

Ethics in gladiator: an honorable death essay



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

According to Aristotle the moral principles of which ethics are derived from are based on an individual's use of justice, courage, and temperance in social situations. However, one cannot gain this moral conduct by solely learning a list of generalized rules, but rather they must experience it and understand the consequences of this practical wisdom.

In addition, a person's upbringing plays a huge role in their overall moral development and can either influence them positively or incredibly negatively. In Ridley's Scott's film *Gladiator*, a comparison of ethical codes is established between the protagonist Maximus and the antagonist Commodus which undoubtedly supports Aristotle's science of morals. The practical wisdom, that Aristotle suggests evokes a moral code within an individual, is displayed through the different upbringings of the two contrasting main characters. Maximus's childhood isn't super detailed within the film, however the viewers are aware that he had experienced struggles that could have ruined or aided his ethical code. With this in mind, his character proves to have gained an enormous amount of practical wisdom that caused him to ultimately die honorably.

Maximus's character displays courage and justice in the battle scenes, but more impressively he exhibits these same traits in his relationships. In comparison, the antagonist Commodus had an upbringing that constantly stressed to him the importance of power and the need to gain it regardless of the consequences. It is inevitable that Commodus's moral values were going to be skewed; however his experiences throughout his life should have provoked some sort of conscience. But rather, Commodus's continuous gain of power allowed him to disregard moral values and associate negative

decisions with positive outcomes. Hence, he never actually experiences the consequences of his actions until he dies without any form of honor. Just before Commodus kills his father in order to gain power, Marcus Aurelius admits that Commodus's poor morals can only be blamed on his upbringing.

This declaration not only supports Aristotle's claims, but more importantly it proves Aurelius' moral code and his understanding for human conduct.

Recognizing his role in Commodus's poor upbringing provoked him to make changes in order to honor Rome. These changes involved Marcus Aurelius choosing Maximus to gain the throne over his own son. This decision is undeniably the reasoning behind why Aurelius is murdered by his son Commodus. Although the king is murdered before his time, he dies honorably due to his ethical choices that were constructed based on his life experiences. In other words, Marcus Aurelius died for the good of Rome and his family, due to the blatant fact that he had a moral code and followed it.

The most impressive display of Aristotle's values in *Gladiator* is from the protagonist himself. After his entire family is murdered by Commodus he is forced to become a gladiator and battle in the Coliseum. Even as viewers we want to see Commodus brutally killed immediately by Maximus, but by watching him wait we begin to understand his reasoning, and most importantly his character. Crowe's character doesn't rashly take revenge on Commodus, but rather gains experience and honorably pursues his enemy.

Maximus waits until he has literally earned a one on one fight with Commodus in order to kill him. He perfectly displays one of Aristotle's main components in his ethical code, temperance. This temperance was gained by

his moral guidance most notably provoked by his honor for Rome and the people, which is mentioned multiple times in the film. In Maximus's death lies the true theme to the entire film, which is that in order to die honorably one must follow a code of ethics.

Commodus even injured Maximus before the battle and still lost in the end, which must be blamed on his complete lack of morality. Maximus died in the end alongside his enemy, but once he falls to the ground the crowd respected him and honored his name and his struggle. The audience is forced to realize the respect that Maximus had gained when the people leave the king on the ground and lift the body of the man who killed him. By contrasting the main characters in *Gladiator*, the viewer indisputably understands some of what Aristotle's teachings are trying to convey. Also, one can argue that the relationship between Maximus and Commodus provides a convincing example of what an ethical code provides for one's character. The fact that Maximus's character had the courage and temperance to earn his fight with Commodus proves that his life experiences gained him an understanding for the moral code that Aristotle details in his teachings.