

Essay on million dollar baby and the philosophy of aristotle and plato

[Experience](#), [Happiness](#)



The central claim of this paper is: the movie Million Dollar Baby is a cinematic argument containing the central thesis of Plato's Allegory of the Cave from Republic and Aristotle's moral philosophy from Nicomachean Ethics. First, the allegory of the cave will be explained as well as Aristotle's theory of virtue. The paper will give examples from Eastwood's film to back up the thesis, along with possible counterarguments.

The story of the cave is Plato's argument for how knowledge begins in darkness and ascends towards truth (517a). The ascent to knowledge is gradual. Darkness represents this world of becoming and change. Nothing stays the same in this world. The world perceived through sensory experience is not a true account of how the world is in reality. Light from the cave is illuminated by fire, but what the people in the cave only see the shadows on the wall. The prisoner of the cave struggles to turn around and see the cave for what it is. Once she turns around she sees the world radically different. Once she sees that the cave is not the real world, she has to climb out of the cave and experience the outside world (515e). Her eyes will not be accustomed to the light, and it will take a long time for her to adjust to the sun's light. After looking at the real world she will gradually adjust, and her vision will improve. She will see the world for how it truly is and not, in the same way, as she experienced it in the darkness of the cave. She will go back into the cave to tell her friends what she saw, but they will not believe her and plot to kill her (517a).

Maggie like the prisoner because she struggles to get out of the cave of her own poor and limited upbringing. Plato writes that this world of becoming is not the truth, Maggie loses her leg; but, she is still able to see a greater

truth. Scrap has no vision in one eye, but he is virtuous. Frankie is an aging boxer trainer, but he reads poetry and is gradually able to appreciate Maggie. Maggie in Clint Eastwood's film is the prisoner of Plato's cave. Maggie is like a prisoner because she gets a glimpse of a better life, but when she goes back down into the cave, the other people chained to the wall spit on her. She works hard in the gym to train to be the best boxer and she has to undergo criticism from the other people at the gym. When she wins a boxing competition, she makes money. She gives money to her mom to purchase a home, but instead of being grateful the mother scoffs at Maggie and tells her that she will no longer be able to collect her welfare checks and Medicaid payments. Maggie's mother chooses to stay in the cave even when her daughter presents her with the promise of a better life.

Scenes in the movie are shot in darkness. Scenes shot in darkness represent being in the darkness of the cave where ascertaining knowledge is hard because everything shifts out of focus and is obscure. Notice in the scene after Frankie takes Maggie to visit her family. The family does not accept Maggie. In the car ride, the scene is shot in darkness and sometimes the viewer is unable to see Maggie face. Her face reflects deep thought. She thinks reflectively and listens attentively to understand her situation. For example, Maggie listens attentively to what Frankie and Scrap try to teach her. Scrap tells Frankie to give Maggie a chance. Scrap and Frankie know that Maggie was born "trash." That is their way of understanding Maggie's background. Maggie knows that she has to leave her family life behind and climb out of the cave, but she the journey is hard and she knows that she can go back to living in a dark dirty trailer where she will eat fried Oreos

cookies.

Plato argues that to get out of the cave one has to use the part of the soul that uses reasons. To reach the light one must move one's mind to greater things. The life of the cave is the life of basic living, a life that Maggie does not want to live. To get out of the cave, she has to use her intelligence and her focus. Of course, Frankie and Scrap can help her get out of the cave, but she has to do it herself, and avert her eyes away from the shadows.

Aristotle argues that virtue is practical knowledge of the good (1095a). He also writes that people gain virtue over the course of a lifetime. Maggie is a good example of a person who acquires virtue over a lifetime. She acquires the virtue of patience. She convinces Frankie to train her even though he does not train female boxers. Aristotle argues that a virtue is a balance between two extremes (1105b). On one extreme lies hastiness. Maggie is deliberate in her choices. She is also not slow to act. Patience is the golden mean between hastiness and not acting at all. Maggie is persistent. She makes the choice to die, and it is a virtuous act. She knows that if she lives she will not have a life in a way that she wants it. However, to continue to live will only see herself deteriorating. She makes the choice to have Frankie euthanize her. One aspect of virtue that Aristotle emphasizes is making a choice at the right time (1106b). At the time she makes the choice to die, it is the right time, and it is not done hastily. Maggie is a deliberate thinker, and she uses her reason to make decisions. She thinks about what she wants to do and does not act impulsively.

A counterargument from others would be that Maggie cannot be a virtuous person, nor is she an exemplar of Plato's allegory of the cave. Detractors will

save that suicide is not a virtuous act. They will say that taking one's life cannot constitute virtue. However, Aristotle says nothing about condemning suicide. And in fact, the choice to take one's own life has to follow the constraints of the golden mean. Maggie was intentional in her decision, and she was not the victim of another person's manipulation. A detractor would say that her decision to end her life was not an example of an upward journey. The opposition to this view is based on an erroneous misconception of both virtue and happiness. No one except Maggie can judge her own actions, and the decision to commit suicide is a very personal decision, one that obviously Maggie took into consideration. Finally, in terms of Plato's theory, her soul will not die, but it is only her body that will perish. What matters is the upward pursuit for truth despite the vicissitudes of this earthly realm.

Maggie makes us think about what it means to live a happy life. Boxing is not an end in itself. Just as being a waitress, is not an end in itself. Aristotle writes that happiness is human flourishing, and it is an activity of the soul (1102b). Happiness is not a feel good moment of pleasure. Happiness is the gradual unfolding of a life towards becoming what you are meant to be. Luck is involved too. What if Maggie had not discovered Frankie's gym? What if Scrap had not been there to help convince Frankie? What if Maggie had not fought the fight that ended up injuring her and leading to her untimely death? Aristotle writes that life is filled with chance encounters (1100b). There are some events in life one cannot foresee. Happiness is the product of luck, skill, and making the best of live opportunities. Can we call Maggie happy? Yes, because she flourished as a human being. At every moment of

her life, she was alive. Even up to the moment of her death. We are the sum of our actions. What we choose to do forms us and shapes us into whom we become.

In this paper, it has been shown that Maggie exemplifies the philosophy of both Aristotle and Plato. She shows us Plato's story of going from the world of sensory illusions to the metaphysical truth of a transcendent world of pure objects of knowledge (. She shows us Aristotle's story of acquiring virtue and the necessity of character development to live a good life. Maggie is the prisoner because she helps explain what Plato meant by the division between the two worlds of being and becoming (511). The journey to truth and knowledge is hard, and it takes training. Boxing is a good metaphor for the allegory of the cave. The endurance and persistence to train eventually yield results. Not everyone makes it. The movie is a good example of someone seeing the facade in the shadows, and fighting hard to get out of the cave. In Aristotle, there is a moral philosophy mapped onto the metaphysics of Plato. Just as reason is the tool of the soul to glimpse truth, so virtue is knowledge of the good. Maggie is both the prisoner and the model of virtue. She gets out of the cave, and she realizes that happiness is human flourishing.

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