Practicing Philosophical Pluralism with `Forrest Gump' A Speech-Act Body-Mind Analysis

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Dedication

I’d like to dedicate this to my family. Without their love and support I would not have made it this far. I’d also like to extend a special dedication to my nieces; although I am the first of our family to make it through graduate school, I certainly hope I will not be the last.

I would like to dedicate this to the chair of my committee Dr. Jules Simon, without whom, many of us in the program would not have come this far. His attitude, patience, and guidance have influenced not only in philosophy but the way I look at experience in the world.

I would like to give a special dedication to Dr. Ann Horak, my mentor, and the person from whom I have stolen all of my teaching methods. She has shown me not only a better way to teach, but a more productive way to keep the students engaged and connected with the material. Without her support and advice I would have been ultimately lost and would probably not enjoy teaching as much as I do. My sanity thanks her as well.
PRACTICING PHILOSOPHICAL PLURALISM WITH ‘FORREST GUMP’

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by

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Abstract

This essay looks at three different types of philosophy: Pragmatism and communication, phenomenology and Zen Buddhism. I discuss these philosophies using the film, *Forrest Gump* as a guide to get through the convoluted ideas and make the concepts easier to understand. We first wade through the waters of analytical philosophy and the language game in communication. We discuss speaker’s intention in meaning according to Paul Grice and Forrest’s problems with the implicatures of language. In the second chapter I focus on the phenomenology of the characters as well as the perspective of the person viewing the film. How do we experience phenomenon in the world? How can one be aware of their “lived world?” I then examine the ego of the individual and how it contributes to suffering. Finally I consider the cause of suffering and, in the footsteps of Forrest, offer a way to cease the suffering. The essay examines questions from the film and the individual; “What makes Forrest different from everybody else and what does he mean by, “Stupid is as stupid does?” Is there such thing as an ego? And how is life like a box of chocolates?
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Chapter 1: Mama Always Says

In this essay, I will be looking at three different philosophies: Gricean linguistics, phenomenology and Zen Buddhist philosophy. I will be using the film *Forrest Gump* as a vehicle to bring the ideas of these philosophies to fruition. Think of the film as a ferryboat in which I carry certain concepts over the muddy waters of complexity. So, we begin in the small town of Greenbow, Alabama, where we meet Forrest Gump. Forrest is a very humble man with an empty mind and an open heart. He begins his narrative by opening a box of chocolates and offering it to the woman sitting next to him at the bus stop. We may wonder: why does Forrest start conversations with strangers? Which leads us to ask: what is the significance of conversation? One response to that question is that by engaging in a dialogue with another person, we are trying to direct them to some implicit meaning we might have. We are pointing them to our thoughts and intentions. We are exchanging knowledge with them and relating one way of understanding ourselves with this stranger. In other words, in conversation we give accounts of our lives. Forrest gives us an account of his adventures when he talks about the people he has met and the places he has been to. But, why does he do this? Why do any of us give our accounts? It’s important because doing so, gives meaning to our lives. We need meaning in our lives and meaningful relationships with others. It is important that others are interested in our lives. In order to convey this meaning and develop interest, we need to have some communication. The language we use is a big part of our dialogue, and by that I don’t mean which language we speak, but the way in which we use our language. When we have a dialogue or narrative, there is some message that we are trying to get across and there are many ways in
which we can relay our message. One way is to just sit on a bench and open up a box of chocolates.

1.1 Communication Breakdown

In this section, we are going to be looking at the speech acts in the form of dialogue. I would like to begin with the problem of failure of communication. In his essay, Dialogue Breakdowns, Danilo Marcondes de Souza Filho explores these problems of conversation identifying them as a misconstruance of dialogue between parties and explains how that hinders communication. He claims that these errors not only occur in language, “But also in the rules and circumstances governing the speech situation” (De Souza Filho, 1985). An example of this kind of miscommunication can be a deliberate prevention of language to distract the hearer from a particular meaning. This is done using ambiguous words in speech that say one thing when the speaker means another. In the film, Mrs. Gump is a strong southern woman raising Forrest as a single mother. When Forrest was a child she tried desperately to enroll him into a public school with average children his age. She didn’t want him to feel different or left out but the principal refuses to let him in due to his low IQ. The principal gives her a casual look and asks if there is a “Mr. Gump,” implicating he has some interest in her and there might be a way he can be persuaded. Her reply is, “He’s on vacation” (Zemeckis, 1994). Mrs. Gump’s response is a vague expression that acknowledges the principal’s proposition while deterring Forrest from understanding the conversation. By using this ambiguity in the language, she dissuades him from the dialogue to avoid hearing something inappropriate. There is only partial communication between Forrest and his mother. The breakdown in dialogue occurs not only because Forrest doesn’t know what vacation means, but he doesn’t understand the implication. By using that
inference with visual and verbal cues, Mrs. Gump was able to point to her meaning. We are able to deviate from the rules of language to express meaning by use of a language game. I will discuss more on language games momentarily, but first I would like to discuss how logician, Paul Grice, gives us an inferential approach to meaning in language.

This approach to language was something new in Grice’s time because semantics or formal logic was generally concerned with linguistic meaning and Grice, in particular, was concerned with ideal language. By constructing ideal patterns of inferences, Grice wanted to understand how humans express implied meanings through their speech acts with each other. From a Gricean perspective, we are asked to approach language as a cognitive science. This entails that, in some way, we are dealing with accessing our state of mind through understanding logical consequences of what is entailed in this or that expressed sentence. In the essay, *Logic and Conversation*, Grice discusses the implicatures of language proposing that they are suggestions to what is being said. When Forrest and Bubba first meet, Bubba introduces himself as Benjamin Buford Blue but people call him “Bubba.” Forrest replies, “My name’s Forrest Gump. People call me Forrest Gump” (Zemeckis, 1994). He doesn’t understand that Bubba is saying something ironic or just letting him know his nickname. But Forrest thinks he is telling him his name and what people call him and not what nickname he might be referred to. Bubba is a friendly man who offers Forrest a seat on the bus and, like Forrest, is honest and humble. When Forrest sits down, Bubba asks if he has ever been on a real shrimp boat. Forrest replies, “No but I’ve been on a real big boat” (Ibid). There’s a problem in their communication. Forrest doesn’t seem to grasp homonyms or perhaps understand the implicatures of conversational language. Implicatures are used when a meaning is conveyed without directly saying it. We hear these all
the time in conversation. For instance, good health is implied when someone says they “feel like a million bucks,” or an example from the film of an injury sustained in the military that will get a person discharged without disfigurement is called, “a million dollar wound.” These phrases have nothing to do with money, they merely convey the idea of having something lucky happen or having a great feeling. In order to understand what is being implied, the person must, first of all, have some mastery of the English language. The person would need to have more than a mere grasp of rules of language; they must have some mastery and understand the laws of semantics of language. Only then could they know when to bend them and why. I will discuss more on this later. They must also know the significance of having such a large amount of wealth for these phrases to make some sense. The time at which the phrase is uttered could also be helpful. I do not mean the time of day or year but the interlocutor should know that the time of the situation does not literally mean that the person who was injured has a wound that is worth a million dollars. Forrest has some trouble understanding this. He assumed that the Army had received the million dollars because he had never come across it. Let’s go back to Forrest and Bubba. By saying a “real shrimp boat,” Bubba means the crustaceans in the ocean. In a normal conversation most people would understand the implicature that when someone mentions a shrimp boat, they’re talking about the vessel used to catch shrimp and not the homonym of shrimp, or small. However, Forrest believes Bubba to be talking about the size of the boat.

Let’s look at another scenario of Forrest in boot camp. Forrest puts his rifle together as fast as he can and the drill sergeant asks why he put it together so quickly. Forrest looks confused and gives a very simple reply by saying, “Because you told me to, Drill Sergeant” (Ibid). What the drill sergeant meant to ask was how he did it faster than the other recruits. He’s astonished at the speed in which assembled his rifle, saying it might be a company record. He
implied with his question the desire to know how it was done, but Forrest has some trouble
distinguishing implications from literal meaning in conversational language. Even when Lt. Dan
makes a joke and asks if he and Bubba are brothers, possibly because they’re both from
Alabama, he answers very straightforwardly, “No sir we are not relations” (Ibid). Lt. Dan gives
a look of slight disappointment that his joke did not connect. In his essay, *Logic and
Conversation*, Paul Grice discusses what he called, the Cooperative Principle. This is a principle
where speakers agree to engage in a conversation provided that they follow some rules of
conversation. In order for their conversation to have some meaning or purpose, they will
mutually accept utterances in which they can understand each other. If two people were to
engage in a conversation without some topic or without an understanding of the language, then it
might not seem like a conversation at all, it would be more of incoherent babble. Grice gives four
Maxims or rules to guide us in following the principle. These are: Quantity, Quality, Relation,
and Manners. Quantity is saying more than is needed in a conversation or not saying enough. For
example, if I were to tell a story about how I broke a vase in the living room and started to
explain what happened when I woke up that morning and what I had for breakfast, it would be
telling too much and not getting to the action that occurred. Sure the story might eventually
allude to how the vase was broken but the intricate details are unnecessary. Perhaps a better
element would be Bubba relating to Forrest the different ways to make shrimp. In a normal
conversation, after one or two examples, a person would be satisfied or understand his meaning.
The point of the story would be clear. Bubba, however, seems to relate every way the shrimp
could be prepared during their time in boot camp. So, because Grice’s maxim is that the story
must be as informative as is required, Bubba is in
violation of it. His contribution should state the necessary details required for the conversation and should neither tell too much, nor too little.

A perfect example of having too little information can be seen in an example from comedian, Lewis Black. In his comedy album simply titled, *The White Album*, he relates a conversation overheard by a woman saying, “If it weren’t for my horse, I wouldn’t have spent that year in college” (Black, 2000). He then tries to understand the information by wondering what she did with the horse. Did she sell the horse to pay for the tuition? Did she ride the horse to school? He kept unsuccessfully trying to figure out what that could mean until it drives him crazy. This story does not provide the needed information for a rational discussion on the subject of her horse. This is also a good reason why people shouldn’t eavesdrop, but it illustrates the point of having too little information.

The next maxim is Quality. An example of Quality can be falsifying information or relating something when one is unsure of its validity. There is a difference between, telling a lie and speaking of something that you have no knowledge of whether or not it’s true. In the essay *On Bullshit*, Harry Frankfurt discusses a lie as being something which is intended to deceive. *Bullshit* is something which is “fluff” or a discussion without valid truth. The bullshitter doesn’t care about the truth. Frankfurt borrows from St. Augustine’s eight types of lies and says that a liar intends to deceive for the purpose of some goal. A liar knows the truth and will speak against those truths. Bullshit doesn’t require a goal nor does it require the knowledge of the truth. The Bullshitter speaks for the purpose of whatever goal is intended, maybe for entertainment or to make someone feel better. A good example of a bullshitter in literature is Humpty Dumpty from Lewis Carroll’s *Through the Looking Glass*. Humpty claims, “I can explain all the poems that
ever were invented—and a good many that haven’t been invented just yet” (Carroll, 1960). He considers himself to be a “master” of words. He believes that he controls their meaning. I would like to make it clear that this is not the same as having a mastery of language. A mastery of language would mean that one understands the rules and knows when and where to use words. Having a mastery also means knowing when to break those rules. Humpty doesn’t seem to care about the rules of the language. He is just making things up as he goes along. It would be impossible to have a conversation with anyone that makes up the definition of words for their own amusement. No dialogue can be established because there are no rules to the game. This would be like making up a language in which only you could speak. Wittgenstein tells us this is beyond the bounds of possibility. How would we know if we are using a word incorrectly? It would be utter nonsense. If I were to say something that only made sense to me, then why would I say it? This brings us back to the discussion on dialogue breakdowns. There would be some miscommunication with someone who did not follow the definitions and rules of language. Coming back to Grice’s maxims, Humpty doesn’t seem to be lying. He is not intending to hide anything from Alice or steer her away from the true meaning of the words, he just wants to impress her or at least win some word game he is playing. So during their discussion he makes up words to the Jabberwocky poem. In making up these words there is no deception: he does not know what these words mean, therefore, he cannot be lying about their definition. Alice even jumps in and starts making up some definitions of her own. In the story, we never find out what the words really mean so we don’t really know if Alice and Humpty got the definitions correct. However, even if they did define the words correctly it would still qualify as Bullshit because they had no previous knowledge of their claims. A true claim is made when the speaker knows the validity of the statement. So, even if a person were to guess at some account and by chance
they were right, they still could not be considered as telling a truth because they had no previous knowledge of that account.

Mrs. Gump lies to Forrest when he asks what the word “vacation” means. It seems that she wants to tell him that his father will not return at the same time she could not tell him what she meant by vacation when talking to the principal. So she tells him that it means when someone leaves and never comes back. She is dissuading him from the inappropriate implicature in their conversation. She is also telling him what happened to his father and ending further inquiry on the subject. She is avoiding a conversation on the matter of his father by breaking the dialogue.

The third maxim is Relation. Relation means to be relevant to the discussion. An example of violating this maxim is jumping off topic suddenly or saying something that has nothing to do with the conversation. When the principal walks down from Mrs. Gump’s room he looks over at Forrest and says, “You don’t say much do you” (Zemeckis, 1994). Forrest looks at him and starts making similar noises that he made moments earlier in Mrs. Gump’s bedroom. Embarrassed, the principal walks away. There was no discussion to be had because Forrest’s response is not relative to the conversation that the principal was attempting to engage in.

The last maxim is Manners. Manners means to make the discussion clear. Grice is careful to state that the clarity does not only lie in what is said, but in how it is said. What he means is we should not be ambiguous in our statements or contributions. When Mrs. Gump says that her husband is on vacation she is deterring Forrest from the conversation. He does not know what vacation means and Mrs. Gump used that word to prevent him from understanding the inappropriate discussion with the principal. The principal understood her implication as well as the audience watching the film, but Forrest did not.
Given these markers or guidelines of conversation, it doesn’t seem to be the case that Jenny or Lt. Dan violate the maxims. Forrest does because he just doesn’t seem to grasp the meaning in conversation. Many of his other actions seem to be quite average. He can run very well, he’s good at sports, and despite having a low IQ, he received a high school diploma and a college degree. It seems that the only thing that makes Forrest different from everybody else is that he is unable to understand implicatures, according to Grice.

Let’s take a step back and look at Bubba’s problem with the rules of conversation. He violates the Quantity maxim according to Grice. Dan Sperber and Deirdre Wilson wrote on the account of a different theory in conversation called, Relevance Theory. This theory states that an utterer will give some implicatures that will help the interlocutor to understand the meaning of the speaker. These implicatures are a type of code that the hearer must deconstruct to interpret. The exchange of utterances in the conversation are expectations related to the relevance of the speaker. This is the Communicative Principle of Relevance, which states that what is said must be relevant to the discussion. So when Bubba is recounting the different ways in which he knows how to cook shrimp, he is relating his knowledge and obsession of the shrimping business. This is how we can understand him and his state of mind. What he is saying and how he is saying it have some relevance to the conversation and to his character. So according to Sperber and Wilson, Bubba has not violated a rule of conversation. Sperber and Wilson broadened the inference that Grice had put on meaning. Grice’s theory focused on implicit meaning and Sperber and Wilson felt that explicit meaning was needed as well. The difference between these two types of meaning is that implicit implies some message or signification. It conveys a meaning without directly stating it. Explicit conveys some message by openly stating it. It is a clear expression of some meaning. In their essay, *Relevance Theory Revisited*, they state the
Cognitive Theory of Relevance is that human cognition has a tendency to maximize relevance. It is not enough to draw attention to a particular object or discussion but to point out that which is the most relevant to our interest.

The Relevance Theory is often used in poetry. A poet can take a few stanzas and generate an amazing amount of information. They could bring to the mind an amalgam of landscapes, emotions, and events. What is even more amazing is they do this by a particular use of words. Let’s look at two famous lines from the poem, *Do Not Go Gentle into That Good Night*, by Dylan Thomas, “Do not go gentle into that good night. Rage, rage against the dying of the light” (Thomas, 1989). The use of the words “gentle” and “rage” evoke a greater emotion than if he just used struggle or fight against the light. It’s a poem about his father dying, and he wants him to hold on to his life. To battle against death, to rage against it, paints for us a striking image of the battle between death and mortality. There is so much emotion in those two sentences, but it is up to the reader or interlocutor to interpret the meaning of it. The poet or speaker packs in a message like a suitcase. They then relate it to the interlocutor who unpacks it and receives the message. We also see this in plays and in film. In *Forrest Gump*, we are not beside Forrest his whole life, because that would result in too long of a film. We are only given moments. We are given a small history of Lt. Dan and his family legacy of dying in the war, but we aren’t given a great detail about his character. However, when he is in the hospital and is angry with Forrest for taking away his destiny, we can understand where he is coming from. We understand that surge of emotion. This happens not just by what he says but how he says it. The acting plays a strong role in conveying the message to the viewer. We see both the implicit and explicit expression of frustration from Lt. Dan. What he is saying and how he is saying it strengthen our understanding.
Looking at the metaphor of ideas in a suitcase, we can see how a film can convey so much more than what we see on the screen. In the small amount of time that we sit in a theatre or in our living room watching a film, we can unpack messages in the story. The words and images speak to us and reveal volumes about our own relationships in our lives. We can take away from it meaning and reflect on the story and the realizations the characters achieved, perhaps comparing them to our own realizations. If there is one thing from this essay that I would like to extend it is this idea. We can look at a piece of art, a piece of music, a story, or a film and although have a brief encounter or experience with it, it can inspire the direction we lead in life. Like a drop in a calm body of water, it sends ripples out from the place of impact that continue far beyond our vision. The writers, actors, and filmmakers can take a message, pack it into a piece of work and we, as the viewers can unpack it. We can understand the message and let it move and inspire us.

Now a question that might arise in response to Grice’s view is whether or not it is fair to see Forrest as different because of his inability to grasp implicatures. Paul Grice was a Kantian. To aid in exploring the predicates of an object, Kant developed categories of understanding. In following Kant’s concept of categorical systems he created the Cooperative Principle. This is his approach to understanding. However, in creating these categories he distances speakers and interlocutors from each other by establishing rules and guidelines for what would seem right and anything that doesn’t fall within that category is wrong. In following this Kantian method, Grice creates judgments in general conversation. As we have seen from Sperber and Wilson, it is possible to violate a maxim from Grice and continue to establish a conversation. But if someone does not fit within the maxims of Paul Grice, could we truly say that they are not having a
conversation? It certainly wouldn’t seem so from Sperber and Wilson. There are many forms in communication and Ludwig Wittgenstein will have something to say about that shortly.

It is unfair to judge someone by their inability to grasp these categories. By putting ourselves in boxes and saying, “This is the only way a conversation can be employed,” we limit our understanding. We limit the ways in which we connect with one another. We are assuming that anything that is said outside of the maxims is pure gibberish or invalid in some way. By boxing in our language, we are boxing in the speaker or interlocutor and pre-judging their character. In doing so, we are saying, “This is the only way that one could be understood.” But we can understand conversations outside of these maxims in conversation. I can make a gesture as if I were holding a cup in my hand and tip it toward my mouth and the other person would then understand I am asking if they want something to drink. They, in turn, can nod their head or give a condescending look indicating the answer is obviously a yes. I can hold out a box of chocolates to someone sitting next to me and say, “Chocolate?” and they will understand that I am asking if they would like a chocolate. If they are hungry or feel like something sweet, they can accept. They would understand by the way I said the word “Chocolate” with an inquisitorial tone and offering a box of chocolates in front of them what I mean by the word, “Chocolate.” This might be seen as a violation of the quantity maxim from Grice but, according to Sperber and Wilson, these gestures add to the relevance of my message. The Gricean view is a good investigation in to how people make inferences, but the problem with that conservative view is that there is some disconnect between what we say and what we mean. This is why the Relevance Theory is important. Our gestures impact the way our message is conveyed contextually and aid the utterance in how listeners interpret its meaning. If I were to come home from work and my wife asked how my day was, I could let out a long sigh, let the entire weight
of my body succumb to gravity and fall upon the sofa and let out a low mumble, “Fine.” This does not indicate that my day was fine at all. It indicates that I probably had a horrible day and, what is more, my gestures and body language say that I am in no mood to discuss the events of my day. The implicit and explicit implicatures are needed to understand the message of what someone is trying to convey. When the principal asked Mrs. Gump if there was a Mr. Gump, she understood that it wasn’t a typical inquiry on her marriage. By his body language and the tone of his voice she knew what his intentions were. She knew what he was referring to. From her answer, the audience could also see that she was unhappily agreeing to it. Humans use more than just dialogue to communicate; we use gestures body language to express meaning. People are organic and spontaneous. We can establish rules and principles in writing an essay or an article, but when it comes to conversation our meaning is tied up with the context. The situation, or how we feel at the time of interaction, determines our utterance.

So like the box of chocolates, every conversation is going to be different. It would not follow established categories for understanding. This is why human cognition strives for the maximum relevance. We look for internal as well as external implicatures. We look for the most relevant cues for understanding someone’s thoughts and intentions. Every communication is different and doesn’t follow the same pattern of inference, just like each piece of chocolate is interesting and unique in its own way. Some pieces may be gooey, a little chewy, or a little nutty, but we can be sure that they are not boring. If all of our conversations followed some precise rules of understanding then they would seem to be boring. So like the box of chocolates it is good to have some deviation in the maxims.
1.2 Language Games

Ludwig Wittgenstein, a man to whom analytic philosophy owes a great deal of gratitude, saw that the problems we face in philosophy can be traced to our confusion in language. His attempt was to clear up the problems by discussing the meaning of words and their use in language. If we could clear up the problems in our language we wouldn’t make the philosophical problems go away, but we would no longer have difficulty with them. In *Philosophical Investigations*, Wittgenstein discusses the concept of language games. This is an exploration of the process in which we assert the practical use of language. In describing the language game, he uses the example of a builder and his assistant. If the builder requires a slab or block he could point to it and say, “Slab!” and the assistant would know that that is what he means and what he needs. There is a mutual understanding that this particular word that is said requires this action. So, the assistant complies with the commands and gives the builder what he needs when he says the words, slab, block, or pillar. This could be a primitive language in which they only say, slab, block, pillar, etc. Although their language could only consist of those few words, it can be translated as, “bring me that block.” We would be leaving out the other parts to the command but even in doing so, it would not change the meaning of the command. If someone else were to say the word, “block,” in a conversation the assistant would probably not hand them a block. The builder’s commands are contextual. It is not only what he says to his assistant but the situation in which he relays it is important. The assistant knows during their labor when the builder says “block” he does not mean it in the verb form or any other particular sort of block. He means precisely a particular designated block that he wants the assistant to hand to him.

In other words, our use of language is contingent on how it is used. Sometimes in these language games there are things that are said that really aren’t meant to be followed. Take the
situation of the film where Lyndon B. Johnson is discussing the wound Forrest acquired in the buttocks during his tour in Vietnam. The president leans over to Forrest and says that the wound is something he would like to see. Forrest then pulls down his pants and shows it to him. He is only following what he heard as the president’s request, but the context in which he meant it did not require that action to be followed at that moment, especially not on live television. I’ll go a little further into contextual language momentarily, but first I would like to talk more about Wittgenstein’s language games.

In naming an object, it is important to understand its function first. Let’s say that we were teaching someone to play chess. If I were to say a particular object is the “King,” it would be irrelevant unless that person knew how to play the game. They would need to gain some mastery on how the game was conducted. The person would have to understand that this character had some function which they had to follow. We could then say, “This character with this shape and in this place on the board has this function, and it is named, the King.” Only after understanding the game can we comprehend the names used in the game. Wittgenstein then imagines a scenario where someone would argue that a mastery of language is not needed for a clear understanding of words. A person foreign to the language of the builder, for example, could probably guess what the builder is pointing to when he says, “block.” This still wouldn’t be an adequate understanding of the language because how would the foreigner know precisely what is being pointed at or what they’re supposed to do with it? If I were to point to a sphere and mention the shape or the texture, would the foreigner know when I am referring to one more than the other? Another example is if I were to point to a dollar bill, am I pointing to the amount of the bill, the paper it’s printed on or the president on the face of the bill? It is important to have some mastery in language to understand what we are pointing at and the meaning of that which we are pointing
to. Wittgenstein uses the example of the chess piece: if he were pointing at it would the other person know that he is pointing at the King and not the carved piece of wood? The other person would have to understand our meaning clearly and not guess at it. A mutual understanding of language is necessary for direct pointing.

The idea of what something is and what that thing does go together. To know what something is, we must understand what it does or how it is used. Words aren’t intrinsic. They have no meaning without a context. If I were to invite someone into my office and say to them, take a seat. I do not mean for them to take a chair from my office home with them. I mean for them to sit down. If I were having a garage sale and someone bought a piece of furniture, then I could tell them to take a seat, maybe with a coffee table. The word seat has no real designated definition either. It doesn’t have to be a chair or some predetermined sitting apparatus. It could be the edge of a desk or perhaps a bucket turned upside down. Maybe someone wouldn’t see that bucket as a seat but as a musical instrument. They could bang on the top of that bucket and then it becomes a drum. Turn the bucket back around again and put a plastic bag in it then it becomes a trash can. It can be many things defined by its use. This is how we also define homonyms. The word ‘rose’ could mean the past tense of rise, “The crowd rose for the national anthem.” The word could also mean that plant that is related to the family of flowers. So if I said, “A rose by any other name would smell just as sweet” (William, 2004). It would most certainly not be mistaken for the past tense of rise. Our understanding of language is contingent on the context from which it is used. We could see this in a phrase that Forrest uses throughout the film to distinguish who he is with what he does.
1.3 Stupid Is As Stupid Does

Forrest Gump’s mother teaches him the phrase, “Stupid is as stupid does.” What she means by this is that it is not the person that is stupid, but what they do that defines their stupidity. Just as we discussed earlier, the name of an object can only be understood after its function is known. Forrest is slow witted and also might have some trouble identifying implicatures in conversation. Now, have we seen an act of stupidity from Forrest? Let’s look at the word stupid as it’s used. What is its definition? The word, stupid is used to identify a person as someone without knowledge, someone who is ignorant. In Plato’s *Apology*, he gives an account of Socrates admitting his ignorance. Socrates is put on trial in Athens for “criminal meddling,” heresy and corruption of the youth. The text is Socrates’ defense from these false accusations, namely, that he asserts that a false representation of him had been made due to a misunderstanding of his wisdom. When the Oracle at Delphi had claimed that there was no one as wise as Socrates, he tried to disprove this claim by interviewing men that he believes are wiser than he. However, as he interviews each person he realizes that he is wiser than them because he does not claim to know that which he does not know. He can admit his ignorance. He does not pretend to have wisdom in an attempt to appear wise. This would be a false representation of the self. Forrest also never claimed to know what he did not know. He was humble in his ignorance of things but never claimed that he was stupid just as Socrates saw himself as neither wise nor stupid, “I neither know nor think that I know” (Plato, 1956). He found a middle way of being. He would neither attempt to be greater than he is, nor would he feign ignorance when it is not there. What he admits is that he knows himself. He does not claim to be or to know any more or any less than he does. When Forrest claims his love for his childhood sweetheart, Jenny, she tells him that he doesn’t know what love is. Later in the film he proposes to her only to be rejected. He
then replies, “I might not be a smart man, but I know what love is” (Zemeckis, 1994). That is a strong and powerful claim. Of all the things in this world that are known and unknown to him, loving Jenny is one experience he can be sure about. He proves his knowledge of the experience of love throughout the film by his loyal relationships with his friends, Jenny, and his mother.

Let’s look at the phrase, “Stupid is as stupid does,” and focus on stupid as an adverb rather than an adjective. So if we are looking at the word stupid as it is used in describing an action, what could it mean other than a foolish act? How would we define a foolish act? We could see something foolish as an act that is wrongful, prejudiced, selfish, and one that leads to harm. When someone acts foolishly it is displeasing and hurtful. If we look at Forrest Gump’s character, could we say that he fits the actions of the stupid? Ever since Forrest was a boy he was seen as an outcast. He had a low IQ and a bit of a speech impediment. He would get rocks thrown at him and he was made fun of. He could barely find a seat on the bus to school or when he was on his way to boot camp because people just didn’t seem to like him. Despite all of this, he acted in kindness. He acted on what he felt was the right thing to do. He helped a young African American girl as she entered a newly segregated school for the first time. He saved Lt. Dan and the other soldiers in Vietnam because they needed help. This is the same reason he helped Jenny when she was in trouble and why he kept his promise to Bubba even after his death. He did these things because he felt it was right, without giving a thought to the consequences. He performed them without a desire for personal gain. These are not foolish and stupid acts but honorable and good (in the Socratic sense of good). We will go further into Forrest’s actions and why he performed them in the third section: however, I would like to look at Forrest’s actions compared to those around him. If we look at what we could consider “stupid” actions, then we will see the many stupid acts that Forrest meets throughout his journey like
segregation, prejudice, bullying, rape, war, etc. All these acts that occur throughout the film can be considered foolish. These are stories we hear and read about in the news unfortunately on a daily basis. They happen across social strata, in the highest of political circles to small groups of people all over the globe. Forrest never seems occupied with these matters because they don’t concern him. He appears to be happy despite what is said about him because he is happy. We will look into what it is that brings him that bliss later on but for now, we will explore life in his shoes.
Chapter 2: Magic Shoes

Edmund Husserl is the grandfather of phenomenology. Husserl proclaimed that we needed to get back to “things in themselves” and gave this task to the world of philosophy. Phenomenology gives us a methodology for how we perceive phenomena in the world. Some of the greatest philosophers in the 20th century have taken this form of philosophizing and opened up views on endless horizons. In popular media, such as film and literature, we can phenomenologically describe the lives of characters in a story by entering their lived worlds and seeing what they see and feeling what they feel. We can sympathize and empathize with them because we can relate to their lives by adopting a phenomenological way of seeing. In Forrest Gump, we travel with Forrest, phenomenologically, as he changes the lives of others, not only of those closest to him, but of the world and the course of history in the process. I am going to explore the media of film itself using phenomenological concepts from the pioneers of this school of philosophy. I will be drawing from the works of a few of those phenomenologists, most notably, Martin Heidegger and Edith Stein and how their methods differ from those of Husserl.

2.1 Others’ Shoes

At the beginning of the film we see a feather floating in the breeze. The camera follows this feather and we in the audience float and sway as if we were somehow a part of it. The feather lands on Forrest Gump’s shoe. We see his shoes and they are worn and muddy. Forrest places a great deal of emphasis on shoes. He looks at the shoes of the woman beside him and remarks at how comfortable they look. He mentions that there’s a lot that can be told about a person from their shoes, “Where they’re going, where they’ve been” (Zemeckis, 1994). I am
reminded of an adaptation of a Cherokee proverb; *Never judge a man till you’ve walked a mile in his shoes.* We can see the importance of filling one’s shoes or what’s called, *Einfühlung*, in phenomenology. This German word, *Einfühlung*, does not translate exactly to empathy but to “feeling into.” Johann Gottfried Herder, an eighteenth century philosopher, helped develop its concept. In relating man and nature, Herder thought that man could perceive natural phenomena and traits in them that are parallel to human traits. This would evoke emotions in us from their correlation or similarity. The idea of “feeling-into” is more than a mimicked sensation, as some might view empathy; rather, it is an understanding of the individual perceptions. These perceptions constitute our intuition or experience. Edith Stein, in her dissertation, *On the Problem of Empathy (Zum Problem der Einfühlung)*, talks about imagining herself standing up, walking around her room and staring at her living body still sitting in a chair. She can mentally put herself in some other state and imagine herself in another situation without physically acting on it. She experiences a separation of her self. There is a separation from her physical body by her imagined body. “Thus my ‘I’ has doubled, and, even though the real ‘I’ cannot be released from its body, there is at least the possibility of ‘slipping out of one’s skin’ in fantasy” (Stein, 2010).

Heidegger discusses something similar in his, *Origin of the Work of Art*. He examines a pair of shoes from a painting by Van Gogh. He talks about the shoes and their usefulness, referring to the equipmentality of the shoes. There is some character in these shoes. They may seem like nothing to us, but to the owner, a peasant woman, they are much more. They are a part of the earth and her world. She needs these shoes to conduct her work, which feeds her and possibly her family. There is some essential *being* in these shoes and the equipmentality of the equipment is important. But, strangely, there is nothing surrounding the shoes, not even an
indication of their owner. In fact, we can’t see the equipmentality of the shoes. We don’t know who uses them or how they were used. Yet, in this painting, looking at the worn out material and soil on the shoes we get the sense of the peasant working in the fields. We get a sense of how the woman uses those shoes and how they are a part of her world. Heidegger paints for us this image of a woman standing before death, trembling, and dependent upon the shoes and their usefulness to feed her and perhaps give her shelter. The shoes belong to the earth and are also a part of her world. Here we see a relation between stuff and form. It is in this reliability of the shoes that we find the truth of the equipment. It is in this truth that we find an unconcealedness or Heidegger’s Greek term, aletheia.

So, we have come upon the equipmental being of the equipment, the thingliness of this thing. But, how have we done so? Heidegger suddenly stops and asks how we came to know about the equipmentality of the shoes. Was it from the thing itself? Did we see the woman working in the fields? Did we see the making of the shoes perhaps? No, we merely brought ourselves before the painting from Van Gogh and saw the art. “This painting spoke. In the vicinity of the work we were suddenly somewhere else than we usually tend to be” (Heidegger, 2005). It was from beyond that thing, from the no-thing surrounding it. When we come upon a thing itself, we are at a dead-end. We can go no further into it. It is in this dead-end, like a forest path, that we come to a clearing. The clearing is something that is beyond beings. There is an unconcealing in the clearing, what Heidegger calls, Holzwege (Forest Path). The unconcealedness is who we are because it reveals ourselves. What we find in the art, or perhaps in the other, is ourselves. We find that people often hide their true selves. They push themselves in front of others, revealing that they are other than what is.
Forrest, however, has always just been himself. Jenny even asks Forrest what he wants to be when he grows up and he answers, “Well, aren’t I going to be me?” (Zemeckis, 1994). He doesn’t seem to understand the question, or so we might think. He feels that he is who he has always been and who he will always be. Jenny talked about being a bird and flying away because she wanted to be someone great, someone who touched others and made a difference. She modeled for Playboy magazine and appeared nude onstage, although the film doesn’t indicate if it was to acquire notoriety or money, but that wasn’t who she really was. She saw herself as a temporary vessel to get to her higher aspirations. This is what Jean-Paul Sartre would consider, Bad Faith. I will talk more about Bad Faith shortly but going back to Heideggarian concepts, it is not until well into the third act of the film that our characters are unconcealed. In this unconcealedness, they find truth. It is what Heidegger calls, “un-truth,” but not as in something that is false as in something that is the opposite of truth, but something that is revealed. It is un-truthed. There is a relationship between the concealed and the clearing.

Heidegger is able to see” within” the painting of the shoes and interpret an understanding of the work of art. He can see the equipmentality of the shoes, their character of being and the way that they are a being-in-themselves. They are equipment for the peasant woman, who might not even exist. We have no indication of her actual existence from the painting. What is important is that this is all the work of Heidegger’s phenomenological perception from a single image. This is what Husserl calls a “content of consciousness.” This content of consciousness is an amalgam of data and putting it together to get one conception of it. Imagine sitting down and looking at a table. From your seat, you can only see the top of the table. However, if you walk around the table you can see different sides, the corners, the bottom, the legs, and chairs pushed under it. We take different angles of an object and can create in our minds a whole. We have a
whole perception or a “consciousness of identity,” according to Husserl. From this one content of consciousness, Heidegger was able to map out a whole object or situation. Stein talks about this when analyzing seeing of the object; we are given only one side and this side is stubborn, much like the moon in only revealing one part of itself. But, when we move our physical body to see the whole object, it then hides the side that was previously revealed away from us but shows another side of itself. For example, when I try to look at my laptop, I can see the screen and keyboard but when I move to see the back portion with the Apple Logo, the screen and keyboard are then hidden. At no time can I get the full object. I must look at their parts, one by one, then retain the image in my mind and piece them together to look at the whole of them. The image that we retain in our mind will be more than what we see before us. We cannot take in the whole image in at once, there is always another perception. So Heidegger took this image of the shoes and found the world of the peasant.

Our first image of Forrest Gump is his shoes, muddy and worn. Just by looking at the soiled, ragged and frayed sneakers we know he has been quite a few places. He has come a long way to sit by this bus stop. From our content of consciousness, we can know that he has quite a tale to tell. This is also what Forrest Gump sees in others. He sees their shoes and imagines a whole story of their life played out starting from their feet. So, Forrest begins his tale by talking about the shoes he had as a boy. We see this played out in film: not the discussion of someone’s shoes, but the sense of unconcealedness. We are only given a couple of hours of scenes with Forrest, but we feel like we know him intimately. We can see the good in him and what surrounds him. A filmmaker will show us an image or a scene and we will take more from that scene than is shown. We do this because we are engaged with the characters. We are part of the experience of the film. At the beginning of Forrest Gump, as I mentioned above, we watch a
feather dance around the screen. The camera follows and we are floating with it. In the process, we might feel a bit lighter in our seats, perhaps we feel nauseous from the swaying, or a sense of excitement every time it looks like the feather is about to land but gets swept up by another breeze. We feel-into the feather. We have become part of the experience of the feather swaying and moving on the screen. It is a lifeless object but by the work of the camera, by the movement of its dance, we become immersed into the film. We are engaged with the screen and succumb to the life of the feather. The film’s image can awaken these emotions within an audience. The actor’s portrayal can take us even further. When we feel for a character, whether it is bereavement for Forrest’s late mother or joy when he gets married to his one love, we are experiencing Einfühlung. The film moves us to feel with the characters. Husserl would say that the film could not produce this response without intention.

2.2 Ego

Before I speak about intention I would first like to examine the ego. I will use Edith Stein’s interpretation of the ego because I believe her view has the clearest understanding. When I experience a sensation, what is the “I” that perceives it? When I interact with any object whether it be a door or a glass of water, there is a bodily sensation that feels the object. I could feel the hard wood from the door or the cold, smooth exterior of the glass. I could grasp the handle on my cup of coffee and feel the rough texture of the pottery and the heat from the cup. The perceiver is the one making judgments on the objects while the body is feeling the sensations. The “I” is making judgments and although I am holding my cup of coffee, it is not the “I” that is touching it, it is my hand. It is a part of me, but, it is not me. If I spill the coffee, it is my hand that gets burnt, not me. These things that I touch or that I hold cannot reach me. Even my arms and legs are only a part of me, though they are attached. If I were to enclose my arms
around my chest, it is not the “I” they are touching, but my chest that is still a part of me. Lt. Dan Taylor suffered an injury during an ambush in Vietnam. Although Forrest was able to save Lt. Dan’s life, he could not save his legs. But, even after losing both legs, he still remained himself. The legs were only a part of him, and not what we would consider his “I.” Forrest even reminds him, despite what has happened; that he is still Lt. Dan Taylor. As close as these objects or our limbs come to us, they are always at some distance away from our “I.” There is some distinction between the “I” that is me and my physical body. This “I” is what Edith Stein poignantly calls the “zero point of orientation.” Objects may come close to this point, perhaps even during surgery a scalpel or the surgeon’s hands can touch my heart or brain, yet, they can never meet the “zero point of orientation.” Husserl refers to this as the ego. Our ego is like a little man living inside of our body somewhere controlling everything like a spaceship. This is similar to the film Men in Black, when a tiny alien is living inside the head of another alien. It doesn’t just live within us, however, it is us. It is the amalgamation of our experiences and how we consider who we are. Our ego is the experiencer of experiences and the perceiver of perceptions.

For Husserl, the relationship between the ego and the physical body is called kinesthesia, which is a relationship based on movement. The ego kinesthetically directs the physical body where to move. Employing this concept we would not use a phrase like, “I see the boat.” Instead we would put it phenomenologically and say, “I move my eyes to the right, tilt my head and see the boat.” I describe myself completely in the act. In this way, I move through the actions and as I am telling my movements the listener goes with me in my intentions. My eyes and the movement of my body are part of the experience. The organs used are what Husserl calls, “organs of perception.” The use of these organs, along with my ego, are a part of my living body but there is a distinction between my living body and my physical body. While my physical body
is quite simply my body and needs no special definition or example, it is through my living body that I perceive phenomena. I see others in my perceptual field that is limited by my living, physical body. Husserl talks about seeing others not as living bodies but as physical bodies because I am only able to perceive them through my living body. However, if I see them in my perceptual field, and they see and respond to me, then I must know that I am also in their perceptual field. If this is so then they too perceive me through their living body. I know they have living bodies because they are like me. I have a physical body and a living body from which I gain perception. We then are related from our living bodies to their living bodies. “But being an ego through the living body is of course not the only way of being an ego, and none of its ways can be severed from the others” (Husserl, 2010). Husserl goes on to say, “Throughout all their transformations they form a unity” (Ibid). We are unified by our living bodies, as ego-subjects and what he calls the “full-fledged ‘I-the-man.’” This unification of our living bodies and “I-the-man,” brings us together in the world. We are existing in a world-consciousness or what Husserl will come to call a “Life-world.”

In this life-world, we live for others and they live for us. In this wakeful world of consciousness, we are all connected. We live for others because we can see that they, like us, are part of the life-world. Forrest Gump lives for others as well and everything he does seems to be for the benefit of the other. For example, he saves Lt. Dan during the war; he runs the shrimp boat business because of a promise he made to Bubba; he cares for his mother; he takes care of Jenny when she’s a frightened child and throughout her life until she is terminally ill; and he even plays football not for school pride or a scholarship but because they wanted him to play. He does all of this because he has empathy for others. He understands their emotions because he can put himself in their shoes phenomenologically. We can look into and share this moment with
them, understanding their emotions because they are not foreign to us. We can do so because we have either felt the same emotions, or can feel what they are feeling vicariously. There is a connection from subject to subject since we are part of the same world. After proposing to Jenny and being rejected, Forrest says to her, “I’m not a smart man, but I know what love is” (Zemeckis, 1994). Intersubjectivity is not reserved for only intellectuals or particularly empathetic people, it is available for everyone. We are all in this life-world together.

There is a point in the film where we see Lt. Dan express empathy for Forrest. This scene needs mentioning because Lt. Dan seems very cold and resentful toward Forrest after Vietnam and it’s interesting to see him take an empathetic stand for him (so to speak). Just after a New Year’s Eve party has gone sour, Lt. Dan scolds some of his “lady-friends” for calling Forrest stupid. As a rebuttal, they call him a freak and laugh at him. In the narrative, Forrest remarks that Lt. Dan doesn’t like to be called crippled just like Forrest doesn’t like to be called stupid. Throughout the film, Forrest touches people’s lives and we see, as a result of that, different dynamics in the relationships beginning to emerge. We see a togetherness that develops in the film. “Togetherness with the other” is an important topic in phenomenology especially with Emmanuel Levinas. We also see it in Hannah Arendt’s philosophy of Existenz. This is a freedom of Being or, to be clearer, it is the expression of meaning that man moves in his freedom in communication with others. “Existenz is never isolated; it exists only in communication and in the knowledge of the Existenz of others...Existenz can develop only in the togetherness of men in the common given world”(Arendt, 2010). Arendt goes on to say that with Existenz, man leaves the period of his egotism. What she means is that with the togetherness of others, man is no longer an isolated ego. Only in this communication can he find a home in the world.
2.3 Intentionality

Intentionality is a difficult concept to grasp or at least to make clear. The pleasure I have when I watch the film as well as the very thought of it I am having now, is intentional. Those feelings one has when Forrest sees his son for the first time, that choked up feeling, is also intentional. When he looks at his son and asks Jenny, “Is he smart or is he…” and tears well up in his eyes, it motivates the audience to have a sympathetic physical experience (Zemeckis, 1994). So this part of our self or ego, as Stein would call it, is not personalized. In the same way that we could imagine ourselves getting up and walking around the table to see all sides of it, extending our ego, we can see the life of Forrest and see life through his experiences. We are living vicariously through him and the characters of the film.

Heidegger would say that in order to understand intentionality we must rid ourselves of all prejudices. There can be no obstructions from preconceived notions. Phenomenology is an examination of things themselves. If we were to look at something with some idea of what this thing is, then we are not looking at the object. We would be trying to relate what we already know, or think we know with our examination. “We set aside our prejudices,” Heidegger says. “Learn to see directly and simply and to abide by what we see without asking, out of curiosity, what we can do with it” (Heidegger, 2010). We are looking at objects themselves as they appear to us. This does not mean that we are only concerned with objects in the physical world. If I see a chair, for instance, in front of me, my intentionality is the perception of that chair. At one moment of the film, Forrest looks out in front of his house and we see a ghostly image of Jenny walking in a white dress that then fades into the background. It is unclear whether Forrest is hallucinating at this point or just daydreaming of her, but that image, although not really on his front lawn, is his perception of her. That perception, regardless of being real or imaginary is an
intentionality. His living body is taking in the perception of her living body as an image. This also includes misperception. Let’s say I see in the distance what I believe is a friend waving at me so I wave back. She doesn’t put her arm down but just stands there immobile, as if frozen with her hand in the air. I walk toward her to say hello and as I draw near, find that it is just a tree with a branch sticking from its trunk resembling an arm. Although I was fooled by the tree and mistook it for a friend of mine, I still had some perception of her. In my mind she was there. Perception is perceiving something even if the object is not really there. Heidegger tells us that intention, from intention, means to direct towards something. Every perceived object has some feeling affiliated with it or better, the feeling is directed at the object. I have a sense of joy when I drink coffee, I even feel comfort from the warmth and the texture of my coffee cup. Every judgment I have of the coffee and the cup is an experience of the perceived object. This is what Husserl calls a “correlative expression.” We cannot have desire without something being desired; when we laugh, we are laughing at something; when we love, we love something; when we hate, we hate something; and when we perceive, we are perceiving something. There is a relation that goes with the expression. I could not have the comfort, warmth, and joy of my coffee without the coffee itself. Even if it isn’t there, if I was just imagining it, it could produce some elation in me. I would have some perception of the phenomena. There is some image or some presented object in my mind of the coffee. To further elaborate the distinction of intentionality, Husserl makes it clear that it is the perception of the object that is intentional and not the object or circumstance itself. I would still have some intention of the coffee. We have immanent contents, those that are given to my consciousness about the object, and those that make up the act or object. The object is not the experience, my perception of that object is the experience.
When we have an object being experienced, we are looking at the object without prejudgment. I see my friend in the distance and it is irrelevant whether it is a tree or really her waving, my perception is that it is her. That is my lived experience, my intentionality. It is because of this intentionality, this looking at things as themselves, as we perceive them without prejudgments, that we are not concerned with reality as defined by science. A phenomenologist would not see a door and involve himself with the wood that is contained in it, nor is he concerned with whether it is an actual door or just a painting on the wall. Science is only concerned with what is real. It is what we can study, break apart, and learn inside and out. We cannot watch a film and enjoy it with the mind of a scientist. A scientist would break down the film *Forrest Gump* and explain the lighting and effects that are used. He could go further and explain the types of effects the lighting has on our eyes, how the film is played through the projector, perhaps the actor’s physical movements or the fact that it is a work of fiction and not very realistic. The scientist could go on and on about the inner workings of film, the chemicals used and how it was manufactured and produced. The scientist would miss the portrayal of the actors, the emotional cues we are given and the engagement we have with the story line. In an endnote to his *Crisis of European Sciences*, Husserl says, “So, we ignore the science, which adds nothing to understanding the movies as an event…left only with the film and [the people], we have to ask each person what the movie meant to them as individuals” (Husserl, 2013). Intentionality is going to be different for everybody because we all have different perceptions, different experiences.

### 2.4 Bracketing

Separating our pre-judgments and examining only what is perceived is a term by Husserl called “bracketing” or “epoché.” This bracketing is a suspension of judgment about the existing
world; we are only looking at the object itself, this object of our intuition that Husserl calls
noema. In *Noesis and Noema*, Husserl discusses the sense or the meaning of the acts. The Noetic
moment is the performing action, when I am thinking or I am remembering. This is the act in the
present. The noematic correlate is the re-thinking of the act. It brings up what has past. I thought
or I remembered something. Our mental process seizes this object and reflects upon it. The
taking in of the immanent object from the actual object is noesis (taking in of the noetic
components). The process is psychological and not physical. If we see a tree in a garden, we see
the physical tree, the perceptual object. We then get a second immanental tree. In our mental
process we receive a picture object of the tree. We now retain the second tree and it is
untouchable. The physical tree in the garden will grow old, wither away, maybe be chopped
down. The immanental tree however, is immortal. We will always have that image. In *Beyond
Intentionality* Levinas states that, “The noema is *concrete* in the intention of the noesis”
(Levinas, 2010). Once our mental process transcends from the natural object (physical tree) to
the intentional object, (immanental tree) then we have achieved the noema. Noema and noesis
are not the same act. This must be made clear. The noesis is the noetic process of seeing. It is the
action and the noema happens when it is moving from seeing the tree to the tree as being seen.
We get from the film a sense stemming from the noematic correlate. In our noema, we gain
meaning. Every perception is different therefore every sense will be as well. From the film, I
would bracket the noetic content intuitively, and reflect upon that later, applying what is
perceived to my own life. Others may not have received the same intuitions and they may not
agree with my interpretation of the film. Perhaps what the writers and directors had in mind
when they made the film is quite different from the sense that I received from it, but that is
irrelevant. I look at the bracketed images from my particular content of consciousness and I see a
posibility of infinite interpretations. But, what I see at the moment of seeing are frozen images of Forrest. I bracket off any other interpretation, the actors, the directors, and the camera; I become engaged in the images as a lifeworld. These things appear to me as through my consciousness.

One last clarification on bracketing: Husserl claims that, “What remains to us is the totality of the phenomena of the world, phenomena which are grasped by reflection as they are absolutely in themselves” (Husserl, 2010). Think of yourself as an investigator at the scene of a crime or a juror in a trial. You can only base your knowledge on what is given to you. Your conclusion must be free from any outside knowledge or interpretation; you must only concentrate on the evidence at hand. If we watch the film Forrest Gump, and we know these are actors on screen, we know there’s a man behind the camera, there are special effects from a computer, and we definitely aren’t moving through his past, then we have lost the point of the film. We have collapsed the pillars of belief and we are no longer part of the experience. Without this bracketing, we would have no particular interest in the film. We would be watching what we expect to see, hearing what we want to hear. We would gain nothing from the film.

2.5 Bad Faith

Bad Faith can be considered a falsehood directed at oneself. In deceiving oneself, a person puts on a play in being what they believe they are not. Sartre uses the example of a waiter in a restaurant. The waiter has the attitude of a waiter, he reflects it in his mannerisms and appears to move too briskly and feigns interest in the customer’s order. He is putting on a show. His actions are mechanical and seem imitated. I worked in a restaurant for a number of years and I can attest to these mannerisms. Servers in most restaurants adhere to a type of script when they approach a table or take an order. They are supposed to have an air and an attitude of “being a
waiter” about them. This is required by the employee because the restaurant not only provides food but provides a service and the service must meet the needs and expectations of the customer. So these servers or waiters must act in a certain way that satisfies the customer’s standards. While I worked at these establishments, I felt as though I were putting on a show and according to Sartre, I was.

In committing to Bad Faith, a person acts congruous to social pressures or demands. In this state of being a waiter, the person is aware they are not a waiter and it is not who they believe themselves to be. Drawing from my own example, I was working in a restaurant so that I could support myself through college and become a philosopher. Being a waiter wasn’t what defined me. I was a waiter but I did not believe I was a waiter. I was stuck in this position and, according to Sartre, lacked a freedom of choice. I felt like my body was just a vessel and I was going through particular motions day to day. So, as a waiter I had to correspond to the idea of what society expects of me as a waiter. My own thoughts or ideas were irrelevant. I had to put on a uniform and act as a waiter. Although I could call myself a waiter, what I really could be defined as was, “A waiter in the mode of being what I am not” (Sartre, 2010). This is the same fundamental concept that I, as well as Forrest, dealt with in the military. Men and women in the armed forces are trained to directly follow orders. Ideas, opinions, or disagreements from a soldier are irrelevant. They are commanded to do what they are told without question. And so, when Forrest Gump’s Drill Sergeant asks him what his sole purpose in the army is he responds, “To do whatever you tell me, Drill Sergeant” (Zemekis, 1994). From this answer, Forrest is praised as a genius, possibly for the first time. Sartre claims, “Society demands that he limit himself to his function...just as a soldier at attention makes himself into a soldier-thing with a direct regard which does not see at all, which is no longer meant to see, since it is the rule and
not the interest of the moment which determines the point he must fix his eyes on” (Sartre, 2010). So, the soldier at the time of attention, during war, or during training must act as a soldier and limit his function to that job. They are soldiers or military combatants, not students, teachers, or shrimp boat captains. They are who they have to be. They are representations of soldiers as I was a representation of a Marine and a representation of a waiter.

Sartre gives another example of the separation of the self. In this scenario a woman is out on a date. She is aware of what the man courting her wants and she is not sure yet how she feels about him. He tells her that he finds her attractive. She pays no more attention to the meaning of these words than if he was just mentioning the color of his shirt or commenting on whether the table is square. Sartre then mentions that he takes her hand in his. To accept his gesture would be to go along with his advances, to pull away would be to reject him. She is not yet sure of whether she wants to pursue this course of action so she just lets her hand sit limp in his. She is removed from this part of her body, it is a thing in the world. This is the way I felt as a waiter. I was far removed from what I thought myself to be. I would put on my uniform and apron, greet customers, smile, and recite the daily specials. It was a costume and I was acting a part that I had no belief in committing to. Jenny seems to have felt this way throughout the film. She was always running away, leaving, perhaps in search of some other life. She uses drugs as a possible escape and in one scene she looks at herself in a mirror and is apparently disgusted or ashamed. She is at odds with who she is. She was in Bad Faith because she had aspirations to be more than what she thought she was. She wanted to be famous, to be an entertainer on a stage that reached out and touched others.

Lt. Dan thought of himself as a great soldier who was supposed to die with honor in the war. It was part of his lineage; after all he was Lieutenant Dan Taylor! But, as Forrest points out,
he still is Lieutenant Dan Taylor. He wasn’t something that could be embodied by putting on a uniform that carried a title. He wasn’t merely an ideal, but a real person. Lt. Dan was always looking to what he could have been or should have been. However, even before his unfortunate accident he hadn’t yet fulfilled his aspiration. He was to die in the war just as his father and grandfathers had done before him. He was just going through the motions of a soldier till his time came to die with honor in battle. Lt. Dan was in Bad Faith because he saw himself as a soldier that was supposed to die in battle. That is an important phrase, “supposed to,” because Dan Taylor already saw his end. He saw his life as a play and he needed to get to the end of the script in just the way it was written for him. He was unaware of the box of chocolates that life provides.

Sartre considers Bad Faith to be an existential paradox. In Bad Faith, we are both free and aware that we are bound; we free ourselves from responsibility of our actions. In playing as a waiter, it was not me who performed those actions; I was acting as some other being. It was what Sartre calls an, “analogue.” If we are to act in good faith, in sincerity, then we must be for ourselves. We can be free by believing who we are. Later in the film, Jenny and Lt. Dan free themselves from the paradox and accept the ideal of good faith.

2.6 Feelings

As we discussed earlier, we cannot produce a response to something without intention. It would be misleading to say, “The film Forrest Gump produced happiness within me.” Instead we should say that it evoked emotion or inspired joy. These feelings are intentional. The pleasure of seeing this film or having a memory of it, as I am having now, is what is intentional. We can have unintentional reactions when we are confronted with an event. When Forrest finds out he has a son or shows his backside to the President, I could have a reaction to smile or laugh.
Smiling might be an involuntary action; I may not even notice I am doing it at the time. I could frown at the loss of his mother or furrow my brow when he’s picked on by bullies since our physical expression mirrors our mental expressions. Edith Stein saw that our feelings had something to teach us about the phenomenon of expression, “Feeling in its pure essence is not something complete in itself. As it were, it is loaded with an energy which must be unloaded” (Stein, 2010). How we unload this energy is of our own volition. Let us suppose that I am standing in line waiting for some popcorn at the snack bar. I have the choice of yelling at the person in front of me to hurry up with their order or I could wait patiently, perhaps enjoy the smell of melted butter or conjure up an old memory of being a kid in the theatre. I have the control to do these things through the act of my will. When I express empathy I can direct some experience and feel-into some other circumstance but I am always centered in the “I.” I am in my living body and not in theirs. I can only get some impression or intuition of their emotion from their expressions, but for my own expressions or emotions, I have the power of will to change or get over them. I am merely engaging in this experience by observing and feeling-into the object’s circumstance.

Stein saw us as “civilized people” and that meant that we must control our actions. We cannot simply act on our emotions without some self-control like Forrest beating up Jenny’s boyfriend. We must practice some self-preservation when intending to express ourselves which Stein says we must do. We can suppress our physical expressions but mentally, we are free to act out our inhibitions. I can imagine myself walking up to the person in front of me at the snack bar and telling him to step aside until he’s actually ready to order. Maybe I imagine that I walk up to him and punch him in the face. I will not really do it, let me be clear on that. I would never do something so cruel and violent. But I can imagine that I would. Imagination enables me to do
this mentally, to let out my aggressions and feelings without acting on them physically. This is a civilized expression of aggressive feelings. Now, when it comes to feelings of joy, I can also take these feelings and express them externally. I can take with me these feelings that were inspired from the film, the lessons that were learned or the connection between the characters, and apply them in my daily life. For example, I could take with me and apply the goodness that Forrest developed in his friendships. He truly cared about his friends and never gave up on them even when they sometimes tried desperately to push him away. He knew it wasn’t him they were upset with; they had their own problems just as he had his. He either tried to understand what they were going through or he would look at the bright side of the situation. Maybe another bracketed interpretation is that although history continues to move past us, even the most unlikely of people can change it; even the simplest of people can make a difference. I gathered these perspectives from the film from my own particular point of view. Through phenomenological analysis, I am able to attain these interpretations. I can better understand the content and function of my consciousness by observing how I am moved through the film. I’m engaged in the dialogue, the characters, and their emotions and it inspires me to have Forrest’s view on life. It’s inspiring to think of life as a random box of chocolates or that we are all floating on the breeze waiting to come into some other’s life, only to be swept back up in the breeze again. I take these images and with them the feelings evoked, and I can apply them in my own lifeworld. I will discuss more on this in the third section.
Chapter 3: The Forrest Principle

Zen Buddhism is believed to have been developed during the sixth century, when Bodhidharma, a monk of the Dhyana school in India, traveled to China and brought with him the concept of Zen. Zen was born from the Mahayana school of Buddhism and unlike the Theravada, is more open to various teachings of Buddhism. It’s not as rigid as its sister school, Theravada. Mahayana means Great Vehicle, *Maha* meaning great and *Yana*, meaning vehicle or ferryboat. So Mahayana Buddhism means that their teachings can carry a large number of people. Anyone can be liberated from *Samsara*, the wheel of birth and death, according to the Mahayana school. Theravada, or as it is sometimes called, Hinayana (*Hina* meaning small) believe in self-liberation and the possible attainment of Nirvana. Although Zen is a branch of Mahayana Buddhism, we also get a sense of both Taoist and Confucian influences in its teachings. Alan Watts discusses an alternate origin of Zen and believes this is why we can see the parallels of Taoism and Confucianism. In his book *The Way of Zen*, Watts attributes the beginning of Zen to Seng-chao, a Buddhist monk during the fourth century. Seng-chao was a former copyist of Taoist and Confucian literature. In Buddhism, especially the *Vimalarkirti Sutra*, he found the nature of non-dualism very appealing because in non-dualism we see a balance of acting and not acting. In the *Vimalarkitri Sutra*, the Buddhist monk answers a question of non-dual reality with a “thunderous silence.” Watts describes this as an awakening without having to rid ourselves of our human passions. He goes on to explain, “Not exterminating the passions does not mean letting them flourish untamed. It means letting go of them rather than fighting them, neither repressing passion nor indulging it” (Watts, 1957). This idea is something of a concern to Western minds. When we hear of Buddhist ideals of non-attachment, many of us are taken aback at that type of
thinking. To rid oneself of all possessions and emotions would be to make oneself a robot. If I were to get rid of all my feelings and all that I have to attain enlightenment, then what is the point?

Zen Buddhism shows that we are not trying to rid ourselves of our thoughts and emotions. This idea of non-duality means that we are not outside of these things. We are not separate from our passions or from nature for that matter. We are a part of it. We are one with it. This is a very strong Taoist theme. The Tao Te Ching is filled with non-dualistic aspects. The first line of the text is, “The Tao that can be spoken is not the Tao” (Lao-Tzu, 1994). It reflects a balance of nature in what is called, “Taoist parallels.” In one of these parallels, Seng-chao wrote a doctrine that states “Prajna is not knowledge” (Watts, 1975). What he means by that is wisdom knows by not knowing. This idea has a strong similarity to knowledge in our earlier discussion of Plato’s Apology.

Socrates is claimed to be the wisest man in Athens. He denies this claim and tries to prove otherwise. During his investigation he realizes that he is indeed the wisest man in Athens because he admits to his ignorance. He doesn’t pretend to know what he does not and he doesn’t deny what knowledge he does have. In an audiobook entitled, Zen Clues, Alan Watts relates a story of a man that travels to a Zen teacher for guidance. However, the teacher replies by saying that he has nothing to teach. When asked why, if he has nothing to teach, does he have students, the Zen teacher says, they are not students they are simply a lot of stupid people hanging around. What he means is that they are not just stupid in the ordinary sense but humble people, without “intellectual pride.” Students of Zen are much like Forrest because they are humble, they have a sense of humility and so they are not driven by their ego. Forrest was very self-effacing about every event in the film. We never heard him boast about his money or the famous people he met.
We didn’t hear him complain and he didn’t lament about his disability, nor did he gripe about his situation in Vietnam. The people and events were just parts of his experience. The medals he won and hardships he faced were not important to him, that is, it was not something to dwell on. He wasn’t out to impress anyone or make himself higher or stronger than anyone else, he was simply himself. He acted for himself and never claimed to be anything more. Going back to Socrates and the Greek aphorism, “Know thyself,” Forrest knew precisely who he was.

In Hinduism the self or soul, known as the Atman, is what transcends from one life to another during reincarnation through the work of karma. This Atman is our eternal soul and, according to Hindu philosophy, the individual must come to the realization that he is part of the one essence, the ultimate reality known as the Brahman. In the Upanishads, it tells us that in the beginning there was only the Atman, when the Atman spoke it said, “I am he” (Madhavananda, 1950). So now, it is believed, that when people first introduce themselves they say, “I am” or “It is I.” In an audiobook from the Out of Your Mind series, Alan Watts discusses an idea of the dreamer. It is similar to the film Inception, where someone could cram 75 years into their consciousness within a few hours of sleep. In this dream, they could do whatever they wanted: create forests, deserts, buildings, mountains, or sunsets, fight abominable monsters, become a superhero or save a damsel in distress. The dreamer could do a million things and live a vast multitude of lives. However, after some time the dreamer would get bored of having this control. It would be like playing a video game with all the “cheats” on. So after the dreamer gets bored, she would need something like the “random” button on an iPod because it builds up the suspense. There’s excitement in the unknown. There’s something appealing about danger and getting lost. We as humans love that sense of wonder, like watching a magic trick; if you knew how it was done, then it would lose all its mystery, it would not be any fun. So, in this dream, the
dreamer gets lost and forgets that she is dreaming. She moves from life to life, living through adventures, getting college degrees, becoming a soldier, an athlete, a sailor, or simply having a family. Then one day, through nirvana, she realizes that she is the one true essence. According to Hindu Philosophy, it is only when we realize that the Atman and the Brahman are one reality, we reach that enlightened state and wake up. In this situation, one would have to decide whether they were done dreaming, or would like to give it another shot or roll the dice one more time.

However, the Buddha did not believe in this way of thinking. He believed in the “five aggregates of attachment.” These five aggregates are the components that make up the human subject without remainder. They are:

1. Form (rupa)
2. Feelings and Sensations (vedana)
3. Perceptions (samjña)
4. Mental Formations (samskara)
5. Consciousness (vijñana)

These elements are always changing. Our body changes as we grow older, our feelings and perceptions change, nothing among them is permanent. The Buddha saw the aggregates and could find nothing that resembled the Atman because after all, there was no remainder among the components. So Buddhism adopted the idea of the Anatman (no self). The Buddha did not mean that there are no entities and that nothing exists. To have a permanent self would be to cling on to some idea of the ego. We are in constant flux and cannot be defined by a single component. In the Milindapañho (Milinda Panha), a text from the Buddhist Pali Canon, King Milinda brings a monk, Nagasena before him and questions him on the nature of the self. This is a very interesting story because while the text was written in the 2nd century BCE, there is also a similar
description of the story in the 39th chapter of the Tao Te Ching. The king asks the monk his name and he tells him that Nagasena is only a sound, a label, there is no thing there but only an idea. The king then asks about his practices, deeds, and his body, and then goes through all the aggregates. If there is no person “there” then who is it that benefits from these things, the king asks. So, Nagasena asks the king how he arrived at this place. The king replies a chariot, so the inquiry goes further. What is the chariot, Nagasena presses. Is it the pole, the wheels, the reins, and so on? He concludes that the chariot is the assemblage of the parts all working in unison. So like the chariot, Nagasena is the assemblage of the five aggregates (Strong, 1995). There is no individual permanent self, but many components working as one and nothing more.

3.1 First and Second Noble Truth

In our discussion about “Bad Faith” I talked about people that take on particular roles that they don’t truly believe themselves to embody. For instance, I could say I work in a restaurant, I put on a uniform and play as a waiter but that is not who I really am. A waiter is not how I define myself. By deceiving ourselves about who we are we cause some confusion. The fundamental principle of Buddhism is the teaching of the doctrine, The Four Noble Truths. It can be seen as treating someone for an illness: when someone is ill, we first identify the illness by its symptoms, make a diagnosis, and suggest a treatment. The first Noble Truth is that all of life is suffering (duhkha). Jenny wanted to be something better than who she was or how she saw herself. She saw that what she was doing was an act; it was some temporary role that she played to get her to what she really wanted to do. This is the second Noble Truth, desire or craving.

Jenny believed that one day she would become a better person than she was like a caterpillar becoming a butterfly. She suffered because of the struggle to be someone else. She wasn’t happy with herself. We can see Forrest’s confusion about this type of thinking from a
question Jenny asked while in her college dorm room. She asks him who he wants to be or who he one day dreams of being and Forrest replies, “Aren’t I going to be me?” (Zemeckis, 1994).

Forrest doesn’t see that who he is now will be different from the person he will be in the future. Lt. Dan had an intense amount of suffering because he believed that he was destined to die in the war. He was supposed to end his days on the field of battle with his men, “With dignity,” as he put it. Forrest saved his life despite his fateful lineage and he spent his days being haunted by it. He didn’t believe himself to be Lt. Dan Taylor anymore but someone else, someone robbed of his fate. So he and Jenny suffered greatly because they saw themselves as separated entities from what they aspired to be. The problem was that they did not see the nature of non-duality. There is no separation of one thing from the other such that, if they put on a uniform and they could be someone different. I did not put on a uniform and play as a Marine and then when my contract was up take my uniform off and magically become another person. I remained the same person, just as the waiter and the person playing as the waiter are the same person.

Jenny didn’t want to be someone who was abused as a child or had to take her clothes off in front of a crowd for money. She wanted to leave it and be someone else but she was haunted by her past. There are these events that happened and they are a part of her. There is nothing that could change that but she can accept that it happened. Lt. Dan is still Lt. Dan Taylor, as Forrest reminds him in the film. There is no separation from the soldier that fought in battle and the person who survived. The caterpillar may become a butterfly but it is still the same insect. We cannot see a duality in our nature because it isn’t there. Our actions and consequences are part of the same event. When we accept this in good faith or accept who we are, the suffering can begin to cease.
Trying to understand who we are can also be a very difficult thing to grasp. How should we define ourselves? Do I define myself or is it the people around me who define me? There is a popular commercial, on television for a Snickers candy bar. In this commercial actors like Joe Pesci, Robin Williams, and even Godzilla, appear in a normal situation with average people. Their character is angry or overzealous until someone gives them a Snickers, then they turn from the famous actor to an average person. The tag line is, “You’re not you when you’re hungry” (Abbott, 2012). The ad was done in good taste and it works quite well because we can all relate to being a bit irritated when we are hungry and impatient to have to wait for food. While I worked in a restaurant we had customers every day that were aggravated from the moment they walked through the door to the moment their meal arrived at their table. But, after they ate they seemed quite pleasant. It was almost as if there was a doppelganger sitting at their table in place of the original person that initially walked through the door and sat down. So, what does that mean, “You’re not yourself?” Who am I? Who am I supposed to be? When I introduce myself I will give my name, but is that me? Is that how I define myself? If I were to have another name would that still be me? The answer is, of course it would. If my name were Jeff or Harold instead of Robert, I would still be the same person that I am now. Well, one question I always had as a child is, “What if I had been born in another country or what if I had been born to different parents?” This leads me to the idea of the soul.

The soul seems to be an entity that exists somewhere within us, probably in our head or chest. Earlier I mentioned the alien from the film *Men in Black*. In the film, we see what appears to be an old man and he goes about his day, carrying his cat with him and has lunch with a friend. However, later in the film his head opens up and we find out there is a tiny alien working switches and levers inside as if the old man were a giant vehicle. That is similar to the Western
idea of the soul. We feel that our soul or our self is a tiny creature within a body. This body serves as a filter to the outside world. When some action occurs, I could say it happens to me, but what I mean is, it happens to my body. For example, something hit my leg or brushed up against my arm. Did it hit me or my leg? Is that leg me or just something that I own? A very funny comedian, Mitch Hedberg made a similar observation on his album, *Strategic Grill Locations.* He was talking about the idea of corn-on-the-cob and how strange it is that the corn is referred to being on the cob when that’s how it is in its natural state. “They should call that ‘corn’, and they should call every other version, ‘corn-off-the-cob.’ It's not like if you cut off my arm you would call my arm ‘Mitch,’ but then reattach it and call it ‘Mitch-all-together’” (Hedberg, 1999).

Although he is making a humorous observation, he has a point. If I were to cut off my arm you could not call that arm me. It is only a part that once belonged to my body but it is not who I am. If I lose it, it doesn’t change me. Lt. Dan may have lost his legs but that didn’t change the fact that he was still Lt. Dan Taylor.

Edmund Husserl called this center of ourselves the ego or as Edith Stein referred to it, the “zero point of orientation.” Objects may come close to us but they will never be able to touch this “zero point.” Now, we may use our organs for our perception but can we really say that our body and our ego are two separate entities? No, because as Husserl pointed out, the living-body and our ego-subjects are unified into the life-world. This is their non-dualistic nature. Although I have this “I,” this Atman, there is also what is encapsulating it. My ‘I’ does not exist without my living body nor vice versa. So Buddha presented the anatman There is no internal self that exists without the encapsulation of the whole. However, knowing this doesn’t settle the question of who we are because the “I” is always changing. So, in the discussion of Bad Faith, we soon find ourselves in a bind.
According to Sartre, it seems that the person who is trying to be of good faith might find themselves in a paradox:

[As soon as we posit ourselves as a certain being, by a legitimate judgment, based on inner experience or correctly deduced from a priori or empirical premises, then by that very positing we surpass this being - and that not toward another being but toward emptiness, toward nothing (Sartre, 2010).]

As humans we are not a “Being-in-itself” but a “Being-for-itself.” We do not fit into some role as does a waiter, soldier, or grocer. We are not defined by these titles. Although this is Sartre’s look at our roles in society and his idea of our freedom, this has a strong Zen “flavor.” In being a person, whether it is a waiter or soldier, I am not this person in the same way that a table is a table. I do not have a permanent position of who I am. I could say, “I am a giant bag of skin and bones and blood that walks and talks,” but is that really me? Is that how we define ourselves? In trying to define the self it becomes elusive. There is a constant flux. When I became a waiter, I was only working so that I could support myself through college. Then when I was a student, I was only doing that so I could become a graduate student. Then I will get a job and do that for a while but that is not me because I will one day retire and be something else. We are constantly becoming something. There is impermanence (anitiya) in our lives and so there is no atman there is only the anatman. There is nothing that is everlasting within us. So we define ourselves not by what we are, but by what we are not. This is a type of apophatic theology.

Apophatic theology is a way of defining God by the use of negative description. The Divine is seen as something so majestic that it is beyond human understanding. We cannot describe what the Divine is but it can be described by what It is not. This may be due to the limits of our language. How can we define something that is beyond words? There are only so
many adjectives I can use when trying to describe what God might be or what it feels like to reach enlightenment. This is also reflective in the opening lines of the Tao Te Ching, “The Tao that can be spoken is not the eternal Tao. The name that can be named is not the eternal name” (Lao-Tzu, 1994). We also see the apophatic description in the teachings of the Buddha. In trying to find the self he found that it was absent in our composition. We are not defined by our material form, feelings, perceptions, mental formations, or our consciousness. There was no atman to be found within us. So, Alan Watts says of this view that one might use the expression, “The true self is non-self.” (Watts, 1957). It is also in this negative description that we come back to the concept of the “Thunderous Silence.” When Vimalarkitri is asked to discuss the nature of non-duality, he remains silent. This “Thunderous Silence” is his way of answering the question; he doesn’t say what this non-duality is but gives its definition by what it is not. This is also a way to describe Sunyata, emptiness, but I will discuss that shortly. Again, we find this apophatic similarity in trying to define ourselves. In Bad Faith, Sartre shows us that we are not these roles which we play in society. We are not a constant self. We only know who we are by who or what we are not. In trying to be that role, we experience suffering. We are trapping ourselves in self-deception. When we find ourselves trapped, it is, as Sartre says, “One puts oneself in bad faith as one goes to sleep and one is in bad faith as one dreams...it is as difficult to get out of it as to wake oneself up” (Sartre, 2010). Lt. Dan suffered because he fell into the role of the soldier. He believed that was who he was and it was who he was destined to be. In his mind he could be no other being other than that. So in being unable to fulfill this role, Lt. Dan felt lost. He was stuck in the belief that he was what he was not. He was not a soldier or a “cripple.” He wasn’t even, “Lt. Dan Taylor,” the man born to fill in his family’s legacy. He was
none of these things because the idea of the self was an illusion. It is constantly changing and impermanent.

3.2 Third Noble Truth

This holding on to the self is what Alan Watts similarly described as holding on to one’s breath. When we hold on to our breath we suffocate. Nirvana, our second Noble Truth is translated as breathing out. So on our journey to end suffering we must remember to breathe out, to let go of our breath. Holding on to the self or our idea of ourselves will only cause suffering, as we have discussed. So, when we let go of this idea, of our forms, perceptions, and our conscious thoughts we let go of our self. In the book, *The Essence of Alan Watts*, Watts says, “To have faith is to trust yourself to the water. When you swim you don’t grab hold of the water because if you do you will sink and drown. Instead you relax, and float” (Watts, 1977). This was apparent in the film during the storm that hit the ocean while Lt. Dan and Forrest were trying to catch shrimp. At this point, all the other shrimping boats had gone to the harbor and found a port to wait out the storm. They were either fighting it or hiding from it. Our protagonists, however, decided to swim with it. They had gone into the storm. This is very much like Zen. It flows like water with as little resistance possible. It is in that resistance that we find suffering, when we try to go against the grain. When we accept nature and let go, we float with the water. As we saw from the film, their shrimp boat was the only one that survived while the others that shied away from the storm were damaged in the harbor. After the storm subsided, Lt. Dan looks at peace and he thanks Forrest for saving his life. He then falls into the water and floats away. He does not resist the water but instead he succumbs to it. He lets his *self* go and floats like a feather in the breeze. Only in letting go does Lt. Dan cease his suffering. In the *Sutta-Nipata* it says, “There exists no measuring of one who has gone out (like a flame). That by which he could be referred
to no longer exists for him. When all phenomena (dharmas) are removed, then all ways of
describing have also been removed” (Prebish, 2007). This going out is the breath of Nirvana. Lt.
Dan, extinguished his desire to be a soldier trying to follow his legacy. He no longer clung to his
past nor did he try to control his future, he was simply in the present.

Forrest didn’t cling to elusive concepts or struggle with the complexities of life. His
mother taught him that life was a cycle; death is a part of life and something that we must face
eventually. When she died, there was no struggle or raging against the dying of the light. She left
peacefully, accepting her fate. Forrest didn’t seem to dwell on her death. This doesn’t mean that
he didn’t love his mother, or Jenny, or Bubba, he just accepted their death as a part of life. He
didn’t carry the burden of emotions in the film, he didn’t bear malice towards the bullies that
pestered him and he didn’t harbor anger toward the difficulties that life gave him. He may have
gotten upset and fought two of Jenny’s boyfriends, but he didn’t take that anger with him. It
didn’t weigh him down. These events were just a part of his life. While he’s running across
America, at one point he steps into a pile of fecal matter. When this is pointed out to him he
merely says it happens sometimes. This implies the meaning of the phrase, “Shit happens.” It’s a
humorous phrase but, again, it has the “flavor” of Zen. In life, shitty things can happen and, like
Forrest, we could choose to just keep on running.

There might be some concern for Forrest’s obsession with Jenny. If Forrest doesn’t cling
to concepts or if he adopts the Zen Buddhist principle of “letting go,” then why does he seem to
be so attached to Jenny? Well, what we see in the film might not be an attachment as much as it
is a mindfulness of Jenny. He would think about her while he was in Vietnam or while he was
running but it never hindered what he was doing. His thoughts of her never became a burden
upon him. He did not become obsessed with her in a way that prevented her from doing what she
wanted to do. His desire for her was not a selfish desire. “But I thought about her a lot. And I hoped that whatever she was doing made her happy” (Zemeckis, 1994). He was mindful of her and how he felt about her, he loved her despite how she felt about him. He loved her for who she was. Forrest never tried to control Jenny, to do what she did not want to or to try and be someone else. He knew that she had to live her own life and, as his momma would say, find her own destiny. She had to be free to make her own decisions and accept the change in her life. Although Forrest was attached to his feelings of Jenny, we have to understand that he is also very much a human being. To control these feelings would be to assume that he was somehow separate from them. The emotions are a part of him and he accepts them, whether or not those emotions are returned.

This acceptance of the changes in life, good or bad brings up the concept of Dependent Origination. This can be also defined as causation or cause and effect. In popular culture this is known as the “Butterfly effect.” If a butterfly were to flap its wings in China, could it cause a hurricane in the Gulf of Mexico? The idea is that a tiny change of the butterfly flapping its wings might cause a ripple in the atmosphere and create a domino effect causing a hurricane somewhere else. This is a dramatic scenario but a useful concept in chaos theory. The point is that all things are connected, no matter how big or small. If anything is apparent from the film it is this concept. When Forrest was a child, his mother used to rent rooms in their house to travelers on the road. One day a man with a guitar was playing a tune and because Forrest had braces on his legs, he danced a little differently. The man seemed to take a liking to it. Later on, we see Elvis dancing in front of a crowd in the exact same fashion that Forrest was dancing. It goes on throughout the film: Forrest inspires John Lennon to write Imagine; he inspires bumper stickers and t-shirts; he inadvertently uncovers the Watergate scandal; he creates the Bubba
Gump Shrimp Company; and many more events that have shaped our culture. What we are seeing is that throughout history the “Forrest Principle” affects people’s lives all over the world. The Forrest Principle is also called, Dependent Origination, which teaches that all things exist as a result of the interdependence of their relationship with others. Nothings exists by itself, there are no independently existing entities, which brings us back to the concept of no-self and the idea of Sunyata.

Sunyata is a doctrine of emptiness or voidness. This might sound odd, one might ask, “If all things are connected, how can they be empty?” What this means is that we are without an independent self within us. We are not filled with some entity transcending from body to body like a soul. We are empty and dependent upon each other. Buddhist, Matthew Bortolin, describes a tree in the forest of Endor in his book, The Dharma of Star Wars, to describe sunyata. I’ll use a similar example but with the film, Forrest Gump. Think of the bench that Forrest is sitting on at the beginning of the film. That bench is made from a tree in a forest that started its life as an acorn. Before it could grow to a tree, it needed the soil and nutrients from the leaves of other trees around it. It needed water too. This water comes from lakes or the ocean. The sun heats up this water and as it is heated, it becomes vapor in the atmosphere. The trees help cool the environment and the change in temperature can cause precipitation. So the trees cause the rain as much as they rely on it. There is an interdependence in the environment. So, in the same way, Forrest is connected with the history of the world that we see in the film. In fact, all the events that we see in the film transpire, leading to his son being born. If Forrest Gump’s father had not left when he was a child, and Mrs. Gump had not done what she had to do to get Forrest in school, he might have never met Jenny, broken out of his braces, gotten a scholarship, gone to war, saved Lt. Dan and Bubba, travelled to China, and done all the other amazing things he did;
Forrest never would have had his son. A very positive thing happens when we begin to think this way. If we think back on all the events that transpired so that we can be here, the “result” is that they transpired just in the way they had to so I could be writing this and you could be reading it. It didn’t begin with our ancestors and forefathers, but they were a part of it. The choices they made eventually connected to our parents somehow meeting. The chance of their meeting could be something as simple as a kiss at a school dance like the plot to the film *Back to the Future*. It shows us that our existence, all existence in general, can be seen as quite a remarkable thing. However, Nagarjuna, a Buddhist philosopher from the 2nd century, claimed that *Sunyata* represents the middle way between existence and non-existence. There is a middle way between the emptiness of who we are, and who we are in connection with others. This explains the non-dualism of *Sunyata*.

I would like to bring up what we had discussed earlier about Heidegger’s concept of *Holzwege* or the Forest Paths. This is explained by the image of a clearing at the dead-end of a forest. When we come to the end of the forest path we see that there is nothing there. However, the clearing is not just the sense of nothing but of no-thingness. Heidegger saw that in this no-thingness we find ourselves. We are unconcealed. So in coming upon that anatman, the middle way between who we are and who we are not, we find ourselves. There is a non-duality between the forest and the clearing, existence and non-existence because they are not separate. They are part of the same thing. Forrest often reflects on the non-duality of nature. When he is telling Jenny of his adventures and the beauty of his surroundings he mentions that he could not tell where Heaven ends and Earth begins, or when he is discussing whether we have a destiny or whether we are floating on a breeze; he sees the connection between both views. He finds a middle way when looking at the world.
Before I move on to the fourth Noble Truth I would like to bring us back to the discussion about the Zen students and what the Zen master might have also meant by saying that they were a lot of stupid people. He might have also meant that they had empty minds or what is called No-mind (wu-hsin). This idea of no-mind is a spontaneity of the mind. It is a returning our mind to its natural state. This is the point of the koan. A koan is an unanswerable riddle designed to stump the person and quiet the mind. We find ourselves at a paradox and we cease thinking even if only for a moment. Some famous koans are, “What is the sound of one hand clapping?” “What came first the chicken or the egg?” or “If a tree falls in the forest…” Many of us, especially children will solve the one hand clapping, or if we feel clever might solve the other two. As we all know, dinosaurs were laying eggs long before chickens evolved so the egg came first. Also, sound is merely the interpretation of vibrations by our ear drums. So if there are no ear drums to interpret it, there is no sound, only a vibration. However, this isn’t the point. The point of the koan is to cease the racket in your mind. To calm the waves on the ocean of thought and be of no-mind. This is what is practiced in meditation. The difficulty arises when we try to quiet the mind. It is like saying, “Don’t think of pink elephants.” The first thing you are going to think of is a pink elephant. Another example is “Be spontaneous.” The whole point of being spontaneous is that it is not preplanned. If you plan on it, then that defeats the purpose. So, in trying not to think, our mind goes wild in thinking of ways not to think. The same thing happens when I try to sleep at night. Fifty percent of the things I worry about during the day happen in that last hour between when my head hits the pillow and my mind wanders into sleep.

The human mind is self-conscious. In trying not to think, we think about thinking and in trying to be happy, we burden ourselves with the struggle to be happy rather than just in enjoying ourselves. This is why holidays and birthdays are so stressful. We are daunted by the task of
trying to control situations that are quite beyond us. We try not only to be happy but to know we are happy. We want to feel happiness. The problem is that it is a spontaneous emotion. Think about laughter; when someone tells a joke, you laugh when you get the joke. If the joke has to be explained, then we don’t really laugh. We might chuckle to be polite or avoid embarrassment, but we cannot be forced to get a joke. The realization of a joke is like the realization of a koan. When we get the joke, our reaction is to laugh, our mind stops thinking and we have this positive feeling, even if only for a moment. We also hear this kind of realization in Zen tales where a master and student will be in a dialectic and the master will ask the student a question or a koan and the student will become enlightened by the realization of the answer (or the non-answer). In trying to be happy and maintain that happiness, we find ourselves stressed and miserable. Trying to hold on to happiness is like trying to hold our breath. We must remember to breathe out. So, holding on to these emotions or trying to control them is impossible. We must let them happen spontaneously.

Zen presents the concept of wu-hsin or no-mind. One who practices wu-hsin does not reflect upon himself. When performing an act, washing the dishes for instance, one’s mind does not think about a thousand things at once. It does not think about trying to hurry and finish washing the dishes to get to another task but, just washes dishes to wash them. It is just an act to act, there is no reflecting on it. When Forrest runs across the United States we do not see him deciding to go running. He just gets up from the porch and starts to run for no other reason than to run. When he got as far as he could, which was the ocean, he turned around and ran until he could not go any further. He moved without a destination, only with pure spontaneity. His mind was empty and he was not concerned with the past nor was his mind intent on the future. He was completely in the present. He was focused only on what he was doing and we learn this when we
hear him say, “When I got tired, I slept. When I got hungry, I ate” (Zemekis, 1994). We see a similarity to Po-chang, a Buddhist monk from the eighth century. Po-chang defines Zen by saying, “When hungry eat; when tired sleep” (Watts, 1957). There is a non-dualism in Forrest’s thoughts and actions because they are not split, but are one movement. Forrest does mention that when he was on his journey he would think of Jenny. Just as in meditation when the mind is to be still as calm waters, thoughts will pass through the mind. It is our natural mind after all. However, like the lake, our minds only reflect these images. They do not stick; it is not a picture only a mirrored image. So Forrest would not be stuck in the past thinking about Jenny or what could have been, nor was he stuck thinking of the future of what he might be. He was only concerned with what is happening now.

3.3 Fourth Noble Truth

Looking back at the Four Noble Truths we discussed Suffering. The Buddha teaches that all life is suffering and we have certainly seen it in Lt. Dan and Jenny. The second Noble Truth is Desire. This is why both of these characters were suffering. They wanted to be someone else or somewhere else. Their mind was clinging to the past, to the future, or what might have been. The third Noble Truth is Nirvana. Nirvana is the cessation of suffering. The liberation and breathing out. Finally, the fourth Noble Truth is the release from suffering by following the Eightfold Path. The list of this path is in no discernible order. There is no particular step by step process or any particular factor that is more important than another. The importance is that they are understood and followed. They are divided in three sections:

A. Wisdom (Prajña):

   Right View

   Right Intention
B. Morality (*Sila*):

- Right Livelihood
- Right Action
- Right Speech

C. Contemplation (*Samadhi*):

- Right Effort
- Right Mindfulness
- Right Concentration

I am going to explore the first two sections by looking at the battle scene in Vietnam. This is an important point in the film where our characters Lt. Dan, Forrest and Bubba face difficulty and hardships.

The First step is Right Understanding or Right View. This is usually seen as understanding the other Noble Truths and seeing the world for what it is. All three of our characters show a Right View during their time in war. Bubba and Forrest were looking out for each other in Vietnam and planned on going into business together after the war. Lt. Dan practices Right View in his concern for his men. He does what he can to keep them safe and even when he was sure he was going to die, his last action was to call in an airstrike. He had a proper outlook and it was not for his own concern but for the sake of his duty. Second is Right Intention: it can also be considered right thought because it is what we see as ethically the correct action. This is similar to Right Understanding. During the firefight Forrest goes back for his best friend Bubba; although this is his main concern, he sees other people in need of help and without a thought to his own wellbeing, he picks them up and carries them to safety.
Right Livelihood is our third factor and this is looking at our way of living. Lt. Dan took his livelihood very seriously. His job was his life and destiny, so he believed. His concern was for his men and his duty. We don’t get a sense for Lt. Dan’s politics or whether he believed in the war because the film is seen through Forrest, but we do get a sense that he was good at his job. As I mentioned earlier, even after he got shot and was ready to die in the jungle, he was calling in an airstrike as was his duty under those circumstances. Lt. Dan’s main priority was his livelihood. He was honest to his profession. The next factor is Right Action. Right Action deals with three themes; not taking what is not given, not taking a person’s life, and abstaining from exploiting one’s passions. Not taking what is not given is something our characters don’t deal with in this scene but Jenny does experience this as a child in the film. Taking what is not given can be more than merely stealing of objects, but also of someone’s body. Jenny was raped by her father and we get a strong sense of the devastation that can leave upon a person. Much of her suffering can be originated from this horrific event. The next theme might seem a little problematic because they are soldiers during a war. One way to look at this scene is that our characters do not take life because of something personal. They are not killing or committing acts out of passion or acting on their emotions, they are doing their duty. They are involved in this situation and they are not doing it out of revenge and they are not doing it to harm the enemy, they are only acting because it is what they have to do.

The abstinence of exploiting the passions is a difficult one because it is seen many ways. There are interpretations that see it as sexual abstinence or adultery and others as consumption of alcohol or narcotics. In a lecture called, *The World as Emptiness*, Alan Watts explains this precept by saying, “When you’re feeling blue and bored it is not a good idea to have a drink because you may become dependent on alcohol whenever you feel unhappy” (Watts, 2004). This
is similar to engaging in sexual relations when you feel sad or bored. This is an example of exploiting the passions. It says that we must not use sex or alcohol as an escape or as a substitute for some emotion. We see Lt. Dan drinking in excess after the war and Jenny engaging in drugs and sex with different partners. Engaging in these devices seems to draw these characters further into misery. It is not the devices themselves but the way they are used. Alcohol is fine in moderation but in excess it can be quite dangerous. Just as sex is fine as long as one is careful about how they share their body. We must be careful not to indulge in our passions for the wrong reasons. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle discusses the means of our passions.

> “Thus it is possible to go too far, or not far enough in fear, pride, desire, anger, pity, and pleasure and pain generally, and the excess and the deficiency are alike wrong; but to feel these emotions at the right times, for the right objects, towards the right persons, for the right motives, and in the right manner, is the mean or the best good, which signifies virtue” (Aristotle, 1943).

Aristotle is describing a middle way. We should not overindulge in our passions but at the same time they should not be denied. We are human after all; it is perfectly normal to have a drink every now and again, but it is important that we be mindful of our actions and not to drink too much or drink for the wrong reasons.

This brings us to our fifth factor, Right Speech which deals with what we say to each other. We should refrain from speech that is intended to deceive the other. After Forrest carries Bubba from the jungle to safety, Bubba asks him, “Forrest, why’d this happen?” To which Forrest replies, “You got shot” (Zemeckis, 1994). His answer is honest. He doesn’t lie to him or sugarcoat an explanation to make Bubba feel better. He answers as rightfully as he can.
The next section deals with contemplation, or as I have also seen it considered, meditation. So we come to Right Effort, which is preventing negative thoughts from arising by using positive ones. There is more to this than merely thinking positively. It is developing the mind to be in this state. It is a practiced effort. Forrest didn’t seem to dwell on negative thoughts. This we can attribute to his empty mind. In the face of such negativity he would also find a positive outlook. When he got shot in the buttocks he was delighted with the ice cream they gave him and that Lt. Dan was in the bed next to him. Later, when Jenny asks him if he was scared in Vietnam, he tells her, “Yes. Well,...I don’t know. Sometimes it would stop raining long enough for the stars to come out. And then it was nice” (Ibid). He uses this implicature to tell her that even though he was in a bad situation, he found some beauty out there. So, with Right Effort, we add some positive to replace the negative.

Right Mindfulness is similar to Right Effort, but instead of being aware of negativity it is being aware of ones thoughts, feelings, mental state, and the body. This is also called Right Recollection. It means being mindful of all our actions. The mind is clear and acts in accordance with the body. I used the example earlier of Forrest running when discussing the concept of no-mind; the same idea is seen here. We could also see it when he is playing ping-pong and putting his rifle together. He is completely focused, his mind and his body work in unison. His thoughts, like calm water, are reflected but do not stay. In The Way of Zen, Alan Watts speaks of Right Recollection saying it is, “A process of experiencing in which there is nothing to be grasped, as an object, and no one, as a subject, to grasp it” (Watts, 1957). There is no atman to hold on to these thoughts. There is nothing permanent that stays, everything changes. So, like our breath, thoughts come in and go back out. In being aware of our body and mind we are awake. This is
what the word Buddha means, the Awakened One. He has woken up from all these illusions and transitory things. His mind is focused on reality, the here and now.

The last factor on the path is Right Meditation. We don’t see Forrest meditating in the lotus position and chanting AUM, but he does simply sit. I say, “simply” because that is all he is doing. Sitting is a large part of Zen meditation called zazen. In Zazen Buddhists use sitting meditation and the practice of the koans to quiet the mind and achieve enlightenment. The body is relaxed and in a natural state. When we see Forrest he is simply sitting, he is not slouched and looking bored nor is he anxious waiting for the bus. He is still and relaxed, with his back straight for proper breathing, and his hands in his lap or on a box of chocolates. This is a type of Asana, a Sanskrit word for sitting or posture. The asana prepares the body for long periods of meditation.

Now, although Forrest is not sitting and meditating in the classic Buddhist or Hindu traditions, he is performing a type of meditation. Remember that when we try to be spontaneous we defeat the purpose of spontaneity, just as when we try to go to sleep at night our mind might thing of ten thousand things at once. So, it is the same when we try to meditate to reach a state of illumination, when we try to let go of our thoughts we find that this is one more thing to cling to. Often Buddhists will find themselves in a paradox, while attempting to achieve Nirvana, they realize that they desire to get rid of desire. So how do they get rid of it? By letting it go, and forgetting about their desire. In doing so, they will find that the spontaneity will happen by itself. “By itself,” is getting back to our true nature. There is an old Zenrin Kushu poem that says, “Sitting quietly, doing nothing, Spring comes, grass grows by itself”(Ibid). This is like the reflection of nature found in the Tao Te Ching. There is an attempt to bring the mind to its natural state. So, when Forrest sits he is not trying to meditate nor is he not trying to meditate. His mind is just empty and calm. He is sitting quietly and observing the world as it is, with no
judgment and no comment. In some way this is how we reach illumination. By not trying to grasp at enlightenment, by not trying to be an awakened being, but simply letting go, it happens all by itself.

The Mahayana school of Buddhism believes in the notion of a *Bodhisattva-yana* or the Vehicle of the Bodhisattva. Bodhisattva means, “Enlightened being,” but it refers to someone that adjourns enlightenment and through compassion is motivated to save other beings. When Forrest is in Vietnam, he runs to safety but realizes he must save Bubba. In the process, he sees others that need help and he feels he must save them despite his own safety and his original intention of saving his friend. This is the compassion of the Bodhisattva. He is not concerned with his own enlightenment, but the great vehicle, all beings can attain enlightenment. In this same way, Forrest helps the people he encounters, especially his friends. However, in saving Jenny and Lt. Dan, he doesn’t do it by himself. Only they can change their paths, Forrest only shows them the way. This is what is meant by the Tao. It literally translates to “The way.” It is the way of things. Similarly, the Buddha shows us the way to enlightenment with the Four Noble Truths. He cannot enlighten us himself, he can only show us the path. The ability to change someone’s life is not up to Forrest. He cannot force them upon the boat and carry them, they must do it themselves. So, they do. Lt. Dan finds his peace and at the end of the film we see him with his fiancé and new legs. Jenny turns her life around as well. She seems to have more stability with a job, apartment, and her son. She accepts Forrest’s love for her. He is their lineage. We must remember that death is a part of life. It is non-dualistic and a part of the change that we must all experience. So Forrest’s son is a part of that change that goes on.
3.4 Ferryboat

By presenting the film *Forrest Gump*, I am using this media as a vehicle to introduce these different philosophies; from pragmatics and communication and phenomenology to Zen Buddhism, we see the characters and events in the film embody these teachings. We should not, however, grasp too strongly on the film itself. After the message has been received, we should move on, and not clutch too tightly to the vehicle itself. In the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Wittgenstein says,

“My propositions are elucidatory in this way: he who understands me finally recognizes them as senseless, when he has climbed out through them, on them, over them. (He must so to speak throw away the ladder, after he has climbed up on it.) He must transcend these propositions, and then he will see the world aright” (Wittgenstein, 2010).

Alan Watts also describes this concept as a “Finger pointing at the moon.” The point is, once we see the moon, we no longer need the finger (Watts, 2004). This always reminds me of when I try to get my dog to get her ball, she just looks at my finger. It’s only after I walk over and touch her ball that she ignores my finger and wants to play. It is in this same way that after we have climbed the ladder, we can kick it away because we no longer need it. In a discourse from the Buddhist Pali Cannon, the *Alagaddupama Sutta*, the Buddha discusses a Raft Simile. He tells a story of a man that comes to a river and sees no way of crossing. He then composes a raft from grass, twigs, and leaves and is able to cross. After he reaches the other side he asks himself whether it would be wise to take the raft with him. The Buddha concludes that it would be wise for the man to leave the raft in the water and continue on his way. The raft has served its purpose
and is no longer necessary. The raft would be a burden upon him. So, the Buddha shows that his teachings should be discarded after the message is understood.

Let me be clear that just because we have seen *Forrest Gump* and understood it does not mean we should throw away our DVD, or in my case the VHS cassette. What I mean is not to cling too tightly to the teacher. When Forrest was running across the United States, he had a large crowd in his following. They followed him expecting him to teach them something because they assumed that he had some answers that they were looking for. When he finally did speak to his company, all that he said was, “I’m pretty tired. I think I’ll go home now” (Zemeckis, 1994). The group seemed disappointed as if they were cheated. They thought he was going to impart upon them great wisdom and give them answers, but all he did was show them the way. He could not solve their problems or give them what they desired because it is not his concern. This is not to say that their problems are unimportant, they are just not his to decide. Forrest claimed that his running was about putting his past behind him and taught nothing more than to live in that moment. While his followers looked to him to solve their problems or give them answers, they missed the lakes, rivers, mountains, sunrises, sunsets, and oceans that surrounded them. They were clinging to their past or future, to Forrest himself, and not to what was happening right in front of them. This is also the essential teaching of Zen Buddhism: If one keeps trying to change their past or control their future they will continue to suffer. When I think of this clinging to the past or to objects, I get the image of the Looney Tunes cartoon, Wile E. Coyote standing on the edge of a cliff as the rock breaks beneath him. As a large chunk of rock is falling, taking Wile E. with it, he clings onto the rock for support. The rock is falling and he is falling, but there is no amount of clinging that will stop him just as there is no amount of worrying that will solve our problems. The only thing that we can be certain of in our lives is that it cannot be controlled so
all that we can do is to let go and enjoy the adventure. “Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you’re gonna get” (Ibid).
References


Vita

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