

# Some Answered Questions, Pre-existence and Origination

'Abdu'l-Bahá

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## Pre-existence and Origination

Question: How many kinds of pre-existence and origination are there?

Answer: Certain sages and philosophers hold that there are two kinds of pre-existence—essential and temporal—and that there are likewise two kinds of origination—essential and temporal.

Essential pre-existence is an existence which is not preceded by a cause; essential origination is preceded by a cause. Temporal pre-existence has no beginning; temporal origination has both a beginning and an end. For the existence of each and every thing depends upon four causes: the efficient cause, the material cause, the formal cause, and the final cause.[156] So this chair has a creator who is a carpenter, a matter which is wood, a form which is that of a chair, and a purpose which is to serve as a seat. Therefore, this chair is essentially originated, for it is preceded by, and its existence is conditioned upon, a cause. This is called essential or intrinsic origination.

The world of existence, in relation to its Creator, is intrinsically originated. Likewise, since the body depends upon and is sustained by the spirit, it is, in relation to the spirit, essentially originated. Conversely, the spirit can dispense with the body and is therefore essentially pre-existent in relation to the body. Although the rays are always inseparable from the sun, the sun is pre-existent and the rays are originated; for the existence of the rays depends upon that of the sun, but the converse does not hold true: The sun is the bestower of grace and the rays are the grace itself.

The second consideration is that existence and non-existence are both relative. If it be said that a certain thing was brought forth from non-existence, the intent is not absolute non-existence; rather, it is meant that the former condition was non-existence



in relation to the present one. For absolute non-existence cannot become existence, as it lacks the very capacity to exist. Man exists, and the mineral likewise exists, but the existence of the mineral is non-existence in relation to that of man; for when the body of man is destroyed, it becomes dust and mineral, and when dust progresses into the human world, and that inanimate body of matter becomes living, man comes into existence. Though the dust—the mineral—enjoys existence in its own station, yet in relation to man it is non-existence. Our meaning is that both exist, but the existence of dust and mineral, in relation to man, is non-existence, for when man dies he becomes dust and mineral.

Therefore, although the contingent world exists, in relation to the existence of God it is non-existence and nothingness. Man and dust both exist, but how great the difference between the existence of the mineral and that of man! The one in relation to the other is non-existence. Likewise, the existence of creation is non-existence in relation to that of God. Thus, even though the universe has existence, in relation to God it is non-existence.

Thus it is clear and evident that although created things exist, in relation to God and to His Word they are non-existent. This is the firstness and the lastness of the Word of God, Who says, "I am the Alpha and the Omega", for He is both the source of grace and its ultimate goal. The Creator has ever had a creation, and the rays have ever emanated and shone forth from the Sun of Truth; for a lightless sun would be impenetrable darkness. The names and attributes of God require the existence of things, and no cessation in the outpouring of God's ancient grace can ever be contemplated, for this would be contrary to the divine perfections.