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## Nietzsche: Dionysian-Apollonian Lord of the Dance

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## Nietzsche: Dionysian-Apollonian Lord of the Dance

### Abstract

Friedrich Nietzsche introduced his philological study of the Ancient Greek's Apollonian and Dionysian duality in his first book, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, in 1872. His interpretation of the two Greek gods underpinned his philosophy of the will to power, the Übermensch, and eternal recurrence throughout his career.

I contend that Nietzsche's philosophy would have a modicum of merit as a metaphor for Greek culture and the German society in which he lived if his underlying assumption about atheism was correct. However, his explicit rejection of Christianity led to a fatal flaw in his reasoning because the Christian God's existence can be rationally defended as the inference to the best explanation in an Apollonian manner. Yet, Christians also experience a Dionysian life-affirming existential encounter with the Living God. Jesus declared, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."

Nietzsche proclaimed that he would only believe in a God who can dance. Christianity is both a rational system of beliefs and an exciting encounter with God. Jesus is the Lord of the Dance.

### Keywords

Nietzsche, Dionysian, Apollonian, Dance, Christian, The Birth of Tragedy

### Cover Page Footnote

I have completed the D. Min. and currently working on a Ph.D. in Apologetics and Theology from Liberty University.

## Introduction

Friedrich Nietzsche introduced his philological study of the Ancient Greek's Apollonian and Dionysian duality in 1872 with his book, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*. His interpretation of the two Greek gods underpinned his philosophy of the will to power, the *Übermensch*, and eternal recurrence throughout his career. I contend that Nietzsche's philosophy would have merit as a metaphor for Greek culture and the German society in which he lived if and only if his underlying assumption about atheism is correct. However, his explicit rejection of Christianity led to a fatal flaw in his reasoning because the Christian God's existence can be rationally defended as the inference to the best explanation<sup>1</sup> in an Apollonian manner. The Christian faith calls individuals to experience a Dionysian life-affirming existential encounter with the Living God. Jesus declared, "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly."<sup>2</sup>

Nietzsche's assessment of Christendom in late nineteenth-century Europe was essentially correct. Christianity in Europe had become stale and spiritless. German Protestantism, especially, gave in to the temptations of anti-Semitism, racism, and misogyny. Nietzsche even showed some of these traits. Because of the failure of German religiosity, Nietzsche felt Christianity represented the negative aspects of Apollonian denial of life. He held that Christianity would necessarily lead to Nihilism, and "the Christian doctrine is the counter-doctrine to the Dionysian."<sup>3</sup> The German philosopher could not conceive of any Dionysian aspects of the Christian life. Jerry Walls described Nietzsche's view of the Christian doctrine of heaven and hell as "a way for weak, dishonest people to get vengeance on their powerful enemies."<sup>4</sup> However, a genuine existential experience with the God of the Bible fulfills the positive elements of Dionysian life-affirmation Nietzsche sought. An encounter with the risen Christ fills followers with a joy that passes understanding and overflows with music and dance.

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<sup>1</sup> David Baggett and Jerry L. Walls, *God and Cosmos: Moral Truth and Human Meaning*, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>2</sup> John 10:10 (KJV)

<sup>3</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power: Including Autobiography and Selected Personal Letters*, translator: Anthony M. Ludovici, Horace B. Samuel, John McFarland Kennedy, Paul V. Cohen, Francis Bickly, Herman Scheffauer, and G.T. Wrench, (The Modern Philosophy Series, <http://www.e-artnow.org/>, 2017), 554. Digital version.

<sup>4</sup> Jerry Walls, "How Could God Create Hell?" *God is Great, God is Good: Why Believing in God is Reasonable*, Edited by William Lane Craig & Chad Meister, (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2009), 158.

Others have questioned whether Nietzsche's evaluation of Apollo and his brother Dionysus is accurate;<sup>5</sup> therefore, I will not delve into the matter. I also do not suggest that the authentic Christian experience is Dionysian in the sense of chaotic or uncontrolled frenzy. Nor is Christianity solely an intellectual assent to a set of philosophical ideas. Instead, I use the Apollonian and Dionysian duality as a metaphor for Greek culture as a foundation for understanding modern Christianity. I demonstrate how embracing Christianity is an intelligent and life-affirming choice – a genuine will to power. I begin with a summary of Nietzschean Apollonian and Dionysian duality, focusing on the so-called life-affirming aspects of Dionysus. Next, I examine the fatal flaw in his understanding of Christianity. I provide examples of Dionysian Christians in the Old and New Testament as well as current trends in Christendom. I conclude with Dionysian elements of Christianity by defending the claim that the positive aspects of Nietzsche's Dionysian life-affirmation are found in a bona fide relationship with the God of the Bible. A balance of Apollonian and Dionysian elements brings music, art, science, and Christian faith into a joyful dance.

### Nietzsche's Apollonian and Dionysian Duality

Nietzsche described Apollo and Dionysus as the "two art deities of the Greeks."<sup>6</sup> Anne-Marie Schultz summed up Nietzsche's view of the Apollonian aspect of the human experience. She wrote, "the Apollonian is associated with reason and rationality, intellectual vision, healing, and dreams."<sup>7</sup> He is the god of calm, stability, and self-control. Apollonian art represents the motionless aspect of the Platonic ideal and is symbolic. Walter Kaufmann pointed out that Nietzsche used Apollo as a symbol for the aspect of Greek culture that "found superb expression in classical Greek temples and sculptures: the genius of restraint, measure, and harmony."<sup>8</sup> Thus, paintings and sculptures in Apollo's domain represented the static or motionless endurance of life. Nietzsche held that the

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<sup>5</sup> Silk, M., & Stern, J. (2016). *Nietzsche on Tragedy* (Cambridge Philosophy Classics). Cambridge: Cambridge University Press. doi:10.1017/CBO9781316534786. See also, Nickolas Pappas, "Nietzsche's Apollo," *Journal of Nietzsche Studies*, Vol. 45, No.1 (Spring 2014), pp.43-53. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.5325/jnietstud.45.1.0043>.

<sup>6</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, Translated and Edited, with Commentaries, by Walter Kaufmann, *Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, (New York: The Modern Library Edition, 1992), 4.

<sup>7</sup> Anne-Marie Schultz, "Nietzsche and the Socratic Art of Narrative Self-Care: An Apollonian and Dionysian Synthesis," *Socrates and Dionysus: Philosophy and Art in Dialogue*, Edited by Ann Ward, (UK: Cambridge Scholars Publishing, 2013), 139.

<sup>8</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy: Out of the Spirit of Music*, 8.

colorless marble of Greek statues and architecture characterized Apollonian culture as sterile and dreamlike. He is the god of the "beautiful illusion." In *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche explained, "This joyous necessity of the dream experience has been embodied by the Greeks in their Apollo: Apollo, the god of all plastic energies [*bildnerischen Kraefte*], is at the same time the soothsaying god."<sup>9</sup> Apollo is also the god of the inner world of fantasy.<sup>10</sup> Apollonian art represents a denial of this world. Nietzsche compares this to the Christian focus on the next life. According to Nietzsche, Apollonian and Christianity are life-denying. The barren expression of Christianity he observed in Germany and throughout Europe confirmed his belief; however, as I will demonstrate, a genuine Christian experience is abundantly fertile.

On the other side of Greek culture, Nietzsche understood that the Dionysian art of music and dance referred to the world of frenzied intoxication. According to Ulfers in his introduction to Nietzsche's *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, this intoxication is not a narcotic stupor, but an exhilarating "rush," a *Rausch* "that spells unboundedness."<sup>11</sup> Ulfers further explained that "Speech—conceptual language (the Begriff)—is replaced by singing, and the measured steps of walking are overtaken by dancing."<sup>12</sup> Dionysus is the liberator and the intoxicating ecstasy tears down the boundaries of the Apollonian. Schultz explained that the Dionysian "resides in the disruption of everyday experience" and "in ecstatic moments where one loses a sense of self in communal experience."<sup>13</sup> In the Dionysian festival, the individual loses self-control. The euphoric experience of this side of Greek culture in its ritualistic music and dance was, as Kaufmann pointed out, "barbarous by comparison and found expression in the Dionysian festivals."<sup>14</sup> According to Nietzsche, Greek Dionysian festivals happened under the influence of a narcotic draught or the "potent coming of spring that penetrates all nature with joy."<sup>15</sup> The emotions intensify, and in the agitated state, everything is subjective; for example,

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<sup>9</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 35. *Bildnerischen Kraefte* is better translated, *artistic energies*. The word *plastic* was first coined in 1907. Nietzsche would not have had that in mind.

<sup>10</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 35.

<sup>11</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, Translated by Ira J. Allen, Introduction by Friedrich Ulfers, (Minneapolis: Univocal Publishing, 2013), 9.

<sup>12</sup> Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, 9.

<sup>13</sup> Schultz, 140.

<sup>14</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 35.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*, 36.

the Apollonian *principium individuationis* disappears into "complete self-forgetfulness."<sup>16</sup>

Regarding Dionysian music, Nietzsche held that other cultures such as Egypt and Babylon celebrated similar festivals centered around "sexual licentiousness, the annihilation of all familiarity through an unbounded hetaerism."<sup>17</sup> As seen in Euripides' *The Bacchae*, the Greek celebration of Dionysus, differed in that "from it flows that same charm, the same musically transfiguring intoxication, that Skopas and Praxiteles concretized in statues."<sup>18</sup> Nietzsche's focus was on the euphoric experience of the music and dance rather than the Dionysian ritual's orgiastic nature. The point of the ceremony was for people to join as a unified whole. Safranski describes Nietzsche's view of Dionysian music as the ecstasy that "melts away the masks representing specific characters to expose an emphatic sense of unity."<sup>19</sup> The music draws people into the oneness that communicates more fundamentally and profoundly than words. Safranski explained that music was "the oldest universal language, intelligible to all people, yet impossible to translate into any other idiom."<sup>20</sup> Music is the voice of the cosmos. The Christian parallel for the cosmic voice is *Λόγος* (Logos). The celestial language is the Word, and the cosmic activity is the dance. Sokel added, "It is the union of universal energy and individuated form or shape which the Dionysian orgiastic dance triumphantly enacts by projecting as an individual image the force that binds all together."<sup>21</sup>

In Nietzsche's essay *Attempt at Self-Criticism*, he urges Christians to learn the art of this worldly comfort and laugh to "dispatch all metaphysical comforts to the devil." Then he adjures Christians in the words of Zarathustra, "Rise up your hearts, my brothers, high, higher! And don't forget your legs! Rise up your legs, too, good dancers; and still better, stand on your heads."<sup>22</sup> Dance is an expression of Dionysian life affirmation. In the book *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche wrote, "In song and in dance man expresses himself as a member of a higher community; he

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<sup>16</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 36.

<sup>17</sup> Nietzsche, *The Dionysian Vision of the World*, 31.

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Rüdiger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, Translated by Shelley Frisch, (New York: W.W. Norton & Company, 2003), 100.

<sup>20</sup> Safranski, 101.

<sup>21</sup> Walter H. Sokel, "On the Dionysian in Nietzsche," *New Literary History*, Autumn 2005, 36, 4; ProQuest, page 501.

<sup>22</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 26.

has forgotten how to walk and speak and is on the way toward flying into the air, dancing."<sup>23</sup> Enthusiasm in pure rapturous music compels the Dionysian to dance and embrace life. Dionysian art "gives us the power of grand attitudes, of passion, of song, and of dance."<sup>24</sup>

Yet, Nietzsche saw how Dionysian drama turns into tragedy. Through the Dionysian tragedy, hope is abandoned, and the will must intercede. Nietzsche's concept of the will to power and eternal recurrence is born out of the Dionysian Greek tragedy's symbolism. The Dionysian must accept the fact that life is meaningless and painful. Sorrow and suffering are inevitable. Nietzsche's formula for embracing life's pain is *amor fati* (love of fate). "The Dionysian affirmation of the world, as it is, without subtraction, exception, or choice – it would have eternal circular motion."<sup>25</sup> Nietzsche insisted the tragedy of the world is that even though nothing matters because everything is doomed to recur, the superior man will say yea rather than nay. Nietzsche concluded his discussion of Dionysus in *The Will to Power* with these words:

The tragic man says yea even to the most excruciating suffering: he is sufficiently strong, rich, and capable of deifying, to be able to do this; the Christian denies even the happy lots on earth: he is weak, poor, and disinherited enough to suffer from life in any form. God on the Cross is a curse upon Life, a signpost directing people to deliver themselves from it.<sup>26</sup>

Only through tragedy can the will to power be exercised. For Nietzsche, the greatest tragedy is that life repeats itself in the eternal recurrence. Since there is no hope, the will to power must seize life and embrace the tragedy.

Nietzsche, however, did not intend for Apollonian and Dionysian duality to be considered antithetical. They are not opposites in a Hegelian sense of thesis and antithesis. In Section 1 of *Ecce Homo*, Nietzsche looked back at his earlier work, *The Birth of Tragedy*, and said it "smells offensively Hegelian."<sup>27</sup> Nietzsche's position is that both the Apollonian and Dionysian are "conditions in which art

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<sup>23</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 34.

<sup>24</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 546.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 540.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 546.

<sup>27</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, Translated and Edited with Commentary by Walter Kaufmann, *The Basic Writings of Nietzsche*, (New York: Modern Library Edition, 1992), 726.

manifests itself in man as a force of nature... Both of these states let loose all manner artistic powers within us, but each unfetters powers of a different kind."<sup>28</sup> Apollonian art produces the power of vision and poetry. Nietzsche held that Socrates sprang from Apollonian intellectualism and thereby developed into all philosophers who devise the fiction of an unseen world or *thing-in-itself*.

Christopher Cox pointed out that although Nietzsche's duality looks like a dialectic in the sense of Hegel or Socrates, it is not. "Were it so," Cox explained, "the Dionysian would be sublated in a higher form. But tragedy does no such thing. Rather it thoroughly affirms the Dionysian."<sup>29</sup> In Nietzsche's *The Birth of Tragedy*, tragic pessimism is superior to Socratic and Hegelian dialectic optimism. He preferred it to Apollonian culture.

Years after he published *The Birth of Tragedy*, Nietzsche added an essay titled, *An Attempt at Self-Criticism*. He made it clear that even though he did not mention Christianity, it was nevertheless written to attack the Christian faith. He wrote, "Perhaps the depth of this anti-moral propensity is best inferred from the careful and hostile silence with which Christianity is treated throughout the whole book—Christianity as the most prodigal elaboration of the moral theme to which humanity has ever been subjected."<sup>30</sup> Atheism and antipathy toward Christianity are well documented in many of Nietzsche's works. In *The Will to Power*, for example, he railed against the "falsehood and fictitiousness of all Christian interpretations of the world and its history."<sup>31</sup>

At this point, Nietzsche's fatal flaw about Christianity must be examined.

### **Nietzsche Misunderstood Christianity**

Admittedly, the Christendom of Europe that Nietzsche observed was at a low point spiritually. The German Enlightenment grew out of rationalism in conjunction with German Idealism, which stripped away the supernatural. Nineteenth-century German theologians personified the barren Apollonian culture against which Nietzsche rebelled. Christianity had become sterile and arid. Theological Liberalism, left with nothing miraculous or authoritative, emphasized ethics over doctrine. The higher critical method of interpretation chipped away at the biblical standard for morality, leaving moral issues up to individuals, the church,

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<sup>28</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 432.

<sup>29</sup> Christopher Cox, "Nietzsche, Dionysus, and the Ontology of Music," in *A Companion to Nietzsche*, Edited by Keith Ansell Pearson, (UK: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, Ltd., 2009), 498.

<sup>30</sup> Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, 23.

<sup>31</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 17.

or the state. In the Old Testament words, "everyone did what was right in his own eyes."<sup>32</sup> Thus, Nietzsche called Christianity Nihilism. He viewed the priestcraft as the culprits, including ministers, theologians, and philosophers.

Concerning the philosophical cognoscenti of the previous two centuries, Nietzsche wrote, "German intellect is my foul air: I breathe with difficulty in the neighborhood of this psychological uncleanness that has now become instinctive—an uncleanness which in every word and expression betrays a German."<sup>33</sup> He had no sympathy for philosophers such as Hegel, Fichte, Schelling, Schleiermacher, or even Schopenhauer, calling them "unconscious swindlers."<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche attacked David Friedrich Strauss, for example, as a "type of German Philistine of Culture and a man of smug self-content."<sup>35</sup> Yet, he accepts without question the fundamental presuppositions of German theologians that deny the historicity and authority of the New Testament. Because of this, Nietzsche completely misinterpreted Jesus and Paul. Though he despised Strauss, Nietzsche blindly acceded to Strauss's rejection of the divinity of Jesus Christ.

Walter Kaufmann obsequiously defended Nietzsche's atheism as "a corollary of his basic commitment to question all premises and to reject them unless they are for some reason inescapable."<sup>36</sup> However, Nietzsche did not challenge the theological premise that created the European Christendom he opposed so passionately. If Nietzsche had questioned the underlying rationalist presuppositions of the German Enlightenment concerning the nature and authority of the Bible, he still might have rejected Christianity; however, he would at least have had a clearer understanding of what it meant to have an existential encounter with the risen Christ. From Nietzsche onward, modernist and postmodernist thinkers have seen Christianity as a "bad fiction"<sup>37</sup> based on a set of bad ideas. Nietzsche's fatal flaw was that he had no concept of Christianity as a relationship with the Creator of the universe. He could not conceive of any Dionysian aspects of the authentic Christian

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<sup>32</sup> Judges 17:6 (NKJV)

<sup>33</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo, Thoughts Out of Season*, translator: Anthony M. Ludovici, Horace B. Samuel, John McFarland Kennedy, Paul V. Cohen, Francis Bickly, Herman Scheffauer, and G.T. Wrench, (The Modern Philosophy Series, <http://www.e-artnow.org/>, 2017), 661. Digital version.

<sup>34</sup> Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, 661.

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid.*,

<sup>36</sup> Walter Kaufmann, *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2013), 134.

<sup>37</sup> Brian Ingrassia, *Postmodern Theory and Biblical Theology*, (UK: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 2.

life. An encounter with the risen Christ fills the follower with a joy that passes understanding and overflows with music and dance.

### **Dionysian Aspects of Christianity**

The metaphor of Dionysian ecstasy in music and dance can easily be seen in the lives of those who have encountered Christ. The Christian's Holy Scripture is replete with examples of people who experience a joyous encounter with, as Francis Schaeffer put it, "the God who is there."<sup>38</sup> Though the Bible does present a Christian philosophy, it is not primarily a philosophical book. Evangelical Christians believe the Bible is divine revelation from God in propositional form. In any case, it is a written record of people's experiences with God. Believers throughout history lived the Dionysian life-affirmation Nietzsche hoped to achieve. Examples from the Old Testament and the New Testament demonstrate the positive aspects of Dionysian enthusiasm.

The book of Exodus records the historical events of God's deliverance of the people of Israel through the Red Sea. Once safely across the sea, Moses and the people broke out into ecstatic celebration.

I will sing to the Lord,  
For He has triumphed gloriously!  
The horse and its rider  
He has thrown into the sea!  
The Lord is my strength and song,  
And He has become my salvation.<sup>39</sup>

Immediately after the Song of Moses, Miriam could not contain her enthusiasm. "Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took the timbrel in her hand, and all the women went out after her with timbrels and with dances." In a genuinely Dionysian life-affirming style of celebration, she danced and sang. Nietzsche's experience at Bayreuth in 1876 convinced him that Wagner's attempt to make a religion of the art of music could not work. Safranski explained that Nietzsche "experienced firsthand how a hallowed art event could deteriorate into banality."<sup>40</sup> Miriam's dance, however, was a spontaneous improvisation.<sup>41</sup> Music welled up

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<sup>38</sup> Francis Schaeffer, *The Francis A. Schaeffer Trilogy*, (Wheaton, Illinois: Crossways Books, 1990), 47.

<sup>39</sup> Exodus 15:1-2 NKJV.

<sup>40</sup> Safranski, 140.

<sup>41</sup> Exodus 15:20-21 NKJV.

from within the crowd and compelled the women into a unifying dance. The jubilation was not drug or wine induced. The people experienced Dionysian ecstasy in its purest and most positive form.

2 Samuel 6:1-17 provides another example of exuberance resulting in an encounter with the Living God. King David brought the Ark of the Covenant into the City of Jerusalem. The Scripture understates his delight, saying he brought the "ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with gladness."<sup>42</sup> He took six steps and then was overcome with euphoria. The Bible says, "Then David danced before the LORD with all *his* might."<sup>43</sup> David's Dionysian fête had an Apollonian effect on his wife. "Michal, Saul's daughter, looked through a window and saw King David leaping and whirling before the LORD; and she despised him in her heart."<sup>44</sup> She called his display of passionate merriment "shameless" (נגלזות). As indicated earlier, Apollonian art is sterile and represents restraint. Michal's response left her barren for the rest of her life. She represents the somatophobia that Nietzsche observed in nineteenth-century European Christendom. In simple terms, European churchgoers believed the spiritual is good, and the physical is bad because it left nature "bloodless and passionless."<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche wrote, "The Christian is an example of exaggerated self-control: in order to tame his passions, he seems to find it necessary to extirpate or crucify them."<sup>46</sup> David responded with Dionysian passion in music and dance, "I will play *music* before the LORD. And I will be even more undignified than this."<sup>47</sup> Iselin and Meteyard express the duality as an epistemic clash. "When reflecting on their personal epistemology, or individual ways of knowing God and his truth, many Christians today distinguish between so-called head-knowledge and heart-knowledge."<sup>48</sup> David blended both Apollonian and Dionysian cultures. His rational and experiential understanding of God led him to coin the phrase *praise the Lord*.

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<sup>42</sup> 2 Samuel 6:12 NKJV.

<sup>43</sup> 2 Samuel 6:14-15 NKJV.

<sup>44</sup> 2 Samuel 6:16 NKJV.

<sup>45</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 133.

<sup>46</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 133.

<sup>47</sup> 2 Samuel 6:21-22 NKJV.

<sup>48</sup> Darren Iselin and John D. Meteyard, The 'Beyond in the Midst': An Incarnational Response to the Dynamic Dance of Christian Worldview, Faith and Learning, *Journal of Education & Christian Belief* 14, No. 1 (Spring 2010): 33–46. doi:10.1177/205699711001400105.

The Apostle Paul, whom Nietzsche called "that pernicious blockhead,"<sup>49</sup> demonstrated a Dionysian exuberance that Nietzsche completely overlooked. Suffering from a severe beating and shackled hand and foot to a prison wall, Paul and Silas jubilantly sang.<sup>50</sup> They did not sing out of a lack of hope or from despair over an eternally repeating tragedy. Their music was not a desperate attempt to embrace their fate—*amor fati*. They sang because they had a genuine relationship with the God of creation. Saints like Paul did not need to reject this world. They did not merely look toward the next world for hope. They lived a life of joy, embracing the present world. They said yea to life as an existential encounter with God, which included this world and the next. The metaphor of Dionysian—Apollonian duality can be seen in other passages in the Bible. In the parable of the Prodigal Son, Jesus told about two sons. The younger son squanders his inheritance, and in desperation, he returns home to his father, who greets the wayward son with a jubilant celebration of music and dance. The older son, representing the Apollonian attitude, responded in anger toward the revelry. His life was spent in self-denial, desperately hoping for some future inheritance.

From the creation narrative in Genesis to the last chapters of the book of Revelation, history is portrayed as a great dance performed by the Creator. Genesis chapter one is written in poetic form, perhaps as an ancient Hebrew song of creation. "In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth." The Spirit moved across the water. I might paraphrase it as the Spirit danced across the waters. The book of John chapter one tells us that Jesus, the Word, was there at the beginning participating in the dance of the Triune God.

According to Jerry Walls, the doctrine of the Trinity explains the eternal nature of love. God is one in three persons. He did not need to create in order to express his love. Yet, he made "us out of love, and his choice to create us is an overflow of who he is in his eternal nature."<sup>51</sup> Walls invoked the words of C.S. Lewis to explain what this means. God is not a static thing, but rather a "dynamic, pulsating activity, a life, almost a kind of drama. Almost if you will not think me irreverent, a kind of dance."<sup>52</sup> The Father, Son, and Holy Spirit existed from all eternity in a relationship of mutual love, joy, and delight. God wants us to join him in "the dance of joy that energizes the three persons of the Trinity."<sup>53</sup> In the final chapters of the Bible,

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<sup>49</sup> Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, 105.

<sup>50</sup> Acts 16 NKJV.

<sup>51</sup> Walls, 160.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid. Quoted from C.S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity*, (San Francisco: Harper, 2001), 175.

<sup>53</sup> Ibid., 161.

George Frederic Handel heard the angelic hosts' music at the culmination of history when he penned the *Hallelujah Chorus*. From before the beginning of time and throughout eternity, God desires us to share in the Triune dance. Walls concluded that some, like Nietzsche, rather than embracing the opportunity to dance, "choose to reject the offer and attempt to construct their own substitute for joy... In so doing, they reject the only possible source of deep and lasting happiness, and thereby consign themselves to frustration, misery, and suffering."<sup>54</sup> Nietzsche personified the results of choosing not to dance with the Creator by manufacturing a hopeless, eternal recurrence, whereas God offers a joyous eternal dance.

### Conclusion

Nietzsche's philosophy was not a radical departure from the dry, lifeless dogma of German intellectualism. He represents the culmination of all Enlightenment thinking. If the atheists are correct and God does not exist, then Nietzsche's conclusions follow naturally. Life is meaningless, leading to a worldview of despair. However, if Nietzsche's fundamental assumption that God is dead is not the case, then the entire structure of his philosophy falls like the house built upon the sand. According to Horton, Nietzsche's understanding of Christianity is "insipid" and a "caricature."<sup>55</sup> If God exists, Nihilism will not be the result of genuine Christianity as Nietzsche predicted. Francis Schaeffer concluded that Christianity "differs from Nihilism, for Nihilism, though it is correctly realistic, nevertheless can give neither a proper diagnosis nor the proper treatment for its own ills."<sup>56</sup>

Ultimately, Michael Horton correctly concluded that "the definitive power for the Christian community is neither Apollo (resignation to defeat) nor Dionysus (the will to power), but the Lamb who was slain for others but now is alive."<sup>57</sup> Christianity is not Romanticism, Mysticism, or an Existentialist leap of faith that has abandoned Scripture's authenticity and authority. Experiencing the life-affirming God revolves around God communicating in propositional statements that are true. St. Jerome wrote, "For if, according to the Apostle Paul, Christ is the power of God and the wisdom of God, and the one who does not know the Scriptures does not know the power of God and his wisdom, [then] ignorance of

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<sup>54</sup> Walls, 162.

<sup>55</sup> Michael Horton, "Eschatology After Nietzsche: Apollonian, Dionysian or Pauline?" *International Journal of Systematic Theology*, vol. 2, number 1, March 2000, 59. 29-62.

<sup>56</sup> Schaeffer, 46.

<sup>57</sup> Horton, 59.

the Scriptures is ignorance of Christ."<sup>58</sup> As I apply Apollo and Dionysus's metaphor, I see no tension between the existential encounter with the risen Christ and the propositional truth found in His Word. Christianity provides the reason for tragedy in the world and allows access to the One who can bring joy in this world and the next. Those in despair need only to embrace the God who is there. In the words of Zarathustra, "I should only believe in a God that would know how to dance."<sup>59</sup> As Walls concluded, "that God wants to dance with Nietzsche, and he will do everything he can to get Nietzsche... in the dance."<sup>60</sup> Even the death of Jesus Christ on the cross is "God's ultimate statement that he wants us to come home to him and learn to dance."<sup>61</sup> Since Nietzsche is wrong about the non-existence of God, it is possible to embrace a relationship with the God who is there. Jesus does more than know how to dance. He is the Lord of the Dance.

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<sup>58</sup> The Commentary on Isaiah By St. Jerome, 1. *Ancient Christian Writers, The Works of The Fathers in Translation*, Translated and Introduction by Thomas P. Scheck, (New York: The Newman Press, 2015).  
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<sup>59</sup> Friedrich Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Dover Thrift Edition, Translated by Thomas Common, (Mineola, New York: Dover Publications, Inc., 1999), 24.

<sup>60</sup> Walls, 164.

<sup>61</sup> *Ibid.*, 163.

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