

Nietzsche and the Bahá'í Writings:

A First Look

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Introduction

The purpose of this paper is to identify and evaluate correlations between the Bahá'í Writings and the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche. Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, calls on Bahá'ís “to investigate and analyse the principles of the Faith and to *correlate* them with the modern aspects of *philosophy* and science.”¹ He also says

The Cause needs more Bahá'í scholars, people who not only are devoted to it and believe in it and are anxious to tell others about it, but also who have a deep grasp of the Teachings and their significance, and who can *correlate its beliefs with the current thoughts and problems of the people of the world.*²

The Guardian adds,

If the Bahá'ís want to be *really effective in teaching the Cause* they need to be much better informed and able to discuss intelligently, intellectually, the present condition of the world and its problems. We need Bahá'í scholars,

not only people far, far more deeply aware of what our teachings really are, but also well-read and well-educated people, capable of *correlating our teachings to the current thoughts* of the leaders of society.³

It is worth noting that the Guardian associates effective Bahá'í teaching with the ability to “correlate” current issues in society with the Bahá'í Teachings. Given the enormous influence of Nietzsche’s thought and especially vis-à-vis the “new atheism,” finding correlations and correspondences with the Writings is an effective way of introducing the Writings to new audiences. The Universal House of Justice echoes the Guardian’s guideline.

Shoghi Effendi has for years urged the Bahá'ís (who asked his advice, and in general also) to study history, economics, sociology, etc., in order to be au courant with all the progressive movements and thoughts being put forth today, and so that they could *correlate these to the Bahá'í teachings*.⁴

In our understanding, the guidance of the Guardian and the Universal House of Justice, to “correlate” means to identify connections between different things.⁵ It can also refer to finding correspondences and various degrees of similarity. Finding correspondences or similarities is useful in dialoguing with other beliefs.

While correlations will be our primary focus, we shall, of course, identify and discuss major differences and the Writings and Nietzsche in order to forestall over-identification of the two. After all, the Writings come from Bahá'u'lláh, Who is the Manifestation of God for this age, and, therefore, set the standard for the truth by which to evaluate Nietzsche’s work. This difference remains no matter how many correlations we find between the Writings and Nietzsche. Among the most important stumbling blocks contradictions and problems are the master-slave morality, the transvaluation of values, and the

often nasty manner of expression and demeaning tone of Nietzsche's writings. None of these disagreements can be swept away and they will always stand as impediments to an over-identification of the Writings and Nietzsche. However, as we shall explain below, there are different ways of understanding or interpreting these conflicts and how they relate to the correlations.

One of the perennial questions in Nietzsche studies is, 'How can we evaluate and interpret what Nietzsche says?' How can we know, as Robert C Solomon and Kathleen M Higgins put it, "what "Nietzsche *really* said"?⁶ Reading him presents a knot of intertwined challenges that are not encountered to nearly the same degree with most other philosophers. The major sources of this problem are, in our view, three-fold. First, as we shall see throughout this paper, are Nietzsche's intellectual self-contradictions, as, for example, the existence or non-existence of a metaphysical substratum to reality. Furthermore, sometimes the *subtext* undermines or flatly contradicts the *apparent* meaning of the text. Second, the foregoing problem is exacerbated by Nietzsche's highly rhetorical and metaphorical style which makes interpretation difficult and easily leads to conflicting views. In addition, Nietzsche's use of exaggeration and bombast which makes it difficult to identify his 'real' position because of the resulting ambiguity.⁷ Third, he writes in a mixture of styles and genres, i.e. he does not consistently present his arguments by step-by-step inferences from premises to conclusions. Styles and genre can include serious extended discussions; shorter 'notebook' entries that are often modified or contradicted by later entries; clever aphorisms, provocations, insults, and ad hominem attacks; quasi-biblical works like *Thus Spake Zarathustra* and philosophical myths such as the master-slave morality.

Obviously, reading Nietzsche is a very complicated business. What is central and essential? What is peripheral and accidental? Is there a 'litmus test' for testing his ideas? One well-known group of philosophers and scholars denies that such a test exists

and that we can find ‘meaning’ or coherent philosophy in Nietzsche’s texts. Among these are Jacques Derrida,⁸ Sarah Kofman,⁹ Karl Jaspers¹⁰, Alexander Nehamas¹¹ and Ruediger Safranski.¹² These scholars agree that there is no single ‘meaning’ in Nietzsche waiting to be discovered. Nietzsche’s texts are essentially an on-going process of discovery in which ideas are suggested and then explored in different contexts and with different issues. Often, they are varied and undermined to lead us to new ideas. Of course, other philosophers and scholars disagree, asserting that to one extent or another, and varying from subject to subject, Nietzsche does, in fact, have a positive philosophy to promulgate. Notable among these are Walter Kaufmann, with his foundational *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*; Robert C Solomon and Kathleen M Higgins, whose book title sums up their position, *What Nietzsche Really Said*; John Richardson who wrote *Nietzsche’s System*;¹³ and Arthur C. Danto whose *Nietzsche as Philosopher* is an early but enduring text.¹⁴ As we can see, the range of Nietzsche interpretation is considerable.

Our study of the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche is based on Kaufmann’s *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist* (1950). We do so for three main reasons. First, this is the book that re-introduced Nietzsche to the English-speaking world by studying him as a philosopher with a coherent foundational idea applied to a large number of issues. Second, Kaufmann’s work has withstood almost seventy years of debate and critique and still remains essential in contemporary Nietzsche studies. Kaufmann’s approach to Nietzsche as a serious philosopher with important ideas has left its indelible mark on Nietzsche studies. Kaufmann’s key idea is that “the will to power is the core of Nietzsche’s thought but inseparable from his idea of sublimation.”¹⁵ Nietzsche’s concept of “sublimation” entails the necessity for self-overcoming to which Nietzsche returns so frequently. In his book, Kaufmann explores the various applications of Nietzsche’s central insight. Sixty years later, the *Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy* (2009) shows the

endurance and pervasive influence of Kaufmann's belief, stating that "the will to power is characterized by self-overcoming and is life-affirming."¹⁶ Third, using the will to power and its concomitant concepts of sublimation and self-overcoming allows Kaufmann to include almost all of Nietzsche's ideas into a reasonably coherent whole. In our view, his book provides unity or at least more unity than other interpretations.

Are the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche compatible in regards to their final end, goal or ultimate purpose? There is no simple answer to this question. Shoghi Effendi says that "the supreme and distinguishing function of His Revelation, which is none other than the calling into being of a *new race of men*" [ADJ 16, emphasis added]. Certainly Nietzsche's work can agree with this. A "new race of men" is Zarathustra's goal, and his means, i.e. sublimation and self-overcoming correspond – up to a point – with the Writings. However, whether or not Nietzsche can endorse the concept of spiritual development, depends very much on if we accept Nietzsche's atheism at face value. Our interpretation does not for reasons to be seen below.

The major, unbridgeable difference vis-à-vis ultimate goals appears in the Bahá'í goal of establishing a unified, federal world commonwealth united by "*one common faith*" [SAQ 65]. In other words, the current world-order needs to be replaced and the means to this end is the transformation or increased spiritualization of human character and the resulting establishment of new institutions. This contrasts with "Nietzsche's lack of a political philosophy."¹⁷ Certainly, he had political opinions but opinions by themselves do not necessarily make a coherent political philosophy. Even his support for rule by a neo-aristocracy does not deal with the issues a genuine political philosophy must deal with – power and power transfers, hierarchies of responsibility, law and so on – thereby leaving his political thought unformed and largely a matter of speculation. In other words, insofar as Nietzsche has a coherent vision of an institutional order, it is completely incompatible

with the Bahá'í goal of a new world order for all of humankind. This topic will be discussed in more detail below.

As so often with Nietzsche, we require a word about Nazism. The idea that Nietzsche was a precursor or proto-Nazi has few if any supporters in modern Nietzsche scholarship. Tracy B Strong in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche* states, “perhaps no opinion in Nietzsche scholarship is more widely accepted than that the Nazis were wrong and/or ignorant in their appropriation of Nietzsche.”¹⁸ Logically, just because the Nazis thought they understood Nietzsche and (mis)used him, does not mean Nietzsche himself was truly a Nazi or proto-Nazi. A parallel error would be to (mis)use Christ’s statement “*Think not that I am come to send peace on earth: I came not to send peace, but a sword*” [Matthew 10:34] to ‘prove’ that He was a warmonger. *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy* says Nietzsche has received “considerable attention in the English-speaking world as the shadow cast by the travesty of his appropriation by the Nazis and Fascists has receded.”¹⁹ *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy* amplifies this point, stating that Nietzsche

gives a large role to the will to power and he proposes to replace the values he attacks with new values and a new idea of the human person (the *Ueberschensch* meaning ‘overhuman’ or ‘superhuman’). Although Nazi theoreticians attempted to associate these ideas with their own cause, responsible interpreters agree that Nietzsche despised and unambiguously rejected both German nationalism and anti-Semitism.²⁰

This last point deserves commentary. Extreme German nationalism, imperialism and anti-semitism are three signature doctrines of Nazi theory and rejection of them is absolutely incompatible with being a Nazi or even proto-Nazi. Further evidence for this comes from Nietzsche’s advocacy of cosmopolitanism and interracial intermarriage,²¹ and, as we shall see below, his rejection of party politics, socialism and

mass movements of any kind because they destroy individual independence. The idea that Nietzsche (who died in 1900) was a pre-Nazi or proto-Nazi begins with his sister Elizabeth who was also the literary executor of his work. Unlike Nietzsche, she was a staunch German nationalist and imperialist who funded copies of *Thus Spake Zarathustra* for German soldiers heading to the front in 1914. She was also a fanatic anti-semitic married to a prominent anti-semitic, which is why Nietzsche refused to attend her wedding. She was enthralled with National Socialism and Hitler and encouraged the belief that Nietzsche would have been a follower of the 'new superman.' It is difficult to suppress a smile imagining Nietzsche as a follower of anyone.

As Robert C Solomon and Kathleen Higgins note, it makes no sense to blame any thinker for the abuse of his ideas by others after his death. Among other things, that is a dangerous and infeasible practice that would hold all authors responsible for the misapplication of their ideas. For example, we could blame Darwin for significant portions of Nazi ideology vis-à-vis the survival of the fittest and its applications to individuals and societies. The term 'superman' may have come from Nietzsche but the concept of the 'fittest' animal dominating the others has a distinctly Darwinian ring. In fact, Richard Weikart's²² *Hitler's Ethic: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress* relates Nazism to Darwin. In the case of Nietzsche and Darwin, the Nazis misused other people's ideas but this tells us more about the Nazis than it does about these two thinkers. We do not believe that it is fair to taint the work of an author because others mishandled his or her ideas.

Nonetheless, the fact remains that even without the Nazis, a number of Nietzsche's ideas that can be read as advocating rule by and for the violent. His theory of master-slave morality and the transvaluation of values are clearly of this kind. However, three points should give us pause before reacting against passing judgment on his work as a whole. First, we must not throw out the baby with the bathwater: it is hard to see why our antipathy to some of his ideas should prejudice us against his

other ideas. Second, we should recognize that Nietzsche was not always a consistent thinker and these parts of his philosophy are inconsistencies in his thought at least from vis-à-vis the “core,” i.e. the will to power, sublimation and self-overcoming. Third, because they are not compatible with the “core” of Nietzsche’s thought, these inconsistencies cannot logically undermine those parts that are compatible. They do not work from the same premise, i.e. the “core.”

Finally, as a Bahá’í, I am convinced that as a result of Bahá’u’lláh’s mysterious influence, Nietzsche was one of those individuals who felt – albeit unconsciously or “*through a glass darkly*” [1 Corinthians 13:12] – the necessity of transforming ourselves to prepare for the coming end of European civilization and a new world. Shoghi Effendi refers to “those hidden and transforming influences which, from the source of Bahá’u’lláh’s mystic strength, continue to flow with ever-increasing vitality into the heart of this troubled world” [BA 113]. This, of course, is a matter of personal faith, but even for those who do not share my belief, the fact that there are significant correlations between the widely separated Bahá’í Writings from the Middle East and the European bourgeois Nietzsche is, at the very least, of interest in the history of ideas.

2. The Common Foundation Between the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche

First appearances notwithstanding, there are at least three major general foundational elements which the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche share: (1) the radical critique of modern society as suffering from irreversible social, intellectual, ethical and spiritual degeneration; (2) the absolute necessity for the establishment of a new kind of society and a re-constitution of humankind, and (3) at the most fundamental level, the Aristotelian substratum of their thought.²³

2.1 The World in Decline

Both Bahá'u'lláh and Nietzsche viewed the modern world as being in a degenerating condition, marked by “*selfish disorders, intellectual maladies, spiritual sicknesses, imperfections and vices*” [PUP 204-205]. Not surprisingly, such conditions lead to mass despair, i.e. an overwhelming conviction of the loss of all values, the loss of all hope for the future and the loss of all confidence in ourselves or anything else, including God. Bahá'u'lláh writes, “*The winds of despair are, alas, blowing from every direction*” [GWB 216], and

The world is in travail, and its agitation waxeth day by day. Its face is turned towards waywardness and unbelief. Such shall be its plight, that to disclose it now would not be meet and seemly. Its perversity will long continue. [GWB 118, emphasis added; see also KI 12]

Shoghi Effendi, the Guardian of the Bahá'í Faith, provides the most comprehensive description of the decaying world order of our time.

No wonder, therefore, that when, *as a result of human perversity*, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts, and the divinely appointed Robe, designed to adorn the human temple, is deliberately discarded, a deplorable decline in the fortunes of humanity immediately sets in, bringing in its wake all the evils which a wayward soul is capable of revealing. *The perversion of human nature*, the degradation of human conduct, the corruption and dissolution of human institutions, reveal themselves, under such circumstances, in their worst and most revolting aspects. Human character is debased, confidence is shaken, the nerves of discipline are relaxed, the voice of human conscience is stilled, the sense of decency and shame is obscured, conceptions of duty, of solidarity, of reciprocity and loyalty are distorted, and the very

feeling of peacefulness, of joy and of hope is gradually extinguished. [WOB 187, emphasis added]

The ultimate cause of this universal decay and loss of direction is the failure of spirituality and religion in the lives modern men and women. The first sign of this inner collapse is the rejection of God's Manifestation for this age, the denial of the "*divine physician*" [SWAB 23] Whose task is to renew and revitalize humankind and to help it advance towards its next stage of its psycho-spiritual and social evolution. Another sign of this "perversity" is the inability of humans to recognize their desperate and spiritually impoverished condition. As Bahá'u'lláh says, "*The Hour hath come upon them, while they are disporting themselves. They have been seized by their forelock, and yet know it not*" [GWB 43]. The third sign is inability to understand that

material progress alone does not tend to uplift man. On the contrary, the more he becomes immersed in material progress, the more does his spirituality become obscured. [PT 108]

We cannot find materialist solutions to spiritual problems. This impossible quest only increases despair – and fuels still more desperate efforts to fill the 'hole in the soul' with more 'stuff.' Similarly, Nietzsche realizes that the "Ultimate Man" cannot find happiness in the quest for more psycho-spiritual comfort because the only way to true well-being is the quest for self – overcoming. It is important to note that for both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche, the origin of the modern crisis is not technological, scientific or political but rather spiritual. In *The Gay Science*, Nietzsche writes that Europe faces

[t]he peasant rebellion of the spirit. – We Europeans confront a world of tremendous ruins ... *The church is this city of destruction: We see ... Christianity shaken to its lowest foundations; the faith in ... God has collapsed...*²⁴

Nietzsche identifies nihilism with destruction of values and purpose²⁵ brought on by the end of the Christian church and Christianity itself. The collapse of religion and spirituality leads to what Nietzsche calls “European nihilism.”²⁶ In *The Will to Power*, he defines nihilism:

*Nihilism as a psychological state will have to be reached, first, when we have sought a “meaning” in all events that is not there: so the seeker eventually becomes discouraged. Nihilism, then, is the recognition of the long waste of strength, the agony of the “in vain,” insecurity, the lack of any opportunity to recover and to regain composure – being ashamed in front of oneself, as if one had deceived oneself all too long.*²⁷

In words reminiscent of the opening of *The Communist Manifesto*, he announces, “Nihilism stands at the door: whence comes this uncanniest of all guests?”²⁸ This “guest” is characterized by

Skepticism regarding morality ... Buddhistic, yearning for Nothing ... the air of mediocrity, wretchedness, dishonesty, etc. Nationalism, Anarchism, etc. Punishment. The redeeming class and human being are lacking – the justifiers.²⁹ He adds that moral skepticism is decisive because it “leads to nihilism.”³⁰

Noteworthy among these deficiencies is the lack of a “redeeming class and human being” i.e. an inspirational figure who can re-invigorate and mobilize mankind’s flagging energies. None of these deficiencies can be cured by material possessions comfort or progress. Providing that required spiritual remedy is the major aim of Nietzsche’s philosophy, as seen in Zarathustra’s valiant efforts to regenerate and re-energize the “Ultimate Men,”³¹ i.e. the comfort-loving denizens of the valley. In vain, he offers to cure them of their self-contented and materialistic sloth by inner, personal or spiritual transformation won through painful self-overcoming. This is a

significant part of the unavoidable cure for the illnesses of modernity that Bahá'u'lláh offers by “*calling into being of a new race of men*” [ADJ 16]. Of course, in the Bahá'í context this self-overcoming requires recognition of God whereas in Nietzsche, this is, as will be shown below, a matter of interpretation.

For Nietzsche, nihilism has two aspects, a “passive nihilism”³² and an “active nihilism.”³³ “Passive” nihilism is a sign of decreased power, despair, “the weary nihilism that no longer attacks.”³⁴ By contrast “active” nihilism is a sign of increased power and is a “violent force of destruction,”³⁵ i.e. a nihilism that clears away all the traditional beliefs and ideas – all the thoughtless and comforting imitations – that prevent us from actualizing our full potentials as conscious beings. “Active” nihilism corresponds to the Bahá'í concept of destroying not the world but rather of “[T]ear[ing] aside the veils that have grievously blinded your vision and ... scatter the idols of vain imitation” [GWB 142]. In the words of Bahá'u'lláh, “None have believed in Him except them who ... have shattered the idols of their vain imaginings and corrupt desires and entered the city of certitude” [GWB 12]. In both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche we must choose to make a radical break with the past. It is important to notice the strong language used in the Writings – tearing, scattering shattering – to show that spiritual evolution requires great energy and is not always a comfortable process. Nietzsche, of course, uses similar language in this regard.

2.2 The Need for Revolutionary Change

Note: In order to frame the following discussion, it is imperative to point out that the ultimate aim of the Bahá'í dispensation is the establishment of a new world order, i.e. the unification of humankind in a world-wide federal state united by “*one common faith*” [GWB 255] in which the “*spiritual susceptibilities*” [PUP 7] of humankind are more awake than they are now. Nietzsche, however, has no clear ultimate goal in mind

— although some have inferred such — as we shall discuss below. Therefore, the correspondences between the Writings and Nietzsche are similarities regarding *means* in contrast to differences regarding the ultimate *ends*. It is also important to note that although Bahá'u'lláh's *goal is revolutionary change* in humankind, His *method is evolutionary*, i.e. spiritual, psychological, social development of our “*spiritual susceptibilities which are merciful and heavenly characteristics*” [PUP 244].

In our view, Bahá'u'lláh does not see Himself as yet another reformer whose purpose is to prolong the existence of the old world order by a patchwork of ‘fixes.’ Rather, His goal is to establish a new world order: “*Soon will the present-day order be rolled up, and a new one spread out in its stead*” [GWB 7]. He takes full responsibility for and makes no secret of the momentous changes destabilizing the world as a prelude to establishing a new world order.

The world's equilibrium hath been upset through the vibrating influence of this most great, this new World Order. Mankind's ordered life hath been revolutionized through the agency of this unique, this wondrous System — the like of which mortal eyes have never witnessed.
[GWB 136, emphasis added]

In *The Tablets of Bahá'u'lláh*, He describes the Manifestation as “*fully capable of revolutionizing the world through the power of a single Word*” [TB 259] and calls on humanity to

[c]ast away that which ye possess, and, on the wings of detachment, soar beyond all created things. Thus biddeth you the Lord of creation, the movement of Whose Pen hath revolutionized the soul of mankind. [PB 117]

Here we see the radical — and spiritual — nature of this Revelation, demanding nothing less than a radical break with the past and a total commitment by divesting ourselves of

whatever attaches us to the old world. Bahá'u'lláh even draws attention to the radical or even traumatic nature of His revelation.

the whole creation was revolutionized and all that are in the heavens and all that are on earth were stirred to the depths. Through that Word the realities of all created things were shaken, were divided, separated, scattered, combined and reunited, disclosing entities of a new creation... [GWB 295; ADJ 46-47]

It must be remembered that the focal point of Bahá'u'lláh's revolution is spiritual. Unlike revolutionaries in the past, He begins the process of revolution and transformation from within, so that His new world order begins with "a new race of men" who do not simply repeat the errors of the past. Of course the primarily spiritual focus of His revelation does not preclude the daily tasks of mitigating the suffering of individuals or striving for justice in our society. However, these activities are most valuable and reach their fullest potential in the framework of serving the Bahá'í Cause.

One consequence of these tumultuous times is an inevitable struggle with opposing forces. Shoghi Effendi writes,

We have only to refer to the warnings uttered by 'Abdu'l-Bahá in order to realize the extent and character of the forces that are *destined to contest* with God's holy Faith peoples, nations, adherents of *divers faiths*, will jointly and successively arise to shatter its unity, to sap its force, and to degrade its holy name. They will assail not only the spirit which it inculcates, but the administration which is the channel, the instrument, the embodiment of that spirit. [WOB 17, emphasis added; cf. CC2 142, ADJ 41, TDH 123, GPB 411]

Shoghi Effendi also writes of

the burden of the impending contest that must be waged, sooner or later ... between the rising institutions of Bahá'u'lláh's embryonic divinely appointed Order, and the exponents of obsolescent doctrines and the defenders, both secular and religious, of a corrupt and fast-declining society. [CF 155]

Shoghi Effendi even assigns responsibility for the start of the inexorable conflict on the way to a new world order:

Our adversaries in the East have initiated the struggle. Our future opponents in the West will, in their turn, arise and carry it a stage further. Ours is the duty, in anticipation of this inevitable contest, to uphold unequivocally and with undivided loyalty the integrity of our Faith. [CF 155, emphasis added]

Given human nature, revolution without contest and conflict is not possible – but the key issue is by what means and towards what end the contest is waged. In the case of the Bahá'í Faith, this “agonistic engagement”³⁶ is waged not by coups, political opposition, subversion or extra-parliamentary movements but by means of new ideas, revitalized values, good personal examples, energized hope, and appeals to the spiritual elements in human nature. The underlying principle is that by the power of example these transformational activities will gradually encourage people to turn their loyalties and activities away from the old world order and turn towards Bahá'u'lláh's Revelation. It is only in this way- a shift of loyalties – that the Bahá'í Faith can be said to be impact negatively on the old world order. In other words, the Bahá'í Faith will not actively work to weaken or bring down the old world order but rather emphasizes spiritual renewal and personal and social transformation that will allow people to build a new world.

Nietzsche appears to suggest somewhat similar action. Through his fictional character Zarathustra as an ideal example and by means of attacking the West's foundational concepts in

metaphysics, ethics, logic, religion, science and social organization, he aims at clearing away the out-dated and/or un-supportable concepts that prop up the old world order and hinder the arrival of the Superman. Zarathustra says,

O my brothers, am I then cruel? But I say: *That which is falling should also be pushed!*

Everything of today – it is falling. It is decaying: who would support it? *But I – want to push it too!*

... I am a prologue to better players, O my brothers! ... Follow my example!

*And him you do not teach to fly, teach – to fall faster!*³⁷

The essential message here – the dramatic flare and hyperbole aside – converges with the Bahá'í Writings in rejecting reform and desiring revolution and a future that is not merely a repetition of the past in a different disguise. Their method is similar – up to a point. The shift of loyalties suggested in the Writings is dedicated to building a positive new order, but does not mandate action against the old order as Zarathustra does by encouraging us to push it down.

2.3: The Rejection of Politics

Both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche reject partisan political activity as a viable way of changing the world. Shoghi Effendi says,

Bahá'ís should remember that *we stand above politics*. That that field does not interest us; that we attribute importance to things of the spirit, that we await salvation to come from the Faith that burns in our hearts. [LDG 47-48]

Of course, non-participation in partisan politics does not mean Bahá'ís should not engaged in positive works to help individuals or striving for justice but we must be sure that

neither we nor the Faith are being co-opted for partisan purposes. Moreover, non-participation in partisan politics does not mean that the Bahá'í Writings do not have certain principles vis-à-vis governance. They make it clear, among other things, that free, open and democratic government is better for human progress than autocratic government [PUP 197]; that elected parliaments are good – if conducted properly [PUP 73; SDC 17]; and that undue centralization is a source of ill [PUP 167]. However, partisanship is to be avoided because it is 'partial' by nature whereas the Bahá'í focus is on the good of the whole. As 'Abdu'l-Bahá says,

universality is of God, Bahá'ís in every land are ready, nay anxious, to associate themselves by word and deed with any association of men which, after careful scrutiny, they feel satisfied is free from every tinge of partisanship and politics and is wholly devoted to the interests of all mankind. [BA 125, emphasis added]

In the words of Shoghi Effendi, “[t]he bonds which hold together the body-politic are not sufficient” [JWTA 43] to unify a nation – or the world. They hold mankind back from its destiny as a global commonwealth.

R. Kevin Hill notes that “Nietzsche rejects all the political ideologies on offer, from left to right as delusions, ‘convictions’ with no foundation.”³⁸ Politics as practiced in Europe during his time no longer serve any useful purpose: “the time for small politics is gone,”³⁹ a point also emphasized in his disparaging reference to “*the wretched gabble of politics and nationalism and nationalism.*”⁴⁰ Indeed, his contempt for politics is expressed even more strongly: he describes it as a “*prostitution of the spirit.*”⁴¹ Nietzsche scholar Ted Sadler states,

For Nietzsche as for Heraclitus, politics is one of the most overestimated things in the world, mainly because it caters for the instincts of the common,

unphilosophical natures who are always in the majority. *Politics stands in opposition to the radically individualizing character of philosophy* expressed in Heraclitus' statement [Diels-Kranz: Fragment 246] 'I searched out myself.'⁴²

Like Bahá'u'lláh, Nietzsche is no mere reformer; he has no confidence in contemporary partisan politics or in political revolutions to solve the problems of nihilism and societal decay. Both insist that we must not confuse and conflate the desire to make revolutionary changes in society by means of individual transformation in goals and values, with the work of political parties, programs and partisan conflicts. In fact, these two will often work at cross purposes. If people are not inwardly transformed, they will inevitably repeat the very behaviors the revolution was supposed to eliminate.

Like Bahá'u'lláh, Nietzsche rejects the partisan politics but most of his political principles not only contradict the Bahá'í Writings but also contradict other aspects of Nietzsche's philosophy as we shall see below. Unlike the Writings, Nietzsche despised democracy as "not only a deterioration, that is to say, the depreciation of a human type, a mediocratizing and lowering of values."⁴³ Instead, he appears to advocate what Mark Warren calls a "neoristocratic conservatism ... [that looks] forward to a time when similar cultural aristocracies might be established."⁴⁴ Bruce Detwiler calls Nietzsche's political views "the politics of aristocratic radicalism"⁴⁵ which establishes rule by the most powerful and ruthless. It is not hard to find evidence for such beliefs in Nietzsche who writes,

Every heightening of the type "man" hitherto has been the work of *an aristocratic society* — and *thus it will always be*; a society which believes in a long ladder of rank order and value differences in men, *which needs slavery in some sense* ... To be sure, *we must not yield to humanitarian self-deception* ... *Men whose nature was still natural, barbarians in every frightful sense of the*

word, men of prey ... such men threw themselves upon weaker, better-behaved, more peaceable races ... The distinguished caste in the beginning was always the barbarian caste; their superiority lay not primarily in their physical but in their psychic power; they were more whole human beings (which on every level also means “more whole as beasts”).⁴⁶

Nietzsche approves of the aristocrats for their leadership because they “heighten[ed] “the type of ‘man.’” In other words, the human race as a whole benefits by their rule. Even if violence is only instrumental at the start of their ascent and their real superiority lay in “their psychic power” the fact remains that they seize and keep power by violence for such is the nature of life itself. Nietzsche writes,

Life is essential assimilation, injury, violation of the foreign and the weaker, suppression, hardness, the forcing of one’s own form upon something else, ingestion and – at least in its mildest form – exploitation ... life is simply will to power ... “Exploitation” is not a part of a vicious or imperfect or primitive society; it belongs to the nature of living things.⁴⁷

In other words, Nietzsche justifies the aristocrats as realists who accept the conditions of natural life and take advantage of them.⁴⁸ This is simply incompatible with the Bahá'í vision of a new world order.

For Nietzsche, the struggle for domination is based on the universally present will to power which is ontologically integral to life. Being ontologically integral to life, it cannot be removed without eliminating life itself. Consequently, for Nietzsche “exploitation” “suppression” or domination i.e. “the forcing of one’s own form upon something else” does not necessarily mean a society is “primitive” or “vicious” as most ethical systems would assert. These are natural and necessary activities. In Nietzsche’s view, the aristocrats ought to rule

precisely because they have attributes listed above and they accept the nature of reality without any shame and/or guilt, and therefore the aristocrat

feels himself the value-determining; he does not need to be ratified; he judges that “which is harmful to me is harmful as such; he knows that he is the something which gives honor to objects; he creates values ... his morality is self-glorification.”⁴⁹

In our view, Nietzsche’s ideas on the will to power in regards to politics have at least two inherent problems which not only conflict with his other teachings but also conflict with the Bahá’í Writings. First, his neo-aristocratic views contradict his doctrine of continuous self-overcoming.⁵⁰ A ruling class without interest in self-critique and self-evaluation, i.e. a ruling class which sincerely experiences itself and whatever it does as “the good” is unlikely to engage in self-overcoming since the necessary ‘good’ has already been achieved. The problem is that for Nietzsche the ethics of self-overcoming “distinguish[] the moral from the nonmoral [person].”⁵¹ Furthermore, as Kaufmann notes, “self-criticism, i.e. man’s critical reflection on his own intentions and actions – is the core of morality.”⁵² The inescapable conclusion is that Nietzsche’s aristocrats are inherently immoral not by Christian standards but the standards set by Zarathustra who is – supposedly – the prime embodiment of Nietzsche’s ethics. The same conclusion follows from Bahá’í ethics in which self-overcoming is also essential to creating “new race of men” [ADJ 16].

2.3.1 Loyalty to the Earth

The second problem concerns the relationship between morality and nature, a subject on which Nietzsche is deeply conflicted. On one hand, he justifies the cruelties of his aristocracy by appealing to nature, thereby falling into the Humean fallacy of confusing ‘what is’ with ‘what ought to be,’

i.e. of confusing 'description' with 'prescription' and 'knowing what is the case' with 'endorsing what is the case.' Describing and prescribing (endorsing, obligating) are not logically equivalent. Just because Alexis always cooks supper at our house does not mean that Alexis *should* always cook supper at our house. Just because mother rabbits sometimes eat their young in times of danger does not mean that we can justify human mothers doing the same. In other words, Nietzsche wants to base his ethics on nature, on what is 'natural' as part of his philosophy of loyalty to the earth. Nietzsche admonishes us to

remain true to the earth and do not believe those who speak to you of superterrestrial hopes! They are poisoners whether they know it or not ... *To blaspheme the earth is now the dreadful offence*, and to esteem the bowels of the Inscrutable more highly than the meaning of the earth.⁵³

There are two problems here. First, self-overcoming is not part of the natural order of things; a crocodile is what it is and does what it does and shows no sign of trying to be 'better' in some way. This loyalty to earth also conflicts with the 'transcendental impulse' we see in his work. Second, it is not necessarily true that belief in the existence of a "superterrestrial" world devalues and degrades the earth and our earthly existence. Why would any believer in God denigrate the Creator's work? That would, in effect, be an attack on the Creator Himself. Nietzsche fails to recognize that there is an essential difference between being excessively attached to the Creator's work and being attached to the Creator. Condemning the undue attachment to nature, i.e. God's work, condemns a faulty response to nature but does not devalue creation itself. Nietzsche's claim that belief in a "superterrestrial" world is in itself a devaluation of the natural world is contradicted by the Bahá'í Writings: "*How resplendent the luminaries of knowledge that shine in an atom, and how vast the oceans of wisdom that*

surge within a drop!" [GWB 177] Furthermore, there is Bahá'u'lláh's condemnation of asceticism and monasticism: they impede the full celebration of earthly life and the divine gifts it offers:

Living in seclusion or practising asceticism is not acceptable in the presence of God. It behoveth them that are endued with insight and understanding to observe that which will cause joy and radiance. [TB 71]

It is worth noting that Bahá'u'lláh emphasises the "joy and radiance" of earthly life just as Nietzsche does. Moreover, He clearly condemns such practices as originating in "idle fancy" and "superstition" [TB 71] and, thereby, unmasking them as distortions of human existence. Moreover, since the Bahá'í view of human life is a process view, i.e. a character-building⁵⁴ journey from earth to the endless spiritual evolution of the Abhá Kingdom, there is no rationale for devaluing the necessary first step of pilgrimage. Without the first step, the others are impossible; indeed, in a process view past steps are implicitly included and even raised to a higher level. Nietzsche's reasoning on this matter does not hold.

However, there is another, in effect, opposing line of thought about nature in Nietzsche. Zarathustra's demand for self-overcoming i.e. self-transcending requires us to tame and transform our natural, animal impulses into something higher. That is why Nietzsche says,

The *spiritualization of sensuality* is called *love*: it is a great triumph over Christianity. A further triumph is our spiritualization of *enmity*. It consists in profoundly grasping the value of having enemies: in brief, in acting and thinking in the reverse of the way in which one formerly acted and thought.⁵⁵

We must transform, or sublimate⁵⁶ animal lust into love and spiritualize our conflicts. As Kaufmann notes, Nietzsche "used

another word side by side with sublimation: *Vergeisterung*, spiritualization.”⁵⁷ We should not view our enemies in the natural way and rise above our impulses to find value in our foes. We must go beyond nature – as is already obvious in Nietzsche’s advocacy of self-overcoming to be better humans, not better animals. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá says, “*The Prophets come into the world to guide and educate humanity so that the animal nature of man may disappear and the divinity of his powers become awakened*” [PUP 41]. It is also noteworthy that Nietzsche’s statement about enemies converges with ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s admonition:

Let them see no one as their enemy, or as wishing them ill, but think of all humankind as their friends; regarding the alien as an intimate, the stranger as a companion, staying free of prejudice, drawing no lines. [SWAB 1]

4: Master and Slave Morality

The issue of Nietzsche’s “aristocratic radicalism” brings us to one of the most challenging, controversial and thought-provoking aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy – master and slave morality as presented in *On the Genealogy of Morals* and *Beyond Good and Evil*. This is one of the places where the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche can only be reconciled to a limited degree.

In outline, Nietzsche’s theory is simple enough. There exist two kinds of morality, i.e. on one hand, the morality of the ruling aristocrats, nobility and masters, and, on the other hand, the morality of the slaves i.e. the subservient classes of people. Nietzsche’s description of the masters is provocative: they are hard, proud, intolerant of weakness, self-confident, challenge-seeking, war-like, active and energetic, strong, bluntly truthful about themselves and the world, and focused on law and what is right. In direct contrast, slave morality values the useful i.e. the comfortable and advantageous over the right; it values

weakness, kindness and compassion, humility, patience, equality of all things as well denigrating earthly life in favor of a heavenly life after death.

According to Nietzsche, these two moralities clash — although one of them, i.e. slave morality, is the victor in the modern world. Nietzsche links this historical downfall with the rise of the priestly class in Judaism and Christianity which he identifies with slave morality. However, it is essential to remember that to one degree or another, the struggle between the two kinds of morality continues within us today.⁵⁸

Nietzsche's views on this subject are summarised in the following passage from *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

All the world's efforts against the "aristocrats," the "mighty," the "masters," the "holders of power," are negligible by comparison with what has been accomplished against those classes by the Jews — the Jews, that priestly nation which eventually realised that the one method of effecting satisfaction on its enemies and tyrants was by means of a radical *transvaluation of values*, which was at the same time *an act of the cleverest revenge*. Yet the method was only appropriate to a nation of priests, to a nation of the *most jealously nursed priestly revengefulness*. It was the Jews who, in opposition to the aristocratic equation (good = aristocratic = beautiful = happy = loved by the gods), dared with a terrifying logic to suggest the contrary equation, and indeed to maintain with the teeth of the *most profound hatred (the hatred of weakness)* this contrary equation, namely, "*the wretched are alone the good; the poor, the weak, the lowly, are alone the good; the suffering, the needy, the sick, the loathsome, are the only ones who are pious, the only ones who are blessed, for them alone is salvation* — but you, on the other hand, you aristocrats, you men of power, you are to all eternity the evil, the horrible, the covetous, the

insatiate, the godless; eternally also shall you be the unblest, the cursed, the damned!”⁵⁹

Before proceeding, we hasten to add that this passage is not an anti-Semitic outburst — Nietzsche openly despised anti-semitism especially in his sister and brother-in-law; rather, it is an observation of a historical turn of events, i.e. the Edict of Thessalonica in 380 CE by which Christianity and its slave morality became the only authorized religion in the Roman Empire. This event marks the success of the slave revolt and the “transvaluation of values.”

The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche's master and slave morality are incompatible for at least one reason: the Writings identify the “slave morality” with the ethical teachings of the Manifestations of God and the “master morality” with the proud and corrupt rulers and leaders of the world to whom Bahá'u'lláh wrote admonitory epistles. In other words, the Bahá'í Writings favor what Nietzsche calls “slave morality”: the morality of the weak, the oppressed, the humble, the compassionate, and the long-suffering as well as the values of dedication to God, unselfishness and service to others. Conversely, the Manifestations have sought to overcome the unself-critical, unreflective self-satisfaction of our animal natures that marks the cruelty and ruthlessness of beasts — and Nietzsche's master class.

Unlike Nietzsche, the Manifestations understood the superiority of the ‘slave’ morals insofar as they maintained the ethics of self-overcoming which “distinguishes the moral [person] from the nonmoral [person].”⁶⁰ Kaufmann notes that “self-criticism, i.e. man's critical reflection on his own intentions and actions — is the core of morality.”⁶¹ In contrast, of master morality shows it to be painfully smug, self-satisfied and arrogant even about inflicting violence and, therefore, highly unlikely to lead to the kind of self-critical awareness required for self-overcoming. Ironically, Nietzsche's own standard of self-overcoming means that the aristocracy fails

Nietzsche's test for being moral. In sharp contrast, the slave morality with its intense awareness of its own weakness and other deficiencies is far more likely to be open to the process of self-overcoming and, thereby, according to Nietzsche's own standards, becomes more fit to rule.

Once again, we face a division in Nietzsche's philosophy. On one hand we have the "master-and-slave" morality justified by a ruthless vision of life:

What is life? – Life – that is: continually shedding something that wants to die. Life – that is; *being cruel and inexorable* against everything about us that is growing old and weak – and not only about us. Life – that is, then: *being without reverence* for those who are dying, who are wretched, who are ancient? Constantly being a murderer? – And yet old Moses said: "Thou shalt not kill."⁶²

The mocking tone of "old Moses" – far more derisive in German than in English – makes clear his contempt for the attributes of slave morality. On the other hand we have On one hand, there is Zarathustra, the exemplar of what humankind should become, i.e. a bridge to the Superman, who engages in constant self-overcoming, who preaches to the "last men" in hopes of awakening the adventure of self-overcoming, who is hard on himself and does not always sing his own praises, who uses the power of words to attain his goals, not violence and who has no real interest in dominating others by force.

Walter Kaufmann tries to avoid this dilemma by suggesting that Nietzsche "would like us to conform to neither [master nor slave morality] and become *autonomous*,⁶³ i.e. grow beyond both. However, it is difficult to see how being "autonomous" prevents us from having to make choices that either agree more with the stark differences between master and slave morality and their respective consequences. Moreover, it is also difficult to see how one can – or would want to – grow beyond self-

overcoming (to what?) and compassion. As soon as we adopt these in any way, we are forced to abandon the master morality. In our view, there is a genuine conflict in Nietzsche's thought on this matter and there is no choice but to recognize one or the other as being consistent with the whole body of Nietzsche's philosophy.

Can the Bahá'í Writings be brought into alignment with Nietzsche's master-slave-morality? In our view, no direct agreements or convergences are evident. However, we find some tenuous parallelism between certain ideas, i.e. we can find ideas that are different in content but fulfill some of the same functions. We might also think of mirror images in which one is the reverse of the other. As we understand the Writings, Nietzsche's concept of 'domination' must be replaced by the concept of 'service,' i.e. the 'leaders' or 'aristocrats' serve humankind. They are 'masters' in the art of promoting spiritual evolution. Thus, both the Writings and Nietzsche have a concept of rank i.e. ways of distinguishing ourselves by special attributes and/or actions but these work in antithetical ways. One obvious difference is that for Nietzsche there is a relationship of enmity and forceful, even violent domination between the masters and slaves. In contrast, in the Bahá'í Writings the 'leaders' neither rule nor dominate nor regard others as foes and inferiors nor are they part of a permanent class. They lead by force of good example and exemplary behavior, by obedience to Bahá'u'lláh's revelation, by constant striving to develop their "*spiritual susceptibilities*" [PUP 7] and in service to others. Among Bahá'ís case, the 'masters' themselves are 'slaves' insofar as they ultimately seek to serve God and not themselves. It is, so to speak, a quest to be part of an 'aristocracy of slaves'!

The Bahá'í Writings themselves encourage this sense of spiritual competition to serve.

'Abdu'l-Bahá says, "*Happy the soul that shall forget his own good, and like the chosen ones of God, vie with his fellows in*

service to the good of all” [SDC 115]. Bahá’u’lláh says, “*Vie ye with each other in the service of God*” [MOTC 123]. The Universal House of Justice tells us that Bahá’u’lláh “encouraged a competitive spirit in its noblest form.”⁶⁴ In short, the Writings and the guidance from the Universal House of Justice recognize the value of spiritual competition in service.

To the objection that this sounds too combative, we point out that there is an agonistic aspect in the Writings as already seen in Shoghi Effendi’s warnings about future “contests” with opposition to the Faith. Furthermore, lower animal traits can be transformed and transvalued into higher, more spiritual traits. For example, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, reminds us that greed – an animal trait – can become a prized spiritual characteristic.

greed, which is to ask for something more, is a praiseworthy quality provided that it is used suitably. So if a man is greedy to acquire science and knowledge, or to become compassionate, generous and just, it is most praiseworthy. [SAQ 214, emphasis added]

The same principle underlies the use of military imagery in the Writings. For example, in one of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s prayers we read:

These souls are Thy heavenly army. Assist them and, with the cohorts of the Supreme Concourse, make them victorious, so that each one of them may become like unto a regiment and conquer these countries through the love of God and the illumination of divine teachings. [TDP 35, emphasis added]

In another prayer he says,

Confirm me in Thy service, assist me with the cohorts of Thy angels, make me victorious in the promotion of Thy Word and suffer me to speak out Thy wisdom amongst Thy creatures. [BP 187, emphasis added]

In the world-view presented in the Writings – and *Thus Spake Zarathustra* – the many of the qualities of the ‘masters’ can be spiritualized i.e. transformed and transvalued to achieve higher goals than mere earthly dominion. They continue the never-ending process of self-overcoming by being cruel and relentless to themselves in defeating their stubborn weaknesses and self-deceptions.

Unlike Nietzsche’s masters, his exemplary hero Zarathustra could agree with much of what the Writings say on the issue of service as well as with the following by ‘Abdu’l-Bahá:

O people! Ye are the fruits of one tree and the leaves of one branch. At most it is this, that some souls are ignorant, they must be educated; some are sick, they must be healed; some are still of tender age, they must be helped to attain maturity, and the utmost kindness must be shown to them. This is the conduct of the people of Bahá. [SWAB 28]

At the beginning of his journey down the mountain, Zarathustra, tells the old man in the forest, “I love mankind”⁶⁵ and answers the old man’s objections by saying, “I am bringing mankind a gift.”⁶⁶ His mission is to educate, to heal, to mature and to show his insights with a sincere heart and kindness. In effect, he comes down to serve in agreement with the words of Bahá’u’lláh that “*The people are ignorant, and they stand in need of those who will expound the truth*” [TB 170]. If there is an ‘aristocracy’ in the Bahá’í Writings, it is an ‘aristocracy’ of service – certainly not an aristocracy of power, domination and harshness.

To conclude: the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche are reversed mirror images of each other in regards to ‘masters’ and slaves.’ Both embody the concepts of ‘rank,’ ‘contest’ and ‘leadership’ but one does so in the service of self and the other in the service of humankind and God. Furthermore, Nietzsche’s aristocrats dominate by force and live in a state of enmity with

others. They are also part of a permanent class structure and are centered on themselves as highest form of human existence. Their actions are justified in and of themselves. This stands in sharp contrast to the Bahá'í understanding of leadership in terms of service to humankind with the purpose of helping all develop their highest “*spiritual susceptibilities*” [PUP 7] both as individuals and as members of society. There is no permanent ruling class.

5: The Bahá'í Writings, Nietzsche and Aristotle

The pervasive presence of Aristotelian metaphysics and ontology in both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche identifies another important area of agreement and convergence between the two. Because of this common foundation, the correlations between the Writings and Nietzsche are not serendipitous coincidences but – for the most part – the outcome of working with the same philosophical concepts in analyzing and explaining reality. At this point it must be said that Bahá'u'lláh and 'Abdu'l-Bahá have affirmed the validity of certain Aristotelian concepts – especially in metaphysics and ontology – by using them extensively throughout the Bahá'í Writings.⁶⁷ Similarly, in the case of Nietzsche, numerous authors have detected Aristotle's influence, among them Kaufmann, Richardson, Solomon, Hough, Silk and Stern, Emden and Williams.⁶⁸ Since Nietzsche was a trained philologist specializing in Greek and Latin supports the belief that he was at least passingly familiar with Aristotle's major principles.

The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche use Aristotle's ontology of potentials to analyze, understand and explain reality. Of course, this ontology implicitly includes all the major elements of Aristotelian metaphysics. Let us see how. For Aristotle, potentials are (a) the ability or power of a thing to initiate or stop change in oneself or others⁶⁹ or (b) the ability to change into or be changed into something else or be acted upon.⁷⁰

Moreover, every single thing or kind of thing is identified and limited by its particular combination of potentials. That is why we cannot make a silk purse out of a sow's ear. It lacks the potentials for such a transformation. Furthermore, the essence of a thing is the collection of potentials that distinguish a particular kind and/or individual from other kinds and/or individuals.

Little reflection is needed to see that the ontology of potentials also implies the concept of 'actuality' or what a thing is at a specific moment as distinct from what it can/will be in the future. This, in turn, implies the distinction between appearance – what a thing is at any particular moment – and its reality, i.e. its full albeit 'bundle' of potentials both actualized and unactualized. Anything that has its own unique 'bundle' of potentials is a 'substance' i.e. something that stands by itself and is not an attribute of something else. "Silver" the Lone Ranger's horse, is a substance because he is not a quality of some other thing. The ontology of potentials also implies the existence of 'force' or 'power' – or 'will' in Nietzsche's language – to actualize a potential, i.e. cause change within oneself or in others. Finally, the ontology of potentials requires that all things have a goal, a 'telos' i.e. a certain preferred direction or goal towards which things develop. Maple trees never grow into lobsters. The potentials a thing has limit what it can become, i.e. set it towards certain goals. Nietzsche, of course, claims to have rejected these concepts as part of a now irrelevant philosophical past, but numerous passages show that in fact, he consistently made use of them either explicitly or implicitly.

Aristotle's ontology of potentials – including teleology – is most dramatically illustrated in Zarathustra's command, "Become what you are!"⁷¹ This command only makes sense on the assumption that we have an essence made up of certain potentials unique to us as members of the human race and as human individuals. It requires the distinction between appearance, i.e. what we are now, and reality, i.e. our

unactualized potentials. Furthermore, this command requires free will in order to struggle for a goal within our range of potentials. In addition, this command only makes sense if we have an essence that is stable, i.e. is continuous enough to be given instructions that can be meaningfully followed over a period of time, i.e. has continuity through change. In short, it must have identity or ‘being’ or be a ‘substance.’ Thus it appears that Nietzsche did, albeit implicitly – or perhaps inadvertently – accept the concepts of potential, essence, goals, free will, cause-and-effect, the distinction between appearance and reality and substance since without them, a significant portion of his philosophy of self-overcoming would lose its logical and ontological foundations.

Another appeal to essences – and implicit to potentials and the ontology of potentials – is what Nietzsche says at the end of *The Will to Power*. He tacitly assumes the reality of essences – and by implication potentials – by saying, “*This world is the will to power – and nothing besides!* And you yourselves are also this will to power and nothing besides!”⁷² This statement plainly asserts that in their essential natures, the world, all beings in it and all human beings are the will to power. However, the matter does not end here. In *Beyond Good and Evil*, Nietzsche writes,

The world seen *from within*, the world defined and designated according to its “intelligible character” – it would simply be “Will to Power,” and nothing else.⁷³

This claim, identifies the ‘inner’ essence of the world and its “intelligible character” as the will to power even though it does not appear as the will to power. In other words, it establishes the distinction between appearance and reality. The same Aristotelian ontology of potentials and essence is present in the following:

The victorious concept of “force,” by means of which our physicists have created God and the world, still

needs to be completed: *an inner will* must be ascribed to it, *which I designate the "will to power,"* i.e. an insatiable desire to manifest power, or as the employment and exercise of power as a creative drive, etc.⁷⁴

Nietzsche's objections to the concept of 'essence' notwithstanding, this is essentialism, i.e. the view that all things have an inner nature which, in Nietzsche's view is "will." Consequently, we can always look 'through' the outward appearance of a thing and deduce the reality, the "intelligible character" of a particular thing while observing the will to power in one of its particular modes. We may see this will to power in a stone or a pike or a baby but in each case the essence operates under the same mandate, to 'become what it is.' In light of the foregoing discussion, it is difficult to avoid the conclusion that Nietzsche's overt denial of concepts like essence,⁷⁵ free will, teleology and the ontology of potentials is cannot be taken at face value because he implicitly re-introduces them in the course of his major teachings.⁷⁶

The Bahá'í Writings harmonize with those aspects of Nietzsche that make use of the ontology of potentials, essence and the appearance/reality distinction. The ontology of potentials is one of the foundational philosophical ideas in the Bahá'í Writings as seen in the following:

Man is the microcosm; and the infinite universe, the macrocosm. The mysteries of the greater world, or macrocosm, are expressed or revealed in the lesser world, the microcosm. The tree, so to speak, is the greater world, and the seed in its relation to the tree is the lesser world. But the whole of the great tree is potentially latent and hidden in the little seed. When this seed is planted and cultivated, the tree is revealed. Likewise, the greater world, the macrocosm, is latent and miniaturized in the lesser world, or microcosm, of man. This constitutes the universality or perfection of virtues potential in mankind. [PUP 69]

In this passage, mankind's relationship to the universe is explained in terms of hidden potentials and actualization or revealing of the hidden. There is the present actuality or appearance and the future actuality after latent potentials have been actualized. Bahá'u'lláh states,

Consider, moreover, how the fruit, ere it is formed, lieth potentially within the tree. Were the tree to be cut into pieces, no sign nor any part of the fruit, however small, could be detected. When it appeareth, however, it manifesteth itself, as thou hast observed, in its wondrous beauty and glorious perfection. [GWB 155]

Once again we observe the appearance/reality distinction: the actual appearance is the tree but the tree's reservoir of potentials or essence remains hidden until actualized in the fruit. Of course, the Writings apply these ideas to the role of the Manifestations in human history:

The holy Manifestations of God come into the world to dispel the darkness of the animal, or physical, nature of man, to purify him from his imperfections in order that his heavenly and spiritual nature may become quickened, his divine qualities awakened, his perfections visible, his potential powers revealed and all the virtues of the world of humanity latent within him may come to life. [PUP 465]

From this it follows that the doctrine of progressive revelation also fits into the ontology of potentials. As seen above, humankind contains latent attributes or potentials and as these are actualized under the guidance of various Manifestations, humankind makes spiritual and material progress.

Nietzsche also agrees with the Writings insofar as we should "become what [we] are" – indeed, one might well argue that enabling us to do so is the whole point of Bahá'u'lláh's revelation. Unless we humans become what we really are,

instead of living hypocritically by professing one thing and doing another, we hinder our growth personally and collectively. This raises the question, 'Who, really, are we?' and to that, the Bahá'í answer is clear:

As for the spiritual perfections they are man's birthright and belong to him alone of all creation. Man is, in reality, a spiritual being, and only when he lives in the spirit is he truly happy. This spiritual longing and perception belongs to all men alike, and it is my firm conviction that the Western people possess great spiritual aspiration. [PT 73, emphasis added]

Because of our essentially spiritual nature, human beings have a spiritual destiny or vocation in this world (and beyond) and our true happiness is fulfilling this nature no matter how hard this may be. How could we be happy if we are, so to speak, living against ourselves by forgetting that our residence in nature, while a necessary part of our development, is only temporary? The task of being a Bahá'í is the task of becoming our spiritual selves.

There is no question that the Bahá'í Writings see all things endowed with an essence (as described by Aristotle as a reservoir of potentials) and, therefore, connect with the implicit recognition of essences in Nietzsche's work. In *The Kitáb-i-Íqán* Bahá'u'lláh tells us that "*the light of divine knowledge and heavenly grace hath illumined and inspired the essence of all created things, in such wise that in each and every thing [is] a door of knowledge*" [KI 29-30, emphasis added; cf. SAQ 195]. Here is a partial list of things which the Writings identify as having an essence: God [GWB 187; PUP 326]; the human soul [GWB 160]; humankind [GWB 164]; justice [GWB 167]; "*all created things*" [GWB 302]; beauty [GWB 321]; species of living things [GWB 300; cf. SAQ 184]; truth [GWB 328]; religion [PUP 344]; "*this new age*" [PUP 326]; and the spirit [SWAB 167]. Indeed, references to 'essence' are even more wide-spread once we realize that such phrases as "*inmost reality*" [GWB 65]; "*the realities of*" [GWB

63; PUP 39]; “*reality of*” [GWB 64; cf. PUP 39]; “*inner reality*” [SVFV 55]; and “*inner realities*” [SWAB 57]; also refer to the essence of things.

It should be noted that the concept of ‘essence’ does not deny the relational or — as we shall see below — the process nature of things and bestow them with “an intrinsic non-relational character.”⁷⁷ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states,

For all beings are connected together like a chain; and reciprocal help, assistance and interaction belonging to the properties of things are the causes of the existence, development and growth of created beings. [SAQ 178]

In general terms, things, including their essences, are relational, i.e. they exist as part of a complex of relations. However, this does not preclude essences. The essence of a particular thing is made up of a certain set of relations — and not a different set of relations. The relations that make up a human being are not the same relations as those that make up a horseshoe crab with its blue blood. In short, there is no logical contradiction between relationality and essence.

Aristotle’s ontology of potentials — and by extension the Bahá’í Writings’ and Nietzsche’s — implicitly embodies other Aristotelian concepts such as substance. For Aristotle, a substance is a thing that exists independently of other things, or, a thing that is not an attribute of something else and a thing that continues through change, i.e. a continuant. For example, a horse exists independently — it does not die if the farmer dies — and it is not a quality that something else has nor is it a different horse tomorrow than it is today. Some of its non-essential attributes may have changed but a slight graying of the mane or a thinner belly does not make it a different horse because there is an observable — or filmable — continuity from birth until today. We shall explain the false contradiction between being and becoming below. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá uses this definition of substance to prove the immortality of the soul:

Some think that the body is the substance and exists by itself, and that the spirit is accidental and depends upon the substance of the body, although, on the contrary, the rational soul is the substance, and the body depends upon it. If the accident – that is to say, the body – be destroyed, the substance, the spirit, remains. [SAQ 239]

Because the soul is a 'substance' in the Aristotelian sense, it exists independently of the body or, conversely, the body is an accidental attribute of the soul and needs the soul to actually be a body and live. Obviously, the soul-substance is a continuant and because it is not an attribute of the body, can exist without it.

Nietzsche's views on 'substance' are ambiguous, i.e. overtly denying the validity of this concept and covertly using it. He writes,

Insofar, however, as all metaphysics has had principally to do with *substance* and freedom of will, one may designate it the science that treats of the fundamental errors of mankind – but does so as though they were fundamental truths.⁷⁸

His words notwithstanding, the problem is obvious: without the Aristotelian concept of substance, Nietzsche's philosophy encounters fatal obstacles. For example, Nietzsche describes the will to power as the essence of all things,⁷⁹ manifesting in everything in the phenomenal world – and, thereby, the will to power that persists through all kinds and all changes is a continuant, i.e. a 'substance' in the Aristotelian sense. Nor is the will to power as such an attribute of anything else, nor does it depend on anything else for its existence. Therefore, one of Nietzsche's key concepts is an example of what he explicitly denies. The same argument can be applied to Zarathustra and the Superman. Once again, we find that the implicit content of his work is in full agreement with the Bahá'í Writings while his explicit statements are not.

6: Process Philosophy⁸⁰

Aristotle's ontology of potentials solves the ancient philosophical problem, of the apparent conflict between 'being' and 'becoming' and, thereby creates one of the connecting points between the Writings and Nietzsche who seems to deny that the concept of 'being' has any validity: "Heraclitus will always be right in this, that being is an empty fiction."⁸¹ 'Being' refers to the continuity of a thing, to the retention of identity⁸² according to Aristotle. In contrast 'becoming' refers to the changes a thing undergoes, i.e. a process of actualizing its potentials and changing from one state or condition to another. Thus, Aristotle's ontology of potential tells us that the traditional absolute dualism between 'being' and 'becoming' is false. Nothing is ever in just one condition or the other: a sprouting sunflower seed actualizes its particular sunflower potentials and, by doing so, is *being* or *be-ing* a sunflower seed. Or, we could say a plant is being a sunflower by becoming more of a sunflower as more of its various potentials are manifested. In regards to Nietzsche, this means there is no basis to the argument that Aristotle's alleged philosophy of being is intrinsically incompatible with Nietzsche's philosophy of becoming. In more general terms, process philosophies are not necessarily irreconcilable with philosophies of being.⁸³

Both the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche are based on a process metaphysics, i.e. a philosophy that is based on the principle that reality is fundamentally constituted by change. The Writings explicitly state:

Know that nothing which exists remains in a state of repose – that is to say, all things are in motion. Everything is either growing or declining; all things are either coming from nonexistence into being, or going from existence into nonexistence . . . This state of motion is said to be essential – that is, natural; it cannot be separated from beings because it is their

essential requirement, as it is the essential requirement of fire to burn ... ?

Thus it is established that this movement is necessary to existence, which is either growing or declining. [SAQ 239]

According to the Bahá'í Writings, motion, i.e. change, i.e. the actualization of potentials is an essential attribute of all existing things. Indeed, a dialectical process between the present actual form of something and the potentials that are trying to actualize and to develop new forms is always underway. In fact, these dialectical 'battles' constitute all things as what they are. The moment this process stops, a thing stops existing. According to Kaufmann, in Nietzsche's "dialectical monism" "will to power ... is always at war with itself."⁸⁴ In humankind this might appear as a dialectic between "reason and impulse"⁸⁵ or between the drive for self-overcoming and the fear of suffering. Here, too, the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche are similar insofar as Nietzsche sees an inner conflict as we have already seen in the doctrine of self-overcoming. He rejects "being" which he identifies with stasis. The "opposition and war" refers to this inward struggle of self-overcoming.

I retained some doubt in the case of Heraclitus in whose proximity I feel altogether warmer and better than anywhere else. The affirmation of passing away *and destroying*, which is the decisive feature of Dionysian philosophy; saying yes to opposition and war; becoming along with a radical repudiation of the very concept of *being* – all this is clearly more closely related to me than anything else ...⁸⁶

6.1: Agreement on Teleology

Nietzsche's overt denials of teleology notwithstanding, teleology plays an essential role in his thought. Indeed, because the teleological strain in Nietzsche's philosophy is so clearly evident, Nietzsche scholar R. Kevin Hill says that Nietzsche's

work shows “in nature a teleological tendency towards the production of higher human beings: artists, philosophers and saints.”⁸⁷ John Richardson adds,

I take it to be evident from the expression itself that ‘*will to power*’ is a *potency for something, a directedness towards an end* ... Nietzsche, despite his repeated attacks on (what he calls) teleology really has such a theory himself: the beings or units in the world are crucially *end-directed* and to understand them properly is to grasp how they’re directed or aimed. Above all, it’s to grasp how they’re aimed at power, an end *essential to them*.⁸⁸

For his part, Nietzsche states:

But all expansion, incorporation, growth means striving against something that resists; motion is essentially tied up with states of displeasure; that which is here the driving force must in any event *desire something else* ... For what do the trees in the jungle fight each other? For “happiness” – For power!⁸⁹

In his view, whatever we do is motivated – consciously or not – by the purpose of increasing power. In *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, we can see the implicit teleological influence at work when he says:

I teach you the Superman. Man is something that should be overcome. What have you done to overcome him?

All creatures hitherto have created something beyond themselves: and do you want to be the ebb of this great tide, and return to the animals rather than overcome man?⁹⁰

“Creating something beyond themselves” is the goal towards which all beings are naturally oriented. Humans are encouraged to mobilize, i.e. actualize their capacities or potentials in order

to “overcome” themselves as they presently are to become something better or to clear the way for something better. That is what “all creatures hitherto” have done, and is, by implication, the natural destiny of humankind. Failing in this regard, means we are no longer acting as ‘natural’ beings and have become something ‘unnatural’ by missing our natural teleological destiny.

The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche agree on the teleological nature of all things, which is to say, all things are goal-oriented. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states that “*All beings, whether large or small, were created perfect and complete from the first, but their perfections appear in them by degrees*” [SAQ 199]. This process of actualizing their potentials is, in fact, their being or be-ing (the process remains constant) and shows that they are teleological in nature, i.e. there is a natural progression from potential or latency to actualization. The difference between humans and a seed is that we must strive for our goal consciously whereas the seed does so unconsciously or automatically. Not only are individual lives teleological but so is the collective life of humankind:

All men have been created to carry forward an ever-advancing civilization. The Almighty beareth Me witness: To act like the beasts of the field is unworthy of man. Those virtues that befit his dignity are forbearance, mercy, compassion and loving-kindness towards all the peoples and kindreds of the earth. [GWB 215]

Here Bahá'u'lláh lists some of the moral potentials humanity should actualize as it fulfills its goal achieving progress. Humans must not “*act like the beasts of the field*” because doing so conflicts with our spiritual nature and is, in effect, a betrayal of ourselves because our essential spiritual nature remains unactualized [PT 72]. Humans — indeed, all beings — can only be happy when they actualize their appropriate potentials — which is precisely their goal. Indeed, actualizing our higher, specifically spiritual potentials is, in effect, the Bahá'í

‘definition’ of happiness. In the words of ‘Abdu’l-Bahá, “*True happiness depends on spiritual good and having the heart ever open to receive the Divine Bounty*” [PT 108]. Opening our hearts to God or awakening our “*spiritual susceptibilities*” [PUP 7] is, of course, our chief spiritual potential.

7: Nietzsche’s “Alleged Atheism”⁹¹ – The Death of God

Although Nietzsche is probably the world’s most famous atheist, we shall demonstrate that his atheism is highly ambiguous. In fact, Roy Jackson aptly characterizes Nietzsche as “a ‘sort’ of atheist.”⁹² What he destroys with one hand he restores with the other. We should add that Nietzsche’s ambiguity about religion and the transcendent is no surprise. It is already evident in his first major work, *The Birth of Tragedy* in which he uses two Greek gods, Apollo and especially Dionysus, as concrete symbols of transcendental powers of order and exuberance.

Metaphysically speaking, Nietzsche is not an atheist. It is true that he overtly rejects the personal God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob but in *The Will to Power*, he offers a metaphysical description of the will to power in language that effectively re-creates the ‘God of the philosophers,’ i.e. something with all the ontological attributes of God. The will to power underlies and is present in everything; it is unlimited power; it has no beginning or end; it is mysterious and unknowable; and it is beyond space and time. Moreover, it is absolutely independent of each of the forms in which it manifests itself, i.e. it depends on nothing and, therefore, cannot be constrained by anything. It is super-natural because nothing in nature has any of these attributes. We need not belabor the point that in the Bahá’í Writings, God possess all of these ontological attributes.

At the end of *The Will to Power*, Nietzsche writes,

And do you know what “the world” is to me? Shall I show it to you in my mirror? This world: a monster of energy, without beginning, without end; a firm, iron magnitude of force that does not grow bigger or smaller, that does not expend itself but only transforms itself ... as a becoming that knows no satiety, no disgust, no weariness: this, my Dionysian world of the eternally self-creating, the eternally self-destroying, this mystery world of the twofold voluptuous delight, my “beyond good and evil,” without goal, unless the joy of the circle is itself a goal; without will, unless a ring feels good will toward itself – do you want a name for this world? A solution for all its riddles? A light for you, too, you best-concealed, strongest, most intrepid, most midnightly men? – This world is the will to power – and nothing besides! And you yourselves are also this will to power – and nothing besides!⁹³

In Nietzsche's view, this ground of being is amoral, i.e. beyond good and evil. However, the Bahá'í Writings reveal a convergent idea – namely that God “*doeth what He willeth, and ordaineth that which He pleaseth*” [GWB 116]. In other words, God – or the will to power – determines what is good or not and thereby shows Himself to be “beyond good and evil.” This idea is illustrated by Bahá'u'lláh's statement “*Shouldst Thou regard him who hath broken the fast as one who hath observed it, such a man would be reckoned among them who from eternity had been keeping the fast*” [PM 67]. The disagreement between the Writings and Nietzsche arises as a result of giving mere humans, i.e. the aristocrats and nobles, the same power of deciding their own morality on their own intrinsically limited human terms. This is logically unjustifiable because they lack the qualifications i.e. God's absolute independence from all external influence and constraint and His complete knowledge of human nature that entitles them to make decisions for all. Without these qualifications, their moral choices are, in the end, self-serving and arbitrary and will inevitably have to be

maintained by force. Moreover, Nietzsche's description of the will to power cannot hide one obvious implication: its creativity and the gift of existence to all things as well as the fact that existence is freely given since we are not there to earn it. This creativity and ontological generosity can easily be the basis of positive moral principles insofar as this super-natural munificence provides a model for human behavior.

Nietzsche's atheism is very tentative. For example, in *The Gay Science*, the Madman says, "God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him" – and then suggests that we must become gods to be worthy of this great act.⁹⁴ Even in such a forthright declaration, we can detect signs of what we call the 'transcendental impulse' in Nietzsche's work, an inclination expressed in both ideas and word choice to re-introduce the divine or transcendental into our consciousness and our understanding of life. There is nothing about the death of God, i.e. atheism, which logically demands that we should take God's place by becoming gods.

Here is an example of Nietzsche's ambiguous language from *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, written in the 'chapter and verse' style of the Bible and showing the 'transcendental impulse' in his word choice. Speaking of the "Sublime Men,"⁹⁵ Zarathustra says,

To be sure, I love in him the neck of the ox; but now I want to see the *eye of an angel*, too.

He must unlearn his heroic will, too: he should be an *exalted* man and not only a *sublime* itself should raise him up, the will-less one!

He has tamed his monsters, he has solved riddles: but he should also *redeem* his monsters and riddles, he should transform them into *heavenly children* ...

Then your *soul* will shudder with *divine* desires; and there will be *worship* in your vanity!

This indeed is the secret of the *soul*: only when the hero has deserted his *soul* does there approach it in dreams – the superhero.⁹⁶

The religious tenor of his word choice is supported by the narrative of the entire *Thus Spake Zarathustra* itself: Zarathustra, a Moses-like prophetic figure descends from his mountain retreat – like Moses bringing His gifts of new commandments and wisdom – by which humans may continue their evolution to make way for a higher being called the Superman. In the idea of becoming gods, he invokes *Genesis* in which the Serpent promises Eve, “*Ye shall be as gods*” [Genesis 7:1-5]. In short, the Serpent promises to help Adam and Eve to transcend their human condition. Throughout his work, there are constant references to words such as ‘spirit,’ ‘holy’ and ‘soul’ words whose ambiguous sacred and non-sacred connotations display Nietzsche’s ambiguity in regards to the transcendent. The following statement also his use of religious language even when repudiating Christian morality:

Every act of contempt for sex, every impurification of it by means of the concept of ‘impure’ is the crime *par excellence* against life – is the *real sin against the holy spirit of life*.⁹⁷

However, the convergences between the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche about God go even further than a common belief in a transcendental entity. In our view, Nietzsche missed and loved religion so much he struggled to create, if not a new religion of his own, then at least an adequate substitute world-view. For example, he sees the collapse of religion as the basis of the modern crisis. Nietzsche refers to “the end of Christianity”⁹⁸ and the Writings state “as a result of human perversity, the light of religion is quenched in men's hearts” [WOB 187]. This belief logically implies that religion provides something necessary for the well-being of human beings and without religion (for whatever reason) humankind suffers and

degenerates. Paradoxically, Nietzsche seeks a Christ-like ‘redeemer.’ He says of the Superman – whose name alone carries transcendent connotations – “Behold! I teach you the Superman: he is the sea, in him your great contempt can go under.” In this description, the Superman is truly super-human, i.e. the sea into which we can save ourselves from overwhelming self-contempt. Like Christ, he can take our sins on Himself [1 Peter 2:24]; the Superman can take into himself our contempt for ourselves and thereby offer us new opportunities for growth. This, too, points to transcendence for no natural human being can do such a thing. This suggests that the Superman is not entirely natural and somehow beyond nature. Ironically, this implication of the Superman violates Zarathustra’s own injunction to be loyal to the earth and to deny the supernatural. Moreover, the need for a ‘redeemer’ converges with the Bahá’í teaching that Manifestations of God are necessary for humankind to progress. The pervasive presence of this ‘transcendent impulse’ helps give a religious dimension to a thinker who is – superficially perhaps – anti-religious.

Nor should we overlook that the “eternal return” is itself strongly tinged with religious and transcendental colors. Seen in a religious light, it seems much like a non-Christian version of heaven and hell. R. Kevin Hill states

the doctrine of eternal recurrence is best understood as a replacement for the Christian doctrine of an afterlife of rewards and punishments. Recurrence is like a reward for those who live well and are strong and a punishment for those who live badly and are weak.⁹⁹

Seen as a metaphysical doctrine,¹⁰⁰ i.e. a doctrine about the basic nature of the universe, the eternal return reveals its transcendental nature by imposing on the universe the supernatural attribute of lasting forever. No empirical observation has ever encountered such an object in nature. So much for remaining loyal to the earth! In effect, the eternal return claims that the universe is beyond time since the same results occur

again and again. Such timelessness is precisely one of the attributes of God in the Writings. Furthermore, the absolute repetition inherent in the eternal return also means there is no essential change – an attribute which converges with the Bahá'í belief that God is not subject to change. On a strictly empirical basis, Nietzsche was bound to reject these attributes – and the fact that he did not, highlights his ambiguity about religious beliefs. But this ambiguity deepens. On the basis of scientific knowledge of his time, Nietzsche would have known that the random collision of atoms, i.e. collisions that were causally unconnected to each other, would not necessarily have brought about the eternal return. If the collisions are truly random, i.e. not determined by any preceding event or object, then there is no necessity whatsoever that today's world will ever return in its exact present form. In fact, in a world of genuinely random actions, there is no necessity of any kind at all: things just happen without being conditioned, i.e. limited by foregoing events or other objects. The concept of the “eternal return” only works if we tacitly assume that atoms have been bestowed with suitable nature and that laws of nature exist – which inevitably leads to the issue of how these attributes and laws originated. In other words, Nietzsche slipped into transcendental thinking, i.e. thinking that implicitly includes God. There is nothing in our empirical, earthly experience on which such concepts can be based for which reason we may say the “eternal return” itself is an example of the ‘transcendental impulse’ in Nietzsche.

Of course, it may be argued that Nietzsche does not mean ‘transcendent’ in any non-physical way, especially in light of his command to “remain true to the earth.”¹⁰¹ But that is exactly the point; as we have shown above by examining Nietzsche's language and thought, he cannot live up to his own ideal – he is fundamentally conflicted and the Transcendent as Jaspers calls it, is present throughout much of his work. This presence is exactly where the Bahá'í Writings make contact with Nietzsche.

In light of Nietzsche's 'transcendental impulse' it is highly improbable that he was an 'atheist' as usually understood: a person who denies any transcendent powers. It is far more likely that "Nietzsche means the god of transcendental monotheism and Christian morality ... it is the 'God' of Judeo-Christianity who is dead, but the divine is something totally different."¹⁰² From a Bahá'í perspective, this idea poses no difficulties as long as we understand that Nietzsche is not making an ontological claim about the existence or non-existence of God or a ground of being but rather is making a sociological claim about the role of God in the lives of individuals and societies. In other words, he is saying – among other things – that the concept of God no longer plays any significant role in the modern world, that people have more confidence in themselves, in government and in science and technology than they do in God or in their own faith in God. He is also pointing out that organized religion, its institutions, its hierarchies and theologies have become corrupt and feeble.

The Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche agree on the 'death of God' if taken as the recognition that genuine religion – as distinct from its superficial outward appearances – is no longer a major force among modern individuals and societies in the modern world. Free thought, i.e. the independent investigation of truth, is imprisoned by the clergy. As already noted, Bahá'u'lláh recognizes that "*The vitality of men's belief in God is dying out in every land*" [GWB 199]. Speaking of Islam and Christianity, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states that only the "*form has remained in the hands of the clergy*" [SAQ 47].

For both the Writings and Nietzsche, the renewal of humankind involves an unavoidable struggle against clergy who seek to retain their power. Both seek to overcome the clergy, but even as Nietzsche clearly aims at the destruction of priesthood, he still feels a certain kinship and pity with them, admitting, "There are heroes even among them; many of them have suffered too much: so they want to make others suffer ... I want to know my blood honoured even in theirs."¹⁰³ In a similar

attitude of reconciliation, the Writings invite the clergy to join the Bahá'í dispensation.

Wherefore flee ye? The Incomparable Friend is manifest. He speaketh that wherein lieth salvation. Were ye, O high priests, to discover the perfume of the rose garden of understanding, ye would seek none other but Him, and would recognize, in His new vesture, the All-Wise and Peerless One. [TU 6]

8: Self-overcoming

One of the central concepts of ethical practice in the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche is 'self-overcoming,' i.e. taking an active part in actualizing one's own potentials, removing undesirable traits and increasing their powers and capacities. Self-overcoming is Nietzsche's strategy for defeating nihilism which, in his view, is corrupting and destroying modern culture. This converges with the Bahá'í Writings belief that "*Man must now become imbued with new virtues and powers, new moralities, new capacities*" [PUP 536]. Obviously, when we gain "new virtues and powers" our powers will be expanded.

Both in the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche we see what may be called "ethics of power,"¹⁰⁴ i.e. an ethics of the growth of power in the sense of 'capacity.' The ultimate purpose of Bahá'u'lláh's guidance is allow us to expand our power, i.e. to "*awaken [our] spiritual susceptibilities*" [PUP 7] and make possible both spiritual and material progress. This requires conscious self-overcoming and transformation inspired by Bahá'u'lláh's revelation; in the case of Nietzsche, this is achieved by conformity with the will to power. In both cases, humans have to submit to a Power greater than themselves and greater than anything in the natural world. What Zarathustra wants from the people in the valley, does not contradict what Bahá'u'lláh wants from us.

Self-overcoming is crucial for two reasons. First, it is the only way to become a bridge to the Superman because by overcoming ourselves, we remove an obstacle – the present selves we cling to – so that the Superman may advance. Second, self-overcoming is the only way to free ourselves from our weak and cowardly aspects and, thereby, to grow in our pursuit of the will to power and to become one with our essential selves. In short, self-overcoming is necessary to end our alienation from our true identity and, thereby, come into possession of our selves. Like the Bahá'í Writings, Nietzsche endorses the paradox that to become our best selves, we must surrender our current identities. In addition, this “true self” becomes “a shining and wonderful reality” because, in Nietzsche’s terms, it has done what is good, i.e. that which “heightens the feeling of power in man, the will to power, power itself.”¹⁰⁵

The importance of self-overcoming to Nietzsche is evident in his belief that self-overcoming “distinguishes the moral [person] from the nonmoral [person].”¹⁰⁶ This is more evidence that Nietzsche does, in fact, have a moral code including an objective standard by which to evaluate our actions: the willingness and effort to surpass ourselves, the willingness to suffer the inevitable discomfort and pain of simultaneously actualizing our potentials for the future and leaving behind our presently achieved actuality. Zarathustra says that he loves those who “will [their] own downfall,”¹⁰⁷ i.e. he loves those who are willing to sacrifice themselves for something greater than themselves. Later, Zarathustra says,

And life itself told me this secret: ‘Behold,’ it said, ‘I am that which *must overcome itself again and again* ... ‘I would rather perish than renounce this one thing; and truly where there is perishing and the falling of leaves, behold, there life sacrifices itself – for the sake of power.’¹⁰⁸

Nietzsche carries on this theme in *On the Genealogy of Morals*:

All great things bring about *their own destruction through an act of self-overcoming*: thus the law of life will have it, the law of the necessity of 'self-overcoming' in the nature of life.¹⁰⁹

Here we observe the 'pruning' or 'self-pruning' mentioned in the Writings [PT 51]. For his part, Zarathustra informs us that "only if he [man] turns away from himself will he jump over his own shadow – and jump into truth, into his own sunlight."¹¹⁰ In other words, the current self must be rejected for our better or higher selves which can only be done by embracing transformational change.

Unlikely as it may seem at first, Nietzsche's statements converge strongly with the Bahá'í Writings. In the first place, there is strong convergence if not outright agreement in regards to self-overcoming as a necessary aspect of living ethically and making true progress in self-actualization and living as moral beings. 'Abdu'l-Bahá says:

For I have supplicated and beseeched before the Threshold of the Almighty that thy wish may be realized, so thou mayest overcome the self and perform charitable deeds and that human perfections may appear from thee. [TAB3 545]

In other words, self-overcoming is needed to "to awaken spiritual susceptibilities in the hearts of mankind" [PUP 7]. The theme of 'self-overcoming' is also presented in the Writings as 'sacrifice' and 'service' since, in the Bahá'í view, these lead to the kind of self-overcoming we need to make. Speaking of the higher and lower self, 'Abdu'l-Bahá states:

The other self is the ego, the dark, animalistic heritage each one of us has, the lower nature that can develop into a monster of selfishness, brutality, lust and so on. It is this self we must struggle against, or this side of

our natures, in order to strengthen and free the spirit within us and help it to attain perfection.

Self-sacrifice means to subordinate this lower nature and its desires to the more godly and noble side of ourselves. Ultimately, in its highest sense, self-sacrifice means to give our will and our all to God to do with as He pleases. Then He purifies and glorifies our true self until it becomes a shining and wonderful reality.¹¹¹

This, too, converges with Nietzsche in significant ways. We must “give our will and our all to God” in the same way as Nietzsche expects us to obey the imperative will to power that functions as ‘God’ in his philosophy.

Self-overcoming also requires us to overcome the traditional beliefs – especially ethical beliefs – that we have passively accepted. To the extent that we do not, our self-overcoming is incomplete and, thereby, less effective and gives us less power or capacity. Nietzsche believes that we must create our own ethics and norms¹¹² – a task that he held as impossible for religious believers. However, the Bahá’í Writings find no difficulty with Nietzsche’s requirements insofar as they unequivocally reject “*ancestral imitations*” [PUP 144] and insist on our obligation to the independent investigation of truth [SWAB 248]. The independent investigation of truth in ethics does not mean we have to reject the moral guidance of the Manifestations – but rather that we must to the best of our ability consciously understand such guidance since otherwise our acts become blind imitation instead of a rational choice. Investigating and understanding a given moral law, in effect, makes that law ours even if it is a re-discovery. As Goethe says, “What you have inherited from your forefathers, it takes work to make it your own.”¹¹³ In this way, the principle of the independent investigation of truth absolves the acceptance of revealed truth from being a mere “ancestral imitation.” In other words, those who are willing to make the sacrifices of self-

overcoming will be blessed with “*the quickening of mental capacity and the increase of spiritual susceptibilities*” [PUP 340].

It may be objected that the Writings proclaim that humans were meant for happiness – which indeed, they are [SDC 60; cf. SDC 98] – but happiness for the Writings and Nietzsche consists in the expansion of our powers not in mere ease and comfort be it psycho-spiritual and/or physical. Athletic training illustrates this point: the training itself is inevitably uncomfortable, painful and gruelling – yet the athlete who this pain in light of his goals, is happy because s/he because s/he can feel the growth of his/her capacity. ‘Abdu’l-Bahá states: “*The mind and spirit of man advance when he is tried by suffering*” [PT 178, emphasis added]. In short, the suffering required by self-overcoming is necessary for the happiness that is to come both in this world and the next. As seen in *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, Nietzsche also recognizes the need to be willing to suffer on the way to becoming a bridge for the Superman or even a Superman himself.

9: Perspectivism and Truth

One of the most controversial and influential aspects of Nietzsche’s philosophy is perspectivism according to which we can only have perspectives on things but have no true knowledge of anything.¹¹⁴

Against positivism, which halts at phenomena – “There are only facts” – I would say: No, *facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations*. We cannot establish any fact “in itself”: perhaps it is folly to want to do such a thing.

“Everything is subjective,” you say; but even this is interpretation. *The “subject” is not something given, it is something added and invented and projected behind what there is* – Finally, is it necessary to posit an

interpreter behind the interpretation? Even this is invention, hypothesis ...

It is our needs that interpret the world; our drives and their For and Against. Every drive is a kind of lust to rule; each one has its perspective that it would like to compel all the other drives to accept as a norm.¹¹⁵

In short, Nietzsche denies the existence of ‘facts’ or ‘truths’ and replaces them with “interpretations” or perspectives or, more colloquially, opinions. This is the view described by Steven D Hales and Rex Welshon as “*strong perspectivism [which] is what many think Nietzsche offers ... [and which] is self-refuting.*”¹¹⁶ This claim that there are no ‘facts’ is self-refuting because it cannot itself be taken as factual. We find “strong perspectivism” exemplified in the following statement by Nietzsche:

The apparent world, i.e., a world viewed according to values; ordered, selected according to values, i.e., in this *case according to the viewpoint of utility* in regard to the preservation and enhancement of the power of a certain species of animal.

The perspective therefore decides the character of the “appearance”! *As if a world would still remain over after one deducted the perspective!* By doing that one would deduct relativity!

Every center of force adopts a perspective toward the entire remainder, i. e., its own particular valuation, mode of action, and mode of resistance. The “apparent world,” therefore, is reduced to a specific mode of action on the world, emanating from a center.¹¹⁷

In other words, all we have is appearances determined by the perspectives we adopt. There is no “noumenal” or underlying reality or ‘real’ truth existing independently of some perspectives. Moreover, Nietzsche states that all truth-claims

are relative since all are the subjective products of a particular perspective. Since all truth-claims or perspectives are relative, we cannot judge between contradictory truth-claims because there is no privileged perspective or viewpoint to function as a standard by which to judge. This leads to the startling conclusion that either there is no truth at all or even if there is a truth, it cannot be known by humankind. Nietzsche writes,

*'Truth' is therefore not something there, that might be found or discovered – but something that must be created and that gives a name to a process, or rather to a will to overcome that has in itself no end – introducing truth, as a processus in infinitum, an active determining – not a becoming conscious of something that is in itself firm and determined. It is a word for the “will to power.”*¹¹⁸

Struggles about truth are ultimately struggles about authority and power. The concept of 'truth' depends on the will to power insofar as all human activities are shaped by each person's will to power. He states,

*'The “will to truth” would then have to be investigated psychologically: it is not a moral force, but a form of the will to power. This would have to be proved by showing that it employs every immoral means: metaphysicians above all.*¹¹⁹

In short, there is no such thing as even attempting to seek the truth objectively.

“Strong perspectivism” has at least five major weak points. The first results from self-reference: logical self-refutation (encountered in many postmodern thinkers¹²⁰). If all truth-claims are perspectival, then this view itself is perspectival – and therefore, the opposite view that truth is absolute may well be true at least from some perspectives. But that is exactly what “strong perspectivism” denies. It says that all truth-claims are

perspectival, thereby including itself. In short, if strong perspectivism is true, then it may also be false. This is a logically untenable foundation for any attempt at a coherent philosophy because it undermines every additional argument built on this principle.

Second, since perspective determines ‘truth’ there can be no non-perspectival or extra-perspectival standpoint point from which to judge among different or competing ‘truths-claims.’ Consequently, there can be no such things as errors. In effect, all perspectives are true even though we may personally prefer some to others – but preferences do not constitute truth. Nietzsche’s view effectively says that there can be no errors since all perspectives must be accepted as equally valid. This is not only improbable but also impractical: nature is not so malleable and accommodating to our perspectives as to let us think that pencils are genuinely broken in a glass of water – or that the traffic light is green just because we think so. At some point we often discover one perspective or the other is false, i.e. that there is a real, ‘noumenal’ truth underneath our perceptions that may, in some cases, quite rudely correct our mistaken views. Furthermore, the Bahá’í the Writings plainly contradict such ego-inflating ‘infallibilist’ views and clearly acknowledge the existence of “*error*” [SAQ 149], “*idle fancies and vain imagining*” [ESW 15], “*ignorance,*” [SAQ 6], “*heedlessness and superstition*” [PB 95], and ideas that are “*absurd*” [TAF 18].¹²¹ Indeed, Bahá’u’lláh even recognizes that some religions “*are the outcome of human perversity*” [GWB 217]. The existence of error harmonizes, as we shall see below, with “*weak perspectivism*” i.e. the viewpoint that not all perspectives are necessarily true.

Third, there is a category mistake insofar as Nietzsche’s conflation of the will to power with the will to truth mistakes God with man. In the case of God, the two are the same: whatever God wills is the truth since God’s will determines the nature of reality and all parts of reality. “*He doeth whatsoever He willeth, and ordaineth that which He pleaseth*” [GWB 290].

However, this is not the case for humans. Who has not had the experience of interpreting a shadow on a forest walk as a ferocious animal? Obviously, our interpretations do not 'make' facts or reality. Nature will quickly correct us if our perspective lets us mistake a crocodile for a convenient log.

Fourth, if perspectives or standpoints determine the truth, then, there can be no absolute truth that is true in the same way in all perspectives. This is incompatible with the Writings because if the statement 'Bahá'u'lláh is the Manifestation of God for this age' is not objectively true across all perspectives (though not necessarily recognized as true), then the universality and potency of His revelation is negated.

The problem with Nietzsche, of course, is that on this issue as on so many others, he is conflicted, making it difficult to know which view is really his. After all, there is significant evidence from his work that he is convinced that there are no absolute truths of any kind.¹²² Yet, he blatantly violates his own principle. The entire doctrine of the will to power would be negated if its existence were dependent on perspective. Moreover, there would be an easy escape from Nietzsche's philosophy by adopting a different perspective in which the will to power is not true! If truth is strongly or purely perspectival, all of Nietzsche's critiques of European culture, of Christianity (which he loves to hate) and of spirituality are moot. They have no validity for other perspectives. How can he purport to 'unmask' morality in *The Genealogy of Morals* if there is nothing to unmask from Christian morality — except a perspective whose morals are as valid as the morality that emerges from Nietzsche's own perspective? If truth is perspectival, how can Zarathustra condemn the morals of the common man — which are true in their perspective? We need not multiply examples of Nietzsche's obvious logical entanglements caused by the conflict between his overt statements that appear to accept "strong perspectivism" and his actual practice.

Clearly, the Bahá'í Writings reject “strong perspectivism.” Nowhere do they suggest that truth is entirely subjective, i.e. wholly dependent on our outlook and perspective. If this were true, there would be no point in teaching the independent investigation of truth. There could only be an exploration of our own perspectives/opinions which are often likely to be mere “vain imaginings.” Would God really cease to exist if no one’s perspective included Him? Is Bahá'u'lláh’s station as the Manifestation for this age or God’s existence really dependent on human perspective and subjective opinion? If that were the case, why would Bahá'u'lláh declare,

Their belief or disbelief in My Cause can neither profit nor harm Me. We summon them wholly for the sake of God. He, verily, can afford to dispense with all creatures. [GWB 85]

In other words, God and the Cause of God any independent of any human perspective or interpretation. Their truths are not relative.

This passage, and others like it, leave no doubt that all perspectives are not equally true or valid, and that at least on some issues, truth is not relative. In other words, our own perspectives, which may be based on the false imaginations may lead us to deny the existence of the Manifestation – but this perspective is false even if it is sincerely held. Sincerity itself is not a guarantor of truth or logical validity; sincerely held beliefs can be wrong. Furthermore, Bahá'u'lláh advises us to “meditate profoundly ... so that *light may be distinguished from darkness, truth from falsehood, right from wrong, guidance from error, happiness from misery, and roses from thorns*” [KI 8]. These distinctions demonstrate there is no attempt made to salvage all possible views by attributing them to differing standpoints or perspectives and by declaring them all to be relatively true. At least some perspectives are able to provide truth while others are not.

There is a fifth problem with “strong perspectivism,” viz. it also leads to problems vis-à-vis understanding the Bahá'í Writings. For example, after explaining that the four methods of acquiring truth are flawed ‘Abdu’l-Bahá writes, “*there is no standard in the hands of people upon which we can rely*” [SAQ 298]. This sounds like “strong perspectivism.” However, if we accept this interpretation non-reflectively, i.e. without analysis, a serious problem rapidly arises: ‘Shall we understand ‘Abdu’l-Bahá’s declaration to mean that we cannot know with certainty even the most ‘elemental facts’ such as (1) human beings need food or they will starve to death; (2) the seasons progress in a specific and orderly manner; (3) lobsters do not grow up to be maple trees and (4) the sun appears to move from east to west across the sky? Do the Writings really mean to suggest that there is no certain human knowledge about anything at all including Napoleon’s defeat at Moscow, yesterday’s sunrise, and the law of gravity? If we take the “strong” view at face value, needless entanglements arise from one of Bahá’u’lláh’s statements:

In pursuance, however, of the principle that for every thing a time hath been fixed, and for every fruit a season hath been ordained, the latent energies of such a bounty can best be released, and the vernal glory of such a gift can only be manifested, in the Days of God. [GWB 262]

The message here would be undermined or even negated if seasonal change were disputed or even disputable. The moment we deny the certainty of our knowledge of seasonal change, the whole point Bahá’u’lláh is trying to make becomes moot. It would cause needless confusion because we would not really ‘know’ that “for every fruit a season hath been ordained.” Bahá’u’lláh knows – but could we know that *our* knowledge of the seasons is what *He* is actually referring to? The same problem would arise if Bahá’u’lláh used other examples, such as the tides or the moon’s course around the earth. It is difficult

not to conclude that the Writings are not intended to cause such difficulties.

While there is no agreement about “strong perspectivism” in the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche, there is far-reaching agreement in regards to “weak perspectivism” which Rex Welshon attributes to Nietzsche. He explains it as follows:

Suppose weak perspectivism is *true for every other statement except itself*. It then turns out that for the thesis of weak perspectivism, absolutism is true. Why? Because truth absolutism claims there is at least one statement that is true in all perspectives. Perhaps the only such statement is the thesis of weak perspectivism. Here, then is a way to rescue Nietzsche’s truth perspectivism without abandoning the spirit behind it ... Perhaps there are *other* statements in addition to the thesis of weak perspectivism that are true across all perspectives.¹²³

The possibility of some absolute truths, i.e. truths from all perspectives means that, in effect, some truths are not dependent on perspective, and even opens up the possibility of “extra-perspectival” truths which is how the Bahá’í Writings characterize God’s revelations. Furthermore, this also revives the possibility that there exist some objective standards by which to judge various perspectives. Finally, error is possible; not all perspectives necessarily give us the truth.

A significant agreement between “weak perspectivism” and the Bahá’í Writings emerges when he examine Shoghi Effendi’s statements about progressive revelation. He writes,

The mission of the Founder of their Faith, they conceive it to be to proclaim that *religious truth is not absolute but relative*, that Divine Revelation is continuous and progressive, that the Founders of all past religions, *though different in the non-essential aspects* of their

teachings, “abide in the same Tabernacle, soar in the same heaven, are seated upon the same throne, utter the same speech and *proclaim the same Faith*.”¹²⁴

Further, he asserts that each Manifestation

restates the eternal verities they enshrine, *coordinates their functions*, distinguishes the essential and the authentic from the nonessential and spurious in their teachings, separates the God-given truths from the priest-prompted superstitions. [PDC 108, emphasis added]

To summarize in Hales' and Welshon's language about “weak perspectivism,” the relative truths, i.e. those which were not valid in all perspectives could be changed as historical conditions alter. Among these were the “spurious” “priest prompted superstitions” and the “non-essential” specific adaptations to geographic and cultural circumstances. They are completely dependent on perspective i.e. the standpoint of a particular culture at a particular time under particular circumstances. However, there are also “*eternal verities*” and “*God-given truths*” that are valid in all perspectives, i.e. they are absolute. Such “verities” are “restat[ed]” in every dispensation – across multiple perspectives – and while they may be expanded or given new form, the essential truths they convey remain true. In other words, the Bahá'í Writings can accept the doctrine that all statements come from a particular perspective – but in “weak perspectivism” that does not mean that some statements cannot be true across all perspectives.

“Weak perspectivism” also allows a robust commitment to the unity of truth. As ‘Abdu’l-Bahá affirms, “*No one truth can contradict another truth*” [PT 136]. He supports this by stating, that “*truth or reality is not multiple; it is not divisible*” [PUP 106]. and “*truth is one, although its manifestations may be very different*” [PT 128]. Differences in the “manifestations” of truth do not necessarily imply *logical* contradictions which ‘Abdu’l-Bahá seeks to avoid. Shoghi Effendi re-affirms this theme,

saying, “Truth may, in covering different subjects, appear to be contradictory, and *yet it is all one* if you carry the thought through to the end.”¹²⁵ He adds, “Truth is one when it is independently investigated, it does not accept division” [JWTA 35]. “Weak perspectivism” easily accommodates the Writings on this issue and so does Nietzsche if read in this way.

Our conclusion is clear: if Nietzsche’s perspectivism is understood in Hales’ and Werlshons’ sense as “weak perspectivism” and as implicitly practiced by Nietzsche, there is agreement with the Bahá’í Writings. “Weak perspectivism,” provides a more flexible outlook because it recognizes relative, perspectival truths such as seen in the cultural adaptations of the divine teachings and, it recognizes absolute cross-perspectival truths as seen in the “eternal verities” restated by the Manifestations. It also recognizes that at least some of Nietzsche’s teachings must be accepted as absolutely true, viz. self-overcoming, the will to power and the eternal return. If Nietzsche’s perspectivism is understood as “strong perspectivism,” as overtly stated by Nietzsche — though implicitly contradicted in much of what he writes — then there is no agreement between him and the Writings.

“Weak perspectivism” avoids outlandish consequences that needlessly complicate and impede the quest for knowledge and truth. After all, it is indisputable that Beethoven is physically dead; that tides come in and go out and a broken leg is really broken. What is to be gained by understanding the Bahá’í Writings in a way that opens them to such critiques as have seen above?

“Weak perspectivism” as in the following example from ‘Abdu’l-Bahá is immune from the critiques that undermine “strong perspectivism.”

He has bestowed upon [man] the power of intellect so that through the attribute of reason, when fortified by the Holy Spirit, he may penetrate and discover ideal

realities *and* become informed of the mysteries *of the world of significances*. [PUP 303, emphasis added]

This statement embodies “weak perspectivism” insofar as under some circumstances — the inspiration of the Holy Spirit — reliably true knowledge about the “ideal realities” and the super-natural “world of significances” can be attained. There is no suggestion here that we need to doubt elemental facts such as difference between apples and horse shoe crabs. We should also remember that the inspiration of the Holy Spirit may impart such intellectual virtues as true independence in the investigation of truth; justice in the quest for fair and accurate presentation; humility to accept the truths we find even though they may not be what we hoped or expected; and wisdom in applying what we find in a positive way. There is no reason to limit the Holy Spirit’s inspiration to such theological virtues as faith, hope and charity. When we understand this, we can also see how and why we have true knowledge of the ‘elemental facts’ because nothing prevents the Holy Spirit from acting in our lives on a continuous basis at least vis-à-vis the basic intellectual virtues.

Elsewhere, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá notes,

the bounty of the Holy Spirit gives the true method of comprehension which is infallible and indubitable. This is through the help of the Holy Spirit which comes to man, and this is the condition in which certainty can alone be attained. [SAQ 298]

Under the right circumstances — receiving the bounty of the Holy Spirit — we can know spiritual truths with certainty. The argument that ‘truth’ is not the same as ‘certainty’ is weak since that implies the Holy Spirit can give us certainty about untruths. That defeats the purpose of trusting in the Holy Spirit. Speaking about love, ‘Abdu’l-Bahá concludes,

This is a proof perceptible to the senses, acceptable to reason, in accord with traditions and teachings of the Holy Books and verified by the promptings of human hearts themselves. It is a proof upon which we can absolutely rely and declare to be complete. [PUP 255]

Here, too, we observe the possibility of attaining reliable knowledge from some perspectives and, thereby, the agreement with “weak perspectivism” not just vis-à-vis elemental facts but also spiritual truths such as the existence of God, which, according to ‘Abdu’l-Bahá can be logically proven: “*The existence of the Divine Being hath been clearly established, on the basis of logical poofs.*” [SWAB 14]

“Weak perspectivism” also allows us to accommodate such statements as “Numerous and conclusive proofs exist that go to show that this infinite world cannot end with this human life” [TAF 14]. Elsewhere, he adds,

It is my hope that from day to day your gatherings will grow and flourish, and that those who are seeking after truth will hearken therein to reasoned arguments and conclusive proofs. [SWAB 269]

And,

Day and night must you think, strive and investigate, that you may attain to the mysteries of the Kingdom; that you may attain certainty in knowledge; that you may know this world has a Creator, has a Maker, has a Resuscitator, has a Provider, has an Architect – but know this through proofs and evidences, not through susceptibilities; nay rather through decisive proofs, evident arguments and real vision – that is to say, visualizing it just as you visualize the sun. May you with complete certainty behold the signs of God and attain to the knowledge of the holy divine Manifestations. [BS 326]

Each one of these passages – and there are others to choose from – makes use of the idea of “conclusive” knowledge, or “certainty” or “proofs” and, thereby, show that the Writings are in harmony with “weak perspectivism” and the possibility of at least some statements being true across all perspectives.

10: Conclusion

In the foregoing exploration, we have shown that, despite first appearances to the contrary, there are a surprisingly large number of correlations between the Bahá'í Writings and Nietzsche's philosophy. Among them we find such issues as

1. teleology;
2. perspectivism in Hale's and Welshon's sense of “weak perspectivism;”
3. the process nature of reality;
4. Aristotle's ontology of potentials,
5. the existence of a transcendent power or force manifesting in all things;
6. the importance of the transcendent aspects of existence; the religious impulse in man;
7. the unavoidable agonistic aspects of life, not by political means but by means of new ideas, revitalized values, good personal examples, energized hope, and appeals to the spiritual elements in human nature;
8. the decline of the present world order;
9. the need for revolutionary change (though not change by political revolution);
10. the rejection of partisan politics, nationalism and imperialism;
11. the universal will to power as the self-overcoming and actualization of potentials;

12. the central role of sublimation and self-overcoming;
13. the call for “a new race of men” transcending the current state of human development;
14. life as a agonistic process in various ways;
15. loyalty to the earth;
16. will as present in all things.¹²⁶

Of course, there are also areas of difference and irresolvable disagreement:

1. the master and slave morality;
2. the transvaluation of values and the slave revolt;
3. “violent aristocratic radicalism” (see Detwiler);
4. the often nasty manner of expression and demeaning tone of his writings;
5. the eternal return (unless understood in Hill’s way);
6. perspectivism, if interpreted as “strong perspectivism”;
7. atheism, if taken at face value;
8. the principle of beyond good and evil.
9. lack of an ultimate vision of a future world order;

At this point a question arises: ‘To what degree do the differences undermine the correlations between the Bahá’í Writings and Nietzsche?’ The answer depends on how we choose to read Nietzsche. If we read him in light of Kaufmann’s claim that the will to power and sublimation (which includes self-overcoming) are the “core”¹²⁷ of Nietzsche’s philosophy, then the undermining capacity of these differences is limited. As we have shown, the master-slave morality, the transvaluation of values, “the violent aristocratic radicalism,” the atheism if taken at face value and the “strong” interpretation of perspectivism and living beyond good and evil are not compatible with Kaufmann’s understanding of the “core” of

Nietzsche's philosophy. In one way or another, they conflict with the ethic of sublimation and self-overcoming in order to actualize our potentials both individually and socially. Thereby, they frustrate human development which requires us to be more than we are. If we think we are beyond good and evil; that we are aristocrats and masters with a right to rule over 'slaves'; that there is no truth to know or that can be known; that there is no progress and everything stays as it is or that the material world is all there is, then there will be little or no incentive to pursue a life of self-overcoming and sublimation of our animal natures. In all likelihood, we will find ourselves among the self-satisfied and comfortable. In our view, neither the Writings nor Nietzsche advocate such a life.

From our Kaufmannian perspective, because these points negate or at least avoid the principle of self-overcoming and sublimation, they do not really undermine the correlations we have identified. That is because the differences are based on premises incompatible with Kaufmann's view. Consequently, we must conclude that Nietzsche's work is divided by inconsistencies. This fact weakens his philosophy and encourages us to turn to the Bahá'í Writings instead.

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NOTES

- ¹ Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, in *Scholarship*, p. 17; emphasis added;
- ² Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, 21, October, 1943 in *Scholarship*, p. 4' emphasis added.
- ³ Shoghi Effendi, in a letter written on his behalf, 5 July, 1949, in *Scholarship*, p. 11; emphasis added.
- ⁴ The Universal House of Justice, 1998 Mar 19, *Compilation on Scholarship*.
- ⁵ *Miriam-Webster Dictionary*, <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/correlate> ; also *MacMillan Dictionary*, http://www.macmillandictionary.com/dictionary/british/correlate_1
- ⁶ Robert C Solomon and Kathleen M Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said?*
- ⁷ *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 631.
- ⁸ Ashley Woodward, *Interpreting Nietzsche*, p. 1. See also, Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, p. 50.

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- ⁹ Paul E Kirkland, *Nietzsche's Noble Aims: Affirming Life, Contesting Modernity*, p. 6.
- ¹⁰ Karl Jaspers, *Nietzsche: An Introduction to the Understanding of His Philosophical Activity*, p. 9.
- ¹¹ Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche: Life as Literature*, p. 15-16.
- ¹² Ruediger Safranski, *Nietzsche: A Philosophical Biography*, p. 350.
- ¹³ John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*.
- ¹⁴ Arthur C Danto, *Nietzsche as Philosopher*.
- ¹⁵ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 10; original emphasis.
- ¹⁶ Nicholas Bunnin, Jiyuan Yu, *The Blackwell Dictionary of Western Philosophy*, p. 472.
- ¹⁷ Brian Leiter, *Nietzsche's Moral and Political Philosophy*, in *Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, <http://plato.stanford.edu/entries/nietzsche-moral-political/#4>
- ¹⁸ Tracy B Strong, "Nietzsche's Political Misappropriation" in Bernd Magnus and Kathleen M Higgins, eds., *Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*, p. 131.
- ¹⁹ Ted Honderich, editor, *The Oxford Companion to Philosophy*, p. 619.
- ²⁰ *The Concise Routledge Encyclopedia of Philosophy*, p. 630.
- ²¹ Robert C Solomon, Kathleen M Higgins, *What Nietzsche Really Said*, p. 9.
- ²² Richard Weikart, *Hitler's Ethic: The Nazi Pursuit of Evolutionary Progress*
- ²³ Ian Kluge, *The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá'í Writings*, in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 4, 2003 or #13 at bahai-library.com/series/Irfan . Also Ian Kluge, *Some Answered Questions: A Philosophical Perspective*, in *Lights of Irfan* 10, 2009
- ²⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, (Common) in "The Peasant Revolt of the Spirit," #358, p. 174; emphasis added.
- ²⁵ See Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, (Kaufmann/Hollingdale) in "Towards an Outline", #2, p. 9.
- ²⁶ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #1, p. 7.
- ²⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #12, p. 12.
- ²⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* #1, p. 7; emphasis added.
- ²⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #1, p. 7; emphasis added.
- ³⁰ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #1, p. 7.
- ³¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, (Hollingdale), in "Zarathustra's Prologue", #5, p. 45.
- ³² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #22, p.15,
- ³³ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #23, p. 15-16.
- ³⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #23, p. 16.

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- ³⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #23, p. 16.
- ³⁶ Christa Davis Acampora, *Contesting Nietzsche*, p. 201,
- ³⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Hollingdale), III, #20, p. 227.
- ³⁸ R. Kevin Hill, *Nietzsche: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 44.
- ³⁹ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (Cowan), "We Scholars," #208.
- ⁴⁰ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, (Mencken), *Foreword*.
- ⁴¹ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (Kaufmann), I, #31.
- ⁴² Ted Sadler, "The Postmodernist Politicization of Nietzsche" in Paul Patton, *Nietzsche, Feminism and Political Theory*, p. 225; emphasis added.
- ⁴³ Nietzsche, (Cowan) *Beyond Good and Evil*, #203.
- ⁴⁴ Mark Warren, *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, p. 213.
- ⁴⁵ Bruce Detwiler, *Nietzsche and the Politics of Aristocratic Radicalism*.
- ⁴⁶ Nietzsche, (Cowan) *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX, #257.
- ⁴⁷ Nietzsche, (Cowan) *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX, #259; emphasis added.
- ⁴⁷ Nietzsche, (Cowan) *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX, #259,
- ⁴⁸ There is no question that passages such as this — and there are others — made it easy for Nietzsche's sister Elizabeth to portray him as a forerunner of National Socialism. From our perspective this is not the case if for no other reason than that Nietzsche despised nationalism (especially German nationalism) and socialism. (See *The Will to Power*, #125) National Socialism was too much of a mass i.e. "herd" — or Volk — movement to merit Nietzsche's approval. In *Nietzsche and Political Thought*, Mark Warren sees certain aspects of Nietzsche's beliefs as "distinctively fascist" (p. 211) but these elements cannot be taken in isolation without distorting his thought.
- ⁴⁹ Nietzsche, (Cowan) *Beyond Good and Evil*, IX, #260.
- ⁵⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, (Hollingdale), "Of the Chairs of Virtue," p. 36.
- ⁵¹ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 183.
- ⁵² Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 184.
- ⁵³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "Zarathustra's Prologue," #3, p. 42.
- ⁵⁴ The poet John Keats called this world "the vale of soul making" in a letter to his brother (Feb. 14, 1819). <http://www.mrbauld.com/keatsva.html> The term strikes me as appropriate to the Bahá'í teachings on the purpose of earthly life.
- ⁵⁵ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, (Hollingdale), V, #3, p. 43.
- ⁵⁶ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 197; cf. p. 10.
- ⁵⁷ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 197.

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- ⁵⁸ Michael Laceywing, “Nietzsche on Master and Slave Morality,” <http://documents.routledge-interactive.s3.amazonaws.com/9781138793934/A2/Nietzsche/NietzscheMasterSlave.pdf>
- ⁵⁹ Nietzsche, *Genealogy of Morals*, (Samuel), First Essay, #7. See also, *Beyond Good and Evil*, #195.
- ⁶⁰ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 183.
- ⁶¹ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 184.
- ⁶² Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book I, #26, p. 100; emphasis added.
- ⁶³ Kaufmann: Nietzsche: Philosopher, *Psychologist, Antichrist*, Princeton University Press, 4th edition, 1974, p. 297.
- ⁶⁴ The Universal House of Justice, 1987 June 03, *Compilation on Vying in Service*; emphasis added.
- ⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue” #2, p. 40.
- ⁶⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, “Zarathustra’s Prologue” #2, p. 40.
- ⁶⁷ Ian Kluge, *The Aristotelian Substratum of the Bahá’í Writings*, in *Lights of Irfan IV*, 2003, p. 17-78. See also *Bahá’í Ontology: An Initial Reconnaissance*, in *Lights of Irfan VI*, 2005, p. 121-160; and *Bahá’í Ontology, Part Two: Further Explorations*, in *Lights of Irfan VII*, 2006, p. 163-200.
- ⁶⁸ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*; John Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*; Robert Solomon, in “Nietzsche ad hominem: Perspectivism, Personality and Ressentiment” in *The Cambridge Companion to Nietzsche*; Sheridan Hough, *Nietzsche’s Noontide Friend: The Self as Metaphoric Double*; M. Silk and J.P. Stern, *Nietzsche on Tragedy*; Christian Emden, *Nietzsche on Language, Consciousness, and the Body*; Robert Williams, *Tragedy, Recognition, and the Death of God: Studies in Hegel and Nietzsche*.
- ⁶⁹ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V,12, 1019a,b.
- ⁷⁰ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*, V,12, 1019a,b.
- ⁷¹ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra* (Hollingdale), Part 4, “*The Honey Offering*”, p. 252. See the teleological subtitle of *Ecce Homo* is “How to become what one is.”
- ⁷² Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #1067, p. 550
- ⁷³ Nietzsche, *Beyond Good and Evil*, (Zimmern) #36, <http://www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/4363/pg4363.txt>
- ⁷⁴ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #619, p. 332-333; emphasis added
- ⁷⁵ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #556, p. 301-302.
- ⁷⁶ John Richardson, *Nietzsche’s System*, p. 4.
- ⁷⁷ R Kevin Hill, *Nietzsche: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 105.
- ⁷⁸ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, (Hollingdale), #18.
- ⁷⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #1067, p. 550.

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- ⁸⁰ See Ian Kluge, "Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings: An Initial Exploration," in *Lights of Irfan V* (2004), p. 109-162.
- ⁸¹ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols*, (Hollingdale, p. 37)
- ⁸² W.D. Ross, *Aristotle*, p. 154.
- ⁸³ Ian Kluge, Process Philosophy and the Bahá'í Writings: An Initial Exploration, in *Lights of Irfan 5* (2004).
- ⁸⁴ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 209.
- ⁸⁵ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 209.
- ⁸⁶ Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo*, (Kaufmann), "The Birth of Tragedy" #3, p. 273.
- ⁸⁷ R. Kevin Hill, *Nietzsche: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 28.
- ⁸⁸ John Richardson, *Nietzsche's System*, p. 21; emphasis added.
- ⁸⁹ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power*, #704, p. 374-375.
- ⁹⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in "Zarathustra's Prologue," p. 41-42.
- ⁹¹ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 83.
- ⁹² Roy Jackson, *Nietzsche: A Complete Introduction*, p. 161.
- ⁹³ Nietzsche, (Kaufman) *The Will to Power*, #1067, p. 549.
- ⁹⁴ Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*, Book 3, #125, "The Madman," p. 181.
- ⁹⁵ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "Of the Sublime Men," p.140-141.
- ⁹⁶ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, "Of the Sublime Men," p.140-141; emphasis added.
- ⁹⁷ Nietzsche (Kaufmann) *Ecce Homo*, "Why I Write Such Good Books," #5, p. 368; emphasis added.
- ⁹⁸ Nietzsche (Kaufmann), *The Will to Power*, #2, p. 7.
- ⁹⁹ R. Kevin Hill, *Nietzsche: A Guide for the Perplexed*, p. 95.
- ¹⁰⁰ Karl Loewth in Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life*, p. 206.
- ¹⁰¹ Nietzsche, (Hollingdale) *Thus Spake Zarathustra* in "Zarathustra's Prologue" #3, p. 42.
- ¹⁰² Abir Taha, *Nietzsche's Coming God*, p. 10-11.
- ¹⁰³ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in "Of the Priests", p. 114-115.
- ¹⁰⁴ Bernard Reginster, *The Affirmation of Life: Nietzsche on Overcoming Nihilism*, p. 194.
- ¹⁰⁵ Nietzsche, *The Anti-Christ*, (Hollingdale) #2, p. 115.
- ¹⁰⁶ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 183.
- ¹⁰⁷ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in "Zarathustra's Prologue," p. 44.
- ¹⁰⁸ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, (Hollingdale), in "Of Self-Overcoming," p. 138.
- ¹⁰⁹ Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals* (Kaufmann), III, #27, p. 161; emphasis added.

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- ¹¹⁰ Nietzsche, *Thus Spake Zarathustra*, in “*Of the Sublime Men*,” p. 141.
- ¹¹¹ From a letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi to an individual believer, Dec. 10, 1947, in *Compilations, Lights of Guidance*, p. 113.
- ¹¹² Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 217.
- ¹¹³ Goethe, *Faust I*, Scene I, l. 683-684.
- ¹¹⁴ Postmodern philosophy is built on the denial of truth-claims. See Kluge, “*Postmodernism and the Bahá’í Writings*” in *Lights of Irfan*, Vol. 9, 2008.
- ¹¹⁵ Nietzsche (Kaufmann/Hollingdale), *The Will to Power*, #481, p. 267; emphasis added.
- ¹¹⁶ Steven D Hales and Rex Welshon, *Nietzsche’s Perspectivism*, p. 18; emphasis added.
- ¹¹⁷ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Kaufmann / Hollingdale). #567. P. 305
- ¹¹⁸ Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* (Kaufmann/Hollingdale), #442, p. 298.
- ¹¹⁹ Nietzsche (Kaufmann/Hollongdale), *The Will to Power*, #583, p. 315.
- ¹²⁰ Ian Kluge, “*Postmodernism and the Bahá’í Writings*” published in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 9, 2008. Also, Ian Kluge, “*Relativism and the Bahá’í Writings*” in *Lights of Irfan*, Volume 9, 2008.
- ¹²¹ ‘Abdu’l-Bahá rejects the concept of a real infinite regress as “absurd.”
- ¹²² Steven D Hales and Rex Welshon, *Nietzsche’s Perspectivism*, p. 35.
- ¹²³ Rex Welshon, *The Philosophy of Nietzsche*, p. 110-111; emphasis added.
- ¹²⁴ Shoghi Effendi, *Appreciations of the Bahá’í Faith*, p. 5.
- ¹²⁵ Letter written on behalf of Shoghi Effendi, Feb. 24, 1947 in *Lights of Guidance*, p. 476, emphasis added.
- ¹²⁶ Bahá’u’lláh: “*the Divine Will that pervadeth all that is in the heavens and all that is on the earth*” [GWB 5]. Also, “*Through His world-pervading Will He hath brought into being all created things*” [GWB 318].
- ¹²⁷ Kaufmann: *Nietzsche: Philosopher, Psychologist, Antichrist*, p. 10.