

# Plato vs. nietzsche



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Johnny Lee Plato versus Nietzsche The central ideas that two great philosophers, Plato and Friedrich Nietzsche, talked about were the reality and appearance; and what they mainly focused on is where we as humans stand between these two. Of course, regarding the fact that Plato and Nietzsche lived in different time periods, they had their differences that conflict with each other's theories. But they do have something to agree upon; they both argue that humans live in an illusory world of our own that we think is reality when we actually are not. One important idea they disagree on is their concepts on what is reality and what is truth.

Plato's theory is mostly based on his cave allegory where he explains human's conditions. I will explain the similarities and differences between Plato and Nietzsche through the cave allegory. Starting from a base point, Plato and Nietzsche both state that there are deceptions and illusions in the world. First, according to the cave allegory by Plato, he believes the "shadows"(Plato 64) to be what's keeping us from utilizing our knowledge to its fullest value. The "shadows" are metaphors that represent our acts of relying on our senses to identify objects in life.

They are only the appearances of the actual objects, meaning that we are not getting the genuine concept that is concealed by the appearances. He explains that the objects humans see in the visible world are far from the truth and their true forms. On the contrary, Nietzsche does not believe that the "shadows" are actually what Plato says they are. Although Nietzsche does believe that there are illusions in the world that humans are commonly deceived by, he argues that what deceives us in the world is our language and not the appearances of objects.

He explains that concepts are the main cause that deceives humans because “a concept is produced by overlooking what is individual and real” (Nietzsche 878). And this is where language part comes in. The language helps creating concepts to objects, making it harder for humans to comprehend the “original entities” (Nietzsche 877) of the objects. Words are only “metaphors of things” (Nietzsche 877) to identify them but nothing more. Words do not hold any meanings or the true essence of the objects. The only purpose of words is so that humans can agree on the same things and get things done; create consistency in our lives. In terms of truth in objects, Plato believes that once humans are out the cave we will be able to see the truth in things and know logic and reasoning. He argues that the only way to grasp the real meanings of objects is to rationalize everything and not rely on our senses (Plato 66). If all humans use logic to define everything and not guess what they would represent, then we would all be in the intelligible realm. On the other hand, Nietzsche has a very different take on the subject matter of truth. In fact, he argues that there are nothing more real than things that visibly and physically exist in the world; things that are accessible.

This is why he does not believe in the intelligible realm or the real reality. He believes that we are already in reality. His main case is that those things that exist in the world “know neither forms nor concepts.” (Nietzsche 878); and therefore there is no reality, meanings, concepts or even truth within these objects. Nietzsche believes that the only truth existing in our lives is the agreement through language. We have put labels and titles on objects so that we would be able to agree upon identifying those objects without any

conflicts or disagreement. Steven Wallace delivers a similar point through his poem, “ Metaphors of a Magnifico”.

The basic summary of this poem is that there are “ Twenty men crossing a bridge/ Into a village” (Stevens) and the speaker, Stevens or the Magnifico, is trying to find the meaning behind these twenty crossing the bridge. The problem that Stevens had was the words that were used by someone else to describe the twenty men. These twenty men could be perceived as twenty men crossing twenty bridges for each man could experience crossing the bridge very differently. It can also be seen as one man crossing the bridge if they all had the same purpose of why they are crossing the bridge. Ultimately, these men will look like one single man.

Stevens could not find the true meaning of his own behind these other people’s descriptions of the twenty men. He starts using words like “ white wall” and “ fruit-trees” to grasp the real meaning of these men crossing the bridge but no matter how hard he tries “ the meaning escapes”(Stevens). This poem perfectly supports Nietzsche’s theory in the sense that, words are only metaphors to describe objects. Words cannot hold concepts for objects do not have real meanings behind them. After all, Stevens and even Nietzsche would say that it is simply “ Twenty men crossing a bridge/ Into a village” with no concepts attached.

Going back to the cave allegory, Plato says that humans think the “ shadows” are the truth behind the objects when they are only appearances. Now if Nietzsche would critique the allegory he would find certain things accurate and other things to be false. One thing he would agree upon is the deception that humans are getting. One big idea on the allegory that

Nietzsche would definitely disagree on is the outside world or the intelligible realm for he does not believe that we are not living in reality right now.

He does not believe that we are in the cave. If Nietzsche would roughly create an allegory for his view on the world and human conditions he would first scrap the whole idea of being in the cave and the outside world. In Nietzsche's allegory, there is a group of men freely standing outside in nature. And everything in nature is labeled with a card on them: " trees", " flowers", " grass" and so on. As each of the men looks at these objects, they will see the same objects but different distorted shadows.

These men, thinking that there are more meanings and concepts beyond theses words on the cards, will have different shapes of the shadows in their heads, due to different perceptions. However in reality, the shadows of the objects will flawlessly match the shapes of the actual objects, meaning that what you see is what you get: there are no hidden concepts. Although Plato and Nietzsche may have differences on the matter of truth, they are able to find a common ground between their theories: it is that humans could not be living deeper in an illusory world right now.