

Plato Vs. Nietzsche: The Nature of Good

Plato and Nietzsche have opposing views on the nature of good. Plato, as demonstrated in the "The Cave" and "Apology," believes that Good is absolute. This means that he is of the opinion that there is one perfect version of Good for all people, whether they are rich or poor, powerful or weak. However, Nietzsche believes in the relative nature of good. He thinks that the meaning of good can be different for different groups of people, specifically the upper (master) class and the lower (slave) class.

In "The Cave" Plato shows that he believes in an absolute and "...essential Form of Goodness." He believes that all earthly Good, i.e. wealth, intelligence, and wisdom, as well as virtues such as courage, patience, altruism, and prudence come from this Good. In the "Apology" he states that "...no evil can happen to a Good man." By this he encourages all men to achieve this Goodness, which he claims should be the ultimate goal of men. Plato maintains that, in order to be good, a man "...ought not to calculate the chance of living or dying; he ought only to consider whether in doing anything he is doing right or wrong - acting the part of a Good man or of a bad." From his writings in "The Cave" and the "Apology," Plato shows his belief in an absolute, unalterable Good which man should prize above all else.

Conversely, Nietzsche feels that there are two different sets of morality dependent on class, meaning that the nature of good is relative. Nietzsche outlines these two systems of morality in "Good and Evil Reconsidered." The noble man, according to Nietzsche, follows a master morality and "...is the arbiter of values." He determines what is good, honoring "...everything that he finds in himself." He believes that the good man inspires fear. The noble man does not see good as being fellow feeling or doing good deeds for others. Oppositely, Nietzsche says, there is a slave morality with a different set of values and a different idea of what good is. In the slave morality, "fellow feeling, the obliging helping hand, the warm heart, patience, industry, humility, and friendliness..." are all to be honored as traits of goodness. The slave despises and considers evil what the noble man holds as being good, claims Nietzsche. As strongly as the noble man believes inspiring fear is good, the slave, just as strongly, believes it to be evil. Obviously Nietzsche believes in the relative nature of good. These views are contrary to Plato's absolutistic ideas about the nature of Good.

