison between the protagonist  
122 and Sisyphus will not be valid, London Journal of Research in Humanities and Social Sciences indicating that  
123 memory is essential to goal setting because without memories, one cannot embrace absurdity and revolt against  
124 it.

125 A true Lockeans might further claim that the present Leonard is different to the Leonard in the past. This is  
126 because "consciousness can be extended backwards to any past action or thought, so far reaches the identity of  
127 that person; it is the same self now it was then; and it is by the same self with this present one that now reflects  
128 on it," meaning that as long as one has memories of the past event, they should be considered to be the same  
129 person. 12 This would mean that the present Leonard is not the same person as the past Leonard because he  
130 does not have any memories of the recent past. By not possessing the same consciousness at present as he does  
131 in the past despite being in the same body, it suggests that memory is a crucial aspect of goal setting.

132 Locke's argument presents several cogent points; however, its complete validity in this particular case may be  
133 subject to scrutiny. He is right that personhood is a "forensic term appropriating actions and their merit" in terms  
134 that we care about this topic mostly to determine when we should blame someone or hold them accountable.  
135 13 However, if this Lockean notion is applied to Memento, we should not hold the main character accountable  
136 for murder, because they would consider the Leonard who killed John G to be a different person to the present  
137 Leonard. Thereby, for a strict believer of Locke, it would be morally incorrect to arrest the protagonist. However,  
138 the majority of us would still believe that Leonard should be punished for his acts because we would not believe  
139 him to be a completely different human being under our societal legal codes. His tattoos, polaroid and notes mean  
140 that he carries intentions across his experiences even when he loses memory, and he can still make plans to kill  
141 people using that system. Thus, we would still hold him accountable for his murder despite his condition. This  
142 suggests that, though Locke is right that we hold memory to be closely related to our conception of personhood,  
143 a Lockean analysis of Leonard not being the same person because he does not share the same consciousness with  
144 his past self cannot be applied to the main character's situation. As a result, Leonard can still be considered as  
145 similar to Sisyphus and the argument that there is no requirement of memory for goal setting.

146 We need to have a goal in life because it allows us to pursue an aim in this absurd world. Only when we  
147 have a goal can, we embrace absurdity and revolt against it, which would ultimately create happiness for the  
148 individual in this meaningless world. Therefore, memory is not essential in goal setting, especially for Leonard,  
149 because without a persistent aim of taking revenge, the protagonist would most likely have taken his life, which  
150 Camus strongly opposes as it rejects the freedom of people.

151 As Albert Camus does not explicitly state the role of memory on Sisyphus, I interpret this as memory is not a  
152 component that Camus consider when setting goals. Therefore, a persistent aim can be formulated, in order to  
153 create meaning in this meaningless life, by recognizing, embracing, and fighting against absurdity. The character  
154 of Leonard is highly compatible with Sisyphus in terms of goals, so I argue that Leonard has a goal despite his  
155 condition. However, strict Lockeans reject this comparison because they do not believe that the main character  
156 of Memento is a person due to his lack of memory. Nevertheless, we would judge that Leonard should be held  
157 accountable for his murder of John G under the current law, at least in part, because he can carry information  
158 through time. Thus, rejecting John Locke's theory that you need to be in the same consciousness as our past self  
159 in order to be considered as the same person. Therefore, my claim that memory is not an essential component  
160 of goal setting remains valid.

161 In regards to the film, Memento, memory is not essential to goal setting because he is able to maintain  
162 a persistent aim through embracing manipulation and acting upon it despite his disability of remembering.  
163 However, Leonard is only able to achieve this by setting up his own system of remembering moments to act as  
164 memorandums, which is not considered as memory in this essay.

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