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One of the oldest questions asked by inquiring minds may be this: “How did the world come into being?” Christian theologians subscribe to the doctrine of *creatio ex nihilo*, the belief that God created the universe out of nothing. An opposing doctrine, *ex nihilo nihil fit*—from nothing, nothing is produced—was expressed by the Roman philosopher Lucretius in his epic poem *On the Nature of Things*:

But only Nature's aspect and her law,
Which, teaching us, hath this exordium:
Nothing from nothing ever yet was born.

There is also *creatio ex deo*, the idea that the cosmos was created out of the being of God.

Before the world existed, the Self Alone existed; nothing whatever stirred.
Then the Self thought: “Let me create the world.” He brought forth all the
worlds out of himself. (*Aitareya Upanishad*)

And then there is *creatio ex materia*, the idea that the cosmos was created out of some eternal and pre-existent type of matter by a divine being or principle. Proponents of these doctrines agree on one thing—the universe exists. How it came into existence is where they part company. So, what does Theosophy say?

In a word: *emanation*. The term is from the Latin, meaning “to flow out from.” It implies an unfolding from within, without; from potential to actual; from the latent to the manifest. “No one creates the universe. Scientists call the process evolution. Theosophists call it emanation” (*Key to Theosophy*). “The doctrine of Emanation was at one time universal. It was taught by the Alexandrian as well as by the Indian philosophers, by the Egyptian, the Chaldean and Hellenic Hierophants, and also by the Hebrews” (*Theosophical Glossary*). But Christian theology long ago “rejected the doctrine of emanations and replaced them with direct, conscious creations of angels and the rest out of *nothing*” (*The Secret Doctrine*).

In the Upanishads, the appearance and disappearance of the Universe has been depicted as the Great Breath, its emergence symbolized by the outward breath, its dissolution by the inward breath. The process is without beginning or end.

And so it is that in a remote galaxy of a future Manvantara, inquisitive minds will again ask the perennial question: “How did the universe come into being?”

David P. Bruce is the National Secretary of the Theosophical Society in America.