

Some Answered Questions, Evolution and the True Nature of Man

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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Evolution and the True Nature of Man

We now come to the question of the transformation of species and the evolutionary development of organs, that is, whether man has come from the animal kingdom.

This idea has entrenched itself in the minds of certain European philosophers, and it is very difficult now to make its falsity understood; but in the future it will become clear and evident, and the European philosophers will themselves recognize it. For in reality it is an evident error. When one examines creation with a penetrating eye, when one grasps the intricacies of created things and witnesses the condition, the order, and the completeness of the world of existence, one is convinced of the truth that “there is naught in creation more wondrous than that which already exists”. For all existing things, whether on earth or in the heavens, even this limitless firmament and all that it contains, have been most befittingly created, arranged, composed, ordered, and completed, and suffer no imperfection. To such an extent is this true that if all beings were to become pure intelligence and to reflect until the end that has no end, they could not possibly imagine anything better than that which already exists.

If in the past, however, the creation had lacked such completeness and adornment, if it had been in an inferior state, then existence would have necessarily been wanting and imperfect and, as such, incomplete. This matter requires the utmost attention and thought. Imagine, for example, the entire contingent world—the realm of existence—as resembling the body of man. If the composition, the arrangement, the completeness, the beauty, and the perfection which now exist in the human body were in any way different, the result would be imperfection itself.

So if we were to imagine a time when man belonged to the animal kingdom, that is, when he was merely an animal, existence would have been imperfect. This means that there would have been no man, and this chief member, which in the body of the world is like the mind and the brain in a human being, would have been lacking, and the world would thus have been utterly imperfect. This is sufficient proof in itself that if there had been a time when man belonged to the animal realm, the completeness of existence would have been destroyed; for man is the chief member of the body of this world, and a body without its chief member is undoubtedly imperfect. We regard man as the chief member because, among all created things, he encompasses all the perfections of existence.



TRANSLATION

Now, what we mean by “man” is the complete human being, the foremost person in the world, who is the sum of all spiritual and material perfections, and who is like the sun among all created things. Imagine, then, a time when the sun did not exist as such, in other words, when the sun was merely another celestial body. Undoubtedly, at such a time the relationships between existing things would have been disrupted. How can such a thing be imagined? Were one to carefully examine the world of existence, this argument alone would suffice.

Let us give another, more subtle proof: The innumerable created things that are found in the world of existence—be they man, animal, plant, or mineral—must each be composed of elements. There is no doubt that the completeness seen in each and every thing arises, by divine creation, from the component elements, their appropriate combination, their proportionate measure, the manner of their composition, and the influence of other created things. For all beings are linked together like a chain; and mutual aid, assistance, and interaction are among their intrinsic properties and are the cause of their formation, development, and growth. It is established through numerous proofs and arguments that every single thing has an effect and influence upon every other, either independently or through a causal chain. In sum, the completeness of each and every thing—that is, the completeness which you now see in man, or in other beings, with regard to their parts, members, and powers—arises from their component elements, their quantities and measures, the manner of their combination, and their mutual action, interaction, and influence. When all these are brought together, then man comes into existence.

As the completeness of man stems entirely from the component elements, their measure, their manner of combination, and the mutual action and interaction of other beings—and since man was produced ten or a hundred thousand years ago from the same earthly elements, with the same measures and quantities, the same manner of composition and combination, and the same interactions with other beings—it follows that man was exactly the same then as exists now. This is a self-evident truth and cannot be doubted. And if a thousand million years hence, the component elements of man are brought together, measured out in the same proportion, combined in the same manner, and subjected to the same interaction with other beings, exactly the same man will come into existence. For example, if a hundred thousand years hence one were to bring together oil, flame, wick, lamp, and a lighter of the lamp—briefly, if all that is needed now be combined then—exactly the same lamp will be produced.

This matter is evident and these arguments conclusive. But those which the European philosophers have adduced are speculative and inconclusive.