

Opinion

Odysseus and His Journey and Ours: Further Short Thoughts

Michael F Angel*

Independent Contractor, USA

*Corresponding author: Michael F Angel, Independent Contractor, Johns Creek, GA, USA.

Received Date: 27 July, 2026 ; Published Date: 10 August, 2026

Keywords:

Odysseus; The Odyssey; Hero's Journey; Human Condition; Lifelong Learning; Mentorship; Virtue; Subjective and Objective Experience

Citation:

Michael FA* (2026) Odysseus and His Journey and Ours: Further Short Thoughts. Digit J Humanit Soc Sci 1(1): 105.

DOI: 10.63592/ DJHSS/105

Abstract

This third entry on The Odyssey offers further reflections on its themes, which have perplexed, fascinated, and taught many people since antiquity. The story of Odysseus can be understood as a representation of the human condition, requiring individuals to confront and, hopefully, overcome real and perceived challenges. Life is a journey in which challenges may be physical and objective or psychological and subjective. Throughout this journey, people must balance thinking and doing, endurance and persistence, and the acquisition and application of knowledge. Mentors can also play an important role throughout life. The journey can be dangerous and unpredictable, and its challenges may be physical, mental, emotional, or combinations thereof. Yet the journey remains an opportunity for learning, adaptation, and personal development.

"To be is to do."
"To do is to be."
"Do be do be do."

A popular humorous aphoristic formulation, circa 1995.

Introduction

Christopher Nolan's *The Odyssey* provides a contemporary opportunity to reflect on the multifaceted nature of the journey, a theme central to the human condition. The continuing cultural interest in Homer's *Odyssey*, together with contemporary interpretations such as Nolan's forthcoming adaptation, provides a useful point of departure for considering why the journey remains such a powerful metaphor. Ryan Holiday, in his writings on Stoic philosophy, examines related themes through the teachings associated particularly with Marcus Aurelius [1]. Like other historical figures, Marcus Aurelius had limitations and existed within the social and political circumstances of the Roman Empire. His relationship to the treatment of Christians during his reign has been debated by historians, and the extent of his personal responsibility for persecutions remains a matter of historical interpretation [2]. Nevertheless, Stoic philosophy offers a number of useful ideas for navigating life's challenges. The development of moral thought has also emphasized the importance of recognizing human weaknesses and cultivating virtues. The seven deadly sins developed within the Christian tradition over several centuries and were further systematized by theologians including Gregory the Great and Thomas Aquinas [3] (Table 1). These concepts provide one framework for considering recurring human weaknesses.

Table 1: Seven Deadly Sins

Seven Deadly Sins
Greed
Gluttony
Anger
Sloth
Envy
Lust
Pride

The traditional concept of the seven deadly sins can be contrasted with the seven virtues, four of which have roots in classical philosophy and three of which developed within Christian theological tradition [4] (Table 2). Within Christian theology, these virtues are understood as having a divine rather than merely human foundation. Vost notes that Aquinas regarded pride as the most serious of the deadly sins [5]. The concept of pride, however, can also be understood differently across cultures and historical periods.

Classical Virtues	Christian Virtues
Prudence	Faith
Temperance	Hope
Fortitude	Love
Justice	

These traditions provide one way of considering how people may confront weaknesses and develop qualities that assist them in navigating life’s journey.

Cross-Cultural Perspectives and Serendipity

Cross-cultural traditions have also contributed to understanding the human condition. One example is the fairy tale *The Three Princes of Serendip*, from which the word *serendipity* is derived [6]. The story illustrates the value of observation, intellectual flexibility, and the ability to recognize unexpected connections. A significant insight may arise unexpectedly, although the circumstances under which it occurs cannot always be predicted. A related idea appears in the teachings of Jesus. In two parables, the Kingdom of Heaven is compared with a treasure discovered in a field and with a valuable pearl sought by a knowledgeable individual [7]. These stories can be interpreted as illustrating two complementary forms of discovery: an unexpected discovery that occurs during ordinary activity and a discovery that follows from accumulated knowledge and purposeful searching. Both examples are relevant to the journey of life. Some

opportunities are encountered unexpectedly, while others become possible through preparation, experience, and persistence.

Life Is a Journey

Holiday’s writings on Stoicism provide another perspective on the challenges involved in navigating life [1]. The journey metaphor provides a useful framework for considering the many resources that people may require when confronting physical, psychological, social, and intellectual challenges.

Table 3: Challenges in the Journey of Life

Objective Challenges	Subjective Challenges
Strength	Self-questioning
Endurance	Considering alternative perspectives
Persistence	Clarifying one’s perception

These qualities represent only part of what may be required. A person’s ability to navigate life also depends on practical skills, knowledge, social abilities, and lifelong learning.

Table 4: Skills and Knowledge for Lifelong Development

Area	Examples
Practical skills	Cleaning, shopping, cooking, household tasks, basic repairs
Personal development	Self-discipline, identifying strengths, finding meaningful activities
Communication	English, written communication, interpersonal skills
Academic knowledge	Mathematics, science, history, geography, civics
Cognitive development	Concentration, critical reading, flexibility, creativity
Cultural development	Reading, travel, music, cultural awareness
Physical development	Play, physical activity, endurance
Financial awareness	Understanding money and basic financial decisions
Lifelong learning	Learning from books, people, experience, and travel

This is a substantial list of abilities that may contribute to successful navigation of life. It should not be understood as a comprehensive or universally applicable list, but

rather as a collection of examples illustrating the breadth of skills and knowledge that may be useful throughout the lifespan. First, humans can develop multiple physical, mental, and emotional abilities with appropriate parental, educational, and social support. Second, physical abilities and other capacities change throughout the lifespan, while many cognitive and emotional skills can continue to develop throughout adulthood. Third, mentorship can remain valuable throughout life. People may be among the most immediate sources of mentorship. However, history, religion, philosophy, literature, education, and personal experience can also provide enduring forms of guidance. Mentorship does not necessarily require a formal mentor; individuals may learn from people they know as well as from the accumulated knowledge of previous generations.

The Continuing Journey

The journey represented by Odysseus is therefore more than a physical passage from one location to another. It can also represent intellectual, psychological, moral, and social development. The traveler encounters obstacles, makes decisions, experiences setbacks, receives assistance, learns from experience, and continues moving forward. The distinction between objective and subjective challenges is particularly important. A physical obstacle may be observable by others, whereas a perceived obstacle may be influenced by an individual's interpretation, expectations, fears, or prior experiences. Successful navigation may therefore require both endurance and the willingness to reconsider one's understanding of a situation.

This is one reason that mentors, teachers, friends, family members, books, history, philosophy, and religion can all have value. They provide alternative perspectives that may help individuals recognize what they cannot see from their own position. The modern digital age introduces another dimension to this journey. Digital technologies provide unprecedented access to information, communication, education, and creative tools, but they may also introduce cognitive, social, and educational risks [8]. Artificial intelligence is an especially important example because it can assist with learning and problem-solving while also creating new questions concerning dependence, critical thinking, judgment, and the development of independent skills. Thus, the challenge is not simply to accept or reject new technology. Rather, individuals must learn how to use it thoughtfully while retaining the capacity to think, evaluate, create, communicate, and act independently.

Concluding Thoughts

The journey of Odysseus provides a useful metaphor for the journey of human life. The challenges encountered along the way may be physical or psychological, objective or subjective, expected or unexpected. Successfully navigating them may require strength, endurance, persistence, knowledge, practical skills, flexibility, and the ability to learn from others. Ancient philosophy, religious traditions, literature, and history provide numerous examples of people attempting to understand these challenges. The concepts of virtues and vices offer one framework for considering human strengths and weaknesses, while the idea of serendipity illustrates how unexpected discoveries may become meaningful when individuals possess the flexibility to recognize them. The journey does not end with physical maturity. People can continue learning, developing cognitive and emotional skills, acquiring practical knowledge, and benefiting from mentorship throughout life. In this sense, the journey of Odysseus remains relevant because it reflects an enduring human problem: how to navigate an uncertain world while learning from experience and maintaining the ability to adapt. The modern digital and AI era adds another set of opportunities and challenges. These technologies can expand access to knowledge and assistance, but they also require individuals to exercise judgment and preserve independent cognitive abilities. The task is therefore not simply to move forward, but to learn how to navigate a changing environment wisely. Odysseus's journey may consequently be understood as both an ancient story and a continuing metaphor. The destination matters, but so do the experiences, choices, relationships, failures, discoveries, and lessons encountered along the way. In that sense, the journey of Odysseus remains, in important respects, our journey as well.

Conflict of Interest: The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

Financial Support and Sponsorship: No financial support or sponsorship was received.

References

1. Holiday R (2025) *The Daily Stoic: 366 Meditations on Wisdom, Perseverance, and the Art of Living*. Portfolio, NY, USA.
2. Keresztes P (1968) Marcus Aurelius a persecutor?. *The Harvard Theological Review* 61(3): 321-341.

Digital Journal of Science (DJS)

3. Ostberg R (2026) Seven deadly sins. Encyclopaedia Britannica.
4. Encyclopaedia Britannica Editors (2026) Seven virtues. Encyclopaedia Britannica.
5. Vost K (2026) Presenting the deadliest sin in the world. Catholic Education Resource Center.
6. Anonymous (2017) The Three Princes of Serendip: A fairy tale and the origins of serendipity.
7. The Holy Bible, King James Version. Matthew 13: 44-45.
8. Michael FA, Evangelos S, Angelo S (2025) Potential advantages of and risks of artificial intelligence in medical/surgical education: Can the genie be controlled? Glob J Otolaryngol 28(2): 556233.