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Final Paper (Prompt 5)

Friedrich Wilhelm Nietzsche was a German philosopher who wrote The Birth Of Tragedy Out Of The Spirit Of Music. In this essay, Nietzsche makes a claim that “the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon.”. This means that Nietzsche believes that art is not only a form of human activity but also the highest form of expression of human consciousness and spirit. Human existence is solely by the value of aesthetics. Essentially, beauty is based on artistic expression rather than the knowledge of rational and moral ideas. In this paper, I will discuss my position on this idea with an example of popular art that agrees with my position.

After reading The Birth Of Tragedy, I have been able to come to the conclusion that I do in fact agree with Nietzsche’s point of view and personally do agree that art is one of the highest forms of expression someone can use to convey a feeling, thought or anything else in-between that they wish to do so.

Nietzsche claims that “art derives its continuous development from the duality of the Apolline and Dionysia;”[[1]](#footnote-0) meaning he uses the Greek Gods Apollo, the God of music, poetry, art, prophecy, truth, archery, plague, healing, sun, and light and the Greek God Dionysus, the God of fertility, wine, and pleasure. He uses the names of these Gods in order to explain that the ideas they stand for go hand in hand with the ideas he wants to convey. Nietzsche claims that dreams and intoxication are the two psychological states that relate to Apollo and Dionysus. In regards to the feeling of intoxication, some forms of art such as dance and music can create a feeling of intoxication. Music can create a feeling of euphoria, especially when the artist of the song expresses emotions or thoughts that the person listening can relate to. When watching a dance, the person watching can experience the same thing, however, the person or people actually performing the dance may experience a feeling of ecstasy, a type of feeling that completely takes over oneself, a feeling of great joy. Intoxication is a way for people to break free of the troubles of life but the feeling of intoxication is only beneficial when it is used in moderation, otherwise, this feeling can become less of a way to become creative and more of a way to freeload around life. Concerning dreams, Nietzsche says that “The beautiful illusion of the dream worlds, in the creation of which every man is a consummate artist, is the precondition of all visual art, and indeed, as we shall see, of an important amount of poetry.”[[2]](#footnote-1), meaning that dreams are the start of all creation, artistic creation that is. Dreams are the source of artistic inspiration and creativity and he backs this up with the note that the Greeks believed dreams were a way to connect with a deeper and more divine being than ourselves, which is essential to the process of creating artistic works. Dreams are an escape from reality, arguably the only escape from reality a person can achieve to take a break from the stresses life throws upon us every day. As stated previously, Nietzsche’s view of ecstasy and its use in creating works of art only works in moderation, and if used incorrectly, can lead a person to become addicted to seeking pleasure rather than using it for a higher goal. Broadly, Nietzsche sees the feeling of intoxication and ecstasy as a powerful way for humans to be able to seek inspiration and creatic something special, but need caution when doing so.

The next thing that Nietzsche talks about is the idea that the best thing for a person to have is not knowledge of moral and rational ideas, but rather the aesthetic experience of life itself.

One of the philosophers that we have discussed in class this semester who gives an opposing standpoint to Nietzsche’s idea is German philosopher, Immanuel Kant. In his essay called The Metaphysics Of Morals, Kant explains that “rational nature exists as an end in itself. The human being necessarily represents his own existence in this way; so far it is thus a subjective principle of human actions.”[[3]](#footnote-2) which shows that Kant believes that rational ideas are the principle to the human experience. I would have to disagree with Kant, because, like Nietzsche, I believe that forms of art are the key to the human experience. Kant also expresses that he believes that “Immaturity is the inability to make use of one’s intellect without the direction of another. This immaturity is self-incurred when its cause does not lie in lack of intellect, but rather in lack of resolve and courage to make use of one’s intellect without the direction of another.”[[4]](#footnote-3). With this idea in mind, Kant is saying that as humans, we can have the ability to use our intellect without restrictions on what we use it on. In this sense, we can imagine that a person who has the intellectual ability to create something society would deem as ‘art’, has to at least have some sort of maturity about them. There is a stigma around people who are able to create amazing works of art are crazy or there is something special or weird about them, but I would say that these people are tapping into a certain type of intellectual ability that other people have not been able to figure out how to access.

Without music, without dance, without art, what are humans supposed to enjoy? Any form of art you can think of leads people into a new world, a new dimension of life. There is great joy found in being able to escape from reality and still be able to come back into reality without all the issues we were able to observe in the art that we experienced from afar. One example of popular art that comes to mind is the music video for American rapper Childish Gambino (Also known as Donald Glover)’s song “This Is America”[[5]](#footnote-4). The song was released on May 6, 2018, and tells the story of what life is like as a Black person in America today and American culture as a whole. The song contrasts what the experience of an African American in America feels like, using brutal honesty but using a carefree type of chorus with aggressive and intense verses. This video won best music video at the Grammies the year it came out and had an incredible amount of social impact not only in the United States but worldwide. In the video, Gambino portrays these things with dances while violence and chaos happen in the background without him seeming to notice. He essentially plays the character of America itself, from violence to the use of entertainment as a distraction from what really goes on in this country. I could write an entirely separate paper on this video alone because everything Gambino put into this video was so incredible and well prepared from the costumes, the beat, the lyrics, and everything in between showcase how art, and in this case, specifically, music is able to allow the person creating it to express their emotions fully and share them with the world. There would also have to be a sense of courage in order to share such deep and thought-out emotions and thoughts with the world because humans, by nature, are judgemental creatures and backlash is always a possibility. However, the artist benefits from this, but the observers also benefit. The listener or watcher is able to experience the emotions and thought processes of the artist without having to leave the comfort of their own life and have an experience that is unique, but also universal. To keep the idea of music as an art form, artists who create music are creating stories in their songs. Storytelling has been a way for people to explain feelings or emotions, thoughts and ideas for thousands of years and music has also been a way for people to express emotions or create a certain emotion for someone to feel when listening. Music is a way for people to become engaged in the things around them and when the artist is successful, a certain tune will evoke these feelings for the listener.

Nietzsche uses The Birth of Tragedy as a way to justify that knowledge is not the key to a wonderful life, but rather creativity. Everything in this world is at least somewhat creative and somebody had to consciously think about what it is they were making, the logistics of it, and whether or not it would be something pleasing to look at. This is why I agree with Nietzsche’s claim that “the existence of the world is justified only as an aesthetic phenomenon” because, without the aesthetics of creativity, the world would be a dark and boring place. People make the world and Nietzsche understood this way before he would have been able to comprehend the amount of creativity people in the world have nowadays.

1. Friedrich Nietzsche, The Birth of Tradegy, trans. Shaun Whiteside, 14 [↑](#footnote-ref-0)
2. Nietzsche, The Birth of Tradegy, 15 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
3. Immanuel Kant, Groundwork for the Metaphysics of Morals, trans. Mary Gregor, 37 [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
4. Immanuel Kant, What is Enlightenment?, trans. Pauline Kleingeld, 17 [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
5. Childish Gambino, This is America [↑](#footnote-ref-4)