Thus Spoke Zarathustra

Nietzsche's Life and Influence

Perspectivism

Zarathustra

I. Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900) shaped intellectual history in the 20th century.
   A. Nietzsche's academic achievements were in Classical studies.
      1. He was raised in a Lutheran family;
      2. became a university professor of classics at age 24;
      3. had to resign his position due to failing health;
      4. wrote most of his philosophical reflections in literary forms, aphorisms and essays;
   B. His writings were unrecognized in his lifetime, but greatly influenced later thinkers.
      1. 20th-century theologians found meaning in Nietzsche's statement, "God is dead."
      2. Existentialist philosophers explored Nietzsche's "nihilism."
      3. Political regimes (Nazis and Fascists) mistakenly looked to Nietzsche's conception of
         human progress as a guiding ideal.

II. An important theme in Nietzsche's philosophy is "Perspectivism."
   A. Philosophers we have studied emphasize different perspectives:
      1. Plato distinguished the world of ideas from the world of sense.
         a. The Idea-world is the source of value and truth for the sense-world.
         b. The sense world is unreal.
      2. St. Augustine distinguished between the eternal and temporal perspectives.
   B. Nietzsche agreed that perspectives are necessary, but found that no perspective is more
      genuine or "valid" than another.
      1. Nietzsche's "Nihilism" is the idea that all value and truth arises only within a
         perspective; outside perspectives there is "nothing" to validate any perspective.
      2. "Humanism" in Nietzsche's philosophy is the idea that value for humanity must arise
         in the human perspective, rather from a non-human, alien perspective of an Ideal
         world or eternity.
      3. "Individualism" in Nietzsche's philosophy is the idea that each individual necessarily
         forms his or her own perspective on values, truth and reality.

III. Nietzsche's most influential work was his literary masterpiece: Thus Spoke Zarathustra.
   A. The character Zarathustra is named after the Persian religious teacher, Zoroaster (620-550BC).
   B. Nietzsche's Zarathustra emerges from a cave to spread his gospel of "The
      Superman" (Übermensch) to mankind.
      1. Zarathustra's opening address to the sun (symbol of Plato's form of The Good) notes
         that the sun would not be fulfilled without those for whom it shines.
      2. The Superman is Nietzsche's ideal for humanity.
      3. Humanity is a "bridge" between the apes and the Superman.
      4. Ultimate value for humanity lies in what humanity can become, rather than in an
         alien, non-human realm: "God is dead."
   C. The market tragedy in the "Prologue" illustrates Nietzsche's doctrine of the Superman.
      1. The hero is the tight-robe walker, on the "bridge" between past and future, high above
         the mass of common men.
      2. The clown represents Zarathustra (Nietzsche), prompting the hero onward, chasing
         him toward his destiny.
      3. Zarathustra admires the fallen hero, for having taken the risk to advance humanity
         toward the Superman.
1. Nietzsche's philosophical view that there exists no fundamental Goodness or Truth that can validate anyone's perspective is known as:
   A) Perspectivism
   B) Fundamentalism
   C) Nihilism
   D) Existentialism

2. True/False: The Superman is Nietzsche's ideal for humanity.