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Final Paper 1

**Comparison of Moral Concepts of Nietzsche and Foucault**

Both Nietzsche in “Geneology of Morality” and Foucault in “Discipline and Punish” offer alternate moral paradigms to the traditional concepts of “good” and “evil”. Nietzsche believes that there are only those who have power and those who are weak, while Foucault believes in those who are disciplined and those who aren’t. While both these moral paradigms are binary systems, the two divisions Nietzsche and Foucault present are different in many ways. Nietzsche’s “weak” and Foucault’s “disciplined” both have limited freedom, but Nietzsche considers the weak to be mediocre and unproductive, while Foucault’s idea of a disciplined class is more efficient, productive, and well-behaved.

The method in which both Nietzsche and Foucault present the traditional ideas of good and bad, and then reject them differ significantly. Nietzsche provides an extensive history on the origin of the words good and bad and how their definitions have changed over time. He discusses how “good” was originally defined by the powerful nobility and how “bad” meant those who were considered weak, lazy, and dishonest. Eventually this definition was inverted by the priestly caste, who redefined good as “pure” and the “impure” nobility as “evil”. By displaying that these terms have inverted over time, Nietzsche is therefore rejecting the concept of good and bad as absolute, constant methods of determining morality. Foucault takes a more metaphorical approach, by describing two methods of addressing outbreaks of disease. The first is that of the plague, where every member of a town, sick or not, became part of a strictly run system where they were strictly watched and controlled. The second was that of the leper, where the sick are isolated and the rest of society treated as usual. The plague example represents Foucault’s concept of Panopticism: disciplining all through constant monitoring. The leper represents the traditional view of punishment, where the “good” are treated as normal and the “bad” are isolated. Foucault not only believes modern society has moved away from the “leper” method of discipline towards Panopticism, but also is a clear proponent that Panopticism is the ideal method for creating an efficient and safe society.

The two moral systems that Nietzsche and Foucault present parallel each other in many aspects but also oppose each other in many ways. Nietzsche’s class of the “weak” and Foucault’s class of the “disciplined” both involve groups of people whose free will is being oppressed in some way. The differences between these two groups lies in the forces of oppression, and the perceived results of the oppression by the writers. Foucault’s idea of Panopticism is that society becomes increasingly disciplined through the constant possibly of being watched by institutions of authority, which include the church, police, schools, and hospitals. Nietzsche saw the weak as those put in a powerless position through being poor, sick, or just unhappy due to resentment of the noble class. The main difference is that while Foucault’s disciplined class is created through institutionalized systems of control, Nietzsche’s weak class is more a result of the existence of a noble class with free will. The actions of these two classes differs significantly as well according to the two authors. Foucault believes that applying systems of discipline will lead to a society which is more efficient, more educated, and more docile. Nietzsche on the other hand, sees the weak’s response to the power of the nobles as that of resentment. According to Nietzsche, instead of pursuing acts of physical greatness like those of the noble class, the weak will be mediocre and content that they are the opposite of the “evil” nobility. While these responses of the two oppressed classes being examined seem to be polar opposites, this does not mean that Nietzsche and Foucault’s ideas completely clash. The method that power is applied in the writings of the two authors are very different as well. In “Geneology of Morality”, the resentment of the weak is due to barbaric, violent methods which they were oppressed by the nobles. The power in “Discipline And Punish” is exerted much more subtly, where many different institutions keep tabs on each individual and the possibility that one is being watched at all times subconsciously keeps them disciplined. It makes sense that power being applied in different fashions would have different responses.

While Nietzsche’s powerful noble class and Foucault’s undisciplined both have similar traits, the evaluation of these classes by the two authors are much different. However, both present evaluations that are outside the paradigms of “good” and “bad”. In “Geneology of Morality”, Nietzsche refers to the “blond beast”, the nobility whom without any power controlling them, and around foreign groups of people, commit acts of atrocity and violence as a display of power. He says that this is not due to their inherent good or bad actions, but merely the nature of this “blond beast”. Foucault wishes to avoid the punishment through isolation paradigm of justice as it labels people’s actions as good or bad. He believes that crime, similar to the barbaric acts of the blond beast, is a result of lack of discipline in society. Both Nietzsche and Foucault see not individuals who choose to follow a path of good or bad, but a society whose actions are collectively defined by its circumstances, namely the powers controlling it. The primary difference is that Nietzsche extensively defends and praises the noble class for living without restraint, guilt, or resentment. Foucault gives a similar amount of praise for the disciplined society which he sees as optimal for achieving order, education, and advancement. While the group the authors have chosen to praise is different, both look beyond good and evil.

Both of these excerpts are useful in that they force the reader to consider alternate methods of morality and justice than what we as a society are taught to accept. Every day, we use the words “good” and “bad” to label both people and their actions, and both Nietzsche and Foucault wish to step away from that. Nietzsche is very effective in proving that the concepts of “good” and “bad” are not universal, static concepts by giving the history of how the two have inverted over time. However, despite refuting this idea, his personal opinion is very strong throughout the entire essay and it is clear he believes the noble power to be “good” and the weak to be “bad”. Foucault does not explicitly define or refute the concepts of good and bad in the way that Nietzsche does. However, he provides a model of justice that is outside the traditionally accepted idea of punishing the “bad”. Nietzsche on the other hand, does not provide such a model for how society should avoid falling victim to the concepts of “good” and “bad”. Nonetheless, read together, the essays are effective at provoking thought on alternate methods of looking at both morality and justice.