Romanticism And Existentialism

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Romanticism, Imagination, and Subjective Experience

Romanticism and existentialism are two appealing approaches to the audience today because both place strong emphasis on subjective experience, personal emotion, individual freedom, and the search for meaning. Although they emerged in different historical contexts, both movements challenged dominant systems of thought that reduced human life to reason, science, rules, or social expectations. Romanticism was largely a reaction against the Enlightenment's excessive focus on reason, logic, order, and scientific explanation. Existentialism, in a similar way, developed as a response to modern uncertainty, secularization, and the feeling that human beings must create meaning in a world that does not always provide clear answers. Both approaches remain relevant today because people still struggle with questions of identity, purpose, freedom, creativity, and personal choice.

Romanticism was a revolt against major political, social, and artistic norms during and after the Enlightenment age. The Enlightenment emphasized rational thinking, scientific progress, and universal rules. While these ideas contributed greatly to human knowledge, some thinkers and artists believed that they ignored the deeper emotional and imaginative dimensions of life. Romanticism responded by emphasizing feeling, imagination, nature, beauty, and the uniqueness of individual experience. It valued the inner life of the person and treated emotion as an important way of understanding reality. In literature, visual arts, and music, Romanticism became a major source of aesthetic experience, allowing artists to express passion, mystery, wonder, and personal vision (Godawa, 2009).

Romanticism is appealing because it gives value to imagination and creativity. Instead of forcing artists to follow strict classical forms, it allows them to explore new styles, themes, and emotional expressions. Romantic writers and artists often focused on nature, heroism, love, suffering, spiritual longing, and the power of the individual. This gave freedom to artists and thinkers who wanted to move beyond rigid traditions. The Romantic approach therefore legitimized individual creativity and imagination, elevating artistic achievement and allowing people to see themselves as more than rational beings. It presented human beings as emotional, imaginative, and deeply connected to beauty and meaning.

Existential Freedom and Meaning in Modern Life

Existentialism also appeals to modern audiences because it focuses on the individual and the personal experience of life. However, existentialism is more concerned with freedom, responsibility, anxiety, choice, and the search for meaning. It emphasizes that human beings are not simply controlled by society, tradition, or fate. Instead, people have the ability and responsibility to make choices and define their own lives. Existentialism recognizes that life can feel uncertain, painful, and even absurd, but it also argues that individuals must still choose how to live. In this sense, existentialism gives importance to personal decision-making and moral responsibility.

Like Romanticism, existentialism emphasizes feelings as a critical guiding force in human life. Feelings such as fear, loneliness, hope, despair, love, and anxiety are not treated as weaknesses but as important parts of human existence. These emotions reveal the depth of human experience and remind people that they are conscious beings facing real choices. Many people do not fully recognize that they possess the ability to choose. They may simply follow social expectations, cultural habits, or popular trends without examining their own values. Existentialism challenges this passive way of living by encouraging individuals to become aware of their freedom and responsibility.

In the modern era of technology and secularization, the approaches of Romanticism and existentialism often appear together. Modern life is full of scientific development, digital communication, consumer culture, and rapid social change. Although technology has improved many aspects of life, it has also created feelings of isolation, emptiness, and confusion for many people. Individuals may feel connected through social media but emotionally disconnected in real life. They may have access to information but still struggle to find purpose. In this context, Romanticism and existentialism become attractive because they offer ways to recover meaning, emotion, creativity, and personal identity.

Personal Narratives and the Benefits of Individualism

People today often try to create stories about themselves in order to make sense of their lives. As Godawa (2009) suggests, people “create myths and fairy tales in order to give meaning to our lives.” This statement shows that human beings are naturally meaning-making creatures. We do not simply live through random events; we try to arrange our experiences into stories that help us understand who we are and why we matter. These stories may come through religion, culture, family history, films, literature, personal goals, or dreams about the future. Romanticism supports this tendency by valuing imagination and narrative, while existentialism supports it by emphasizing personal choice and meaning-making.

However, these approaches can affect people both positively and negatively. On the positive side,

Romanticism and existentialism help people recognize their uniqueness, creativity, and freedom. They encourage individuals to think deeply about their lives and not simply accept the definitions given by society. They also allow people to value culture, religion, art, and personal experience as meaningful parts of human existence. Through these approaches, people can see their lives as purposeful rather than meaningless. They can also understand that their choices matter and that they have responsibility for the direction of their lives.

Subjectivity, Relativism, and the Need for Truth

On the negative side, too much emphasis on subjective experience can create confusion if it is not connected to truth or reality. If everyone creates their own meaning without any shared foundation, society may become fragmented. People may begin to live in fictional or self-created narratives that ignore reality. Godawa (2009) warns that "storytelling is meaningless gibberish unless reality itself is narratable. And the reality is unnarratable in a universe without a transcendent narrator." This means that if there is no higher meaning or ultimate foundation, human stories may become unstable and disconnected. From this view, Romantic and existential approaches may become problematic when they completely reject objective truth or spiritual meaning.

This concern is especially important in a secular and technological world. Many people today attempt to define life only through personal desire, emotion, success, or social approval. They may create identities based on trends, entertainment, or personal preference without considering deeper moral or spiritual questions. In such cases, freedom can become confusing rather than meaningful. Existentialism teaches that people are free, but it also reminds them that freedom comes with responsibility. Romanticism celebrates imagination, but imagination must still be connected with wisdom and truth.

Cultural Diversity and Conclusion

At the same time, these approaches help bring out human diversity and uniqueness. Different cultures, religions, and traditions give people different ways to understand life. Rather than seeing human life as a series of random events without purpose, people often use their beliefs and cultural stories to create meaningful connections. Religion, culture, literature, and personal experience help individuals understand suffering, love, death, success, failure, and hope. These meaning systems allow people to live with purpose and direction.

Romanticism and existentialism therefore remain important because they speak to the deeper needs of human beings. People do not only need scientific explanations; they also need meaning, beauty, identity, and hope. Science can explain how the world works, but it does not always answer why life matters. Romanticism responds by emphasizing imagination, beauty, and emotional experience. Existentialism responds by emphasizing freedom, responsibility, and personal meaning. Together,

they provide a rich way of understanding human life in a modern world that often feels mechanical and impersonal.

In conclusion, Romanticism and existentialism are still appealing today because they focus on subjective experience, creativity, freedom, and the search for meaning. Both approaches challenged systems that reduced life to reason, science, or social convention. Romanticism values imagination, emotion, and beauty, while existentialism emphasizes choice, responsibility, and personal meaning. In the modern world of technology and secularization, these approaches help people understand their uniqueness and create purpose in their lives. However, they must be balanced with reality, truth, and moral responsibility so that personal freedom does not become meaningless or disconnected. Ultimately, Romanticism and existentialism remind us that human beings are not merely rational machines but creative, emotional, and responsible persons seeking meaning in the world.

References

Godawa, B. (2009). *Hollywood worldviews: Watching films with wisdom and discernment*. InterVarsity Press.