

Some Answered Questions, The Origin of the Universe and the Evolution of Man

'Abdu'l-Bahá

Translated. Original Persian



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The Origin of the Universe and the Evolution of Man

Know that it is one of the most abstruse questions of divinity that the world of existence—that is, this endless universe—has no beginning.

We have already explained that the very names and attributes of Divinity require the existence of created things. Although a detailed explanation of this matter was already provided,[129] a brief mention will again be made here. Know that a lord without vassals cannot be imagined; a sovereign without subjects cannot exist; a teacher without pupils cannot be designated; a creator without a creation is impossible; a provider without those provided for is inconceivable—since all the divine names and attributes call for the existence of created things. If we were to imagine a time when created things did not exist, it would be tantamount to denying the divinity of God.

Apart from this, absolute non-existence lacks the capacity to attain existence. If the universe were pure nothingness, existence could not have been realized. Thus, as that Essence of Oneness, or divine Being, is eternal and everlasting—that is, as it has neither beginning nor end—it follows that the world of existence, this endless universe, likewise has no beginning. To be sure, it is possible for some part of creation—one of the celestial globes—to be newly formed or to disintegrate, but the other countless globes would continue to exist and the world of existence itself would not be disrupted or destroyed. On the contrary, its existence is perpetual and unchanging. Now, as each globe has a beginning, it must inevitably have an end as well, since every composition, whether universal or particular, must of necessity be decomposed. At most, some disintegrate quickly and others slowly, but it is impossible for something that is composed not to ultimately decompose.



TRANSLATION

We must know, then, what each one of the great existent things was in the beginning. There is no doubt that initially there was a single origin: There cannot have been two origins. For the origin of all numbers is one and not two; the number two is itself in need of an origin. It is therefore evident that originally matter was one, and that one matter appeared in a different form in each element. Thus various forms appeared, and as they appeared, they each assumed an independent form and became a specific element. But this distinction attained its full completion and realization only after a very long time. Then these elements were composed, arranged, and combined in infinite forms; in other words, from the composition and combination of these elements countless beings appeared.

This composition and arrangement arose, through the wisdom of God and His ancient might, from one natural order. Thus, as this composition and combination has been produced according to a natural order, with perfect soundness, following a consummate wisdom, and subject to a universal law, it is clear that it is a divine creation and not an accidental composition and arrangement. That is why from every natural composition a living thing comes into existence, but from a chance composition no living thing will appear. So, for example, if man, with all his astuteness and intelligence, were to gather together and combine certain elements, a living being will not be brought into existence as it would not be according to the natural order. This is the answer to the implicit question that might arise, that since these beings come into existence through the composition and combination of these elements, then can we not also gather together and combine the very same elements and thus create a living thing? This idea is mistaken; for the original composition is a divine composition, and the combination is produced by God according to the natural order, and it is for this reason that a living being is created from this composition and an existence is realized. But a composition made by man produces nothing because man cannot create life.

Briefly, we have said that from the composition of the elements; from their combination, manner, and proportion; and from their interaction with other beings countless forms and realities and innumerable beings have come to exist. But it is clear that this terrestrial globe in its present form did not come into existence all at once, but that this universal existent gradually traversed different stages until it appeared in its present completeness. Universal existences can be likened and compared to particular ones, for both are subject to one natural order, one universal law, and one divine arrangement. For instance, you will find the smallest atoms to be similar in their general structure to the greatest entities in the universe, and it is clear that they have proceeded from one laboratory of might according to one natural order and one universal law, and can therefore be compared to one another.

For example, the human embryo grows and develops gradually in the womb of its mother and assumes different forms and conditions until it reaches maturity with the

utmost beauty and appears in a consummate form with the utmost grace. In like manner, the seed of this flower which you see before you was, in the beginning, a small and insignificant thing, but it grew and developed in the womb of the earth and assumed different forms until it appeared with such perfect vitality and grace in this degree. It is likewise clear and evident that this terrestrial globe came to exist, grow, and develop in the matrix of the universe and assumed different forms and conditions until it gradually attained its present completeness, became adorned with countless beings, and appeared in such a consummate form.

It is therefore evident that the original matter, which is like unto the embryo, initially took the form of composed and combined elements, and that composition gradually grew and developed over a myriad ages and centuries, passing from one shape and form to another until, through the consummate wisdom of God, it appeared with such completeness, order, arrangement, and soundness.

Let us return to our subject. From the beginning of existence in the womb of the terrestrial globe, man gradually grew and developed like the embryo in the womb of its mother, and passed from one shape and form to another until he appeared with this beauty and perfection, this power and constitution. It is certain that initially he did not possess such loveliness, grace, and refinement, and that he has only gradually attained such form, disposition, comeliness, and grace. There is no doubt that, like the embryo in the womb of the mother, the embryo of humankind did not appear all at once in this form and become the embodiment of the words "Hallowed be the Lord, the most excellent of all creators!"^[130] Rather, it gradually attained various conditions and assumed divers forms until it attained this appearance and beauty, this perfection, refinement, and grace. It is therefore clear and evident that the growth and development of man on this planet unto his present completeness, even as the growth and development of the embryo in the womb of the mother, has been by degrees and through passing from state to state, and from one shape and form to another, for this is according to the requirements of the universal order and the divine law.

That is, the human embryo assumes different conditions and traverses numerous stages until it reaches that form in which it manifests the reality of the words "Hallowed be the Lord, the most excellent of all creators!" and shows forth the signs of full development and maturity. In like manner, from the beginning of man's existence on this planet until he assumed his present shape, form, and condition, a long time must have elapsed, and he must have traversed many stages before reaching his present condition. But from the beginning of his existence man has been a distinct species. This is similar to the embryo of man in the womb of the mother: It possesses at first a strange appearance; then this body passes from shape to shape and from form to form until it appears in the utmost beauty and perfection. But even when it possesses, in the womb of the mother, a strange form entirely different from its present shape and

appearance, it is the embryo of a distinct species and not of an animal: The essence of the species and the innate reality undergo no transformation at all.

Now, were one to establish the existence of vestigial organs, this would not disprove the independence and originality of the species. At most it would prove that the form, appearance, and organs of man have evolved over time. But man has always been a distinct species; he has been man, not an animal. Consider: If the embryo of man in the womb of the mother passes from one form to another which in no way resembles the former, is this a proof that the essence of the species has undergone transformation? That it was at first an animal and that its organs developed and evolved until it became a man? No, by God! How feeble and unfounded is this thought! For the originality of the human species and the independence of the essence of man are clear and evident.