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**From the Temporal Time to the Eternal Now:
Ibn al-'Arabi and Mulla Sadra on Time**

Dr. Ibrahim Kalin*

Abstract

In this article, at first the common and popular views on the concept of time will be discussed. Then a new concept of time which is not temporal will be introduced as Ibn Arabi's and Mulla Sadra's views. Then the implications of this new concept of time based on eternity will be discussed.

Eseceially the relation between the eternal world and the created one will be studied from Ibn Arabi and Mulla Sadra's viewpoints. It will be also discussed whether time is real or not real from their views.

Key Words: 1. Ibn Arabi 2. Mulla Sadra 3. time
4. motion 5. temporality 6. Islamic philosophy
7. Islamic cosmology

1. Introduction

Our perception of the world is mediated through two characteristics. We find objects extended in space and observe things as passing in time. In both cases, we seem to respond to something relational: relation of object A to object B and relation of moment 1 to moment 2. Our ordinary and natural encounter with the world gives us space as related to objects and time to events. We relate events to one another as 'before' and 'after' and thus place them within a temporal continuum. Time is the name of this 'before/after framework' stated in a more abstract language. This makes time a term of relationality. Even though time is relational, we might be tempted to conceptualize an absolute time independent of what is happening around us. In fact, we all experience moments

* Prof. Of College of Holy Cross, U. S. A.

of timelessness and eternal moments, which may lead us to think that there must be another order of time different from the one in which we live.

Upon reflection, however, we realize that we derive time from events and not vice versa. Therefore, unlike Newton's claim, there cannot be an absolute time within the specific spatio-temporal framework in which we find ourselves. To speak of another kind of time such as the absolute time, we must consider a different order of being in which the terms 'before', 'after', 'event', 'moment', 'relation' have different meanings. Both Ibn al-'Arabi and Mulla Sadra speak of a different order of being when they declare "time" (*zaman*) as a subjective and "imaginary" (*mutawahham*) term. Does this make time something unreal? If time is an extension of existence, as Sadra claims, can we speak of existence without time? From another point of view, how do we explain the absence of a concept of time as pure temporality and historicity in Ibn al-'Arabi and Mulla Sadra? Before turning to these questions, let's consider how the modern concept of time has formed our perceptions of temporality.

Is time the master of everything? In a world in which we measure everything by its speed, there is only one answer to this question. The modern preoccupation with doing everything as fast as we can hardly gives us a breather to think about the meaning of time. We feel that it is time that pulls us where it wants. We cannot resist it. We often believe that we follow time even though this is an absurd idea from a philosophical point of view. We do countless things to keep up with it. "Keeping up with the times" is the motto of the modern world.

All this creates a sense of dislocation and homelessness. We hardly give any thought on the meaning of time because such a pause puts us even further behind time. We must *do* first and then think. The deep sense of spatial and temporal dislocation forces us to accept change as the only permanent reality. We are forced into believing that the fast speed of events around us is a reflection of the natural order of things. Change, not permanence, is the call of the day. We're human as much as we change. Therefore, it is concluded, we should change, i.e., follow the times.

But Plato says that "all change is a dying" (*Euthydemus* 283d, *Parmenides* 163a-b). Change by itself is not a value. The

philosopher's quest before the modern period was a quest for what is permanent and eternal. The Aristotelian science, for instance, was a quest for essences, that is for the essential nature and changeless qualities of things whereas modern science thinks "in terms of sequences rather than essences" and "investigates the development of systems in time from given initial conditions". (21, p: 21).

2. Time and the Imitation of Eternity

In traditional philosophy, time, which signifies change and impermanence was never seen as something worth considering in its own right. It was always taken up within the cosmological order of things. The slow pace of pre-modern societies left room for qualitative time in that the kind of change observed in nature had meaning. It did not have the kind of alienation effect that modern technology and urbanization has on us. As Marx had said more than a century ago, we no longer have control over what our hands have produced. We make things that are so complex that we cannot make them stop anymore. It is this sense of helplessness vis-à-vis the productions of our hands that create a sense of alienation and uneasiness in us. We feel out of place. We feel out of time.

All of this calls for a moment of reflection on the meaning of time. The concept of time developed by Ibn al-'Arabi and Mulla Sadra presents a different understanding of what constitutes time and what significance it has for us humans. Their perennial concern to live in temporal time to reach the eternal now is grounded in an ontology and cosmology that sees everything through concentric circles and ascending hierarchies. As I shall discuss below, our concept of time is closely linked with our concept of existence because what we call time is ultimately a subjective measuring of an aspect of existence. Without a proper ontology, all we can do is to absolutize time and commit a kind of 'philosophical polytheism'. If time is an effect of existence and existence reveals itself in myriad ways, as Mulla Sadra would insist, then there cannot be one kind of time. Different orders of being entail different orders of temporality.

To give an example, Fakhr al-Din 'Iraqi speaks of different times in accordance with different degrees of existence. His

language is indicative of the hierarchic view of the multiples states of being:

“The time of gross bodies which arises from the revolution of the heavens is divisible into past, present and future, and its nature is such that as long as one day does not pass away the succeeding day does not come. The time of immaterial beings is also serial in character but its passage is such that a whole year in the time of gross bodies is not more than a day in the time of an immaterial being. Rising higher and higher in the scale of immaterial beings we reach Divine Time – time which is absolutely free from the quality of passage, and consequently does not admit of divisibility, sequence and change. It is above eternity: it has neither beginning nor end” (1, P: 181).

For ‘Iraqi, the Divine Time is beyond temporal contingencies which apply only to things that change. For the Divine, the whole of time and history is summed up in a single eternal now.

This is where the traditional concept of time is markedly different than the modern one. It is often asserted that the modern concept of time is linear and thus differs from the traditional concept of cyclical time. While there is some truth to this, the linear concept of time was not totally absent from traditional societies. Cycles contain some idea of the linear march of time when we consider them in shorter spans of time. What is more important, however, is the homogenous nature of the modern concept of time. Time as an even continuum of serial moments leads to a position that levels off all types of time and leaves no space for different degrees of temporality.

While believing that time belongs to the world of becoming and thus cannot extend to the whole of reality, the classical tradition believed in what we might call ‘uneven time’. This is not to be understood in terms of speed, acceleration or slowness but rather in terms of qualitative unevenness. The unevenness in question results from existential qualities rather than temporal and historical considerations. We experience this all the time without realizing it. Such mathematical truths as “ $2+2=4$ ” are both universal and a-temporal in that they are not bound by space and time whereas my eyes seeing the colors on the computer screen requires the continuous presence of all the elements of what makes this visual

experience possible. There is thus an asymmetrical relationship between being and becoming since being represents permanence and becoming denotes transience or, in Plato's words, a certain type of 'dying'. To use Sadra's more abstract language, the more 'beingful' a thing is, the less temporal it is. The unevenness of time is closely tied to the hierarchical notion of time where the presence or absence of ontological qualities change the nature of time.

Lest we think this is a purely philosophical idea, we should remember that it is reflected in how we relate to different moments of time in our daily lives. The quality of time in the morning is different from that of the evening. According to Ibn al-'Arabi's interpretation of the "days of God" (*ayyam Allah*), each of the Divine days has a night and a daytime. The night represents the upper, invisible world while daytime represents the lower visible world (8, III/197). Furthermore, all rituals follow the march of time reflected in the cycle of the sun or the turn of the seasons. Certain times are preferred for certain prayers. While we may think that this is all psychological and has no bearing on reality, we should perhaps note that the 'right moment' is not an accidental moment we create by will. It imposes itself on us, and induces us to do what needs to be done. In a general sense, this binds all Islamic rituals to nature and time in a strong way. The Night of Power (*laylatu'l-qadr*) is more powerful and sacred than others because "the night of power is better than a thousand months in which the angels and the spirit descend from all sides with their Lord's permission. It is peace (which lasts) until the dawn" (The Qur'an, 97/3-5). The psychological and the cosmological converge on such moments of significance.

A common misconception about the traditional concept of time is that it is concerned only with things in the past. The rituals that are reenacted to invoke and re-present an event of origin such as creation, covenant or the building of a sacred shrine appear to celebrate a pivotal event of the past. It is also true that the extreme concern of the moderns with the future is markedly different from the concerns of traditional religions to focus on the origin. This, however, does not suggest that traditional societies lack a concept of the future. To the contrary, all major religions of the world are deeply concerned about the future. In fact, religions see past and present as a passage to future, to the final culmination of things in

their origin and their return to where they come from. An event of origin is a guide for making sense of the past and the present. Yet it is also inextricably linked to the future state of who we are. That is why all religions hold a concept of the hereafter even though their emphasis might be different (CF: 5).

3. Modalities of Time

The fascination of modern societies with the future appears to be marred by their lack of a sense of the 'origin'. The fast and seemingly irreversible pace of modern time forces us to always look forward so that we can re-define ourselves without the burden of remembering the beginning of things. But how can we have a meaningful future if we have no sense of our origin? The classical thought was so concerned with the question of origins that Aristotle, *inter alia*, had insisted that to know something is to know its origin. This principle holds true even today in modern science where the more we know about the cause, the more accurate we are about the effect.

At this point, we should note how the mechanical clock changed the nature of time. The clock made time a mathematically measurable, i.e., quantifiable entity always present at hand. When such large units as seasons and cycles were the measure of time, they represented qualitative change in that one was witness to seasonal changes, growth and death in nature, and the maturation of human beings. Mathematical time changed this once and for all. What was a very special case of measuring time through specific scientific tools became the common definition of time. The invention of the mechanical clock was the turning point in this history. Lewis Mumford is right when he says that 'the clock, not the steam-engine, is the key machine of the modern industrial age' (18, P: 14). Thanks to mass production, the machine clock has become such a pervasive gadget that we now measure time by looking at our clocks. But this is absurd because it is not the clock that measures the time.

The quantification of time is closely linked to the modern notion of the universe as a machine.

Newton's absolute time was an important step in this historic process. In his *Principia* (1687), Newton had defined time as "absolute, true and mathematical time, of itself and from its own

nature, flow(ing) equably without relation to anything external” (21: P: 26). Locke gave a more elegant expression to it when he defined duration as “the length of one straight line extended ad infinitum, not capable of multiplicity, variation or figure, but is one common measure of all existence whatever, wherein all things whilst they exist equally partake” (16, II/15011). Both Newton and Locke needed an absolute time to conceive the universe in terms of quantifiable objects and eventually as a machine. But defining time as an absolute in itself does not make sense because no matter what kind of motion or phenomena we take to be the measure of time, time remains dependent on the phenomena, not vice versa.

One of the frustrations of the contemporary students of pre-modern thought is the little or no interest of classical thinkers in time as historicity. We can hardly find any full-fledged discussions of time as a driving force of human history. Traditional thinkers were aware of time as a condition of human existence. They knew about the history of revelation, prophets, their struggles, different communities, Israelites, and so on. But their interest lied not in time *per se* but in its psychological and cosmological meaning and our ability to overcome it. For Plato and his followers, the value of something derived from its ability to resist the eroding impact of change and becoming. In the works of Muslim philosophers and theologians, time is usually discussed as a footnote to the larger questions of motion (*haraka*), generation (*kawn*), corruption (*fasad*) and transformation (*istihala*). This is perfectly understandable since the world is in a constant flux and created anew at every moment. In this view, history is not something we leave behind but rather watch under our feet.

This, however, in and of itself did not mean much for the classical philosophers unless we placed it within a larger context of being and permanence. Ibn al-‘Arabi describes this by employing the Qur’anic concept of continuous creation (*khalq jadid*), which makes the world absolutely contingent but also fresh at every moment. Mulla Sadra presents a similarly dynamic cosmology with his concept of substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*). Existential renewal is an intrinsic quality of things. Locational movement, i.e., something moving from one point to another in space and transformation or alteration (*istihala*) all are accidental movements compared to substantial motion. They are what Sadra

calls “motion in motion”. The real motion and change takes place in the very substance of things, and this holds true for the entire cosmos. Yet again, all this makes sense only within the larger context of being and permanence since the ultimate goal of things that change is to realize their *telos* (*ghaya*) and return to their point of origin.

Does this suggest a static concept of culture? Are not the modernists right in claiming that such a notion of time leads to the death of human society? Some may think so but the matter is never as simple as it seems. One of the enduring achievements of classical Islamic culture has been to establish a balance between a dynamic concept of time based on the continuous renewal of the cosmos and a sense of timelessness towards which every finite soul is to strive. The remarkable dynamism of Muslim societies reflected in their scientific, artistic and political achievements has not led to a notion of self-subsisting time, a time that is self-referential and which runs the risk of becoming an idol by itself. Is this not what the Meccan polytheists believed when they said that “it is only eternal time (*dahr*) that destroys us” (Qur’an, Jathiyah, 45/24)? The Islamic tradition was able to establish a balance between the changing (*mutaghayyirat*) and the unchanging (*thawabit*), and this was the backbone of all branches of knowledge from jurisprudence to tasawwuf. The accounts of the human soul in the Sufi tradition, for instance, are much more dynamic and multi-dimensional than the modern notion of the self. The famous hadith of the Prophet is lived through the entire Muslim culture: “Those whose two days are the same are at a loss”. It would be a gross mistake to charge the Islamic tradition of having no sense of change. The key issue is to decide on the quality and direction of change.

Now, if time is the measure of motion, as Aristotle would say (*Physics*, 11.5.219b), then all temporal considerations imply contingency and transience. While we can talk about things that are in time because they’re subject to change, we cannot use the same language for non-temporal beings. We have to make some radical adjustments to employ the language of time in regards to such non-temporal beings as angels, reason, and God. As Aristotle says, “change is impossible in that which has no parts” (*Physics*, 4.12.221B). He then adds that “eternal entities, by the fact of their

eternity, are not in time”. In conclusion, time does not apply to incorporeal beings.

If there is something like ‘Divine time’, then it must be subject to different criteria. Like other sacred scriptures, the Qur’an presents God as living, breathing life, creating, destroying, and doing something at every moment (Qur’an, Rahman 55/29). The God of the Qur’an is not passive but dynamic. Divine activity or dynamism, however, is not to be understood in terms of a Bergsonian *élan vital* or process philosophy, both of which make the Divine dependent upon change in the world. Divine time is not serial or temporal time. It does not follow time but creates it. It is the generative act of the Divine. Creation is the name of the divine time.

4. Ibn Arabi and the Non-Reality of Time

Ibn al-‘Arabi defines time (*zaman*) as a subjective entity and denies any objective reality to it. Time is something ‘imaginary’ (*mutawahham*) and arises in the faculty of estimation (*wahm*). It has no reality of its own for it cannot exist apart from the context of relations in which it is found. What we call the passage of time is only the succession of events stated in response to the question ‘when’ (8, I: 365). Things in the outside world do not possess time the way they have accidents. Time is not like the color red in relation to the rose. It is not an accidental quality we can identify through the sense or reason. Rather, it is a mental attribution, something we conceive in our minds and then relate to events, which we formulate in temporal terms. In this limited sense, time is like the essence-existence distinction: it is a distinction that enables us to understand things through classes and generalities. But it is a distinction that exists only in our minds.

In Ibn al-‘Arabi, as it is in Mulla Sadra¹, relations are not real entities. They denote a state of ‘in-between’, a *barzakh* or isthmus without possessing a reality of their own. “Relations are not realities (a’yan) or entities; they are matters of non-existence compared to the realities of the relations” (8, II: 505)². Time falls under this category because it does not correspond to any reality in concerto: “Its intelligibility is something imaginary extending with no ends. Thus we judge it to be past for what has passed in it, we judge it to be future for what will come out in it and we judge it to

be present for what it is in it; and this is called the present moment (al-an)"(8, III: 529).

To stress this point, Ibn al-'Arabi relates the famous question asked of the Prophet of Islam: "Where was our Lord before He created the creation?" Commenting on this, he says that "if time were to be a real being by itself, the transcendence of the True One would not have been above limitation (*taqyid*) since the rule of time would limit Him" (8: I/365). We may take this to mean that time is something we attach to things rather than something that co-exists with them. This is especially true in relation to God to whom none of our temporal categories apply. Ibn al-'Arabi's conclusion is that "time is something imagined and has no reality of its own"(8, I/366). This point is expressed in one of his poems as follows:

When the fruits of time are realized as real
 It is known through imagination (*awham*)
 Like nature, its power lies in its effect
 (But) its reality by itself is non-existence
 Things are determined by it but
 It has no reality ('*ayn*) through which to rule
 The intellect is incapable of grasping its form
 Thus we say eternal time (*dahr*) is imaginary
 Had it not been for His transcendence
 The Divine would have not named His existence through it
 In the heart is its glorification
 The origin of time is crystallized from pre-eternity (*azal*)
 Even though it is ruled over, its rule is eternal
 Like emptiness (*khala'*), it has extension (*imtidat*) with no sides
 It is not in any entity but through imagination something it
 becomes (8, I/364-5).

Ibn al-'Arabi does not spend too much time on the ordinary sense of time as the measure of motion other than saying that "the principle in the existence of time is nature"(8, III/531,365). Nature is the principle of change and accounts for different kinds of change, motion and growth in the world. Like Aristotle, Ibn al-'Arabi follows a steady logic and allows time for things that change while stressing that things that do not change are not subject to time. After all, his concept of time as a subjective entity is shared by others in the Islamic tradition. What he seems to be really interested in is what lies behind serial or temporal time, i.e., the

timeless order of things. At this point, Ibn al-'Arabi introduces several new concepts and focuses on *dahr*, or eternal time, as pertaining to the Divine order. As always, Ibn al-'Arabi's primary concern is to see the reality of things through the eyes of the Divine order. His considerations on time are no exception.

There is both a metaphysical and psychological reason for Ibn al-'Arabi to move beyond time as temporal duration. If time is a continuum made of instants or 'nows' (*anat*), then there is only the present now. In fact, what we assume to be a continuum is only a perception, not reality. For eternity, "the only proper way of saying it is the 'is', not was or shall" (4, P: 66). The presence of the eternal now secures the essential reality of things and is thus indispensable for the metaphysician. From a psychological point of view, this is of pivotal significance since the ultimate goal is to prepare the soul for realizing the eternal now and participating in it. It is to train the soul so that it can be a witness to the fact that "everything perishes except the face of your Lord" (Qur'an 28/88) and that "He is the exterior and the interior, the beginning and the end" (Qur'an 57/3).

The celebrated Sufi concept *ibn al-waqt*, the "child of the moment", describes this state of consciousness and means to be free from the worries of the past and the future. It does not simply refer to the present moment, which can be a fleeting moment among millions of others but to the state of being present. In the language of Islamic philosophy, presence (*hudur*) is not just a matter of standing in relation to something but participating in the full reality of existence (*wujud*). Sadra goes so far as to define existence as presence for existence is fullness, plenitude and absence of privations. To be present is to be in a state of participating in the "eternal now".

To explain the divine order of being, Ibn al-'Arabi turns to the famous hadith that "there was God and there was nothing with Him. Then He entered into (creation). It is like that now as it was before"(8, I/169). He takes this to be the stage where "God is qualified by Himself" and nothing else. This eternal now is the Divine time. This is the *sarmad* or absolute eternity where an eternal being is related to another eternal being. Here, God knows things not through temporal sequence but through ontological generation. Thus when God "wished the existence of the world and

created it in a certain manner, he knew it through His knowledge of Himself”.

At this point, we need to make a distinction between a temporal moment and an ontological one. The temporal moment is something that occurs “in time”, to use our misleading language of time. It refers to a point in the succession of events. It comes before something and follows certain things. Moreover, it has a definite beginning and end and allows us to speak of it in terms of series. The ontological moment, however, does not imply a beginning, passage or end in time. It refers to “an origin in the First Principle” (4, P: 2). The contrast between the two is a contrast between the temporal and the non-temporal orders of being.

5. From the Temporal (*Zaman*) to the Eternal (*Dahr*)

The question of ‘eternal time’ is taken up in Chapter 59 of the *Futuhāt* (8, I/365). Ibn al-‘Arabi stresses the Qur’anic dictum that there is nothing before and after God. “To God belongs the order, both before and after” (*lillahi’l-amr min qabl wa min ba’d*: al-Rum, 4). God as the rich (*al-ghaniyy*) precedes everything in the ontological sense of the term since “he is not in need of the worlds in an absolute sense”. He then quotes the Qur’anic verse (Al-i Imran, 97) that “He does not stand in need of anything in the world”. The word *ghaniyy* denotes a positive state of wealth, richness, fullness, self-subsistence and self-sufficiency where the English rendering “not in need of” does not exactly capture that meaning. This is borne out more clearly in another Qur’anic verse: “God is rich and you are the needy” (*Allahu ghaniyy wa antumu’l-fuqara*). In fact, Ibn al-‘Arabi has a section on the Divine name *al-ghaniyy* called “on the knowledge of the station of *ghina*/richness and its secrets” where he says that “*al-ghina*’ is an attribute of negation (*sifat salbiyyah*); therefore its rank is different from the other names” (8, II/261).

To further emphasize this point, Ibn al-‘Arabi describes richness and poverty as two perfect stations in their own degrees: poverty is not privation or limitation but a state of perfection for the servant because “poverty in its essence is the perfection of creation (*kamil al-khalq*) which has no foot in richness, and richness in its state is the perfection of the True One (*kamil al-haqq*) which has no foot in

poverty. If the two were mixed, then poverty would be the same as richness and richness would be the same as poverty. Therefore each of them is the constituent of its owner ... richness and poverty never mixes together. There is no place for poverty for God in His existence and no place for richness for the servant in His existence ... (in this sense) it cannot be said that richness is better than poverty or poverty is better than richness because poverty is the quality of the servant and richness is the quality of the True One”(8, II/641-2). In short, God’s richness in the ontological sense of the term absolves Him of any condition to be part of the temporal order.

The key concept which Ibn al-‘Arabi discusses at some length is *dahr*, perpetuity or eternal time as one of the names of God. He relates the famous saying of the Prophet: “Do not curse the eternal time (*dahr*) because the eternal time is God”.³ This is in reference to the Qur’anic verse 45/24 where the Meccan polytheists are mentioned as saying that “it is only *dahr* that destroys us (or makes us perish)” (Qur’an, Jathiyah, 45/24). *Dahr* encompasses temporal time and expresses an eternal duration without beginning (*azal*) and without end (*abad*). As Sadra would later elaborate, *dahr* denotes the relation between an eternal being such as God and a created being such as the world(17, III/147)⁴. In this sense, *dahr* is God’s face turned towards the world of creation because “there is a face (*wajh*) for God in everything and no one can say that except the true believer”(8, III/348)⁵.

The Meccan polytheists were aware of this meaning of *dahr*. According to Ibn al-‘Arabi, they were right in saying that “it is only *dahr* that destroys us” because *dahr* is God (8, IV/266). But they were mistaken in thinking that *dahr* is time (*zaman*). Their confusion between the two categories of time has led them to mistake temporal time for eternity and thus attribute to it something it does not possess. In Ibn al-‘Arabi’s words, “they were right in using the name (*itlaq al-ism*) but wrong (in understanding) its meaning”(Ibid). In Chapter 390, Ibn al-‘Arabi comments on *dahr* and quotes the hadith “God is *dahr* and what destroys them is only God”. Then he returns to his concept of time as a pure relation: “Know that time is a relation (*nisbah*) that is non-existent in its essence”(8, III/529). It is clear that in emphasizing the relativity and imaginary nature of time, Ibn al-‘Arabi responds to the

metaphysical error of the Meccan polytheists, viz., taking time to be an absolute reality in itself and placing it above God. Thus he says that “the universe never ceases to be under the decree of the present time (*zaman al-hal*) and God’s decree in the universe never ceases to be in the decree of the temporal time (*al-zaman*)” (*Ibid*).

Ibn al-Arabi frequently quotes the verse “Every day He is at something” (*kull yawmin huwa fi sha’n*) (Qur’an, Rahman, 55/29). The verse is a vivid description of God’s act in the universe, which explains all the “changes in the world” (8, III/195). What we call time is nothing more than God acting in the world in infinitely diverse and colorful ways. This explains why God is called *dahr* because “He transforms the forms and He is at something every day (i.e., moment)” (*Ibid*). God is eternal time insofar as He is the source of all change and all generation and corruption. God as *dahr* helps the universe to realize its *telos*, i.e., the final return and consummation of things in the Divine.⁶

Dahr as an aspect of the Divine corresponds to “one single day (*yawm wahid*) without day and night”. But this single day turns into days as each Divine name takes it up and becomes particular through its “decrees” (*ahkam*). This gives us the “days of God” (*ayyam Allah*), which, in turn, correspond to different Divine names and their acts of disclosure in the temporal order. Thus each Divine name has a “day in the eternal time”. In other words, each day of the eternal time is nothing but a particularization and manifestation of a Divine name. As we would expect, this is in perfect harmony with Ibn al-‘Arabi’s repeated idea that “there is nothing in engendered existence (*al-kawn*) except His names and qualities” (8, II/505). Thus while time is something purely subjective, *dahr* has a reality of its own insofar as it denotes one of the faces of God. In a seemingly paradoxical line, Ibn al-‘Arabi says that “I swore by the eternal time (*dahr*) that it has no reality/Yet it is intelligible to the intellect” (8, II/639).

In Chapter 291, Ibn al-‘Arabi gives a description of everything as having a *sadr*, root or origin (lit. “breast”), and a *qalb*, heart. While the heart is the innermost reality, the *sadr* is its protection. The highest form of knowledge is to know the breast, i.e., the primordial source of something. Man is the only being who can have the true knowledge of things because “the universe and every single genus in it are in the form of man and man is the last

existent. Man alone is in the form of the Divine in his outward and inward reality. God has made a *sadr* for him. And between the True One who is the first, and man, who is the last, are many breasts whose number only God knows” (8, II/640). Then Ibn al-‘Arabi gives a list of things with their *sadr* and says that “the *sadr* of existence is contingent beings, the *sadr* of existent beings is the first intellect, the *sadr* of eternal time (*dahr*) is what lies between pre-eternity and post-eternity, the *sadr* of temporal time (*zaman*) is the time of the hyle receiving the form...”. Just as everything has its innermost reality and true perfection in a higher being or principle, the temporal time in which we live receives its essential reality from the eternal time (*dahr*).

6. The Present Moment and the Abode of Eternity

Yet neither time nor eternal time is exactly what is presently or presentially available to us. What we experience as ‘real time’ is the moment. In section 239 of the *Futuhat*, Ibn al-‘Arabi turns to the question of moment (*al-waqt*) and says that “the truth of the moment is what you are with and upon”. In defining moment as “that upon which we are”, Ibn al-‘Arabi touches upon the question of what befalls human beings in their destiny. Since every moment is a manifestation of the Divine will, it is “what the True One decrees (for you) and what passes onto you”.⁷ In this sense, the moment is nothing but “what you are upon and what you are upon is nothing but your disposition (*isti’dad*). The affairs of the True One, which He has decreed, do not dawn upon you except through what your disposition wills”. The moment designates a state of being in which the individual acquires God’s decree in tandem with his disposition. Everything that happens in an individual’s life happens in the moment, and for Ibn al-‘Arabi this is an occasion for celebrating God’s infinite grace. The “people of the moment” (*ashab al-waqt*) know this fact and do not lose sight of God’s decree in existence and “combine the presence of God with His decree. They have the utmost knowledge and felicity, and they are the people of the moment which brings (them) happiness” (8, II/529).

This is what the moment means for human beings. But there is also the cosmological moment whereby every natural event is an emergence or appearance of the “affairs of the True One (*shu’un*

al-haqq) in contingent beings”. Just like the disposition of individual, the universe also has a disposition according to which God’s decrees emerge in different degrees of ontological intensity. In this sense, the cosmological moment “emanates from the engendered existence (*al-kawn*), not from the True One”. Just like human beings, the universe receives “God’s manifestation in contingent beings in accordance with their disposition and variations. But in Himself, He is above the universes” (8, II/528).

The metaphysical and cosmological senses of the moment converge in the invocation of the Divine. Ibn al-‘Arabi describes this moment of intimacy as follows:

The moment (*al-waqt*) is what you’re always qualified by
 You never cease to be witnessed by its decree (*hukm*)
 God makes my moment in it a place to witness Him
 In the moment are found what is reprehensible and what is
 praiseworthy

In it are the affairs of the Compassionate
 And for us they become a path, faith and unity (*Ibid*).

Abd al-Razzaq Kashani, one of Ibn al-‘Arabi’s important commentators, reiterates the significance of the moment as a kind of Divine presence. Under the entry “the continuous moment” (*al-an al-daim*), he defines time as a collection of moments and moment as an extension of the Divine presence (*al-hadrat al-ilahiyyah*): “The continuous moment is the extension of the Divine presence by which pre-eternity (*azal*) enters post-eternity (*abad*). Both of these are in the present moment because of what emerges from pre-eternity at eternal moments. Each of their moments (*hin*) combines pre-eternity and post-eternity and through it pre-eternity, post-eternity and the eternal moment are united. Thus it is called the inner reality of time (*batin al-zaman*) and the origin of time (*asl al-zaman*). Temporal moments are imprints on it, and its decrees (*ahkam*) and forms are manifested in temporal changes (*taghayyurat*). But it itself is continuously and perpetually unchanging. Certain things may be added to its own presence as he (the Prophet), peace be upon him, has said: “There is no morning or evening for your Lord”” (15, P: 54).

Kashani then equates “continuous moment” (*al-waqt al-daim*) with “continuous instant” (*al-an al-daim*). He defines the moment (*al-waqt*) as presence in the full sense of the term:

“The moment is what is presently available to you in the moment. Since everything is from the ordinance of the True One (*tasrif al-haq*), then you should have nothing but contentment and submission so that you will always be under the decree of the moment and do not think of anything else. If it is something that concerns your livelihood, then take care of it and don't concern yourself with past or future. If you are fixated upon the past, then you lose the present moment. The same holds true for the thought of the future. Do not pay too much attention to it because you have been given the present moment. The verifier has thus said that the Sufi is the child of the moment (*ibn al-waqt*)” (15, P: 75).

Eternal time stands above the temporal time and thus represents permanence over against transience. God stands over them all since He is the only absolute reality beyond any, temporal or eternal. In a sense, this explains why the human counting of days or years do not apply to God. The Qur'an says that “in thy Sustainer's sight a day is like a thousand years of your reckoning” (al-Hajj, 22/47). Since a day in God's sight is never the same as our measurement of time, it could be of a completely different length: “All the angels and spirits ascend unto God in a day the length whereof is fifty thousand years” (Qur'an, al-Ma'arij 70/4). In short God has eternity whereas the servant has only the moment (3, PP: 90-91). But for Ibn al-'Arabi, the two are somehow connected because to be a child of the moment is to gaze upon the lands of eternity.

7. Mulla Sadra and Time

Like Ibn al-'Arabi, Mulla Sadra rejects the concept of time as an independent and self-subsistent entity. For Sadra, time is not a physical entity like color black or white. It is something that 'arises in the mind'. More precisely, it corresponds to motion as *measured*. Measurement is something we do, not something we find in the external world. Furthermore, measurement does not add anything new to the reality of what is measured. In this sense, time is subjective, mental and 'imaginary' (*mutawahham*). This, however, does not suggest that time is something we make up with no relation to the external world. Time's being something mental or imaginary is different from essences which are also things arising

in the mind (17, I/ 434)⁸. In one place, Sadra admits that time has “some kind of existence” (*darb min al-wujud*) (17, I/151 CF.6: P.110) and this existence is nothing but “continuous renewal for which there is no essence except conjunction, continuity and renewal” (17, I/14).

According to this meaning, time has a reality of its own in the sense that its essential properties are also logical necessities: “Before-ness (*al-sabaq*), beginning, attached-ness (*al-luhuq*) and end (*intiha'*) are among the essential meanings of the parts of time ... every single part of time is one of its essential necessities. For instance, yesterday's being before tomorrow is an essential property of yesterday just as being after yesterday is an essential quality for tomorrow” (17, I/358). In short, time has a special kind of existence different from both mental concepts and physical entities. It is therefore more proper to say that time is a category or frame we place upon the physical reality. But again this is not like me calling the blue sky red. Rather, it is something I arrive at through both sensation and mental analysis. The actual reality outside my mental constructions does not contain something called time.

Sadra partly rejects and revises the two conventional definitions of time as the measure of spatial motion on the one hand and the circular movement of heavenly bodies, on the other. While time remains imaginary in the sense defined above, what constitutes time is something that belongs to the very constitution of things. It is the “measure of (physical) nature that renews by itself from the point of view of its essential priority (*taqaddum*) and posterity (*ta'akhkhar*)”. The nature that renews by itself has two dimensions: space and time. The two are co-existent in physical beings and form a spatio-temporal continuum. They are not some physical attributes or accidents but a mode of existence.

“Nature has two dimensions and two measures. The first is a temporal gradual one which admits the imaginary division of temporal priority and posterity. The second is an instant spatial one which admits the division of spatial priority and posterity. And the relation of measure (*miqdar*) to dimension (*imtidad*) is like the relation of something definite (*muta'ayyin*) to something indefinite (*mubham*), both of

which are united in existence, separate in the mind” (17, I/140 & III/304).

In tandem with his concept of substantial motion (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*), Sadra defines time, like space, as an inherent dimension of things, not something attached to them from outside. Space is not something “in” which things are found. Rather, it is a mode of existence proper to the spatial dimension of physical beings. By the same token, time is not something “in” or “during” which events occur. Rather, it is the mind’s depiction of before-ness and after-ness in the form of a temporal continuum. Time, then, is dependent on physical beings and has no independent existence apart from them. It is a property of things which we can detect through the senses. To think of time in terms of passing, arising, slow or fast is a work of our minds. But since we cannot perceive the world without our minds, we are always bound to perceive it in terms of time and temporal succession.⁹

For Sadra, the most essential feature of corporeal beings is their continuous renewal (*tajaddud ittisali*). This is an essential aspect of physical beings and goes back ultimately to existence itself. Continuous renewal is also an essential aspect of time. Substantial motion, which is an effect of existence in the world of generation and corruption, applies to all beings. That is why Sadra defines motion in terms of existential qualities: “motion is an existential perfection and a quality for its subject” (17, I/193). Time is the measurement of this movement-as-substantial change, not movement-as-locomotion. In Sadra’s terms, “the existence of substantial nature is continuous renewal. This state of ‘being gradual’ corresponds to time. By the same token, the existence of gradual quantities, qualities, positions and places is to be gradual. Motion is not a ‘gradual existence’ (i.e., a thing) but to be gradual in engendered existence (*kawn*)” (17, II/220). Time is the measure of this gradual existence, not one of the existents that change gradually. In other words, time is “the measure of existence” (*miqdar al-wujud*) (17, I/139)¹⁰ and this makes time an intrinsic dimension of corporeal things. Sadra thus establishes a unitary relationship between corporeal beings and time as *quanta continua* in that both are extensions of existence.

At this point, Mulla Sadra turns to moment (*an*) as a unit of measure for the continuum of time. For Sadra, only the moment can be said to really exist for neither past nor future is present at any given time. As temporal orders, past and future are mental constructions. But since Sadra does not accept atomism, he rejects the idea of dividing time infinitely: “Time is a *quantum continuum* (*kammiyyah muttasila*) and every continuous quantity can be divided infinitely but only potentially, not in actuality” (17, I/166). Then he defines moment as the ‘numbering’ of time but warns that this can be done only hypothetically because time as ‘something continuous’ (*amr muttasil*) cannot be counted. Moment as a measure of time is different from counting something as one, three or twenty.

“Time is continuous and that which is continuous cannot be numbered except after it is divided into parts. Now, division takes place only through the creation of parts. When the parts come about, then the continuous becomes divisible into parts. In this case, its parts can be counted like the line whose parts are constituted by points. The point is the numbering of the line in the sense that if there were no points, there would be no counting (*ta’did*)” (17, I/178).

This suggests that we cannot measure time by any of its derivatives such as moment, hour, day, year, etc. These ‘fragments of time’ are themselves derivatives of what we call time. In conclusion, time cannot be counted through numbers but should be conceived as a *continuum*. This is what Sadra urges us to do when we talk about existence (*wujud*) as the source of existents (*mawjudat*).

Sadra’s definition of time as the measure of existence restates all discussions of time in terms of the modalities of existence. True, to talk about time is to talk about change, motion, and alterity. It is also to talk about things that change. In this sense, time is bound up with instants, moments, sameness, difference, flow, and succession. All of these, however, bring us back to existence because these are nothing but various states and attributes of existence. To talk about time is, therefore, to talk about a particular modality of existence, i.e., existence as ‘unfolding’, ‘expanding’ and ‘measured’. As Izutsu puts it when discussing Dogen’s philosophy of continuous creation, “a unit of time, for Dogen, is identical with a unit of

existence” (11, P: 124). The hierarchy of time(s) is thus based on the hierarchy and gradation of existence (*tashkik al-wujud*).

8. Heavenly Bodies and the Temporal Origination of the World

By defining motion as the measure of existence and the continuous renewal of things, Sadra moves away from the Peripatetic notion of change as an effect of the eternal movement of heavenly bodies. The Peripatetic philosophers had assigned a semi-divine role to the spheres when they defined them as the source and measure of time in the sublunar world while themselves being immune from any change. This was based on three interrelated premises. First, the highest heavenly bodies contain all the other moving bodies in lower levels of existence. This assumption was based on the idea that that which is higher contains *in principle* that which is lower. Secondly, heavenly bodies effect the movement of lower bodies by virtue of holding a higher position in the hierarchical scale of the cosmos. The two famous examples that come to the mind are the effect of the sun and the moon on the earth. Thirdly, the perfect circular movement of the heavenly bodies is more appropriate to be a measure of time than other forms of imperfect motion. In conclusion, they are the measure of time without themselves being subject to change (19, II/PP:306-7).

Sadra notoriously rejects this premise and introduces change in the heavenly bodies. In their perfect circular movement, heavenly bodies too undergo substantial change and yearn for their ultimate *telos* (*ghaya*). This makes them part of the lunar world, i.e., the world of change and impermanence, and preempts the possibility of assigning any theological role to them. The perfect circular motion, which is the leitmotif of heavenly bodies, does not amount to perpetuity or eternity for “the substance of a sphere (*falak*) is not permanent with its natural and positional (*wad'iyyah*) form. The same applies to all heavenly bodies. The cause of motion and its subject is a particular corporeal being and such a being cannot be eternal” (17, I/131).

While the movement of the spheres is the distant cause of movement in the sublunar world, nature (*tabi'a*), which causes things to change continuously, is “the proximate principle for all

movements” (17, I/120, CF. 12: PP: 65-93). Thus “motion is the continuous renewal of things” and the “measure of this continuity is time” (17, I/126). Time is then the measure of this “world-order-in-motion”. In this sense, Tabatabai, one of Sadra’s contemporary commentators, is right in claiming that Sadra has defined time as the fourth dimension of physical beings (17, I/140).

Seeking to produce a balanced and comprehensive definition of time, Sadra comes back to the Peripatetic concept of time and presents a hierarchical classification of the causes of time: “In our view, time is tied up with the renewal of the highest nature, then with the circular movement (of the spheres) which is the oldest (i.e., the first) of movements in other categories. This is so especially for the highest entity (*al-jirm al-aqsa*) through which other spatial and positional movements as well as qualitative and quantitative changes are measured” (17, I/182). To make time part of the present world-order, not something that governs it, Sadra further defines motion as a relational term, i.e., as something that exists not on its own but as a result of two or more things. Like Ibn al-‘Arabi, he considers relations as essentially non-existent or as something suspended between existence and non-existence. This, in turn, leads Sadra to define motion as a process. In this sense, motion is passage, renewal and change and thus cannot entail its own principle of existence:

“Motion is a relational thing (*amr nisbi*) and has no origination or eternity by itself. It is subject to what is attributed to it (i.e., subject of motion). As we discussed before, the meaning of motion is the gradual passage of something from potentiality to actuality. In reality, what passes from potentiality to actuality is that in which motion takes place. But motion is the renewal of that which is renewed and the origination of that which is originated insofar as it is originated” (17, I/129).

To further emphasize this point, Sadra says that time belongs to the category of things that are “weak in existence” (*da‘ifat al-wujud*), i.e., hung between existence and non-existence (17, I/151). While this description presents time as process, it also makes it something that depends on something else for its subsistence.

It is not difficult to see why Sadra defines motion as a purely relational and positional term: he wants to avoid attributing to time

any role that may approximate God. This danger arises when we define the movement of heavenly bodies with such terms as 'eternal', 'absolute', 'perfect', 'unchanging', and so on. Instead, Sadra posits God as the ultimate cause of motion and time:

“The cause of time and temporalities (*zamaniyyat*) which change continuously and by themselves is either God Himself or His exalted command (*amr*), which is called the active intellect and the spirit, and it is the proximate angel containing many other angels who are the soldiers of the Lord as he pointed to it when He said “no one knows the soldiers of your Lord save He”” (17, I/127).

As we would expect, such Muslim thinkers as Ghazali and Sadra were earnestly concerned that an argument for the eternity of time would entail an argument for the eternity of the world¹¹. If time were to be the measure of everything, it would precede everything including God and His acts. Even the ordinary language of time is misleading when we use it in relation to the Divine. When we say, for instance, that God has always existed from eternity or eternally, we imply that time is an eternal reality in which God has existed from the very beginning. Such a temporal language implies that God exists in time, which leads to all sorts of dichotomies as God cannot be preceded by anything spatial or temporal (19, II/310). Since such a conclusion must be preempted, time ought to have a beginning and thus an end. All we can say in relation to God and the world is that God precedes the world of creation not temporally but ontologically. Even to say that God is above time is coupled with problems as it may lead to some kind of a relation between the Divine and the temporal. To stress this point, Sadra turns to the language of existence:

“God’s existence is above any qualification with before-ness and after-ness in relation to any daily happenings (*al-hawadith al-yawmiyya*). Nor is it related to any togetherness (*ma’iyya*) unless we assume a different kind of togetherness, and it would be other than temporal togetherness. This is a togetherness of subsistence (*al-ma’iyya al-qayyumiyya*) which is above time, motion, change and origination” (17, I/146).

Sadra's main point is that God is above and beyond all temporal attributes in an ontological sense of the term. Now, time should not only have a beginning but also an end in the sense that it cannot encapsulate and embrace everything. This explains in part why 'absolute time' was approached with suspicion as it too could have led to a notion of time independent of God. In fact, Berkeley did not shy away from claiming that Newton's absolute time could lead to atheism (2, P: 19).¹² Aristotle is quoted to have said that "whoever speaks of the temporal origination (*huduth*) of time also speaks of the eternity (*qidam*) of time without realizing it" (17, I/148). It is in response to such a potentially dangerous idea that Sadra insists that no matter how carefully we explain the internal workings of the world as a perfect order of relations, the world is preceded by the "absolutely one God himself or, from another point of view, His divine knowledge (*'ulum*) or unending perfect words or the world of his command (*amr*) in which when he tells something "be", it is" (17, I/124).¹³

All of this hinges upon a simple premise: the world-order as a whole is subject to change at all times. Since everything that changes is contingent and thus somewhere between existence and non-existence, the world cannot be eternal. Sadra calls this essential and continuous change 'substantial motion' (*al-harakat al-jawhariyyah*). This is a deeper kind of motion which may not be easily available to our senses. It takes place in the very substance of things but the deep change that things undergo usually escapes our sensate faculties. This is especially true when we use such categories as genus and species to refer to things in the world. The human mind works with a fixed picture of essences (*mahiyyah*) for it is only those general notions and universals that it can perceive. The reality of things, however, is too dynamic and complex to be forced into any fixed concept. The same principle holds for time, motion, potentiality and a host of other concepts whose actual existence is different from their mental representation. To stress this point, Sadra summarizes his oft-repeated principle that the reality of existence evades any conceptualization. What the mind presents as 'reality' is only a picture of it and, like all pictures, is bound to be fixed, limited, thus distorting (17, I/132-3).

Following the Platonic tradition, Sadra defines permanence as perfection and plenitude as opposed to change which signifies

deficiency and indigence. The seeming perfection of things lies not in their essences or accidents but in their perfect and unchanging 'truth in God': "for every corporeal nature (i.e., physical being) there is a truth in God that exists in His knowledge. As far as its intellectual truth is concerned, it does not need matter, capacity (*isti'dad*), motion, time, non-existence, origination (*huduth*) or potential capacity (*imkan isti'dadi*). Rather, it has existential states (*shu'unat wujudiyya*) that go on to exist in a continuous manner. Its continuous unity is a requirement of its intellectual unity which exists in God's knowledge" (17, I/137-8). In short, the perfect circular motion of heavenly bodies is not immune from substantial motion and thus cannot be the ultimate measure of time.

9. Between the Eternal and the Created

Since time is the measure of motion and all motions have a beginning, time too has a beginning. This simple syllogism, however, has not always worked for various cosmological reasons. In the *Asfar*, Sadra mentions eight major arguments for the thesis that time has a beginning (17, I/152-60). He then gives his over all evaluation and faults them for not being fully convincing. According to him, the most convincing argument for the temporal origination of the world has been formulated by some Christian philosophers. It is based on the premise that the world has limited power/potentiality (*mutanahi al-quwwa*) and as such cannot have indefinite subsistence (*baqa'*). That which cannot subsist by itself cannot be eternal (17, I/164-5).

After narrating this particular argument, he quotes the views of some Sufis (*'urafa'*) without mentioning any names. Their argument, says Sadra, is based on the idea that the world cannot sustain its existence except through the "help of a higher principle", i.e., God's generative act of creation (17, I/165). The world is temporally originated since every single being in it is preceded by a "temporal non-existence eternally". Sadra believes that this is the gist of the "view of those following one of the three faiths, I mean Jews, Christians and Muslims" (17, I/166).

This brings us to Sadra's underlying concern when discussing time: the "relation of the temporally created to the eternal" (*rabt al-hadith bi'l-qadim*). Mulla Sadra considers this to be one of the most important and difficult problems of metaphysics and seeks to

offer his solution through an elaborate analysis of the modalities of time. Speaking of the absolute contingency of the world of creation, he denies any independent subsistence to created beings and reverts everything back to the eternally present moment of God's creation notwithstanding the seeming multiplicity of the world around us: "Contingent beings are such that their essence is false (*batil al-dhawāt*) and their quiddity is perishing (*halik al-mahiyyat*) in both pre-eternity and eternity. What exists (*al-mawjud*) is the Truth itself (*dhat al-haqq*) forever and perpetually" (17, I/340).

This heavily ontological language, so typical of Sadra's philosophical corpus, turns the world of solid substances into a process of change. The Aristotelian framework of actual substances, which are supposed to be immune from all change, is replaced with a metaphysics of contingency that leaves nothing outside the realm of continuous renewal and substantial motion. This makes the present world-order both utterly contingent and dynamic, and thus makes change and continuity, the two fundamental aspects of time, part and parcel of the universe.

It is within this framework that Mulla Sadra turns to the question of linking the uncreated eternal to the temporally created. The hierarchical relationship between the two realms of existence leads to a hierarchy of temporal modalities. Following the Peripatetic and Sufi traditions before him, Sadra introduces three kinds of time: *sarmad* ("eternity"), *dahr* ("perpetuity"), and *zaman* ("time"). Each modality of time corresponds to a different mode of existence, and denotes a different temporal order.

"In the language of the pillars of wisdom (*asatin al-hikma*)¹⁴ the relation of the unchanging to the unchanging (*thabit*) is eternity (*sarmad*), the relation of the unchanging to the changing is perpetuity (*dahr*), and the relation of the changing to the changing is time (*zaman*). With the first one, they mean the relation of God to His names and knowledge (*'ulumihī*), with the second the relation of His unchanging knowledge to His renewing knowledge (*ma'lumat mutajaddida*), which is the beings of this corporeal universe as a whole through existential with-ness (*ma'iyya*), and with the third the relation of some of his knowledge to some of his

other knowledge through temporal with-ness (*al-ma'iyya al-zamaniyya*) (17, I/PP:147-8).”

In conclusion, both Ibn al-‘Arabi and Mulla Sadra seem to have stepped into the depths of the temporal order only to overcome it. Their concern was not so much to give a systematic account of time as to find a way to move beyond the temporal limitations of the world in which we live. What they were looking for was the eternal in the temporal. This may sound quaint and obscure to us but this is what we discover in the two seemingly contrary qualities of time: flow and permanence. Time flows but this flow is continuous. Change and permanence converge. Duration and succession come together in time. This is precisely what Plato says in his description of time as the moving image of eternity: “(The demiurge) resolved to make a moving image of eternity, and as he sat in order the heaven he made this eternal image having a motion according to number, while eternity rested in unity; and this is what we call time” (Timaeus, 17). In this Platonic view, the temporal order in which we live is only a reflection of the eternal now because “time ... is an imitation of eternity, as becoming is of being, and as thinking is of knowing” (4, P: 104).

Notes

- 1- Sadra describe relation beings (*al-idafat*) as having "some kind of existence" (*darb min al-wujud*) but eventually dependent upon the Necessary Being, (CF.17, III/37).
- 2- For a translation of this chapter see (9, I/162-8).
- 3- For this hadith in the canonical collections, see (20, I/50 and II/155).
- 4- Where Sadra also cites the hadith about not cursing the *dahr*.
- 5- In the same place Ibn al-‘Arabi says that “God has not created anything in the universe except to praise Him”.
- 6- Yet, this is something already achieved for the Divine but not for us. That is why there is still room for perfection in the world. That is also why Ghazali and a host of philosophers after him consider this world to be the “best of all possible worlds” (*ahsan al-nizam*). For Sadra’s assesment of the best of all possible worlds argument, see 13.
- 7- Ibn al-Arabi’s cosmological concept of time is based on this notion of time as the manifestation and disclosure of a principle. This theme is developed in

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Futuhāt I, Chapter 12, pp. 195-200 where Ibn al-‘Arabi comments on the hadith “I was a Prophet when Adam was between water and fetus”. Here he considers temporal time to be a succession of moments leading up to the Prophet Muhammad’s appearance as a person in flesh and blood.

8- Sadra mentions the Peripatetics as holding that the “parts of time are like essences (*mahiyyat*) even though some are before others by their essences, not through something outside themselves”.

9- In bare outline, this is the conclusion at which Kant arrived when he defined time (and space) as the forms of intuition through which we have the experience of “all things as appearances” (14, P: 189). Kant adds: “Space and time contain a manifold of pure *a priori* intuition, but at the same time are conditions of the receptivity of our mind – conditions under which alone it can receive representations of objects, and which therefore must also always affect the concept of these objects.” (*Ibid*, p. 111).

10- Tahanawi quotes the same definition in (19, II/308). Fakhr al-Din al-Razi admits the difficulty of giving an acceptable definition of time. Sadra does not miss the opportunity to make a point of Razi’s confession: the kalam thinkers cannot give a proper explanation of time for most of them hold on to a version of atomism. Sadra quotes the following from Razi’s *al-Mabahith al-Mashriqiyya*: “Know that so far I have not been able to reach the truth on the question of time. Let your share from this book be the enumeration of whatever could have been said about the matter. The onus of providing answers (to these questions) is really difficult for everyone and thus I do not go into it in many of the issues, especially in this problem”.

11- Ibn Sina is no exception. Cf. (10, PP: 292-3). Where he insists that God must precede both time and motion but fails to present a full-fledged argument.

12- At this point, the famous debate between Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi and Abu Hatim al-Razi is quite revealing. Abu Hatim rejects M. Zakariyya’s concept of the absolute time for similar theological reasons despite the fact that one can defend a concept of absolute time without infringing upon God’s unity and absoluteness. Cf. (7: P:12).

13- Sadra gives a list of names used for God’s ‘instruments’ that precede time: “Nothing precedes time except God the Exalted and His power (*qudra*) and command (*amr*) which is sometimes called ‘detailed knowledge’ (*al-‘ilm al-tafsili*), sometimes ‘qualities’ (*sifat*) by some people, ‘angels’ by others, and divine forms (*al-suwar al-ilahiyya*) by Platonists”, (17, I/124-5).

14- This is a reference, among others, to Plato: cf. (17, I/144).

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