

The purpose of this article is to analyze and explore some of the philosophies that inspired or can be seen in the character Christopher J. McCandless from the movie *Into The Wild*. There will also be an attempt to show how these philosophies themselves are connected. The chosen concepts are the Absurd by Albert Camus, Nausea by Jean-Paul Sartre and Anxiety by Søren Kierkegaard, which will also be compared to an excerpt from Sartre's "Existentialism is a Humanism".

To begin with, it is most important to establish the world as seen by Danish philosopher Kierkegaard, for it can be seen throughout the entire movie and also in parts of the two other concepts chosen for this reflection. For Kierkegaard, philosophy had never actually questioned what it truly means to exist, and that humans had forgotten the most important question in their lives, which is the search for their meaning. From there, he described many key concepts which helped describe the human condition in existential terms. Among those, Anxiety was one of the most important, and the one that most connects with the rest of this analysis.

Anxiety is at the heart of human existence. It is the disposition of the spirit in the face of freedom of choice. Kierkegaard affirms that, when we look at a precipice, we feel dizzy at the possibility of being attracted to it, by the freedom of choice between throwing ourselves or not into the void. The possibility of choosing to jump represents our complete freedom to make decisions, and the fear of that freedom is Anxiety.

The works of Kierkegaard greatly inspired all philosophers that attempted to solve the questions of existentialism after him. Jean-Paul Sartre's concept of Nausea, felt by a character in his novel "The Nausea", can be closely tied to the Anxiety of Kierkegaard. Sartre describes the feeling of philosophical Nausea as a very negative perception of life. A person feeling Nausea cannot find meaning for anything, and does not believe in any explanation or meaning for the existence of everything and everyone around them (including things, objects). They thus regard existence as a kind of absurdity, which will be discussed later when mentioning Camus. If Kierkegaard's Anxiety is the fear of our own freedom, Sartre's Nausea is the realization that only through that Anxiety can we realize our own life's meanings. Only with complete freedom of choice can we try to find a way to combat the soul crushing Nausea that affects us, and Anxiety shows that making those choices is indeed dreadful.

Lastly, it is important to remark how the Absurd, a concept developed by Albert Camus, also comes together to greatly connect with the works of Kierkegaard and Sartre. Camus' Absurd is a confrontation, an opposition between the need to find the meaning of life and the realization that it is impossible to do so, personified by a sense of strangeness and mystery. This sense itself is similar to Sartre's Nausea. Faced with this confrontation and the incompatibility between human beings and the world they inhabit, and assuming the Absurd as an integral part of reality, human freedom is found, in short, somewhat in the image of what Sartre defends in his philosophy. It is a freedom that is seen as the most valuable unit of human existence, since it is through it that the purpose of life is found, from a set of ideas and ideals that orchestrate the human being in the universe in which he acts.

This connection can be seen well in the excerpt from Sartre's "Existentialism is Humanism", where he explains how humans are responsible for themselves and their individualities. Our choices are made only after our own existence, which he describes as a "projection of self". Our will comes after our purpose, which is a more spontaneous decision necessary to existence itself. This can be compared to the three concepts established before in this document. Anxiety would come after we have a purpose but face the possibility of having a will; Nausea comes from the realization that we are the only responsables for ourselves, and that there is no inherent meaning to things outside from our own perception of them; Absurdity is the contradiction between the two: we are free to choose our will, but it is almost impossible to completely eliminate existential Nausea only through those decisions and without external sources of meaning.

Now that the chosen philosophical concepts have been established, it is clear how they all have deep connections to the character of Christopher McCandless from "Into the Wild". For the purpose of clarity, I will call him "Chris" from now on.

During the movie, there is a Chris located in the past, displaced from society, a stage of the script focused on setting the viewer in Chris' previous story and on justifying how his feelings shape the next stages. In his youth, Chris clearly displayed the feelings of Nausea. He didn't see any meaning in the material good gifted to him by his parents, and saw himself disconnected from the modernized world. The Nausea led him to seek a different path, outside the civilized world and immersed in the wilderness and in the loneliness of his own mind. The middle of the movie shows the many different encounters Chris has during his journey for self-discovery, each having a different impact on his personality. It is interesting to note that when he briefly returned to Los Angeles during the movie, his Nausea had become so strong to a point he couldn't even stay there. We then have the arrival, and with it the new and expected beginning, full of disengagements, individual claims and releases from the most varied assumptions. Free as a whole, and of everything. However, with that freedom came Anxiety, and the fear of all he could now choose to do. Chris desperately tries to come back, but the harsh winter wouldn't let him. His freedom, symbolized by nature, was harder to deal with than he thought. He couldn't handle it alone, and wrote "happiness is only true when shared". The movie ends in absurdism, where Chris himself was caught in the contradiction of complete freedom and trying to find true meaning.

In conclusion, the character Chris from Into the Wild goes through a complete circle during the movie, which symbolizes the philosophical concepts of Nausea, Anxiety and the Absurd, and highlights how these concepts themselves are deeply interconnected.

References:

- [*The Stranger*](#) (*L'Étranger*, often translated as *The Outsider*. An alternate meaning of "l'étranger" is "foreigner") (1942)
- [*The Plague*](#) (*La Peste*) (1947)
- [*Nausea*](#) / *La nausée* (1938) Jean Paul Sartre
- Into the Wild (movie)
- [*The Concept of Anxiety*](#), Vigilius Haufniensis (Kierkegaard)

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