

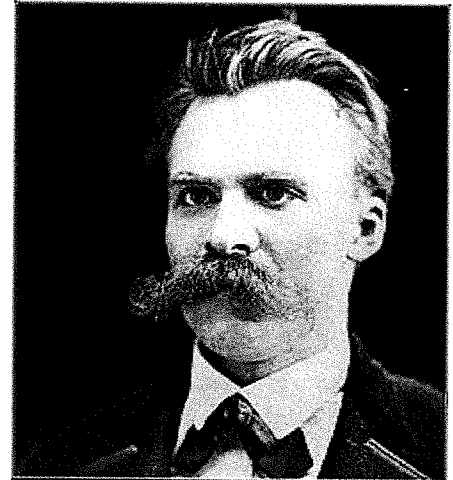
HZT4UE – Theory of Knowledge

UNIT 4: LANGUAGE

4.11 Nietzsche

Friedrich Nietzsche (1844 – 1900)

Main Ideas: Übermensch (Superman or “Over”man);
Will to Power;
Eternal Return



In *Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (1883), the main character, Z., is like a prophet that comes down from a mountain to spread ideas. In *Zarathustra* Nietzsche claims:

- i) **God is dead** (not that He ever even existed);
 - argues that the idea of God is dead, and human beings have killed it (Him)
 - the idea of an absolute truth and the “perfectibility of Man” is dead
 - refers to a spiritual malaise in a secular society where scientific rationality is privileged and therefore it is naïve to think of an anthropomorphic deity that is a “law-giving lord or a well-ordered and meaningful world” (Braman 8).
 - Life thus seems arbitrary, and nihilism is a problem
 - An “übermensch” is Z.’s answer to the modern wasteland
 - Very critical of J.S. Mill’s Utilitarianism (greatest good for greatest number of people)

- ii)
 - Rejects metaphysics and the idea that there is a “real” world behind the physical world. Z. is a material monist, rejecting the dualism of an actuality that we cannot perceive: there is nothing else but what we perceive.
 - rejects Plato, Descartes, Kant, Christianity, or any other metaphysical religion. Clerics of any religion are “Preachers of death” as they focus on the next world, not the living one.

- iii)
 - Rejects body-mind dualism. Human beings are whole organisms, and he encourages living through the body, not cerebrally (celebrates singing and dance rather than the spoken word which is “disembodied”)

- iv)
 - Advocates self-asserting individualism: disregarding the moral rules and sensibilities of the “herd”. The more people follow their own inspiration, and the less clouded they are by other people’s rules and values the closer they will come to pure life.

- v) - Self asserting individualism involves the “**Will to Power**” Nietzsche argues (expanding on Schopenhauer’s Will to Live”) that everything is about expressing power over other things and people. Being alive means subordinating other people/things in one’s own interest. This is natural and creates a “war-like” state, but this is not bad: risks must be taken and conflict experienced to transcend beyond nihilism
 - this rejects nationalism or patriotism as “vulgar forms of self-alienation” (where one is allowing oneself to be defined in non-individual terms)
- vi) - Life is a process, not a state. To live life as if one were a being, rather than a becoming, would be a false life.

By living by these principles, one can “fully be” as an übermensch.

Z. then retreats to let people try and become “Supermen” realizing that they cannot do it if he remains as their teacher.

He then has a crisis, realizing that everything is doomed to repeat itself: the Universe is made up of infinite time, but finite material, hence the material must be reconstituted in the same form at some point. There is a cycle of repetition (the **Eternal Return**) and hence there can be no transcendence (any “übermensch” will be doomed to be lowly again).

He recovers from this crisis by realizing that what matters is living in the here and now. The past and the future are irrelevant, all that matters is the present and fully realizing oneself in the moment.

Source (largely from): Bramann, Jorn K. “Nietzsche’s *Zarathustra*: A Summary.” <<http://www.fsu.umd.edu/dept/phil/forum/Zarathustra.htm>> Accessed 24. Jan. 2001.