

A Study on the Existentialist Perspective to Analyze the Need for Pure Existence in Life

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Abstract. Forrest Gump is a movie full of life philosophy, telling the story of Forrest Gump, a small town boy with congenitally intellectual disabilities, who just purely experiences life at his own pace, and creates legends in multiple fields. By comparing the protagonist's innate intellectual disability with his legendary life experiences, it has triggered people's contemplation of several concepts including the purity, existence, sinking, "ordinary people", and death of life from an existentialist perspective. Sequently, based on Heidegger's existentialism, thinking about the purity, being, sinking, "ordinary people" and death of life, the author draws three conclusions. The first one is primarily associated with purity pointing out that people should "live a pure life" like Gump. The second one is mainly related to existence, which concludes that being is "to be", "to become" and "to exist". The last one is about sinking, "ordinary people" and death, illustrating that if someone wants to understand the essence of life, then he must go to death initially.

Keywords: Existentialism; Purity; Sinking; Death.

1. Introduction

"Forrest Gump" is a film directed by Robert Zemeckis and starring Tom Hanks, Robin White, and others [1]. It was released in the United States on July 6, 1994, and combines various genres such as plot, biography, love, and motivation [2]. The film's ingenious production, legendary and inspirational story content, thought-provoking theme, and stunning performance quickly won six major awards, including the Academy Award for Best Picture, Best Actor, and Best Director, after its release [3].

The movie tells the legendary life of a child named Forrest Gump with an innate IQ of only 75. When he is a child, he is often bullied by other children due to his innate intelligence deficiency and unique leg bands. In order to avoid being bullied by other children, he follows his good friend Jenny's advice and starts running. In high school, he accidentally run into a school rugby field to avoid bullying, and his fast speed is appreciated by a coach. Forrest Gump is exceptionally admitted and becomes a football superstar, receiving an audience with President Kennedy.

After graduating from college, Forrest Gump enlists again and goes to Vietnam, where he makes two friends: Bubba, who is passionate about catching shrimp, and the awe inspiring Captain Deng Taylor. At this point, Jenny has already fallen and lives a promiscuous life. Forrest Gump has always loved Jenny, but Jenny doesn't seem to love him. After the war, Forrest Gump is received by President Johnson as a hero. At a peaceful gathering, Forrest Gump meets Jenny again, but the two hurriedly breaks up. Guided by the belief of "you must do what you say", Forrest Gump finally breaks through a sky of his own. In his life, he meets many American celebrities. He reports the eavesdroppers of the Watergate incident and goes to China as a member of the American table tennis team, contributing to the establishment of diplomatic relations between China and the United States. Elvis Presley and John Lennon, two music giants, also creates many popular songs through their interactions with him. Finally, Forrest Gump becomes an entrepreneur by catching shrimp. In memory of the deceased Bubba, he founds Bubba Gan Company and gives half of the company's shares to Bubba's mother, but he chooses to become a gardener himself.

In his reclusive life, he often misses Jenny. He does not know that Jenny has already gone astray and fallen into despair at this moment. Finally, one day, Jenny comes back and lives with Forrest Gump for a while. One night, Jenny throws herself into Forrest Gump's arms, but quietly leaves at dawn. After waking up, Forrest Gump sits on the bench in front of the door, then suddenly starts running. He runs across the United States and once again becomes a celebrity.

After running for over three years, Forrest Gump stops and begins to return to his hometown. On the way, he receives a letter from Jenny, and then immediately set off to find Jenny meeting again eventually. There is also a little boy living with Jenny, who is their son. At this point, Jenny has already developed an incurable disease. Forrest Gump and Jenny return to their hometown together and spend a happy time together. Jenny passes away, and their son has also reached the age of school. Forrest Gump sees his son on the school bus and sit on a bench at the bus stop, recalling his life experiences.

Throughout Forrest Gump's life, I have seen him approach life purely, focusing on doing one thing well. He never transforms into "ordinary people" and never falls into a state of "sinking". What is more, he always purely "to exist", "to be", "to become". Although he has experienced the deaths of Bubba, his mother, and Jenny, he still strives to live. His life has great enlightening significance for our lives. Hence, this article will analyze the characters and plot of the film from a philosophical existentialist perspective, attempting to provide a philosophical interpretation of the film from the perspectives of purity, being, being an ordinary person, sinking, and death.

2. Live a pure life

He starts running and loves it purely to avoid being bullied by other children. He runs everywhere purely because he merely loves running. It is purely because he liked to run everywhere, so he ran faster and faster. He joins an football team, goes to college, becomes a football superstar, and even receives an audience with President Kennedy. Purely because he has always insisted on doing well in internal affairs, standing upright and always saying "Yes! Drill Sergeant!". No matter what he answers, he has become the most outstanding soldier in the army. Purely because he wants to rescue Bubba, he shuttles through gunfire multiple times, and almost saves the entire team during the round trip. Purely because he only focuses on doing his duty as a soldier, brave and persistent, he becomes a combat hero after the end of the Vietnam War and he is received by President Johnson. Purely because he enjoys playing table tennis and plays it every day, he is invited to showcase his experience of playing table tennis to the injured and sick, representing the American table tennis team to visit China. It is purely because he is illuminated by a flashlight from the opposite building in the middle of the night and couldn't sleep. He calls to complain, so he exposes the Watergate Bridge incident. It is purely because he wants to fulfill his old friend Bubba's shrimp fishing wish and never gives up, so he founds Bubbagan Shrimp Fishing Company and grows bigger and bigger. Purely because he wants to take a jog, before he knows it, he crosses the entire United States and once again becomes a celebrity. It's purely because he thinks that as long as the money is enough to spend, even if he's a billionaire, he doesn't think he's really great. He still works as a gardener and donates a lot of wealth to public welfare.

Forrest Gump uses his legendary life experience to interpret what "purity" is. He never intends to succeed or stand out, he simply runs, loves, fights, and lives his life purely. He says, "I've always had to run wherever I go, never thought I could make a name for myself."; He says, "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you will get."; He says, "Stupid is as stupid does."; He says, "To move forward, you must first forget the past." [4]

Can you imagine that this series of legendary achievements are achieved by a boy with congenital intellectual disabilities? Forrest Gump's mother says "You have maximized the gift God has given you." I think this "gift" refers to his pure energy. This "gift" makes him fearless or hesitant in times of trouble, not hesitant or hesitant, but purely to do and take action. Some may have feared death, and disobeyed orders during the Vietnam War, but Gan simply fulfills his duty as a soldier and bravely

fighters tirelessly, so he survives and even rescues many comrades. Some may give up after repeatedly failing to catch shrimp, but Gan did not because he had a firm idea in his heart, which was to catch shrimp and fulfill the agreement with his old friend. With this pure perseverance and hard work, he eventually survived the storm and established a shrimp catching company. Some may find it difficult to persevere and constantly have distractions while doing something. However, Gan Neng can walk across America because he is simply running, in his own words, "I just keep running, keep running, eat when hungry, sleep when tired, and keep running when awake." Forrest Gump uses his life to tell us how joyful and exciting it would be to live a pure life.

3. This is "going to be", "going to become", "going to exist"

Heidegger, a master of the Western existentialist school, once wrote in "Being and Time": "We once used the word 'self' to answer the question of who this being is for [5]. We formally defined the reason why this being is for ourselves as a way of survival, that is, not as a ready-made being." I understand this passage as: we always define ourselves with various ready-made labels and fixed attributes.

The label here refers to the formal way of "me" living, for example, I will define myself with labels like "I enjoy exercising, dancing, sleeping, eating a lot...". However, the way we perceive ourselves in this way is wrong, and we overlook a very important thing - that is, this "being" is not defined by various facts that have already occurred, but by millions of unknown possibilities. So, this "being" is not an entity with fixed attributes, it is "going to be", "going to become", and "going to exist".

There is a classic line in Forrest Gump that appears many times in the play - "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you will get." I think this sentence is full of wisdom and philosophy. It compares life to a box of chocolates, breaking free from the cage of the past and labels, to give people and life infinite possibilities. Forrest Gump never imagines that he would have a legendary life like a story. [6] He just tries, tries, and runs. He successfully lives to be, to become, and to exist.

Some people say that he is a fool with good fortune, but it is only by chance that he achieves such success. However, this is not the case. The underlying logic of his legendary life is "not sinking". Heidegger says, "When 'this being' no longer sees itself as 'de existing', but chooses to go towards the 'masses' and survive as an existence, it falls into a state of 'sinking'." [7] In the small town, while "ordinary people" were drinking in restaurants and watching boring TV channels, Forrest Gump is running. When ordinary people talk about Forrest Gump being a fool or a runner, Forrest Gump is still running. When the average person sat idle in the restaurant many years later, Forrest Gump was already a football star and had received several presidential receptions. During the training on the front line of the Vietnam War, as the "ordinary people" slowly relaxes and has a casual attitude, Forrest Gump is fully focused and breaks the team record for assembling guns. When "ordinary people" always gives up halfway, Forrest Gump spends three years running across the entire United States. From the beginning to the end, Forrest Gump never cares about what "ordinary people" says or does. He always maintains his uniqueness and focuses his time and energy on what is most important to him.

Nowadays, many people are always at the mercy of ordinary people. Ordinary people believe that they live a complete and authentic life. As ordinary people enjoy themselves, so do we. Ordinary people don't learn and play Tiktok every day, and we also don't learn and play it every day. Ordinary people become dirty when they export, and we also become dirty when we export. Ordinary people do not have ideals and directions, and we do not seek our own ideals and directions... In the end, you find that you have achieved nothing, while this "ordinary person" is "without this person". But sadly, most of them have already been at the mercy of this person in their coexistence

When you are at the mercy of this nobody, will this nobody take responsibility for your life? The cruel fact is that only you will take responsibility for your life, so why should you be at the mercy of "no one else"? Your life has ten thousand or even more possibilities, and it can be exciting and legendary, just like Forrest Gump's. Whether or not this can be achieved depends entirely on yourself.

Each and every one of us should believe that we are "going to be", "going to become", and "going to exist". [8] We should be our own kings, not the slaves of "ordinary people", as we have infinite possibilities.

4. Go first to "death" and then comprehend "life"

Heidegger once said, "Death, as the end of this being, is the most inherent, unrelated, and definite possibility of this being, while as itself it is uncertain and insurmountable." [9] Forrest Gump doesn't understand Heidegger's profound meaning. His IQ is only 75, and his favorite is a fairy tale book which he has read since childhood. This may be his reading limit, and he naturally can't understand Heidegger's obscure and difficult discourse on death. However, why can he still live so purely and diligently in front of Bubba's death, his mother's death, and Jenny's death?

Buba's greatest wish before his death is to have his own shrimp boat and make an agreement with Forrest Gump that he would be the captain and Forrest Gump would be the first mate. Forrest Gump always adheres to the principle of "doing what he says" throughout his life. After Bubba's death, he almost spends all his savings to fulfill this promise, which is almost impossible for ordinary people to achieve. Only by doing extraordinary things can people become extraordinary people. He succeeds by establishing the Bubagan Shrimp Fishing Company, fulfilling his old friend's long-standing wish, and even distributing half of the company's shares to Bubagan's mother.

Gan's mother is a great mother. When everyone knows that Forrest Gump is a child with low intelligence, and when everyone stares at him with strange eyes, she firmly tells him, "You are like others, there is no difference." My mother's words are not about hoping Forrest Gump will sink, but about giving him confidence while dispelling his doubts in childhood. The calmness that my mother shows when facing death is like facing a relaxed dinner, even though she has cancer. She reminds Forrest Gump, "Death is just a part of life, it's predetermined. I don't know, but I'm destined to be your mother, so I'll do my best. I believe you've also taken control of your destiny and maximized the gifts God has given you. Life is like a box of chocolates, and you never know what you'll get." These words convey Forrest Gump's pure attitude towards life, a lack of fear and composure towards death, and an affirmation of the infinite possibilities of life.

Jenny is one of Forrest Gump's two most beloved women in his life. One is his mother and the other is Jenny. Jenny has a huge impact on Forrest Gump's life, as her "Run! Gump!" makes Forrest Gump start running and start a legend. Forrest Gump's feelings for Jenny are long-lasting, passionate, and cherished, and Jenny is Forrest Gump's spiritual pillar. Before Jenny passes away, she meets Forrest Gump with her son. The three of them spends a happy and joyful time in Jenny's last moments. Jenny also treats death calmly, probably because her life is too bumpy and tumultuous.

Although Forrest Gump doesn't understand what "the most personal" is, he knows that everyone has their own death. Although he doesn't understand what "unrelated" is, he knows that the death of others does not affect his own death. Although he doesn't understand what "certain" means, he knows that people will eventually die. Although he doesn't understand what is uncertain as it is, he understands that he doesn't know when he will die or why he will die. Although he doesn't understand what "insurmountable" means, he understands that death is predetermined and unavoidable.

Heidegger once wrote in "Being and Time": "Death is the most intrinsic possibility of being here. To exist towards this possibility, long absent from it, it develops its most original being, and in this being, everything is for the existence of this being. In this being, the being can be seen clearly, and the being retains its flavor in this unique possibility of its own, that is to say, it can precede and always has been separated from the ordinary man. To grasp this 'ability' is to reveal that it has in fact been lost in the daily lives of ordinary people." Regarding to this passage, in my understanding, death is a possibility that inevitably occurs in a short human life. Everyone will die, and everyone has their own death. Now that we understand this truth, why not simply focus on oneself? Why not do what you want to do in just a few decades of life, become the person you want to be, and focus on living for yourself?

The reason for it is that everything is for the existence of this being. This kind of understanding awakens people from sinking and alienation, neither clinging to the possibilities that have already been realized in the past, nor cowardly avoiding death, but freely and carefree to develop their most authentic abilities, actively planning to achieve the possibility that best reflects their unique existence. [10]

Many people always harbor a sense of fear when facing the special possibility of death. In fact, what is the use of "fear"? It can not solve any problems, it is just adding trouble to life. Our lives have countless possibilities, and "death" is just one of them. We can allow other possibilities to come, why not accept the idea of "death"? Everyone will eventually die, and it is impossible for anyone to escape from the fate of death. We do not know when or why death will come, so why not simply live each day well and manage it as the last day of life? If we truly treat each day as if it were our last, focused, down-to-earth, and pure, doing what we want to do and becoming what we want to be, how rich our lives would be!

Go first to "death" and then comprehend "life". After realizing that death is just an inevitable possibility in life, letting go of fear and feeling individual uniqueness are no longer difficult. Arrange each day like the last day of life, and in the fleeting life, comprehend "life".

5. Conclusion

As a classic masterpiece that has been passed down for a long time, *Forrest Gump* reveals to us the truth of the need for purity in life through the portrayal of Forrest Gump's legendary life, revealing the philosophy that "this is" is "going to be", "going to become", and "going to exist". It also reveals the philosophy of first going to "death" and then understanding "life". Forrest Gump is pure, unique, persistent, open-minded, and open-minded. He has lived his life as a "pure existence", exploring countless possibilities in his life, which has inspired and healed the public. According to this, people should understand that when they live, there are infinite possibilities. People are not beings with fixed attributes, but rather "to exist". "Ordinary people" are not responsible for their lives, only they are responsible for themselves. Therefore, the ideal strategy is to let go of this "no one" and focus on themselves, always retaining our uniqueness, and living purely. "Death" is the most inherent, unrelated, and definite possibility, but as such, it is uncertain and insurmountable. Since it is known, people only need to let go of our "fear", go to "death" first, and then understand "life", so as to live a brief life purely, without regrets, and with enthusiasm.

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