

The Human Desire to Struggle on The Truman Show

Nathaniel Varen¹, Raka Meydha Putra Susanto²

Universitas Bina Sarana Informatika^{1,2}

e-mail: varen546@gmail.com¹, meydharaka@gmail.com²

Abstrak – Manusia selalu bermimpi untuk meraih kebenaran. Sesulit apapun itu, kebenaran telah tertulis dalam jiwa manusia. Itulah sebabnya manusia terus melangkah maju meskipun sulit. The Truman Show merupakan film satir sosial yang mengangkat tema kebenaran yang dikendalikan, keyakinan, dan perjuangan manusia. Komentar sosial The Truman Show tentang bagaimana media mengendalikan kehidupan manusia digambarkan oleh tokoh utamanya, Truman Burbank, seorang pria yang tidak menyadari bahwa hidupnya direkam sepanjang hari dan sepanjang malam. Tulisan ini bertujuan untuk menganalisis hakikat keinginan manusia untuk mengetahui kebenaran. Peneliti akan melihat perjalanan tokoh utama dari awal hingga akhir cerita. Penelitian ini menggunakan Metode Kualitatif dan filsafat Eksistensialisme sebagai landasannya.

Kata Kunci: Keinginan Manusia, Perjuangan, The Truman Show

Abstrak – Humans always dream of reaching the truth. No matter how hard it is, it is written in the human spirit. It is why humans keep moving forward despite how tough it is. The Truman Show is a social satire movie that explores themes of controlled truth, faith, and human struggle. The Truman Show's social commentary on how the media controls human life is depicted by the main character, Truman Burbank, a man who doesn't realize that his life is being recorded all day and all night. This paper aims to analyze the nature of the human desire to know the truth. The researchers will look at the main character's journey from the beginning until the end of the story. This research used the Qualitative Method and the Existentialism philosophy as its basis.

Keywords: Human Desire, Struggle, The Truman Show

INTRODUCTION

(Norlock, 2019) What happens if things do not become better? Contrary to more upbeat viewpoints that believe ending "the big ills of human history" is desirable and feasible, I contend that there is no chance for eradicating human-caused evils. We are better off with the heavy awareness that atrocities recur than we are with idealizations of progress, perfection, and completeness; a suitable ethic for living with such heavy knowledge could involve opposing evils, improving the lives of victims, and even enjoying ourselves. Improved ideas about what constitutes the good life and the objects of hope inspire a feminist ethic that is praxis-centered, nonideal, and supportive of moral motivation that endures and even cheers

At the beginning of the Seventh Book of *the Republic*, Plato introduces the allegory of the Cave. Part of its purpose is to provide a more detailed explanation of a simile he previously used (in the Sixth Book), the Divided Line, whose several sections stand for the four stages of knowledge and their respective objects of knowledge (the allegory of the cave). Another part of its purpose is to provide a picture that will clearly illustrate the human condition or experiences from the perspective of their advancement in intelligent apprehension. "Considerate a group of men living in an underground abode similar to a cave with an entrance that opens toward daylight," Socrates tells Glaucon and the other members of the small group at Polemarchus' residence. The entrance to the cave's lowest point is both long and wide, measuring the same as the cave itself. These males, whose legs and necks are so tightly bound that they cannot move and can only see what is in front of them due to the chains preventing them from moving their heads, have been in bands since they were young.

Envision a brilliant fire burning somewhere behind and above them, with a roadway at an elevation separating it from the inmates. Along this roadway is a low wall that resembles the screens jugglers erect, above which they display their puppets." "I see." Do you notice men carrying statues, different animal figures of wood, stone, and other materials, and numerous vessels that rise above the wall? Some people carrying these artifacts, perhaps predictably, chat, while others remain mute. "A peculiar image, and peculiar inmates." "Same as ourselves..." These inmates would believe that the only realities were the shadows (of the fabricated things) they saw shifting on the cave wall before them. Assume one of the inmates is freed, turned around, and guided toward the fire. Initially, he would be perplexed and believe his earlier experiences with shadows were more accurate than the items now being thrust upon him. Then, if he were dragged reluctantly up the steep and uneven cavern's ascent



and brought into the Sun's light, he would be initially dazzled but eventually grow accustomed to seeing things in this higher realm and eventually observe and think about the Sun himself. From there, he would conclude that the Sun is the creator of the seasons and years, the protector of everything in the visible world, and, in a sense, the source of everything that he and his companions used to see.

A cave that meets the specifications in this description would have an elevation like the one shown in the cut that goes with it. The cave is a metaphor that suggests the following conclusions and analogies: the ideal world, whose light and source of Being and Knowledge is the Form or Idea of the Good; the Cave-World, whose light is Fire; and the Visible World, whose light and source of both phenomena and perception of phenomena is the Sun. (Wright, 1906) Religious interpretations of the cave allegory read it as a tale that embraces the Orphic initiation ceremonies; the climb of the cave denotes the mind's release from the bonds of the body. Plato's Allegory of the Cave is one of the ideas that influenced many philosophies, especially the existentialism movement, which gained popularity in response to the nihilism movement.

Existentialism is sometimes referred to as the philosophy of stress, the philosophy of human life, or the philosophy of living (Dildor, 2024). Existentialism is linked to the names of French philosophers Simon de Beauvoir, JP Sartre, G. Marcel, A. Camus, and M. Heidegger, as well as Danish intellectuals S. Kierkegaard and K. Jaspers (Yeni Absah, 2020). Existentialism originated from the unstable world conditions caused by world conflicts (Purnama et al., 2022). According to Rasheed, existentialism is a literary and philosophical movement that started in the mid-to-late 19th century and gained popularity in France in the middle of the 20th century. According to the philosophical tenets of existentialism, people must determine their meaning for existing even though they live in a meaningless universe. They must make sensible decisions since they live in an irrational world. Existentialists place a strong emphasis on human existence, actions, freedom, and decision-making (Rasheed et al., 2021).

Existentialism holds that because everyone has free will, they can each select their own life's purpose. (Barrett, 1964). Jean-Paul Sartre popularized this philosophical concept (Burnham & Papandreopoulos, n.d.) Sartre believes that the meaning of life lies in our hands. For Sartre, the idea that consciousness is not a physical entity is crucial. It is not, first and foremost, that of which it is cognizant; nothingness is the fundamental quality of awareness. (Sartre describes human existence as existing "for-itself" and the existence of things as existing "in-itself.") It is not a cause-and-effect chain, nor does its identity resemble that of a substance. Hence, it is not constrained by the laws of things because it is not a thing. As previously noted, curiosity in existence characterizes existentialist themes and what makes human existence unique. Existentialism's emphasis on human accountability and the value of free will has greatly influenced morality. As a result, people now understand how difficult it is to make moral decisions and how important it is to have empathy, compassion, and understanding when moral ambiguity arises (Sasan, 2023).

This existential perspective emphasizes Sartre's claim that persons exist first and define their essence or identity by their activities. Existence comes before essence. As a result, the only person who can be held accountable for their decisions and deeds is the individual, who must exercise their freedom by consistently acting with intention in line with their guiding principles and beliefs. Sartre believes that his existence transcends his essence. Thus, his well-known adage, "Existence precedes essences," is applicable (Cussen, 2022). This viewpoint is unusual because something must have an essence before it can exist. Existentialism holds that human lives come before the essence. Similarly to plants, animals, and rocks, if they exist, their essences go before them. According to idealism, existence came after the essence. As a result, human beings differ due to a certain quality in their core. Therefore, human existence comes before human essence. The central tenet of existentialist philosophy is this theory (Kurniaman et al., 2023).

One of the most influential and controversial philosophical concepts that has dramatically influenced the development of intellectual history is the idea of essence, especially in metaphysics. Without a doubt, Aristotle's philosophy becomes a pillar in the discussion of essence, solidifying essentialism with his name and making his writings a crucial part of philosophy's history (Khodadadi, 2023). In Greek philosophy, "essence" refers to the essential qualities that characterize something. Aristotle believed that telos, or the intrinsic purpose or end goal of something, was intimately related to essence. For instance, the ability to cut is the essence of a knife, the ability to contain liquid is the essence of a cup, and the ability to sail on water is the essence of a boat. (Cussen, 2022) In traditional philosophical systems, essence usually comes before existence. A thing's ability to maintain its essential qualities determines whether it can continue to exist as it is; for example, a cup cannot be considered a cup if it cannot contain liquid. (Plantinga, 1983)

The Truman Show is one of the examples of an existentialist story. It is also reflected in many aspects of Plato's Allegory of the Cave; it gives insight into the depths of the human desire to search for the truth and to struggle. The show received critical acclaim from audiences; IMDB gave the movie an 8.2/10. Daveisit reviewed the movie

and props Jim Carrey for his fantastic performance. His effort in the film was perfect and deserved more credit. (*The Truman Show (1998)* - IMDb, n.d.) The Truman Show made its global premiere in Los Angeles on June 1, 1998, and was released across North America on June 5. In addition to opening to critical acclaim and earning multiple nominations for the 71st Academy Awards, 56th Golden Globe Awards, 52nd British Academy Film Awards, and 25th Saturn Awards, the movie was a commercial success, costing \$264 million worldwide.

Jim Carrey plays the title character of Truman Burbank in Peter Weir's 1998 satirical science fiction movie *The Truman Show*. Truman Burbank, the tale's protagonist, has unwittingly spent his entire life inside a giant television set. From infancy, Truman's life has been aired to the globe as part of a reality TV show called "The Truman Show." Everybody in Truman's world—the town, his friends, family, and coworkers—is an actor, and the show's creator, Christof, the broadcast's deity-like director, meticulously controls and manipulates every aspect of his surroundings. Seahaven, the town where Truman resides, is a man-made set shaped like a dome and intended to resemble the ideal, bucolic American community. The show has aired for thirty years with millions of viewers worldwide and tracks Truman's every move through covert cameras. But Truman has no idea that everything about his life is contrived and orchestrated.

In this research, the researchers aim to explore the film *The Truman Show* by analyzing the depiction of human desire and struggle, highlighting it as evidence of human existence. The previous study about existentialism has been conducted by (Suryani, 2017) with the title *A Kierkegaardian Existentialism in Rise of The Guardians Movie*. She used the same existentialism theory from a different philosopher, Soren Kierkegaard. She analyzed the main character's journey from the beginning of the story using Kierkegaard's three stages of existentialism theory. The result of this study is that the researcher found that Jack Frost, the movie's main character, passes the three stages of Soren's existentialism, which are aesthetic, ethical, and religious. To pass all these stages required some "leap of faith." The same research was also conducted by (Mart, 2012), who explored similar themes and ideas within the context of existentialism and its implications for understanding human existence. (Mart, 2012) Cagri's thesis, "Existentialism in Two Plays of Jean-Paul Sartre," used Sartre's theory of existentialism. He reviewed two of Sartre's dramas, *The Flies* and *Dirty Hands*. By doing this, he found that in his analysis, Sartre often employed specific themes in his works, such as absurdity, alienation, anxiety, and forlornness.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

For this study, a qualitative descriptive methodology was employed to explore the theme of human desire for struggle as depicted in *The Truman Show*. This method was chosen due to its effectiveness in capturing and presenting participants' interpretations in a straightforward, narrative style that closely aligns with the characters' experiences and the film's message. Qualitative descriptive methods are well-suited for research questions aiming to gather unembellished, coherent insights directly from participants' perspectives (Sandelowski, 2000). The research focused on collecting data from interpretive analyses of key scenes in the film. Data were then categorized into themes that illustrated the innate human inclination toward self-determination and conflict, as observed through Truman's experiences. By organizing the findings thematically, the study aims to provide a rich, accessible analysis of how *The Truman Show* reflects and critiques the human need for struggle as part of authentic self-realization.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The analysis below showed the researchers clear evidence of Truman's desire to struggle and pursue the truth. Throughout *The Truman Show*, Truman repeatedly demonstrates that the human drive to seek answers prevails despite numerous obstacles and attempts to suppress his curiosity. Initially, Truman appeared content with the life he knew, but a pivotal encounter with Sylvia sparked a profound shift in his worldview. This encounter planted the seeds of doubt and a yearning for something beyond the fabricated reality he inhabited. The show's director, Christof, implemented various strategies to maintain control over Truman and reinforce the illusion of his world. However, these efforts ultimately failed as Truman's determination and resilience overcame the barriers in his path. His journey underscores the universal human trait of striving for freedom and truth, even when faced with formidable challenges. This persistence highlights an intrinsic aspect of human nature: the desire to understand and transcend limitations, no matter the cost.

Throughout the movie, Truman realizes that his whole life is a fabrication made by a company. From beginning to end, his life is recorded and broadcast to the whole world. He does not realize this at first; instead, he gathers

the information bit by bit throughout the movie.



Figure 1: Truman picked up a mysterious lamp that fell in his backyard called “Sirius”

Sirius symbolizes bad omens or rebirth in certain mythologies. In this case, Truman's discovery of the lamp expresses the idea that his own reality is crumbling, which is a bad omen and starts the rebirth of Truman as a “True Man.”



Figure 2: Sylvia first reveals to Truman that all his life is fake and scripted.

Sylvia is a nobody in this show, yet she manages to attract Truman's attention. However, the production team always tried to keep Truman on the storyline to the point where they had to take Sylvia out of the picture. In this scene, Sylvia manages to contact Truman and reveals the truth of his life. After revealing the truth, the production team decided to eliminate her entirely. This was the first instance in which Truman got a confirmation that his reality was fake.

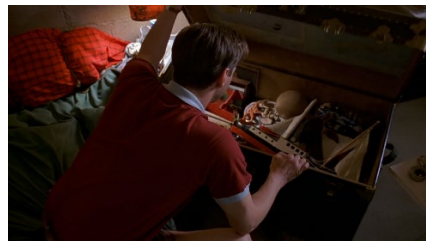


Figure 3: Truman unlocking his secret stash

In this scene, Truman looks at his memories in his secret stash, which contains numerous items related to his desire for an adventurous escape from his life.

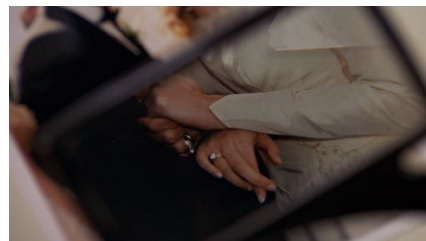


Figure 4: Truman analyzed his wedding picture as odd

Truman realized that his wife was crossing her fingers in their wedding photo, realizing that his wedding was a false marriage.



Figure 5: Little Truman climbed rocks

This scene shows us that Truman has always had an adventurous soul. Even when his parents forbade him from crossing the line, he was always that curious kid who wanted to explore.

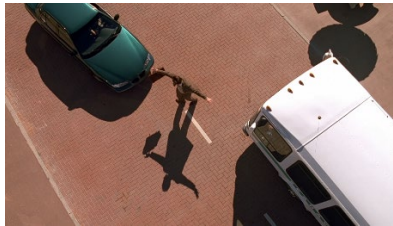


Figure 6: Truman felt something was off

Truman started to notice that something felt off. In this scene, after an abrupt issue in which he heard a radio transmission from the wrong frequency, he started to suspect something was off. In this shot, when he tried to stop these two cars, no one appeared to be mad, which was weird.



Figure 7: Truman looking at a poster plane struck by lightning.

Truman tried to book a ticket to Fiji through a travel agency, but oddly enough, a poster with a threatening tone is out of place considering the location. This proves that the production team wants to keep him locked up.

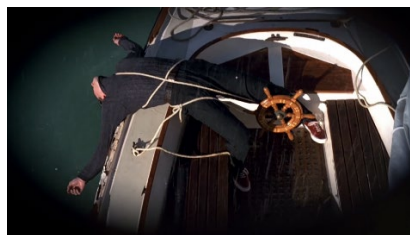


Figure 8: Truman goes through a storm in the middle of the sea to go to Fiji.

In the climax of the story, despite several warnings and even an attempt by the director to drown him, he is still adamant about seeing things through to the end, even if it costs him his life. His desire to escape appears the strongest here, with Truman mocking them, saying things like, "Is this the best you can do?"

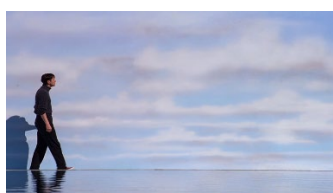


Figure 9: After going through his trauma and storm, Truman discovers he lives in a dome.

Truman discovers that after all the pain he has endured, he finally finds the truth that the director has fabricated his whole life. Christof (The Director) has a final conversation with Truman, trying to convince him that his world, even though fake, is far better than the real world, which is full of lies and deceit.



Figure 10: Truman's final bow

After a long conversation with Christof, Truman still wanted to go to the real world despite knowing that the real world was so much worse than his “fabricated” world. With his final catchphrase, “In case I don’t see ya, good afternoon, good evening, and good night,” he bowed and entered the real world. In this shot, we see that the door that leads to the real world is colored black, surrounded by clear colors (his world), symbolizing that the real world is full of lies and sorrow, but even then, Truman still steps into the unknown.

CONCLUSION

The analysis of *The Truman Show* shows that the desire to struggle and search for the truth is a natural part of being human. Truman's journey highlights this, as he moves from accepting his life as it is to actively seeking freedom and the truth. Despite many challenges and attempts to control him, Truman's determination does not waver, and he eventually escapes his fake world. This story reminds us that the strong human spirit will always push through obstacles to find meaning, freedom, and truth.

REFERENCE

- Barrett, W. (1964). *What is existentialism?* 3(2), 91–102.
- Burnham, D., & Papandreopoulos, G. (n.d.). *Existentialism* | *Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy*. Retrieved December 10, 2024, from <https://iep.utm.edu/existent/>
- Cussen. (2022). *Nihilism vs. Existentialism vs. Absurdism*. <https://www.thelivingphilosophy.com/p/nihilism-vs-existentialism-vs-absurdism>
- Dildor, N. (2024). *Existentialism - Philosophy Of Life*. 30(March), 1–5.
- Khodadadi, H. (2023). ON ARISTOTELIAN ESSENCE. *Revista Controvérsia*, 19(3), 55–67. <https://doi.org/https://doi.org/10.4013/con.2023.193.04>
- Kurniaman, O., Copriady, J., & Firdaus, L. . (2023). a Study on the Existentialism and Its Relevance To the Reading Learning for Elementary School Students. *JMIE (Journal of Madrasah Ibtidaiyah Education)*, 7(2), 16. <https://doi.org/10.32934/jmie.v7i2.512>
- Mart, C. T. (2012). Existentialism in two plays of Jean-Paul Sartre. *International Journal of English and Literature*, 3(3), 50–54. <https://doi.org/10.5897/ijel11.042>
- Norlock, K. J. (2019). Perpetual Struggle. *Hypatia*, 34(1), 6–19. <https://doi.org/10.1111/hypa.12452>
- Plantinga, A. (1983). On existentialism. *Philosophical Studies*, 44(1), 1–20. <https://doi.org/10.1007/BF00353411>
- Purnama, A. Y., Putri, A. S., & Saputri, R. (2022). Philosophy of Existentialism: Individual Awareness in Indonesian Education. *Radiant*, 2(3), 220–227. <https://doi.org/10.52187/rdt.v2i3.84>

Rasheed, N., Khan, M. Y., & Rasheed, S. (2021). Philosophical Exploration of Absurdism and Existentialism: A Comparative Study of Kafka's Work *The Metamorphosis* and *The Trial*. *Global Social Sciences Review*, VI(II), 94–100. [https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2021\(vi-ii\).10](https://doi.org/10.31703/gssr.2021(vi-ii).10)

Sasan, J. M. (2023). Existentialism and Its Influence on Our Understanding of Knowledge, Truth, Morality, Values, and Religion. *European Journal of Learning on History and Social Sciences*, 1(1), 40–48. <https://doi.org/10.61796/ejlhs.v1i1.11>

Suryani, A. N. (2017). JACK FROST: A KIERKEGAARDIAN EXISTENTIALISM IN RISE OF THE GUARDIANS MOVIE. *Jurnal Akuntansi*, 11.

The Truman Show (1998) - IMDb. (n.d.). Retrieved October 4, 2024, from https://www.imdb.com/title/tt0120382/?ref_=nv_sr_srsrg_0_tt_6_nm_2_in_0_q_the%2520truma

Wright, J. H. (1906). *The Origin of Plato's Cave Author (s): John Henry Wright Source : Harvard Studies in Classical Philology, 1906, Vol . 17 (1906), pp . 131-142 Published by : Department of the Classics, Harvard University Stable URL : <https://www.jstor.org/stable/. 17>, 131–142.*

Yeni Absah, P. L. A. S. L. (2020). the Thought of Human in Existentialism. *European Journal of Human Resource Management Studies*, 4(1), 72–84. <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.3732228>