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Benefits of Philosophical Diversity in Art

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“Benefits of Philosophical Diversity in Art” by Raymond Cordova

Instructor’s Notes

In this persuasive essay, Rebecca sets up a duel argument: the US was partially responsible for the plight of the Mayan people in Guatemala, and, thus, is responsible to provide aid. Notice how she supports and refers to those arguments throughout the essay, never losing sight of her purpose in writing. Using references to her thesis like, “obligation to help,” “should provide continued assistance,” and “must take responsibility,” to support the first half of her argument and “America’s obsession with ending communism,” “the American-backed army targeted the indigenous people,” and “partially responsible for the economic hardships” to support the second half of her argument, Rebecca supports her thesis well.

Writers’ Biography

Raymond writes a persuasive paper arguing that Christians can benefit intellectually from non-Christian art. I had tasked him with taking a definitive stance on a controversy relating to Christianity and the arts. Observe how Raymond thoroughly develops each paragraph, supporting his claims with multiple examples. He is still working out his style in this paper (it’s a bit wordy at points), but Raymond’s triumph in the paper is his determination to understand viewpoints that differ from his own. Bravo, Raymond.

Benefits of Philosophical Diversity in Art

As Robert Hugh Benson explained in *Papers of a Pariah*, “Ignorance may be bliss, but it certainly is not freedom...The more true information we can acquire, the better for our enfranchisement” (34). A scholarly approach to the arts should embody this mindset in order to produce intellectual and spiritual maturity. On the other hand, intellectual impairment is the inevitable result of the mind’s prohibition from anything not explicitly Christian. The scholar should not limit intellectual curiosity for the sake of keeping his

beliefs untainted; this is not only an immature lack of discernment, but also a gross mishandling of man's God-given reason. Contrarily, intellectual curiosity should be encouraged and praised for its inclusive relationship with knowledge. One must discern and dissect differing philosophies for a comprehensive knowledge of the world. The most effective methods of expressing one's worldview are through artistic mediums; in artwork, the artist's philosophical convictions and underlying emotions are carefully embedded for the scholar to uncover. Valuable perspective and understanding are gained by interpreting art from differing worldviews. Artistic expression enlivens emotion and human nature, allowing the scholar to explore and unearth these concepts in depth. The Christian scholar's knowledge and comprehension of the world deepens after studying and experiencing art from differing worldviews.

One artistic work that enhances the intellectual's understanding of humanity is *The Scream*, by Edvard Munch. *The Scream* expresses the feelings of anxiety, loneliness, and illness better than any other modern work of art. Munch stated his goal with *The Scream* was, "the study of the soul, that is to say the study of my own self." Munch was in turmoil throughout his life and, while a priest's son, was not a self-confessed Christian. When analyzing *The Scream*, valuable perspective can be gained concerning human emotions and outlooks on life. The depicted figure's facial expressions convey a deep sense of abandonment, and its sexless nature shows a brokenness and emasculation. Contributing to the sense of loneliness, two figures walk away from the main character. Also, the twisted appearance of the backdrop conveys a confusion and spiraling disorder that inhabits the surrounding world. Munch explained this feeling: "I sensed a scream passing through nature; it seemed to me that I heard the scream. I painted this picture, painted the clouds as actual blood. The color shrieked. This became *The Scream*." Valuable content regarding the human condition is present in this artistic work for the Christian to observe, discern, and consider in light of the Holy Scriptures.

Leland Ryken, in *The Liberated Imagination*, rejects the truthfulness of secular works: "No matter how great an artist's technique may be, or how sensitive the portrayal of human experience is, a work of art is finally false if it limits reality to the temporal, physical world or omits God's existence from its picture

of reality.” Yet, truth is found in accurate portrayals of humanity. Absence of the supernatural does not lessen the realities of sorrow or distress. To adequately answer the world’s problems, one must firstly be well-acquainted with them. The dire need for rescue from the world’s flaws cannot be fully realized unless one carefully and unbiasedly discerns them. The fallen nature of creation, humanity’s depravity, and the degenerative cycle of post-fall nature, directly coincide with Biblical revelation. By temporarily viewing the world from a non-Christian perspective, one gains a more comprehensive understanding of humanity and the disastrous effects of sin on creation. The figure’s face shown in *The Scream*, exudes a common feeling within the lost soul—alienation. This alienation and loneliness results from the absence of fellowship with God. It conveys the loneliness of the unsaved life, and the confusion that results from recognizing something is amiss within oneself. The twisting nature of the backdrop shows the chaos and disorder occupying the enclosing world. This “scream” described by Munch is echoed within the scriptures, such as in Romans 8:22: “We know that the whole creation has been groaning as in the pains of childbirth right up to the present time.” The verse speaks about the secular recognition that the Earth is in a sinful bondage and groans in pain. The Christian mind can use this perspective to achieve greater understanding regarding the depravity of life and find common ground with those who do not hold to Christian theology. *The Scream* is an example of non-Christian expression that adequately communicates several aspects of the issues facing humanity. For these reasons, *The Scream* is beneficial for the Christian to examine for greater knowledge and intellectual maturity.

Another example that shows artwork from different worldviews being profitable for the Christian observer is *The Persistence of Memory*. Created by Salvador Dali in 1931, *The Persistence of Memory* is a forefront example of modern surrealist art. Surrealism aims to combine dreams and reality into artwork; it stems from Dadaism, a style deeply mingled in the political far-left. Not only was Dali an artist, but also a philosopher who studied the works of Freud and Nietzsche. Dali’s *The Persistence of Memory* provides insight into his philosophical worldview. The painting is a compilation of many concepts including time, death, reality, and life. Three melting clocks are depicted in the painting which convey

a seemingly snail-paced passing of time and the finiteness that limits everything in its grasp. One clock lays still solid, but covered by ants, suggesting the gradual decay and anxiety associated with time. There lies an undefined figure in the middle of the painting which likely symbolizes the artist himself. The figure resembles a fish abandoned, suffocated, and dead on dry ground without breath. Upon examination, *The Persistence of Memory* conveys a confusion and merge of the dream world and reality. This painting struggles to understand time's decaying effects and the perpetual disintegration of all matter. When seen in the light of Christian theology, one can understand time is not limitless, but created with fixed boundaries by the boundless God (Ps. 90:4). The reason time injures all matter is due to the consequences of sin upon this world; all matter is now subject to decay and death following the Curse. For the secular mind, the idea of time and perpetual decay can be numbing and cause the confusion exhibited in Dali's painting. For the Christian mind, however, this painting presents an in depth look at a common view held by secularists concerning time. It also gives the Christian a new perspective on time and the finiteness of creation. The objection regularly raised asserts paintings such as this espouse surrealistic philosophy and purposefully confuse the recipient(s); because of this intentional misleading, it is not worthy for study. However, as one can see, there is much content relevant to humanity within the painting, and the work can help one better understand the unbeliever's mind in regards to time and death. *The Persistence of Memory* is worthy artwork for the educated Christian to benefit from by studying the ideas and conflicts within the work.

Christians must begin tearing down the walls that inhibit curious and reflective thought. Whether it be surrealism, Dadaism, or nihilism, there exist remnants of truth and perspectives that are valuable to the Christian walk. In order to effectively communicate the nature of humanity and the nature of this universe, one must be open to all ideas and philosophies regarding them. To be intellectually closed off to specific artwork from differing philosophies hinders the mind from a more complete comprehension of humanity. The Christian should not be afraid to dissect artistic work from differing worldviews, but should embrace this diversity of content, in the goal of furthering knowledge and understanding.



The Scream by Edvard Munch



The Persistence of Memory by Salvador Dali

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