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# F. NIETZSCHE IR RELIATYVISTINĖS MENO FILOSOFIJOS KONTŪRAI

## Nietzsche and the Outline of a Relativist Philosophy of Art

### SUMMARY

The paper attempts to reveal the originality of Friedrich Nietzsche's solution to philosophical problems. Using Schopenhauer's metaphysics of irrational will power, Nietzsche formulates a new non-classical relativist philosophy of art. Nietzsche gives it a solid empirical basis by associating it with human existence. Nietzsche's "philosophy of life" is an attempt to change the very essence of predominating regulations in classical metaphysical Western philosophy. Also it avoids the abstract observative nature of rational philosophy and its irreverent attitude towards the problems of human existence. From here follows a fierce criticism of rational thinking and a huge tendency of ontologisation and aesthetisation of philosophical themes which emphasizes the means of artistic expression. When treating the problems of individual human existence, the followers of non-classical philosophy of art relied on an understanding of being as non-substantial (personality is not something given but a totality of constantly emerging potentialities) and at the same time subjectivized their ontological problems. Thus, the strengthening of subjectivist tendencies in post-Hegelian philosophy of art reached the culmination of its development.

### SANTRAUKA

Straipsnyje siekiama atskleisti įtakingo vokiečių mąstytojo Friedricho Nietzsche'ės filosofinių problemų sprendimo originalumą veikaluose. Remdamasis Schopenhauerio iracionalios valios metafizika, Nietzsche kuria naują neklasikinę reliatyvistinę meno filosofiją, tiesiogiai susijusią su žmogaus būtimi ir suteikia jai tvirtą teorinį pagrindą. Jo „gyvenimo filosofija“ tai – bandymas paneigti pamatinius anksčiau vyravusios klasikinės metafizinės filosofijos principus, kuriuos jis aiškino kaip platoniškos dualistinės metafizikos sklaidą Vakaruose. Iš čia seka radikali racionalaus mąstymo kritika ir galinga filosofinės problematikos ontologizavimo ir estetinio tendencija, kuri skleidžiasi neklasikinės meno filosofijos šalininkų veikaluose. Gvildendamas individualios žmogiškosios būties problemas, Nietzsche, kaip ir kiti neklasikinės meno filo-

RAKTAŽODŽIAI: Nietzsche, Schopenhaueris, neklasikinė meno filosofija, gyvenimo filosofija, grožis, menas, estetika.  
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sofijos šalininkai, rėmėsi ne substancine būties samprata (asmenybė nėra kažkas duota, o nuolat atsirandančių galimybių visuma) ir kartu subjektyvino ontologinę problematiką. Taigi subjektyvistinių tendencijų stiprėjimas pohegeliniėje meno filosofijoje pasiekė kulminacinį vystymosi tašką.

In the Western intellectual landscape of the last few centuries, the German thinker Friedrich Nietzsche (1844–1900) is undoubtedly one of the most significant and controversial figures; his texts are a goldmine for the history of aesthetics and the philosophy of art. The fascination of Nietzsche's words and thought lies in their universal nature, their openness to lively impressions of the world around man, and their rejection of the dogmatic intellectual schemata of classical Western philosophy. He turns the basic problems of the human condition into authentic thought.

Nietzsche – the last 19th-century German thinker of European stature – became a symbol of the new, nonclassical aesthetics and of frank thinking, both of which reflected fundamental changes in Western philosophical consciousness during the preceding hundred years. This genius's prophetic words that “some are born posthumously” should be applied, first of all, to him, for none of the other great thinkers of the late 19th century influenced the artists of later generations as much as he did – this uncatégorizable destroyer of the mythologems of classical aesthetics. Nietzsche achieved much by dethroning the principles of metaphysical thinking that had flourished in the Western intellectual tradition, and he developed his own distinctive style of aesthetic expression, which differed from the academic jargon that had formerly dominated the German philosophy of art.

As Bertrand Russell justly noted, “Nietzsche, though a professor, was a literary rather than an academic philosopher” (Russell, 1967, p. 760). For Nietzsche the highest praise for a philosopher nurtured by the study of classical philology is to be compared to an artist. This fact explains his constant effort to give his philosophy a poetic or artistic form. He admits *that he values the opinions of artists more than the thoughts of all preceding philosophers, for artists have not strayed from the wide road that life follows. They have loved everything that belongs to this world and have treasured their senses.* Thus, a philosopher has to be a good writer and constantly cultivate his style. Understanding the refinement of style as also the cultural enhancement of a thinker, he devoted much attention to the artistic form of his works. What eventually became established in Nietzsche's works – an aphoristic manner of explicating ideas linked by a common theme – was determined not so much by his impulsive character or admiration for French essays as by his health problems. Struggling with progressive nearsightedness and suffering from constant migraine attacks, he could not work at his desk for long periods of time. This constant struggle with a mental disorder forced him to train his will and choose a concise way of expounding his thoughts that, despite the independence of their separate parts, preserves their integrity.

The concise expression of his ideas and his fluent language accord well with the impressionistic style he adopted

from the latest French literature. Here, philosophy is intertwined with wonderful elements of lyric poetry and the intellectual essay. To make his thoughts clear, he skillfully uses improvisation, incompleteness, symbols, unexpected juxtapositions, and plays on words. "My style is a *dance*," Nietzsche writes in one letter, "a play of symmetries of all kinds and an overleaping and mockery of these symmetries" (*Nietzsche in seinen Briefen*, 1932, p. 333). In any discussion of this thinker's style, his metaphor of dance does indeed have tremendous meaning, for dance is an art characterized by a special flexibility, suggestiveness, plasticity, and elegance. The graceful and embellished aphorisms in Nietzsche's mature writings are especially expressive and become true works of art. In truth, one of the most important specific features of his style is a special intimacy and expressiveness that determine the suggestiveness of his texts and their orientation to the depths of the reader's subconscious.

Thus, under the influence of Schopenhauer and the Romantics, Nietzsche understood art as the embodiment of absolute values, supreme truth, and the meaning of life. The most perfect form of life, he believed, is an artistic existence, or an artistic life. Here, Nietzsche maintains, we encounter the clearest and most powerful of all known expressions of the instinctive will to power. An adequate knowledge of the nature of existence can come only from those reflections that are provided by the philosophy of art. In any discussion of Nietzsche's philosophy of art, we must note that he approached its object, structure, and basic goals under

the influence of the Romantics, of Schelling and Schopenhauer, and for this reason, he identified aesthetics with the philosophy of art because, for him, aestheticism was primarily associated with art. This fact explains his special interest in the main problems of the nature and function of art in society, of the creative potential of the genius and the artist, and of the creative process.

Without stretching the truth, we may state that elements from the ideas of Schopenhauer, the Jena Romantics, and Wagner were precisely what comprised the essence of Nietzsche's early metaphysics of art (*Metaphysik der Kunst* – his own term). He formulated the main goal of his first work, *Die Geburt der Tragödie aus dem Geiste der Musik* (The Birth of Tragedy From the Spirit of Music), thus: "to see science from the perspective of the artist and art from that of life" (*die Wissenschaft unter der Optik des Künstlers zu sehen, die Kunst aber unter der des Lebens*). In his interpretation of ancient Greek tragedy, Nietzsche connects the two great mythological principles of all artistic activity with the names of the Greek gods Apollo and Dionysos, who, in his opinion, symbolize all the diversity created with the help of artistic illusions.

When describing the interaction between the Apollonian and Dionysian principles, Nietzsche maintains that the first represents the world of dream images. Their perfection does not depend on the intellect and the artistic training of the individual. The second – the realm of intoxication, also has no regard for the individual. It even seeks to destroy individuality by rescuing and liberating it through a mystical perception of unity.

This contradiction between intellectualism (which reached its apogee in the Hegelian cult of reason) and voluntarism (the exaltation of Schopenhauerian irrationality) lies, in Nietzsche's opinion, at the heart of every authentic culture and of all art.

For Nietzsche to talk about art and its highest forms meant to talk about music. Like Schopenhauer, Nietzsche considered music not only the mother of all the arts but also a special metaphysical substance that can penetrate to the depths of existence. Nietzsche inherited this enthusiasm from his father, who was a passionate music lover and liked to improvise during the evening on the organ in church. Nietzsche received a good musical education in his youth; he not only took a lively interest in musical life and was well acquainted with classical music but was also a composer himself. Later, Schopenhauer's works and those of the Jena Romantics helped finally establish the priority of music in his consciousness. In letters to friends, Nietzsche admitted that during bleak moments in his life only music gave him great comfort and helped him express himself. Moreover, direct contact with music inspired him to philosophical and poetic creation. He was convinced that an aptitude for music is one of the most important components of the creative personality. Hence follows the thesis: "So much the more does one become a philosopher, the more one becomes a musician."

The only way out lies in tragic art, which provides the illusion of beauty and helps man to overcome his sense of the meaninglessness of existence and to restore his will to take decisive action.

Unlike Schopenhauer, Nietzsche is not satisfied with a passive declaration that the human condition is tragic. He also suggests a way out. "Here," Nietzsche declares movingly, "in [the face of] this highest danger to the will, as an enchantress skilled at healing, art comes to the rescue; it alone is able to turn those sickening thoughts about the terror or absurdity of existence into images that allow one to live..." (Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Kapitel 7). In this way, in Nietzsche's early thought, art becomes a kind of saving illusion that helps one escape from the absurdity of the human condition.

By maintaining that art seeks illusion, which is more valuable than truth, Nietzsche also opposes art to science. However, his intention is not to make truth subject to art. On the contrary, he asserts, art was created so that we might not perish from the truth.

Because the irresistible desire to know inevitably leads to emptiness and ugliness, Nietzsche calls upon his contemporaries to learn to be satisfied with an artistic view of the world. Thus, by orienting itself toward illusion, art takes the path of a conscious lie, while science is characterized by an unconscious lie. For Nietzsche, however, this lie or game of illusions is a greater truth than what science can achieve. Because the pursuit of truth will paralyze a thinking person into inaction, this thinker takes one more step: he declares "that the 'will to truth' is a symptom of degeneracy." The openly irrational logic of this philosopher's reflections discredited the rationalist worldview and raised art above science and life.

During the second period of Nietzsche's intellectual development, a new

attitude emerged toward many of the most important problems of the philosophy of art. Unlike his early Romantic works, in which he raises art and beauty to the spheres of the heavens and on this basis proclaims that they are ends in and of themselves, Nietzsche's views were now more realistic. In this new orientation of Nietzsche's thought, an important role falls to new ideals of classical artistic culture. As he overcame the metaphysical pessimism of Schopenhauer and his own Wagnerian complex, he took an increasing interest in the humanistic traditions of the German philosophy of art, in classical music, in realistic literature (Stendhal, Gottfried Keller, and, somewhat later, Dostoyevsky), and in Eastern culture, art, and philosophical and aesthetic ideas. In Nietzsche's thinking, the influence of Eastern ideas fused with that of Goethe's universalism. For him, this poet-thinker became a symbol of the greatest period in German culture and of the supreme Apollonian principle. "Goethe was, in the midst of an unrealistically disposed age, a convinced realist." Plagued by conflicting thoughts, Nietzsche felt an irresistible attraction to Goethe's sober realism and sought the undisturbed Olympian tranquility characteristic of his work.

Influenced by Jacob Burckhardt's ideas, Nietzsche revealed growing cultural tendencies in his philosophy of art.

He professed that the most important functions of art are cultural, mythic, and ontological. He studied art together with culture and regarded its level as the main criterion of whether a culture is flourishing or in decline. Moreover, here

as in his early works, cultural and artistic vitality is connected with a myth that gives its manifestations their "healthy, creative natural force." Emphasizing the universal syncretic nature of myth, Nietzsche regards it as an exalted allegory and "contracted worldview," as a manifestation of universality and primordial truth. He connects hopes for the rebirth of an intellectual culture with the creation of a new mythology and corresponding artistic language. In mythology he sees an inexhaustible force that stimulates life and art by nourishing the imagination and that thus protects man against pointless meandering.

Finally, by equating art with philosophy, Nietzsche gave it an ontological meaning. In his opinion, only artistic activity can justify the existence of the world and give meaning to the human condition. It is in the thesis, already put forth in *The Birth of Tragedy*, "that only as an aesthetic phenomenon can the existence of the world be justified" (*daß nur als ästhetisches Phänomen das Dasein der Welt gerechtfertigt ist*) that the main direction of Nietzsche's later philosophy of art actually emerges.

Nietzsche distinguished three qualitatively different forms of art: 1) the highest – monologue art, or "communion with the gods," which is capable of expressing the true nature of artistic activity; 2) the social – oriented toward the spiritual needs of more or less subtle people; and 3) the demagogic, or vulgar – which strives to satisfy the low taste of the masses. True spiritual art is always elitist and accessible to a small circle of people who have a subtle artistic sensibility. Nietzsche perceived the

specific feature of true art to be the high style. High style is characterized by a rigorously logical organization of forms and a poetics of clear and austere lines, i.e. everything that is alien to philistine consciousness.

In Nietzsche's mature philosophy, the main force that helps man endure the pressure of the alien world around him and give meaning to human life (existence) is creative activity or, more precisely, its most perfect form – art. Unlike Schopenhauer, who believed that the main purpose of art is flight from the hardships of life and a rationalization of the vanity of the human condition, the mature Nietzsche considered art the “*clearest*” and “*most powerful*” expression of the will to power, “*the greatest stimulator of life*” – a stimulator that reveals the meaning of existence. Finally lost is any nuance of the disinterestedness that characterizes the philosophy of art in Kant and Schopenhauer. Art for art's sake is now interpreted as a dangerous principle because: “If one detaches an ideal from the real, one pushes the real down, one impoverishes it, one slanders it” (Nietzsche, *Der Wille zur Macht I*, Kapitel 17, 1922, § 298). However, these words should not be interpreted as indicating Nietzsche's preference for realism in art. By discrediting its disinterestedness, he sought to give art a new, physiological function.

The main precondition for art and aesthetic activity to exist, Nietzsche declares, is an *a priori* physiological state that he calls *Rausch* (intoxication – also translatable as rapture, ecstasy, frenzy), which stimulates the spirit of the creator of art as well as that of its apprehender. The essence of intoxication is a feeling

of the surge and fullness of creative powers – a feeling that originates from overflowing physiological energy stimulated by impulses of the will. The oldest and most primeval form of intoxication, he states, is sexual arousal.

In Nietzsche's mature philosophy, art neither gives comfort nor heals the wounds of existence; it is the most important stimulator of creative activity. By biologizing the traditional philosophy of art, Nietzsche seems to turn it into a sort of applied physiology. Here, art is valued under the aspect of its effect on the personality, for its purpose is to develop man's creative powers and provide additional impulses in the struggle against mass culture in order to establish a new system of values and a new type of person.

Having grasped how dangerous the results are when the stereotypes of mass consciousness are formed, Nietzsche tried to distinguish the true culture created by an intellectual elite from the false one of the philistines. He contemptuously called it the quasiculture of the masses and the majority. He connected the degeneration of culture and art with the destructive, tyrannical influence of mass consciousness on individuality. In order to preserve the standard type of the vulgar consumer of culture, mass culture is forced to defend itself and to attack on two fronts: first, against degenerate social types and second, against those who rise above it through their individuality. Because mass culture mainly tends to be immobile, stagnant, and self-protective, Nietzsche did not see any elements of creativity in it; the very idea of the creative masses struck him as absurd.

Nietzsche's elitism, which arose from his negative attitude toward the recrudescences of mass culture, eventually reached the point that he revalued certain principles of classical philosophy. He called for the renunciation of "dishonest" principles of equality. In this way, he wanted to provide a theoretical basis for the exceptional nature of the morality and standards of behavior of geniuses of the spirit. He correctly indicated the main defect in the humanism of German classical philosophy – a tendency toward a calm onlooker's understanding of reality. The classical humanism dominant before Nietzsche was based on an often formulated cultural-historical complex of humanistic ideas noted for their anthropologism. Relying on a criticism of the main trends in the cultural and artistic developments of his time, Nietzsche refuted traditional anthropology and formed the contours of a new mythological anthropology of the "superman" – one that exalts individualism and aestheticism.

At the center of Nietzsche's philosophy of art is the problem of the genius, or subject of artistic creation. Directly related to the problems of human freedom and the meaning of life, it is dealt with from an ontological viewpoint. For this thinker, artistic activity is the most perfect expression of the uniqueness of the personality. Hence, too, follows the view of man as the creator of supreme values. The problem of the subject of artistic creation in Nietzsche's philosophy of art permits the surmise that the personality of the artist will be exalted in Western European art of the early 20th century. Martin Heidegger aptly observed that in Nietzsche's conception the

world of art is valued from the viewpoint of the artist and not of the bystander.

In his early works Nietzsche already regarded the personality of the genius as an exceptional phenomenon that does not lend itself to a simple explanation. Typical of this peculiar divinity are freedom from care and amorality. Seized by a flight of artistic creation, it wants, first of all, to feel joy and greatness and to free itself from suffering the contradictions that lie within. Thus, in Nietzsche's concept of the genius the Romantic cult of the exceptional, he personality fuses, as it were, with Enlightenment nostalgia for the natural man.

In depicting the genius's historical mission and his relationship with the world around him, Nietzsche mainly followed Schopenhauer. Between them, however, there are also some basic differences that are due to Nietzsche's more consistent historicism. Unlike Schopenhauer, who considered both the philosopher-genius and the artist-genius an ahistorical cultural subject, Nietzsche rigorously separated their goals and fields of activity. The philosopher-genius, he maintains, is oriented toward eternal, nonhistorical values, while the artist-genius always feels the direct dependence of his work on the spirit of his age.

However, this historicism is not consistent when used to describe the artistic genius because it is constantly deformed by voluntaristic ideas. Moreover, if for the philosophical genius striving for truth is inseparable from the fulfillment of his historical mission, for the artistic genius it is not essential to aim for truth because an artist does not wish to renounce those means by which art can achieve its greatest effects, i.e. fantasy,

mythology, symbolism, the exaggeration of human capabilities, faith in the miraculous nature of genius. Thus, it is far more important for the artist to preserve his creative style than to be faithful to scientific truth.

Nietzsche's early concept of the genius-artist may be regarded as a sort of prototype of Zarathustra and the superman. This transformation of the creative subject can be explained by the changes that occurred in Nietzsche's worldview. He considered the genius a certain bridge between the historical man and the type of the supreme man, which is expressed by the image of the superman or Zarathustra. In Nietzsche's opinion, the future exaltation of man will take place not by elevating his present-day personality, which is overly delicate and sickly in its reflections, but by revealing man's natural instincts, by emphasizing what has still remained primordial and untouched in him.

Nietzsche's early philosophy of art was based on a Platonic and Romantic interpretation of the patterns in artistic creation. Here, the subject of artistic creation has become an unconscious medium for the Dionysian forces that rule the world. The creating is not done by this subject, as it were, but rather, the work of art is born through its own powers from the depths of existence. This view of the creative process negates subjectivity. "[W]e recognize the subjective artist only as a bad artist," Nietzsche writes:

and in every type and level of art we demand, first and foremost, the defeat of the subjective, release from the ego, and the silence of each individual will and desire. Indeed, without objectivity, with-

out pure disinterested contemplation, we can never believe in the slightest truly artistic creation. (Nietzsche, *Die Geburt der Tragödie*, Kapitel 5)

Although Nietzsche speaks of the essential harmony between the Apollonian and the Dionysian, his early works are dominated by the latter principle, which he considered a symbol of the elemental creative forces that reveal the true nature of the world. The most important precondition for artistic creation is a special spiritual state, intoxication, inspiration, a surge of creative powers, great excitement, passion. Hence follows the conviction that authentic art can be born only from great passions, from powerful spiritual urges. Seized by a creative flight, the artist grasps the nature of the world by means of mystical intuition. All this plunges him into an emotional trance and allows him to fuse with the phenomena he perceives.

In this unconscious state of spiritual enlightenment, according to Nietzsche, the artist becomes very similar to a fairytale monster that sees itself from within, as it were, as both subject and object, as poet, actor, and spectator. In order to give flesh to his creative flights of the will, the artist destroys artistic principles and all normative rules. He is guided by the most powerful impulses of artistic will (*Kunstwollen*) in the depths of his subconscious, by his undoubtedly correct intuition. This authenticity and spontaneity of the artist's creative attitudes determines the value of a work of art. Because artistic creation is interpreted as a completely unconscious activity, it is considered foreign to science and knowledge.



Moreover, there are no evaluative criteria suitable for the forms of beauty created by the artist because art and reality are separated by a gulf, and the nature of artistic beauty is considered foreign to truth. (The opposition that Nietzsche theoretically grounded between beauty and truth later became dominant in the works of many modern art theoreticians.) The sources of artistic creation are related to biological factors, of which the most significant is the sublimation of the sexual instinct (this latter thesis is the most important element in the psychoanalytical theory of art). Hence follows the effort to ground the philosophy of art in the latest achievements of the science of physiology. Comparing the creator of art to an overflowing river, this philosopher explains that artistic creation represents a surplus of vital energy, an overflow of physical efflorescence, a discharge of affective tension. The criterion for value, he maintains, is not reality or artistic practice (truth is an illusion), but uncontrollable intuition. Moreover, the artist's love of form for its own sake also determines the value of a work of art. In this way, irrational, biological, relativist tendencies became dominant in Nietzsche's early concept of artist creation.

Under Goethe's influence, Nietzsche's mature concept of artistic creation allots a greater role to rational motifs. During this period, he critically assesses the Platonic theory of divine inspiration and accuses artists of spreading myths about the divine nature of creative enlightenment and inspiration. He asserts that the imagination of the artist and thinker constantly creates images of different value, images that his keen gaze and great experience critically assess, reject, select, and combine, and that only through these creative experiments are significant works of art born. As a mature thinker, he is restrained in his assessment of even the most talented improvisations and compares them to consistent and serious work approved by artistic thought. Without denying the existence of innate talent, Nietzsche speaks increasingly about the significance of work, the mastery of professional secrets, constant experimentation, and the correction of errors. He maintains that the activity not only of a genius but also of other people is extremely complex. Is it possible to believe that only artists, orators, and philosophers are geniuses with a special intuition, as if they had mysterious spectacles allowing them to see the true nature of phenomena?

## SUMMING-UP

These ideas are contrary to the ones that this philosopher had formerly professed. In Nietzsche's later concept of artistic creation, the once dominant irrational Dionysian principle is replaced by the rational Apollonian one. In harmonious Apollonian art, the creative act

has finally lost the intoxication and frenzy formerly attributed to it and acquires new features. The artist glides, as it were, on the surface of phenomena, playing with bright, clear artistic forms that do not disturb the peace. This rationalistic Apollonian concept of artistic

creation is difficult to integrate into the general context of Nietzsche's irrationalist philosophy of art (and especially into his individualistic theory of the subject of artistic creation and into his concept of the will to power). For this reason, in later theoretical thought this philosopher is ranked almost without exception as a proponent of irrationalist ideas.

Although Nietzsche admired classical art, and his works hardly ever refer to the artistic practices of his own times, his ideas nevertheless played a decisive role in forming the theoretical platform of modern art. Failing to grasp the true meaning of Nietzsche's ideas, the radical artistic intelligentsia and associated bohemians were intoxicated by their vitality and Dionysian frenzy. Inspired by a sentimental vulgarization of Nietzsche's revolutionary ideas, a new generation of artists rose up against established artistic traditions. In this way, the ideas in Nietzsche's mature philosophy about the revaluation of classical cultural values passed, as it were, from the sphere of theory to that of practice in modern art. Not only did Nietzsche lay bare the obscure irrational strata in the artist's psyche, but he also

demonstrated that by taking possession of each artist's personality they determine the ultimate results of creative activity. He liberated art from the fetters of reality, elevated the significance of the subconscious, and declared that the illusion created by art is the highest truth. By appealing to irrational vital powers and to natural human instincts, he demolished all objective criteria for evaluating the results of artistic creation and theoretically validated relativism. From Nietzsche the modernists adopted their conviction that the human condition is inevitably tragic, and from his philosophy of art they transferred to concrete artistic practice the proposition that *the aim of true art is not the depiction of the real world, but the expression of the artist's inner world*. Upon discovering the potential in this philosophy of art, the leaders of the modernist movement (Ernst Ludwig Kirchner, Wassily Kandinsky, Franz Marc, André Derain, Maurice de Vlaminck, Filippo Tommaso Marinetti, Giorgio de Chirico, Salvador Dalí, and others) adopted many of these ideas as their artistic credo and used them extensively as a theoretical basis for their creative principles.

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