
Metaphor over Experience: Transcendentalist Were Wrong

The transparent eyeball is a philosophical metaphor introduced by Transcendentalist, Ralph Waldo Emerson. The transparent eyeball represents an eye that serves only to be observant rather than reflective. Therefore it teaches us to take in all that nature has to offer. Christopher McCandles proves this very notion wrong. In the beginning stages of his life, he was very observant. He would keep to himself about the ideologies he strongly believed in. At times, when witnessing his parents fight, Christopher along with his sister would sit there witnessing their parents argue, with feelings of hatred. Chris absorbed the negativity from his parents and the corruptness of society. Chris McCandles acted as a transparent eyeball, according to Emerson, one would benefit from by being a silent onlooker since they would have a chance to find oneself. However, Chris did not benefit from being an onlooker, but rather it was the ability he had to voice his thoughts. This freedom was what powered Chris to find himself in the wildness. Without first standing up to his parents, he would never acquire enough will power to find himself in the Alaskan wilderness. Emerson and Chris McCandles, both incorporate transcendentalism in their lives, although, both seem to act hypercritical when carrying out their ideologies. Emerson preaches about living and going to the wilderness and finding himself, but he never did so, unlike Chris McCandles. However Chris gives us, readers an overwhelming amount of proof that he is a transcendentalist, but he performs a major task that contradicts his initial philosophies. Chris was seeking to go to Alaska to create his own experiences that diverge from society, although, found himself in a run down and used bus. This bus has clearly been used, and deteriorates his notion of creating one's own experiences.

Christopher McCandles major turning point was when he broke out of the shell of the transparent eyeball is immediately after he graduated; his parents wanted to gift him with a new car. Almost instinctively, Christopher denied this gift, at that very point he was no longer an observant onlooker. He spoke out, and he voiced what he thought to be the way of life. As it is stated, "It was the first present she had received from her son in more than two years, since he had announced to his parents that, on principle, he would no longer give or accept gifts...I can't believe they'd try and buy me a car'...bought my respect" (p. 20-21) By Him affirming, he no longer wanted to accept of giving gifts, in other words, he didn't want to owe anything to anyone. He was clearly an opinionated individual, once society capped him, he exploded, and unfortunately, his family felt the immediate repercussions, as he disappeared to Alaska for a long period of time.

The fact that Chris wasn't raised and practiced expressing his philosophies, triggered him to ratify his life, also known as escaping to Alaska. Christopher had to eventually voice his revolutionary ideas, such as depending on himself, and not to feel in debt and owe anything to

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anyone, even his parents. This represents the first turning point of Chris McCandless of no longer being voiceless or absorbent, he is no longer a transparent eyeball. It was time for him to speak out and stand up for what he believed in, no matter the negative onlookers that he will face throughout his journey. The fact that Chris kept all his notions and thoughts bottled up until his graduation caused him to commit rash decisions such as burning his money or escaped into the wilderness of Alaska where he did not communicate with his family. His family was a major cause of his rash decisions and society's corrupt filter on your true self. Because his emotions were bottled up for so long he acted out in what seemed illogical to us. If he would've voiced out his opinions from the start he would never feel compelled to abandoned his family and society.

Chris McCandless and the major transcendentalism, Emerson and Thoreau, both were hypocritical when carrying out their philosophical ways. Emerson is generally hypercritical since he preaches one needs to go out to the woods and find your true self, although he has never physically escaped to the wilderness, unlike Chris McCandless. One of Thoreau's main idea was to make your own path and not to follow others footsteps, although Chris McCandless does not direct his journey in this way. As stated in his essay, *Walden, or Life in the Woods*, "It is remarkable how easily and insensibly we fall into a particular route, and make a beaten track for ourselves. I had not lived... he would meet with a success but it will be a success unexpected in common hour." (p. 933) Once he discovers the run down bus where lies in a used bed and puts old utensils into use. If Chris would have purely believed in his transcendentalist ideas he would not live where other experiences were created in that very space.

Emerson believes that when you are a child, you attain special connections to daily activities because you have not yet been corrupted by society's filter. He states this in his essay, *Nature*, "To speak truly, few adult persons can see nature. Most persons do not see the sun. At least they have a very superficial seeing. The sun illuminated only the eye of the man, but shines into the eye and the heart of a child..." (p. 487) Chris as a child was not able to have these personal connections because he was observant and acting as a transparent eyeball. Instead of acting as an extrovert and voicing his opinions, he was raised and trained his mind to stay silent. This caused his extreme urges of breaking out the reflective shell in order to have these connections that were in a lack of in his childhood. His expedition to Alaska made up for all of his lost connections as a kid. By being observant of society's brainwashing powers, he became unable of speaking out, until a milestone in his life, graduation. This is when he was able to become independent and voice his philosophies, which allowed him to have the experiences he yearned for.

Emerson and Thoreau were major transcendentalists who were not only hypocritical but also teach, young journey seekers, such as Chris McCandless about personal experiences and daily life adventures. However, many of their philosophies are contradicted by their own actions. In

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addition, Chris McCandless proved some of their notions wrong. All of his childhood he had been what Emerson refers to the transparent eyeball, reflective and observant. This caused him to bottle his emotions and result in an extreme need to escape society. Emerson believes that being observant will lead to one finding oneself. But, in Chris's case, he found himself in the complete opposite case. He spoke out and stated his philosophies, which shocked and disappointed his family, but for once he stood up for himself. Although some of Chris actions were contradictory to his initial conquest, for example, cheating his own experiences, and feeding off others "traveled paths." He doesn't take to the grave his philosophies in life, and but rather prays to god after claiming he was an atheist. Chris's revered idols proved to be two faced in the end. Even though Chis proved some of Emerson's notions to be incorrect, they still are similar, in the sense that they are both hypocritical.

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