

Helming nous in the autarkic inner tempest

Tread or revoke – a road not taken

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PHIL 13

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Introduction:

“To be or not to be?” This quintessential philosophical inquiry, immortalized by Shakespeare, has long served as a metaphor for the human condition. Yet, when one ventures into the untamed wilderness, this question takes on new dimensions, probing not just the mechanics of survival, but the very essence of what it means to exist. Our protagonist, Alexander Supertramp, navigates through life’s narrative, transcending from the shackles of conventional dilemmas.

“I’m gonna be all the way out there, all the way,” he vowed, with the fervor of a young, rebellious spirit. Despite this, echoes of morality and societal duty resonated within him, the very notion of sustaining his association with society, tugged at the threads of his wandering heart, pinching at his vagabond soul. This essay seeks to unravel the complex interplay between the yearning for individual autonomy and the inextricable ties of communal obligation, with McCandless’s tragic journey into the Alaskan wilderness serving as the focal point. Through his story, we are reminded of the gilded confines of liberty and the profound sense of connectedness that both defines and restricts human existence.

Onto the trail unto deliverance:

The vast expanse of open skies, the tranquility of serene waters, and the majesty of scenic beauty did not serve to astonish McCandless; rather, they provided a sanctuary, a place where he could escape the incessant assault of “Society!! Society!! Society!!” The metamorphosis of Christopher into Alexander was a monumental undertaking, reminiscent of the Herculean feat. Christopher’s childhood, marred by domestic strife, suppressed the vivacity of his youth, only for it to resurface later as the driving force behind his adventurous spirit. Christopher McCandless, the restless heart of Sean Penn’s “Into the Wild,” personifies the intricate dance of freedom – a concept as seductive as it is riddled with contradictions. He is the very personification of the dilemma of the family bound vagabond -- to choose a vicious life guided and dictated by society or barbarism, where nature makes no distinctions between her children and the fittest survives.

In the crucible of youth, Christopher McCandless experienced a profound discursive struggle, one that he articulated as, “The climatic battle to kill the false being within and victoriously conclude the spiritual revolution, no longer poisoned by civilization, he flees, and walks along over the land to become lost in the wild.” This internal conflict reached its zenith as he attained the societal rite of passage—a college degree—marking both an accomplishment and a departure point. McCandless's journey was marked by a near-religious zeal, as he severed familial bonds, incinerated his cash reserves, and symbolically purged his past in a pyre-like conflagration. This act of fiery renunciation resonates with the existential concept of the "leap of faith," a deliberate plunge away from the predetermined

paths of family and societal norms. He yearned for existential emancipation, a clean slate, as he expressed, "I wanted to walk into the wild alone, unknown, hoping I would emerge a new man, shed of all this useless crap we carry in our lives." McCandless sought not just a change of scenery, but a transformation of self, an unshackling from the superfluous burdens of modern existence to carve out an identity solely his own, severing the last tethers of familial duty.

Freedom, as Christopher McCandless's journey poignantly illustrates, is not merely the absence of constraints but a complex interplay between choice and consequence. As he traverses the dusty roads, meeting a variety of individuals, he encounters numerous opportunities for connection and responsibility. Ron Franz, the kind grain elevator worker, offers McCandless a haven, a chance to build a life based on reciprocity and shared experience. Yet, McCandless, steadfast in his pursuit of an idealized freedom, opts for solitude. This pivotal moment, where Franz extends a hand of friendship, encapsulates McCandless's tragic flaw: he conflates isolation with freedom, overlooking that true liberation flourishes within the tapestry of human connections. His statement, "Society, you're a crazy breed, I hope you're not lonely without me," reveals his awareness of the bonds he leaves behind as he distances himself from society. Despite moving away, the last strands of intimate connections made with strangers on his journey to Alaska continue to tug at him, reflecting the persistent dilemma of his quest for absolute freedom.

Alaska, the final frontier in Christopher McCandless's odyssey, emerges as a profound emblem of his self-imposed constraints. It is here, amidst the vast and merciless wilderness, that he confronts the essence of his philosophy: "And I also know how important it is in life not necessarily to be strong, but to feel strong, to measure yourself at least once, to find yourself at least once in the most ancient of human conditions, facing the blind, deaf stone alone with nothing to help you." This landscape, once envisioned as an infinite canvas for his unbridled spirit, starkly mirrors his own pride and folly. His scant preparation and disregard for nature's untamed might lay bare the emptiness of his quest for absolute autonomy.

In a secluded park ranger's logbook, he uncovers a hidden truth, "Happiness is only real when shared," a sentence that reverberates with the intrinsic social nature of human beings. This revelation underscores the philosophical discourse on the interdependence of life: "If we admit that human life can be ruled by reason, then the possibility of life is destroyed." McCandless's journey, therefore, is not merely a flight from society but a pilgrimage towards understanding that genuine contentment and fulfillment are not found in isolation. Instead, they are woven into the complex fabric of shared experiences, responsibilities, and love—a tapestry that binds the individual to the collective human saga.

The Unfinished Wild Melody: Echoes of What Could Have Been

Christopher McCandless's journey into the wild is a poignant narrative that captures the essence of a philosophical quest for freedom and the stark realities that accompany it. His tragic end leaves a resonant echo of unfulfilled potential, a reminder that his path, while fatal, imparts a profound lesson. The encounters he has with others and the humbling power of nature compel him to face the illusion of his self-constructed freedom. He admits, "I didn't yet appreciate its terrible finality or the havoc it could wreak on those who'd entrusted the deceased with their hearts." The film, reflecting on his life, suggests that absolute freedom—an existence devoid of responsibility and connection—is an unattainable ideal. The human condition requires a delicate balance, one that recognizes the liberating power of individual choice while acknowledging the inescapable web of responsibility that connects us to the broader human community. In his introspection, McCandless muses, "What if I were smiling and running into your arms? Would you see then what I see now?"—a rhetorical question that encapsulates the tension between the desire for solitary liberation and the innate need for shared human experience. His story is a testament to the complex interplay between autonomy and community, a dance of freedom that does not exist in isolation but within the intricate network of relationships that define our existence.
