



Nature and the Existence of Time and Its Theological Implications in Avicenna's View

Hamidreza Khademi 

Associate Professor, Department of Philosophy and Theology, Institute for Research and Development in the Humanities, SAMT. khademi4020@gmail.com

Abstract



The nature and existence of time is a major issue in Islamic philosophy. Avicenna is a philosopher who presented various discussions of the problem in different works, trying to explain the problem of time and its relation with other things such as motion and distance (*masāfat*). In his major philosophical books, *Remarks and Admonitions (al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt)*, *The Book of Healing (al-Shifā')*, and *The Book of Salvation (al-Najāt)*, Avicenna examines and explains the nature and manner of existence of time, but he does not isolate the theological consequences of his account. An account of such consequences can reveal his view of the matter. In fact, it is essential to see how definitions of time would affect views of theological problems, as it can clarify the intellectual-philosophical system of philosophers. In this article, I draw on the analytic-descriptive method to offer an accurate picture of the nature and existence of time in Avicenna's view, and then explicate the consequences of that definition for theological problems. I argue that Avicenna's account of time has four consequences: (1) time's pre-eternity is evidence of God's pre-eternity, (2) time's post-eternity is evidence of the post-eternity of the necessary existence, (3) the relation between God and time is possible only through the existence of intermediaries, and (4) the essential incipience of time implies the eternity of God's grace.

Keywords

nature and existence of time, pre-eternity (*azaliyya*) and post-eternity (*abadiyya*) of time, existence of intermediaries, essential incipience (*al-hudūth al-dhātī*), Avicenna.

Received: 2022-09-10 ; Received in revised form: 2022-10-15 ; Accepted: 2022-10-30 ; Published online: 2022-11-05

▣ Khademi, H. (2023). Nature and the Existence of Time and Its Theological Implications in Avicenna's View. *Journal of Philosophical Theological Research*, 25(1), 121-136. <https://doi.org/10.22091/jptr.2022.8586.2766>

▣ Copyright © the authors



Introduction

Philosophers have a significant place among intellectuals who try to discover the natures of things and their relations. Notwithstanding their use of, and respect for, empirical achievements, philosophers never rest content with experimental results and do not confine the reality of things to their material dimension. For this reason, they discuss how a material entity can be related to non-material entities, and articulate the results of their research in the form of general principles. To do so, the philosopher should go through a number of stages. She begins with a classification of things by reflection on their specific and common properties and then determines general concepts in reference to those properties—the so-called genera and differentia of things. She then introduces other things as “accidents” or accidental properties (al-Kindī, 1978, p. 62; Ibn Sīnā, 1953, vol. 2, p. 128; Fakhr al-Rāzī, 2002, p. 123; Mīrdāmād, 2002, vol. 1, p. 164; Mullā Ṣadrā, 1989, vol. 4, p. 185). In this way, the fundamental concepts of substance and accidents are obtained, which have been a focus of philosophical reflections throughout history.

For a more convenient study of entities and phenomena in the world, philosophers have classified them, say, into substances and accidents, which are in turn divided into various categories (al-Kindī, 1978, p. 68; Ibn Sīnā, 1953, vol. 1, p. 41; Fakhr al-Rāzī, 1990, vol. 1, pp. 137-142). The category of “quantity” (*al-kamm*) is a subcategory of accidents. There are two kinds of quantities: continuous (*muttaṣil*) and discontinuous (*munfaṣil*), where the former is divided in turn into two other subcategories: static (*qārr*) and non-static (*ghayr al-qārr*). A static continuous quantity is one whose parts are co-present, while a non-static continuous quantity is one whose parts are not co-present; rather, the existence of one part is conditional upon the nonexistence of the previous part. The non-static continuous quantity is “time,” because each part of time can exist only if the previous part ceases to exist. This reveals the place of the category of time for Muslim philosophers in terms of their outline of the phenomena of the world. Moreover, they have tried to address the relation between time and other entities such as motion (*ḥaraka*) and distance (*masāfa*), which I will briefly tackle in what follows.

Among Muslim philosophers, Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) has presented remarkable discussions of the problem of time. Drawing on the works of Aristotle (1991, Physics, 219a-223a) and al-Kindī (1978, pp. 5058 & 151-160), which were influential on definitions and issues of time, Avicenna elaborated upon the problem and contributed to the debate. For instance, we see the definition of time as the amount of motion in the works of Aristotle and al-Kindī, but Avicenna has distinguished two types of quantities in motions, and then refined the definition by saying that time is the amount of motion, not

with respect to its distance, but with respect to the incompatible (non-co-present) priority and posteriority of its parts.

Independent research is needed for a comparative study of Avicenna's and Aristotle's contributions to the definition or nature of time and its features, but since Avicenna's view of the matter and its theological consequences have not been separately studied, it is necessary to consider the issue. In this article, I draw on Avicenna's texts to offer a clear definition of the nature of time, and then give an account of his argument for the externality of time. Finally, I explicate the theological consequences of the definition.

Avicenna's definition of time

I begin with a clear-cut picture of the nature of time based on passages in Avicenna's works and then elaborate on his argument for the claim that time has an external, objective (rather than merely mental or subjective) existence. Finally, I examine the theological consequences of his definition of the category of time.

Avicenna's definition of time is based on incompatible priority and posteriority; that is, those in which the antecedent and subsequent parts are not co-present. In his view, the emergence of a new thing or constant expiration—that is, time—can be imagined only when there is a gradual change, that is, motion, from one state to another. A gradual change, or motion, is indeed a move from potentiality to actuality, and this is possible only when it is possible for the subject of the motion to change. This is because change is a kind of accident (or accidental property), and accidents always exist in their subjects.

So, in Avicenna's view, this kind of continuity, renewal, and expiration—that is, time—depends in its existence on an accidental property, which is change, and change as an accident depends on the physical body or subject in which it is inherent or immanent. Accordingly, time depends in its existence on a motion and a moving subject. In other words, the nature of time depends on, and is impossible without, its relevant motion and moving subject. There is therefore no motion when there is no moving subject, and there exists no time when there is no motion (Ibn Sīnā, 2002, p. 283). For more elaboration, let us explicate the relation between motion and time.

As for the manner of relation between time and motion, it should be noted that time is something eternal (*qadīm*) and not incipient (*hādith*) since the incipience of time would entail that there was another time before time, in which time was nonexistent, but this is absurd. That being so, the negation of time would entail its affirmation, and its incipience would entail its eternity. Time is thus a constant fixed being that always exists. Given that time cannot be conceived without motion, and motion cannot be conceived without a

moving subject. Time as an eternal entity requires an eternal motion and an eternal moving subject.

In Avicenna's view, the motion on which time depends is not a straight motion. In fact, straight motion cannot be eternal and cannot have a link without a beginning. If a moving subject is to move in a straight motion from a given point in the world to another point, it will finally reach the point where the straight motion ends, because extensions and dimensions of the material world are limited or finite, and hence, a straight motion cannot be pre-eternal or post-eternal. One might say that if the straight motion is considered in terms of a come-and-go motion, in the sense that when the moving subject reaches the destination point, it returns from it to the point of origin, and so on *ad infinitum*, then a straight motion can be pre-eternal and post-eternal.

In response to this, we can say that, on Avicenna's account, there is a stillness or immobility between going and coming. Moreover, even if there is no stillness between the two motions, this is indeed two motions, rather than one continuous motion, and since time is a unified continuous entity, it is impossible for it to be accidental upon two distinct motions or two distinct entities (Ibn Sīnā, 2002, pp. 303-305). On this account, in Avicenna's words, the motion on which time depends in its existence is a continuous perpetual motion; that is, an everlasting constant motion that has no beginning nor an end. For Avicenna, such a motion is the rotatory motion of the starless sphere (*falak al-aṭlas*) (Ibn Sīnā, 2002, p. 305). Time as a continuous unified genesis and destruction is measurable, in which respect it falls under the category of quantity as a continuous quantity.¹ Time is accordingly the amount or measure of such a motion.

Finally, in his *Remarks and Admonitions*, Avicenna defines time as follows: Time is the quantity, amount, or measure of motion, but not with respect to its distance, but with respect to an incompatible priority and posteriority. In his interpretation of this remark, Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī suggests that motion includes two quantities or measures or extensions.

First: a motion includes a distance quantity. This is because when the distance of motion increases, motion increases as well, and when the former decreases, the latter decreases as well. Alternatively put, the longer the distance covered in a motion the longer the motion will be, and the shorter the distance the shorter the motion.

Second: motion includes a temporal quantity, because with more temporal

1. A continuous quantity is that for which parts can be conceived, which have overlapping limits. An overlapping limit is what might count simultaneously as the end of one part and the beginning of another. See Sabzawāri, 2001, vol. 2, pp. 474-475.

extension, the motion will increase, and with less such extension, the motion will decrease.

Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn goes on to suggest that distance contains parts some of which have positional priority (*al-taqaddum al-waḍ'ī*)¹ over others, and yet the priori and the posteriori—that is, different parts of the traversed distance—are existentially compatible or co-present, which is to say that they can simultaneously exist, rather than existing on a gradual basis such that the existence of every new part requires the nonexistence of previous parts. Accordingly, by division of the distance, motion will also be divided into numerous parts, and in parallel to the priority and posteriority of certain parts of the distance to one another, certain parts of the motion will also be prior or posterior to others. In this way, just as the first part of a distance is prior to its second part, the parts of motion in the first half of the distance will be prior to those in its second part.

On this account, the difference between parts of motion and parts of distance is that the prior and posterior parts of motion cannot be co-present or compatible, while those of distance can be co-present.² Time is therefore a quantity and measure of motion, but not in respect of its distance, but in respect of the priority and posteriority, parts of which cannot simultaneously exist or be co-present (Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, 2007, vol. 3, pp. 657-658). It should be noted that this account of time appears in other works by Avicenna as well, including his *Book of Salvation* and his *Risālat al-ḥudūd* (Ibn Sīnā, 2000, p. 231; Ibn Sīnā, n.d., p. 92).

Avicenna's argument for the external existence of time

Aside from his account of the nature of time, Avicenna erects an argument for the external existence, or objectivity, of time. The argument is elaborated in his *Remarks and Admonitions*, which can be analyzed into two premises.

The first premise: In Avicenna's view, when something becomes incipient after having been nonexistent, the posteriority or afterness is preceded by a capability or disposition that disappears after its incipience. For example, A exists as incipient after A's nonexistence. A's nonexistence disappears after

1. Positional priority is a type of hierarchic (*rutbī*) priority and posteriority in which two distinct things are measured against a certain origin. The one that is closer to the origin is prior, and the one that is farther from the origin is posterior. See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, 2007, vol. 3, p. 657.

2. As for the distance of motion (*mā fih al-ḥaraka*), it should be noted that the distance is indeed the category in which the motion lies, and at each given moment, the moving subject possesses an instance of the category. See Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, 2007, vol.3, p. 434.

A's incipience. In other words, when an entity becomes incipient its existence is preceded by a nonexistence that no longer holds. Therefore, what becomes incipient has a past that is incompatible with its subsequent state.

It should be noted that, on Avicenna's account, a mere relation between existence and nonexistence does not imply that the existence is preceded by nonexistence. To the contrary, the nonexistence is characterized as past or antecedent and so the existence in relation to nonexistence counts as antecedent. For instance, when the father's existence is deemed in relation to the son's nonexistence (when it is said that the father exists when the son does not exist), then this can be ground from which the property of priority can be inferred. Thus, the mere relatedness of the father to the son's nonexistence does not establish the property of priority for the father unless the nonexistence coincides with the antecedent time, in which case it is said that the father's existence is simultaneous with the nonexistence that precedes the son's existence, so the father's existence is prior, or it is said that the father's existence simultaneously with the son's past nonexistence is prior to the son's existence. In this way, as for the property of priority, it is important to note that the relation of existence to nonexistence is not sufficient for the application of the notion of priority; rather, the relation of existence to a past nonexistence is necessary for the application of priority to the father.

Avicenna articulates the same analysis about the property of posteriority as well; that is, the mere relation of existence to nonexistence is not sufficient for the obtainment of the property of posteriority; rather, the existence that coincides with the antecedent nonexistence is posterior, and not the existence that coincides the nonexistence, since the latter can coincide the antecedent nonexistence and hence be priori, and yet it can coincide the subsequent nonexistence and hence be posterior. For this reason, it should be specified what nonexistence it coincides with. If the upshot is to establish the property of posteriority for existence, then the nonexistence should be characterized as subsequent, which is to say that the existence coincides with the subsequent nonexistence, in which case the existence will be subsequent; that is, posterior (Ibn Sīnā, 1989, vol. 1, p. 158).

The second premise: the priority of something's nonexistence to its existence is not like the priority of number one to number two, or other cases of priority and posteriority in which the prior and the posterior can be co-present. To the contrary, in the case of existence and nonexistence, the prior and the posterior cannot be co-present. In fact, in this case, once the posterior is actualized, the prior expires and goes away. Such a beforeness and afterness or priority and posteriority in which the prior and the posterior are not co-present exist in the external world. Accordingly, the priority and posteriority between parts of time are essential to them, not in virtue of something else.

However, the priority and posteriority between temporal entities, such as, say, the priority of Avicenna to Mullā Ṣadrā, is in virtue of time and its parts. As a result, there is something in the external actual world, which is fluid, transitory, non-static, and non-persistent, and that is time.

With these premises at hand, about the continuity of time, we can say that time and motion are mutually concomitant. More precisely speaking, time is the measure and quantity of motion, which means that each part of motion is located in, and coincident with, part of time, in the sense that when one is divided, the other is thereby divided. Accordingly, infinite indivisibility, which demonstrates the falsity of the indivisible part (*al-juz' lā-yatajazzā*), would mean unending indivisibility in the other, which indicates the continuity of motion and time. It follows that the continuity in these cases of beforeness and afterness or priority and posteriority is of a piece with the continuity in motion and distance. This is because of the mutual concomitance of motion and time. Before the incipience of every incipient entity, there is a non-static, transitory, transient, and continuous entity in the external world, which we refer to as time (Ibn Sīnā, 2002, pp. 282-283).

To supplement his argument, Avicenna adds that such beforeness, with which every incipient thing is preceded and cannot be co-present with afterness, can be conceived in two ways, both of which are false. This shows that the beforeness as conceived in the argument is the right one.

The first way is that the beforeness is nothing over and above the nonexistence of the incipient entity. Alternatively put, such beforeness and afterness are abstracted from the incipient entity's nonexistence and existence, which is why its nonexistence qua nonexistence is the criterion of priority, and its existence qua existence is the criterion of posteriority. Avicenna believes, however, that this is false because nonexistence can sometimes be there after the incipient entity's existence as well. For instance, if the incipient entity does not have an eternal, but a temporary existence, then nonexistence can be assumed to be there after the existence of the incipient entity's existence, in which case its nonexistence cannot be the criterion of this type of priority and posteriority in that it can be there both before and after the entity's incipience.

The second is that the priority and posteriority are indeed causal priority and posteriority; that is, those that are abstracted from the essence of the subject, in which case, the subject's existence is there before the incipient entity's existence. In that case, the priority of the incipient entity's nonexistence to its existence can be rendered as the priority of the subject's essence to its action. However, Avicenna rejects this because the subject's essence is there sometimes together with action, and sometimes after the incipient entity's existence, as in the case where a subject has a pre-eternal and post-eternal existence but action is temporary in that it comes to be at a certain time and

goes away at another time. Therefore, in these cases, the subject's essence stays the same before the incipient entity's existence and after its expiration, and hence it cannot be a criterion of a kind of priority and posteriority in which the prior and the posterior cannot be co-present (Ibn Sīnā, 2002, pp. 283).

Having provided an account of Avicenna's view, it is necessary to note Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's point in his commentary on *Remarks and Admonitions* that, for Avicenna, the existence of time is obvious and self-evident, although an argument such as the above might be necessary as a reminder. Still, the nature of time is hidden from us. In fact, consideration of the non-co-present beforeness and afterness is a reminder of the existence of time in the external world, which is why Avicenna describes the argument as an admonition or reminder (*tanbīh*).

In this way, people can easily distinguish yesterday, today, and tomorrow, which indicates that there is doubt about the existence of time in the external world, although it is very difficult to discover the true nature of time. Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn also points out that talk of the existence and nature of time is indeed part of natural philosophy, in which accidental properties of physical objects are discussed with respect to their motion and stillness. One such property is time, which is the measure of motion (Ibn Sīnā, 2002, pp. 283).

Drawing on Avicenna's account of time, Khwāja Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī believes that the priority and posteriority of the parts of time are essential to them, while the priority and posteriority of other things are in virtue of their instantiation in time; for example, Avicenna's priority to Mullā Ṣadrā is in virtue of their occurrence in time, and not in virtue of their essences. In fact, the transitory evanescent essence of time, and not anything beyond time, paves the ground for being characterized as *priori* or *posteriori*. In this way, the existence of incompatible or non-co-present priority and posteriority indicates the existence of time.

Explanation of the theological consequences of Avicenna's definition of time

With this account of Avicenna's view of the nature of time, and what follows, I offer an account of the consequences of his view for theology. In the remainder of the article, I develop four theological consequences of the definition of time.

Proof for God's pre-eternity

An implication of Avicenna's account of time, which he himself emphasizes after having offered his argument for the external existence of time, is that time has no beginning, which can prove God's eternity. Let us begin with an

elucidation of two terms: (a) temporality, and (b) a thing's being invented (*mubda*).

Indeed, for Avicenna, time is an entity that is not temporally incipient. Instead, it is incipient in an invented manner; that is, consideration of essential possibility suffices for its realization, without a need for matter or predisposition. When Avicenna says that something is "invented," he means that its existence only depends on God, and not other things such as intermediaries, time, matter, and means (Ibn Sīnā, 1984, p. 77).

On his account, time is an entity whose manner of existence is not temporal, but invented, which is to say that it has no beginning nor an end. Avicenna concludes that the manner of the incipience of time is essential and invented, rather than temporal.

Since time is an eternal entity without a conceivable beginning, it follows that its need for God is perpetual. Accordingly, the eternity of time indicates its eternal need for God, and thus in turn indicates God's eternity as its cause and creator. This is the first theological implication of Avicenna's account of time.

It is necessary to note that the eternity of time has led some people to believe that time is a necessary existence (*wājib al-wujūd*) and a substance that exists in the external world as an eternal substance (Ibn Sīnā, 1989, vol. 1, pp. 148-149).¹ Avicenna does not explicitly reject the latter view. However, given Avicenna's account of the nature of time and its need for motion, the substance view of time cannot be accepted, which is perhaps why Avicenna does not directly address this view.

Proof for God's post-eternity

The argument present for the post-eternity of time is indeed the argument offered by Avicenna for the pre-eternity of time. The argument can be fleshed out as follows: if a beginning or an end is conceived for time, then there should be a distance between time and the end of the world; that is, the necessary existence. The distance includes the incompatible (or non-co-present) beforeness and afterness. In other words, if an end is conceived for time, then another time or period should be conceived in which the nature of time is nonexistent. However, to accept another afterness or period is to accept

1. Another Muslim philosopher, Mullā Ṣadrā, has elaborated on the issue even more, saying that some of those who believe time is a substance in the external hold that (1) time is a necessary existence, and others maintain that (2) time is a possible existence. The latter are in turn divided into those who believe time is an immaterial (*mujarrad*) entity, and those who believe time is a physical entity, which they identify with the ninth sphere. See Mullā Ṣadrā, 2001, p. 120.

time. This shows that time is an entity that cannot conceivably have an end; that is, it is post-eternal. Moreover, it shows that time is an eternal perpetual entity. Given that time is a possible entity, and it needs a perfect cause (*al-'illat al-tāmma*) for its realization and existential survival, its post-eternal need for its total cause indicates the post-eternity of its cause.

It is true that the pre-eternity or post-eternity of time indicates those of God, but they also imply the pre-eternity and post-eternity of other intermediaries, to which we return later.

In short, Avicenna presents an argument from the pre-eternity of time for its eternal need for a cause—that is, God—which then implies that its cause should also be pre-eternal.

Proof of the existence of intermediaries in the world

In light of Avicenna's approach to the pre-eternity and post-eternity of time, it should be said that time is a material entity because it is the criterion of the priority and posteriority of material physical entities. On the other, God is a simple non-material pre-eternal post-eternal entity. In this case, to establish a relation between God's pre-eternity and the pre-eternity and post-eternity of time, there should be other intermediary entities. A reflection on how multiple entities issue forth from the one simple God can provide us with a plausible explanation of the problem. For more illustration, we need to briefly outline Avicenna's view of how multiple diverse entities issue from God to show that although the pre-eternity of time is evidence of God's pre-eternity, it also establishes the existence of other pre-eternal perpetual intermediaries because of the absence of a direct relation between material entities and a purely immaterial entity.

Avicenna begins by noting that the issuance of the entire world from the necessary existence is something necessary, rather than contingent. In elaboration of his view, Avicenna maintains that since God is a necessary existence in all respects, it is also necessary as a creator, which implies that the issuance of all contingent creatures from Him is necessary (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, pp. 402-403).

Making recourse to the principle that from one, no more than one can issue forth,¹ he argues that the first entity that issues from the necessary existence is

1. Briefly speaking, the principle can be explained as follows: if a cause is purely simple such that no multiplicity can be imagined in it, then its effect will be one and unified. If two mutually unrelated effects issued forth from this cause, then each effect would issue in a certain respect. Such a multiplicity of respects is incompatible with the simplicity of the cause. Therefore, it is impossible for two effects to issue from one simple cause.

an immaterial intellectual entity, which is not a combination of matter and form, nor is it preceded by matter. For if two mutually unrelated effects issued from the necessary existence, then the necessary existence would have two distinct respects or dimensions, which is incompatible with the principle (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, p. 404). The same point appears in the *Book of Salvation* as well. On his account, the first entity that is entitled to existence by God is a non-physical immaterial substance, then comes substance, then physical objects, and then *hyle* (first matter), and finally accidental properties (Ibn Sīnā, 2000, p. 512).

On this account, what issues from an entity that is simple in all respects—that is, God—should be one and unified. Although issuance from the necessary existence implies that the first effect involves a sort of multiplicity, it does not mean that two distinct entities exist in the external world. Alternatively put, although there is a dimension of multiplicity in the first effect, it will not have two distinct characters that involve numerical multiplicity. For further illustration, a brief elucidation of the aspects of the first effect is in order.

Different aspects of the first emanation

Avicenna attributes three aspects or dimensions to the First Emanation (*al-sādir al-awwal*), each of which leads to the existence of a specific entity:

(1) Knowledge and intellection of its origin or source.

(2) Necessitation by something else: although the first effect is an essentially possible existence, it is necessary by something else in the sense that it is necessitated by the necessary existence. Thus, necessitation by something else constitutes the second aspect of the First Emanation.

(3) Essential possibility: the First Emanation is a contingent entity in the sense that it has a contingent quiddity. In this way, its essential possibility constitutes the third aspect of multiplicity attributed to it by Avicenna.

Thus, whereas the First Emanation is one simple entity, it has three different aspects or dimensions. In Avicenna's view, this entity gives rise to the second intellect in that it perceives and intellects its origin. This aspect is, on his account, nobler than and superior to the other two aspects. Insofar as it perceives its aspect of necessitation by something else, the first effect causes the existence of the soul of the first sphere. Finally, in that it perceives its essential possibility, the first effect gives rise to the body of the first sphere.

Since form is nobler than matter, it issues from the nobler aspect of the First Emanation; that is, the aspect of being necessitated by something else, and the inferior aspect—that is, matter—issues from the contingent aspect of the first

intellect. For Avicenna, the reason why the aspect of matter is inferior is its concomitance with potentiality, possibility, and lack. In this way, three independent entities come to exist at the second stage: the second intellect, the soul of the second sphere, and the body of the second sphere (Ibn Sīnā, 1983, p. 406).

Given the above account, since time is the measure or amount of the motion of the ninth sphere, the pre-eternity and post-eternity of time are indeed evidence of the eternity of the motion of the ninth sphere as the cause of time. The pre-eternity and post-eternity of the motion of the ninth sphere are in turn evidence of the eternity of its cause; that is, the first intellect. Finally, the pre-eternity and post-eternity of the first intellect suggest the eternity of God. This analysis gives a picture of the existence of intermediaries between time and God. Indeed, the relation between a material entity such as time and God as an immaterial simple entity is impossible without intermediaries. The manner in which entities issue from the necessary existence, on the one hand, and lack an immediate relation between a purely material entity and the necessary being, on the other, imply that the pre-eternity and post-eternity of time indicate the existence of intermediaries, in addition to God, which are also eternal.

It should be noted that, in some of his works, Avicenna suggests that since time is an “invented” entity in the sense that it does not involve time and matter, it is only preceded by God (Ibn Sīnā, 2000, pp 229-230). In interpretation of this remark, however, we need to note two points:

- (a) The manner in which entities in the world issue from God.
- (b) The definition of time.

Given that the nature of time does not directly issue from God, and that time is the measure or amount of the motion of the ninth sphere, it should be noted that only God, but also the ninth sphere and intellect, precede time.

Divine grace being eternal and perpetual

Given the pre-eternity and post-eternity of time, the eternity of God and intermediaries such as the intellect and sphere has been established. In this part, I highlight a fundamental difference between God and time. It is true that while time is just like God a pre-eternal and post-eternal entity, there is a major difference here. To illustrate, let us note that while time is eternal, it is still incipient albeit not in a temporal manner, but in an essential manner.

Let us elucidate the notion of “essential incipience” (*al-ḥudūth al-dhātī*) as follows: given that the essential nature or quiddity of contingent entities is essentially possible, neither existence nor nonexistence is necessary for it. Indeed, when we consider something in its essence, we cannot attribute to it

anything beyond its essential properties. To attribute anything more than such properties there needs to be a cause by which those properties are given to it. For instance, existence or nonexistence can hold for something only if a cause external to the essence of its quiddity is at work. In this process, the essential properties of something are prior, and anything given to it, such as existence or nonexistence, is posterior. Accordingly, existence or nonexistence counts as incipient with respect to its essence. This is an essential, as opposed to temporal, incipience, in the words of Avicenna (see Ibn Sīnā, 2000, pp. 542-543).

Given the above account, time is an entity whose essence is nothing but renewal, transience, and becoming; that is, it is identical to the priority and posteriority in which antecedent and subsequent parts cannot be co-present. Therefore, everything outside of the essential properties of time, such as pre-eternity or post-eternity, is only given to it by its cause. In other words, for time to be characterized as pre-eternal or post-eternal, it needs an external cause. In this way, although time is like God in its pre-eternity and post-eternity, these properties are given to it by its cause, that is, God, and are not among its essential properties. God's grace (*ḥayd*) is pre-eternal and post-eternal, while time is an incipient reality albeit in an essential way, where the essentiality of the incipience of time is compatible with its characterization as pre-eternal and post-eternal.

Conclusion

On Avicenna's account of time, the nature of time consists in a priority and posteriority in which the antecedent and subsequent parts are not co-present. That is, in his view, the nature of time is the measure or amount of motion not in respect of its distance but in respect of the priority and posteriority in which the parts do not simultaneously exist. Arguing from things being preceded by their nonexistence at a previous time, which is evidence that the antecedent and subsequent parts are not co-present, Avicenna believes that, before the incipience of an entity, there is a non-static incipient entity called time. The account implies that time has an external objective existence. Given Avicenna's view of the category of time, his account has four theological consequences: (1) time's pre-eternity is evidence of God's pre-eternity, (2) time's post-eternity is evidence of the post-eternity of the necessary existence, (3) since time is a material entity and God is an immaterial simple entity, the relation between them is possible only through the existence of intermediaries. This can be another theological ramification of Avicenna's account of time, and (4) the essential incipience of time implies the eternity of God's grace in the sense of the pre-eternity and post-eternity of time given to it by its cause,

namely God.

Ethics declarations

Conflict of interests

The author has no competing interests.



References

- Al-Kindī, Y. (1978). *Rasā'il al-Kindī al-falsafīyya*. (M. A. Kabu Rayda, Ed.). Dār al-Fikr al-'Arabī. [In Arabic]
- Aristotle. (1991). *Complete works*. (J. Barnes, Ed.). Princeton University Press.
- Fakhr al-Rāzī, M. (1990). *Al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya*. Bīdār. [In Arabic]
- Fakhr al-Rāzī, M. (2002). *Al-Risālat al-kamāliyya*. (K. A. Tarzi & A. Muḥyi l-Dīn, Eds.). Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyya. [In Arabic]
- Ibn Sīnā, H. (Avicenna). (1953). *Rasā'il Ibn Sīnā*. (H. D. Ulkun, Ed.). Maktaba Ibrahīm Kharūz. [In Arabic]
- Ibn Sīnā, H. (Avicenna). (1983). *Ilāhiyyāt al-shifā'*. (S. Zayid, Ed.). Library of Ayatollah Mar'ashī Najafī. [In Arabic]
- Ibn Sīnā, H. (Avicenna). (1984). *Al-Mabda' wa-l-ma'ād*. (A. Nurani, Ed.). Institute for Islamic Studies, University of Tehran. [In Arabic]
- Ibn Sīnā, H. (Avicenna). (1989). *Al-Shifā' (al-Ṭabī'iyyāt)*. (I. Bayyumi Madkur & S. Zayid, Eds.). Library of Ayatollah Mar'ashī Najafī. [In Arabic]
- Ibn Sīnā, H. (Avicenna). (2000). *Al-Najāat*. (M. T. Danishpazhuh, Ed.). University of Tehran. [In Arabic]
- Ibn Sīnā, H. (Avicenna). (2002). *Al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*. (M. Zariei, Ed.), Markaz al-Nashr al-Ṭabī' li-Markaz al-I'lām al-Islāmī.
- Ibn Sīnā, H. (Avicenna). (n.d.). *Tis' rasā'il fī l-ḥikma wa-l-ṭabī'iyyāt (Risālat al-ḥudūd)*. Dar al-'Arab.
- Mīrdāmād, M. B. (2002). *Majmū'a muṣannafāt (al-Ufuq al-mubīn)*. (A. Nurani, Ed.). Society for the National Heritage of Iran. [In Arabic]
- Shīrāzī, S. D. M. (Mullā Ṣadrā). (1989). *Al-Ḥikmat al-muta'āliya fī l-asfār al-aqliyyat al-arba'a*. Maktabat al-Muṣṭafawī. [In Arabic]
- Shīrāzī, S. D. M. (Mullā Ṣadrā). (2001). *Sharḥ al-hidāyat al-athīriyya*. Mu'assasat al-Tārīkh al-'Arabī. [In Arabic]
- Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī, M. (2007). *Sharḥ al-ishārāt wa-l-tanbīhāt*. (H. Hasanzade Amuli, Ed.). Būstān Kitāb. [In Arabic]
- Sabzawārī, H. (2001). *Sharḥ al-manzūma*. Annotated by H. Hasanzade Amuli. (M. Ṭalibi, Ed.). Nāb. [In Arabic]