

BETWEEN TIME AND ETERNITY: MĪR DĀMĀD ON GOD'S CREATIVE AGENCY

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The philosophy of time in pre-modern philosophy was never far removed from the question of the world and its relationship to its principle. Whether or not thinkers had a keen sense of what time was, how it may be divided and even whether it was real or conceptual, they all had distinct notions about whether the world was created in time or an eternal logical consequence of its principle, whether the Neoplatonic One, the Aristotelian Unmoved Mover or the Islamo-Judaeo-Christian God. There were two key questions relating to the problem. First, how could a timeless, immutable God create and act in and/or with time? Second, how can an omniscient God have timeless knowledge and yet be cognisant of contingent events ‘in the future’?² I shall focus on the former question as the latter requires a more detailed explanation of tensing and causation and my interest here is more generally on the problem of time and ‘the beginning’, and not the continual relationship between God, time and the cosmos.

¹ Author's note: This paper is part of a larger work-in-progress on time and creation in post-Avicennan philosophy. A related version was presented at the Third Safavid Roundtable in Bamberg in July 2003. I am grateful to Hermann Landolt and Toby Mayer for discussions on this topic.

² For insightful discussions of this problem in the philosophy of religion, see Paul Helm, *Eternal God* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1997); William Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1998); Norman Kretzmann and Eleonore Stump, ‘Eternity’, *Journal of Philosophy* 78 (1981), 429–58; William Lane Craig, *God, Time and Eternity* (Dordrecht: Kluwer Academic Publishers, 2001). Most Islamic thinkers understood God to be beyond time, eternal in the sense of being timeless and thus their positions are susceptible to some of the critiques from the analytic tradition of the philosophy of religion that, at the very least, from the time of Pike's seminal work on the subject has regarded the notion of an acting but timeless God to be incoherent. A good example of the analytic critique is Anthony Kenny, *The God of the Philosophers* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986), 38 ff.

Before considering time in the Safavid period, we need to appreciate the shifts in philosophical discourse from an earlier period. Whereas earlier philosophers had considered time as a problem of physics, along with corollaries of matter, place and motion, and associated time as a concomitant of a spatial extension, in the Safavid period, the philosophy of time was intimately associated with the focal discussion of metaphysics, namely the question of being. Hence the issue for our thinkers is: how does time relate to being? There were other significant shifts: while earlier thinkers such as Avicenna (d. 1037) had produced a creative system based on Aristotelianizing Neoplatonic principles, Safavid thinkers seemed most consciously to revive a late antique Neoplatonic tradition that sought to integrate philosophy and spiritual practice, ontology and psychology. A key feature of this was a shift from an Aristotelian metaphysics of substances as stable, immutable essences to a more processual understanding of realities as structures of events or, as Henry Corbin (d. 1978) would put it, of 'acts of being'.³ Further, Safavid thinkers were rather fond of syntheses, even of those which one terms (following the medievals) *coincidentiae oppositorum*: eternity and physical time, creation and emanation, eternity and incipience of the cosmos.⁴ Finally, in relation to the notion of time, Safavid thinkers rejected the uni-directional model of time as a sequence from pre-eternity through our time into the future of post-eternity. They supported an alternative model that conceived of time as cycles of ontological processes that affect different spheres of existence. The central sphere is the phenomenal world of physical time; beyond that is the sphere of perpetuity and beyond that still the sphere of eternity. When philosophers of the period spoke of an eternal God, it is quite clear that they held the common medieval doctrine of the timelessness of God.⁵

In the course of this inquiry, I shall examine the positions on time and creation of a key thinker among the three whom Henry Corbin

³ Especially Henry Corbin, *En Islam Iranien* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972), vol. iv.

⁴ Cf. Henry Corbin, *Temple and Contemplation*, trans. P. Sherrard (London: Kegan Paul International, 1986), 375–6; for a discussion of the notion of the 'coincidence of opposites' in history of religions and in particular in the thought of Corbin, see Wasserstrom, *Religion after Religion* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1999), 67–82.

⁵ One ought to add that this amounted to an argument for God's 'durationless' existence and not, like some contemporary process theologians, to His everlasting duration.

famously used as exemplars of the 'School of Isfahan', Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631).⁶ Mīr Burhān al-Dīn Muḥammad Bāqir Astarābādī known as Dāmād (1561–1631) was a prominent courtier at the time of Shah 'Abbās I (d. 1629) and a pre-eminent 'ālim of Isfahan.⁷ A scion of a noble *sayyid* family of Astarabad and grandson of the powerful *mujtahid* Shaykh 'Alī al-Karakī (d. 1538), he combined in his ancestry the prestige of the native *sayyid* elite and the scholarly elite of the 'Āmilī 'ulamā'. A jurist as well as a subtle philosopher and theologian, he served as Shaykh al-Islām of the Safavid capital Isfahan from 1621 to 1631 and conducted the coronation ceremony of Shah Ṣafī in 1629. His eminence and wit were famed and celebrated. The court chronicler Iskandar Beg wrote of him in 1616: 'Today he lives in the capital Isfahan and I hope that his most gracious being will continue to adorn the garden of time for years to come allowing seekers of knowledge to be graced by the illuminating rays of his solar mind.'⁸ As an Illuminationist philosopher who had a taste for the modifications of the Avicennan system suggested by Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191), he founded a school of philosophy that was perpetuated by his students, his son-in-law Sayyid Aḥmad 'Alawī (d. 1651) and Mullā Shamsā Gilānī (d. 1687). His most famous student, perhaps the most prominent Safavid philosopher, Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad Shīrāzī known as Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1635), dissented from his philosophical views including those on time and the creation of

⁶ Corbin coined the term 'l'école d'Isfahan' and devoted the fourth volume of his major work *En Islam Iranien* to the school.

⁷ On Dāmād, see Iskandar Beg Turkumān (d. 1633), *Tārīkh-i 'Ālam-ārā'-yi 'Abbāsī*, ed. Ī. Afshār (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Ittīlā'āt, 1971), i. 146–7; Muḥammad al-Ḥurr al-'Āmilī (d. 1693), *Amal al-Āmil*, ed. S. A. al-Ḥusaynī (Najaf: al-Maṭba'a al-Ḥaydariyya, 1965), ii. 249–50; Sayyid 'Alī-Khān Ibn Ma'sūm Shīrāzī (d. 1707), *Sulāfat al-'aṣr fī maḥāsin al-shu'arā' bi-kulli miṣr* (Cairo: Maktabat al-Khānjī, 1894), 485–7; 'Abd Allāh Afandī (d. 1717), *Riyāḍ al-'ulamā' wa-ḥiyāḍ al-fuḍalā'*, ed. S. A. al-Ḥusaynī (Qum: Maktabat Āyat Allāh al-Mar'ashī, 1981), v. 40–4; Sayyid Muḥammad Bāqir Khwānsārī (d. 1898), *Rawḍāt al-jannāt* (Tehran: al-Maktaba al-Islāmiyya, 1976), ii. 234; A. Newman, 'Dāmād', *Elr*, vi. 623–6; Sajjad Rizvi, 'Mīr Dāmād', *Elr* Suppl., forthcoming; H. Dabashi, 'Mīr Dāmād', in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, eds. S. H. Nasr and O. Leaman (London: Routledge, 1996), i. 597–634; 'Alī Mūsavi Biḥbahānī, *Ḥakīm-i Astarābād*, (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 3rd imp. 1998). The best recent study of him is 'Alī Awjabī, *Mīr Dāmād: Bunyān-gudhār-i ḥikmat-i Yamānī* (Tehran: Intishārāt-i Sāḥat, 2003). Awjabī has also produced critical editions of most of his major works.

⁸ Iskandar, *Tārīkh-i 'Ālam-ārā'-yi 'Abbāsī*, i. 147

the cosmos.⁹ Dāmād's work is often described as 'obscure'. Certainly his choice of archaic and arcane terminology and rather laboriously ornate Arabic expression have often had (the perhaps intended?) effect of dissuading scholars from analysing his work. Nevertheless, within the history of philosophical traditions in Safavid Iran and after, Dāmād's school remains an important alternative to the hegemony of his student's philosophical enterprise and school. In European languages, one of the very few scholars to engage with his thought has been Henry Corbin. It is indicative of Corbin's method that he devotes most of his analysis of Dāmād's thought to his spiritual vision and his exposition of the imaginal realm, an ontological state of being that mediates between the higher intelligible world of archetypes and forms and this sensory world of material bodies.¹⁰ Thus he almost entirely ignores the one theory for which he is most famous, namely his innovative solution to the old problem of the incipience of the cosmos and its relationship to the question of time.

Augustine said in Book XI, Chapter 14 of his *Confessions*: 'What then is time? If no one asks me, I know what it is; if I want to explain it to someone who asks, I know not.'

Time is indeed one of the most obvious and puzzling aspects of reality. Why are the notion of time and questions of its reality interesting? From our contemporary perspective, thinkers concerned with literature, nation and identity often speak of narrative time,¹¹ philosophers of language may talk about tensed-time and its resultant theories of meaning, logicians about modalities of time, metaphysicians about time's reality, and so forth. But when we consider philosophies of time in the Safavid period, and if we offer to take Safavid philosophy seriously as Corbin, rightly, suggests we should, and engage with it critically and creatively, then we should attempt to contextualize those theories as well as consider their significance for our own engagement with theories of time. So we should start with the question: why is the notion of time, its definition, and its ontology important for the thinkers of this period? The most obvious answer is to understand that time is seen as a concomitant

⁹ On Mullā Ṣadrā and his thought, see Sajjad Rizvi, *Mullā Ṣadrā Shīrāzī: His Life, Works and the Sources for Safavid Philosophy* (Journal of Semitic Studies Supplements, 18) (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006); Fazlur Rahman, *The Philosophy of Mullā Ṣadrā* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1975).

¹⁰ Corbin, *En Islam Iranien*, iv. 30–53.

¹¹ Most magisterially discussed in Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit*, 3 vols. (Paris: Seuil, 1985).

of some aspect of ontology and as some measure. It is linked to arguments about the nature of and indeed the incipience of the world. Thus one of the key issues of philosophical theology is whether the world is incipient, that it had a beginning (*ḥudūth*), often understood to be a beginning in time, or whether the world is a necessary contingency (*al-wājib bi-l-ghayr, ghayr masbūq bi-l-'adam*) of its principle, that is the famous theory of emanation. This is a critical issue because it considers whether divine activity is volitional or instrumental: is the cosmos a direct causal result of a choosing divine agent or the natural consequence of the essence of its principle? As a polemic, this was the key contention between philosophers in the Avicennan tradition and theologians in the Ghazālīan tradition who accused philosophers of heresy for denying that God could create in time *ex nihilo*. The key to this question is the nature of time and its role in the cosmos, and its relationship to the principle of the cosmos.¹²

Perhaps Mīr Dāmād's greatest and most obscure philosophical contribution is his paradoxical notion of perpetual incipience (*ḥudūth dahrī*). This notion combines the theological insistence upon the incipience of the world as an act of a volitional deity with the philosophical demand that the good deity necessarily supports and emanates an eternal cosmic existence.¹³ This theory depends on a hierarchy of incipience resulting from the three orders of temporality found in Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā, d. 1037), namely, time (*zamān*), perpetuity (*dahr*), and eternity (*sarmad*). In *al-Qabasāt (Burning Embers)*, Mīr Dāmād sets out to prove his theory of incipience by citing key passages

¹² To a certain extent, contemporary philosophical preoccupations with time have little relevance to our analysis because they are concerned with issues of temporal duration as exhibited in tenses and dates, and in the psychological question of the (un)reality of time as well as the physics of time entailed in studying time's direction as a dimension of material existence and the speculative issue of the possibility of time travel.

The question of the divine will also raises the following problems. If God is omniscient and possesses foreknowledge including that of future contingents and indeed of all *possibilia*, in what sense do those future events possess true contingency? If God is the cause of existence (including time) and stands 'together' with time and space in some form of simultaneity, then how can He possess 'foreknowledge' of what is simultaneous with Him, and how can that knowledge lead to constraints in human (and indeed divine) freedom? On the question of freedom, see Richard Taylor, 'Deliberation and Foreknowledge', *American Philosophical Quarterly* 1 (1964), 73–80.

¹³ Henry Corbin, *Histoire de la Philosophie Islamique* (Paris: Fayard, 1964), 464.

from Ibn Sīnā on the nature of time and one from *Kitāb al-Taḥṣīl* (*The Digest*) by Ibn Sīnā's student, Bahmanyār (d. 1066).¹⁴

Dāmād sets out the following, rather processual, definition of orders of temporality before citing his examples from the Peripatetic tradition:

In *de re* existence (*al-ḥuṣūl fī naḥs al-amr*), there are three types of consciousness (*wa'īyya*). The consciousness of an extended existence in flux (*al-wujūd al-mutaqaddar al-sayyāl*) and a continuous extended non-existence that belongs to mutable entities insofar as they are mutable in time (*zamān*). The consciousness of a pure existence (*ṣarīḥ al-wujūd*) that is preceded by a pure non-existence, and that transcends the horizon of extension and non-extension and belongs to immutables insofar as they are immutable while embracing actuality, is perpetuity (*dahr*). The consciousness of a pure Real Immutable Sanctified Existence (*baḥt al-wujūd al-thābit al-ḥaqq*) absolutely devoid of the accidentality of change and transcendent above any sense of being preceded by non-existence, and who is pure and sheer activity (*energeia*, *fī liyya*) is eternity (*sarmad*). Just as perpetuity transcends and is more vast than time, so too is eternity higher, more majestic, more holy and greater than perpetuity.¹⁵

I want to indicate five key points in this passage. First, note the processual nature of entities at each of these levels and the processual nature of the order of temporality that corresponds to it. We are not here faced with an Avicennan substance metaphysics. Even God is a process insofar as He is pure activity.¹⁶ Second, note that both existents and

¹⁴ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, eds. M. Mohaghegh, T. Izutsu *et al.* (Tehran: Tehran University Press, 1978), 6–10. This major text was completed by 1034/1624–5, the same date as the completion of two other key texts on *ḥudūth*, namely *Risālat ḥudūth al-'ālam* (comparing Plato and Aristotle) and *al-Širāṭal-mustaḳīm* (the latter has been published): see Awjabī, Introduction to Mīr Dāmād, *Taqwīm al-īmān*, ed. A. Awjabī (Tehran: Mīrāth-i Maktūb, 1998), 101, 110.

¹⁵ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 7.1–7.

¹⁶ However, this does not mean that God undergoes change or that He is in time—which is quite different from the position argued by process theologians such as Nicholas Wolterstorff, who ('God everlasting', in *Contemporary Philosophy of Religion*, eds. S. M. Cahn and D. Shatz (New York: Oxford University Press, 1982), 78) says:

God the redeemer cannot be a God eternal. This is so because God the redeemer is a God who *changes*. And any being which changes is a being among whose states there is a temporal succession . . . A theology which opts for God as eternal cannot avoid being in conflict with the confession of God as redeemer

Analytic philosophy of religion finds the notion of a timeless God to be nonsensical, a mediaeval *façon de parler* that shows the vestiges of Hellenic thought but tells us little about the nature of God. William Kneale has focused on

non-existents are considered within the category of time that raises interesting issues of tenses and future possibility within this world. Third, the level of perpetuity is the crucial ground for the relationship between God the immutable and the world the mutable (generative and corruptible in the standard Aristotelian terminology). Fourth, time is an aspect of existential consciousness. This raises the possibility of the psychic provenance of time that would suggest continuity with the late Neoplatonic tradition. Fifth, the temporality of perpetuity (*dahr*) seems to follow Proclus' (and other Neoplatonists') notion of 'temporal perpetuity'.¹⁷

the Hellenic roots of the need for a changeless and timeless God but ultimately rejected the notion because if God is a person—and in most monotheistic traditions He is addressed as a person—then the agency of persons takes place within time. See Kneale, 'Time and eternity in theology', *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 61 (1960–1), 87–108. In the *Timæus* 37–39, Plato distinguishes between the immutable, timeless demiurge and the cosmos that it produces in time, making the cosmos and time coeval. (For a dissenting interpretation of time and creation in the *Timæus*, see John Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato's Timæus* (Bloomington, IN: Indiana University Press, 1999); for an attempt to reconstruct the cosmology of the *Timæus* in the light of contemporary physics, see Luc Brisson and F. W. Meyerstein, *Inventing the Universe: Plato's Timæus, the Big Bang and the Problem of Scientific Knowledge* (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1995). Another objection to divine timelessness is the argument from indexicals. Truth conditions about some propositions of fact require the notion of a 'now'. How can God know that I am typing this sentence at this point in time and know it to be true if He is timeless? Hasker (*God, Time and Knowledge, passim*) has argued that the problem of divine foreknowledge can be solved if one discards the condition of divine eternity. However, recently from within the analytic tradition, there have been defences of eternity—see Helm, 'Eternal God'; Kretzmann and Stump, 'Eternity'. Of course, much of the debate rests upon the assumption of the analogy of God and creation, on the notion (in principle) that my personhood is much the same as God's, that my knowledge is similar to God's, that my location in time is similar to God's. While analogy within religious language is a key requisite for theological talk, it is clear that most Islamic philosophers did not support this analogy: God's personhood, His knowledge, His agency are utterly different from the human. For a defence of a God who is timeless and personal, considering three criteria of personhood (consciousness, intentionality and inter-person relationships), see William Lane Craig, 'Divine Timelessness and Personhood', *International Journal for the Philosophy of Religion* 43 (1998), 109–24.

¹⁷ Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, trans. E. Dodds (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1963), prop. 55 = *Fi l-Khayr al-mahd (Liber de Causis)*, ed. 'A. Badawī (Kuwait: Wikālat al-Maṭbū'āt, 1977), ch. 29, 28–30.

Mīr Dāmād draws upon a number of proof texts for his tripartite division of temporality, beginning with passages from Ibn Sīnā:

1 *al-Ta'liqāt (The Glosses)*:¹⁸

Mīr Dāmād cites the passage below from this late work comprising a series of notes addressing questions brought to Ibn Sīnā's attention by his students concerning issues in his major works.¹⁹ Thus the discrete paragraphs of the *Glosses* are often more explicit and clear than the relevant passages on time in the *Shifā'* (*Cure*) or in *al-Ishārāt wa-l-Tanbīhāt* (*Pointers and Reminders*). This passage describes the intellect's ability to grasp three orders of temporality relating to three types of entities. This is significant: temporality devoid of an ontology of things would be quite absurd for Ibn Sīnā and is so for Mīr Dāmād also.

The intellect grasps three types of entities. The first is in time and expressed by 'when' and describes mutables that have a beginning and an end, although its beginning is not its end but necessitates it. It is in permanent flux and requires states and renewal of states.²⁰ The second is being with time and is called perpetuity (*dahr*) and it surrounds time.²¹ It is the being of the firmament with time and time is *in* that being because it issues from the motion of the firmament. It is the relationship of the immutable to the mutable although one's imagination cannot grasp it because it sees everything in time and thinks that everything is 'is', 'will be' and 'was', past, present and future, and sees everything as 'when' either in the past or the present or the future. The third is the being of the immutable with the immutable and is called eternity and it surrounds

¹⁸ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 7.10–8.5; cf. Avicenna, *al-Ta'liqāt*, ed. 'A. Badawī (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb/GEBO, 1974), 141.26–142.17; Jean R. Michot, *La Destinée de l'homme selon Avicenne* (Louvain: Peeters, 1986), 59–60.

¹⁹ Gutas, *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 141–3.

²⁰ In *K. al-Hudūd*, Avicenna defines time as a measure of motion in a direction from what came before it and what succeeds it—see *Tis' Rasā'il fī l-Ḥikma wa-l-ṭabī'iyyāt*, ed. Ḥ. al-Āṣī (Beirut: Dār Qābis, 1986), 76.5. Elsewhere, he defines time, not as a measure nor even by association with place (time-space), but as that thing to which 'before' and 'after' pertain such that the 'before' and 'afters' continue eternally—see *Uyūn al-Ḥikma*, ed. 'A. Badawī (Cairo: al-Hay'a al-Miṣriyya al-Āmma li-l-Kitāb/GEBO, 1954), *Physics*, *faṣl* viii, 26.7–8.

²¹ In *K. al-Hudūd*, Avicenna defines perpetuity as an intelligible relationship between an immutable and the totality of time as experienced in the soul: see *Tis' Rasā'il*, 76.3–4.

perpetuity... Perpetuity is conscious of time as it surrounds it. Time is a weak existence as it is in flux and mutable.²²

The inadequacy of human intellection requires us to use notions of temporality and even tensing to explain in temporal terms, the two notions of perpetuity and eternity even though these notions and realities transcend time as such. Our ordinary language of time and temporality is tensed; that is an inescapable fact. The Neoplatonic taste of the passage is quite clear: what is immutable, what is simplex and what is motionless is ontologically higher and prior to what is mutable, complex and in motion. That time is described as a 'weak existence' also suggests the beginnings of a processual shift in the language of temporality and ontology as it entails the notion of intensity, of more or less, stronger and weaker, in existence, which would seem odd in a strictly substantialist notion of existing things. It also suggests that Avicenna allows a discourse of intensification, of more or less, to be applicable to existence.

2 *al-Shifā' (The Cure)*:²³

The following passage occurs at numerous junctures in the *Physics* and *Metaphysics* of Ibn Sīnā's main summa the *Cure*.²⁴

There is no extension in either perpetuity or eternity because measure pertains to motion.²⁵ So time is as if an effect of perpetuity and perpetuity [is] as if it were an effect of eternity. If there were no permanence of the relationship of the causes of bodies to their principles, bodies would not exist, let alone their motion, and if there were no permanence of the relationship of time to the principle of time, time would not be realized.

Thus we have further evidence adduced to demonstrate the intimate link between ontology and temporality. But what we also see in this passage is an aspect of the circularity of Ibn Sīnā's definition of time: we can only understand eternity and perpetuity through temporality, and temporality and change only with respect to immutability and permanence. Note the recourse to figurative language to describe the

²² On this final statement, see Aristotle, *Physics* IV 218^b 21–2.

²³ Mīr Dāmād, K. *al-Qabasāt*, 8.23–9.3. Various instances in Avicenna's work.

²⁴ On this text, see Gutas, *Avicenna and Aristotelian Tradition*, 101–12.

²⁵ Following the physical Aristotelian notion of time as a measure of physical extension and motion. See Avicenna, *al-Shifā': al-Ilāhiyyāt*, eds. G. Anawati *et al.* (Cairo: al-Hay' al-Miṣriyya al-ʿĀmma li-l-Kitāb/GEBO, 1960), 19, 117. This is also a denial of the Proclean view that there is some temporal extension in this intermediate level of time: see Proclus, *Elements of Theology*, 229.

relationship between temporality and atemporality precisely because the notion of a God who is beyond time is so difficult to grasp.

3 'Uyūn al-Ḥikma (Elements of Philosophy):²⁶

The following passage is cited from a short epitome of philosophy. Once again in this passage we see that temporality is defined in terms of the relationships of entities to mutability and motion.

The essences of things are immutable, and also mutable in a sense and immutable in another sense. Considered in the sense of their being immutable, they are not in time but with time. The relationship of what is with time but not in time is perpetuity. The relationship of what is not in time to what is not in time is eternity. Perpetuity in itself is of eternity but in comparison to time is perpetuity.

This passage reflects two issues. First, the gradation of temporality that we have already seen in other citations is clear. Second, if we take the body-soul relationship within humans as a referent of those things discussed in the first two sentences, we may see that the soul is the eternal, unchanging element, while the body is mutable, corruptible, perishable and temporal.

4 al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt (Pointers and Reminders):²⁷

Finally, we have two passages from Ibn Sīnā's later summa, *Pointers and Reminders*. The first passage comes from *namaṭ* VII on the intellect and the particular section relates to Ibn Sīnā's famous 'denial' that God knows particulars because that would compromise God within time.

It is necessary that the knowledge of particulars that the Necessary Being has is not temporal knowledge such that He is in time, in the present, past and future. That would require that an attribute of His essence be that He is mutable. Rather, it is necessary that His knowledge of particulars be in a sense that is holy and transcends time and perpetuity.

God, as a transcendent, immutable and timeless deity cannot be confined in temporality. Our knowledge of things is a function of the temporal and ontological contexts of ourselves and the objects of our knowledge. God is not confined to such a context; He is singularly in eternity and thus His knowledge of objects cannot be the same as

²⁶ Mīr Dāmād, K. *al-Qabasāt*, 9.4–8; Avicenna, 'Uyūn al-Ḥikma, *Physics*, faṣl VIII, 28.12–17.

²⁷ Mīr Dāmād, K. *al-Qabasāt*, 9.9–15; cf. Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, ed. M. Shihābī (Qum: Nashr al-Balāgha, repr. 1996), III, *namaṭ* VII, 315.16–18, *namaṭ* V, 119.9–10.

ours conditioned by space and time and sensibility. However, what this does not preclude is that God may be in time in the sense of McTaggart's B-series.²⁸ Avicenna explicitly rules out the tensed notion of time, or McTaggart's A-series. The second passage from *namaṭ* v deals with the nature of eternity and causality.

If it is permitted for something to be similar in state in all matters and have an effect, it is not far from being necessarily eternal.

If a cause encompasses potentially all things and there is sympathy between it and all entities beneath it in the ontological hierarchy, it is an eternal cause beyond time since, unlike its effects, it is not confined by temporality. The similarity of the state of that thing in all cases means that Ibn Sīnā is discussing immutable entities. Immutable causes are beyond time. Mīr Dāmād goes on to cite an explanation of eternity with respect to the two other modes of temporality as explained in the commentary upon the passage by Ibn Sīnā's enthusiastic but creative champion Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī (d. 1274):²⁹

He [Ibn Sīnā] uses the term 'eternity' to express permanence because it is a technical term. The term 'time' is applied to the relationship between mutables. The term 'perpetuity' is applied to the relationship between immutables and mutables, and the term 'eternity' is applied to the relationship between immutables.

5 *al-Najāt (The Salvation)*:³⁰

The final citation from Ibn Sīnā glosses the passage cited earlier from the *Cure*. What is significant throughout these citations is that Mīr Dāmād intends to establish the possibility of God being with time and space and indeed being an agent but not being implicated in time and space.

Not everything that exists with time is in time.

²⁸ But even this may be problematic, because in this series, there is no future as such: see William Lane Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom* (Leiden: Brill, 1991), 226–7. However, it is quite conceivable that events may lie in the future for us and as such be future contingents whilst being simultaneous with God's durationlessness.

²⁹ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 9.16–19; cf. Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, III, *namaṭ* v, 119.22–25.

³⁰ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 9.20–21; cf. Avicenna, *al-Najāt*, ed. Z. 'Umayrāt (Beirut: Dār al-Jil, 1992), I, 146.23–4.

The reference, as is clear in the commentary tradition of Aristotle's *Physics* IV 221^a.17 to which it alludes,³¹ is to eternal entities that exist with time and have causal efficacy within time but are not in time or confined by time and space.

He completes his citation of Avicennan texts by quoting a passage, by way of summarizing the school position, from *K. al-Taḥṣīl* (*The Digest*) by Ibn Sīnā's student Bahmanyār (d. 1066):³²

It is known that time does not exist in time such that its non-existence is in another time. Time is one of those things that is weak in existence such as motion and matter.

Temporal things are those in which there is priority and posteriority, past and future, beginning and end, and what is motion or possesses motion. But what is extrinsic to this is what exists with time...

If this simultaneity exists by analogy of the permanent to the impermanent, then it is perpetuity that encompasses time. If it is in relation of the permanent with a permanent, then it is properly called eternity... Both of them are opposed to being temporal in time... Neither perpetuity nor eternity have extension, either in conjecture or in fact, not even a measure of motion.

This passage strongly mirrors the initial Avicennan citation from the *Glosses* and illustrates the completion of the Avicennan 'position' whose authority Mīr Dāmād wishes to invoke.

Then to reflect his Platonic tastes, Mīr Dāmād cites passages on time from the *Physics* of *al-Muṭārāḥāt* of the Iranian Illuminationist philosopher Shihāb al-Dīn Suhrawardī (d. 1191) and the *Theologia Aristotelis*, the famous so-called 'Theology of Aristotle' that is in fact adapted renditions of sections of Plotinus' *Enneads* IV–VI.

Suhrawardī says (following and paraphrasing Avicenna from the passage from *al-Shifā'* cited above):

Perpetuity is on the horizon of time and time is like an effect of perpetuity and perpetuity is like an effect of eternity. If there were no permanence of the relationship of universal bodies to their principle, bodies would not exist, let alone their motion, and if there were no permanence of the relationship of time

³¹ Most clearly articulated in the comments of Alexander and Simplicius on the lemma: see *Simplicius in Physicorum* in *Commentaria in Aristotelem Graeca*, ed. H. Diels (Berlin: G. Reimer, 1882) ix. 739, 14–20, trans. J. O. Urmson (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1992), 150.

³² Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 10.3–15; Bahmanyār, *K. al-Taḥṣīl*, ed. M. Muṭahharī (Tehran: Tehran University Press, repr. 1996), *Metaphysics* II, *maqāla* II, 462.12–463.9.

to the principle of time, time would not be realized. So it is valid to say that eternity is a cause of perpetuity and perpetuity a cause of time.³³

Notice that the hierarchy of temporality is glossed here as a causal descent and the Neoplatonic tendency of this explanation of temporality is more striking.

The citations from the *Theologia* are designed to demonstrate that perpetuity is the level of intelligible time, while the level of eternity is that of a simultaneous whole. The *Theologia* thus also represents the threefold division of temporality, but also most significantly posits the possibility of a human soul to traverse these levels. In the headings of topics (*ru'ūs al-masā'il*) provided in the introduction of the text, the author argues that every intelligible entity is timeless because intelligibles properly exist in perpetuity and not in time. It is because of this that they can be causes for time.³⁴ Humans are thus paradoxical composites of a body that is temporal and a soul that belongs to perpetuity.³⁵ To demonstrate the distinction between time and perpetuity, Mīr Dāmād cites *mīmar* II of the *Theologia* in which the author argues that when the soul reverts to its origin in the higher intelligible world, as is its wont indicated by the famous doffing metaphor of *Enneads* IV.8.1,³⁶ it shows that it belongs to a world of perpetuity and not of time.³⁷ The soul knows through its recollection of the immutable and timeless essences of things in that intelligible realm, and thus can be a cause for time through the process of cognition. Then he cites *mīmar* V of the *Theologia* to demonstrate the divine level of eternity.³⁸ The author discusses three levels of activity: the perfect *energeia* of the First Agent that is God, a less perfect activity of the intellects, and the transient activity of temporal agents. To each of these levels of activity corresponds a level of temporality. Finally, he cites *mīmar* VII of the *Theologia* to demonstrate the relationship of God with entities across time.³⁹ There is a causal chain that traverses levels of temporality depending on the level of the

³³ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 11.1–4.

³⁴ Ibid, 11.12–17; cf. *Theologia Aristotelis (Uthūlūjīyā)* in *Alfūṭīn 'inda l-'Arab*, ed. 'A. Badawī (Cairo: L'Institut Français, 1947), 8.6–10.

³⁵ Cf. *Theologia Aristotelis*, 11.11–16.

³⁶ Ibid, *mīmar* I, 22.

³⁷ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 11.19–12.10; *Theologia Aristotelis*, *mīmar* II, 29.3–8, 30.6–11, 31.7–9.

³⁸ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 12.11–13.3; *Theologia Aristotelis*, *mīmar* V, 68.2–17.

³⁹ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 13.4–14.6; *Theologia Aristotelis*, *mīmar* VIII, 94.1–6, 96.4–14, 108.5–8, 110.18–19, 111.2–3, 12–13, 114.14–18.

mutability of entities at that ontological level. What is of critical importance is that God does not create in time; the cause of time itself must transcend time.⁴⁰

The result of the citations of these texts is to show that there are three levels of temporality that correspond to three ontological levels of reality. Hence, there are three possible types of incipience: the first means that the cosmos has a beginning in time (*ḥudūth zamānī*), a view usually associated with the dialectical and systematic theology in Islam known as *kalām*,⁴¹ the second that the cosmos is preceded by absolute non-existence which means that it succeeds God by essence (*ḥudūth dhātī*), a view associated with Ibn Sīnā, and the third that the cosmos is preceded by a relative non-existence, meaning that it was potential but then becomes actual, and this last is what is known as perpetual incipience (*ḥudūth dahrī*).⁴²

Now what does this entail for the God-world relationship? Avicenna reduces the notion of the incipience of the world to a mere contingency (*imkān*) on the Necessary Being.⁴³ The cosmos is utterly dependent upon God as its cause, giver of existence and ontological sustainer. The world is essentially incipient (*ḥudūth dhātī*) as it is logically posterior to God but not temporally posterior. For Mīr Dāmād, the reduction of *ḥudūth* to *imkān* does not entail a real incipience of the world. Further, he regards the Avicennan compromise between the perpetual level of the intellects and the eternal level of the divine to be problematic.⁴⁴ The incipience of the world may be saved through a radical disjuncture between the notions of perpetuity and eternity.⁴⁵ Essences that are logical concomitants of God are not really incipient and thus the notion of incipience needs to address the

⁴⁰ Mīr Dāmād could have cited further texts from the *Theologia* that insist that the world is not created in time but rather at the intelligible level of perpetuity (although the text uses the term eternity), which God transcends.

⁴¹ Bihbahānī, *Ḥakīm-i Astarābād*, 198, mentions 3 lemmata for this option: *tadrijī* (graduated) incipience in which existence unfolds over and in time, *daf'ī* (once and for all) in which creation comes about all at once for all time, and another *daf'ī* which is a theological occasionalist model for creation in time. The argument has been popularized by William Lane Craig (*God, Time and Eternity, passim*) as the 'kalām cosmological argument' for the existence of God.

⁴² Mūsavī, *Ḥakīm-i Astarābād*, 196.

⁴³ Avicenna, *al-Ishārāt wa-l-tanbihāt*, *namaṭ* v, III, 97–115.

⁴⁴ Mīr Dāmād, *Taqwīm al-īmān*, 326.12–329.6.

⁴⁵ Fazlur Rahman, 'Mīr Dāmād's Concept of *ḥudūth dahrī*', *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 39 (1980), 142–3.

issue of whether contingency lies in the nature of events or in their temporality.⁴⁶

Having accepted with Avicenna the absurdity of creation in time,⁴⁷ the question thus arises: where and when does creation take place? While for Avicenna the answer of this question may be meaningless insofar as the world has no real beginning, for Mīr Dāmād, the answer is more ontologically absolute and distinct: creation and the incipience of the world occurs at the level of perpetuity because it is there that the immutable God in His eternity interacts with a mutable time. This theory is known as *ḥudūth dahrī*.⁴⁸ For Mīr Dāmād, there must be a rupture (*infikāk*) between the divine essence and the cosmos, the latter being absolutely posterior to the former. The cosmos is both conceptually and causally posterior to God because all that exists revolves in the perpetuity of *dahr* but God alone exists at the level of *sarmad*.⁴⁹ In *Taqwīm al-īmān* (*Establishing Faith*), he argues that God is absolutely prior and unique in eternity, creative and together with entities in perpetuity where He brings them forth from potentiality into actuality, and transcends time whose physical constraints cannot embrace Him.⁵⁰ One point to bear in mind in understanding Mīr Dāmād's notion of incipience is his essentialism.⁵¹ He posits three ontological levels: God who is beyond being, essences both in potentiality and actuality in perpetuity, and individual existents that manifest those essences in this phenomenal world. At the level of perpetuity, essences that are potential are those that are with God sharing simultaneity (*ma'yya*), but those essences that become actual are posterior to God because they have undergone the process whereby He brings them from potentiality to actuality. The problem thus with the Avicennan model is that it does not explain divine causality at this level

⁴⁶ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 226.3–14, cf. Rahman, 'Mīr Dāmād's Concept of *ḥudūth dahrī*', 144.

⁴⁷ Of course, contemporary philosophy of religion considers the notion of creation without time to be equally absurd: see Helm, *Eternal God*.

⁴⁸ Mūsavī, *Ḥakīm-i Astarābād*, 179–99.

⁴⁹ Mīr Dāmād, *K. al-Qabasāt*, 75.4–76.6, cf. Rahman, 'Mīr Dāmād's Concept of *ḥudūth dahrī*', 150.

⁵⁰ Mīr Dāmād, *Taqwīm al-īmān*, 329.10–330.6. This text may have been written around the same time as *al-Qabasāt* or earlier. It must have been completed by 1023/1614–15 (eleven years before the completion date of *al-Qabasāt*) because the earliest manuscript (MS Āstān-i Quds-i Raḍavī 222) of the commentary of Sayyid Aḥmad 'Alawī (his student and son-in-law) entitled *Kashf al-ḥaqā'iq* bears that date: see Awjabī, Introduction to *Taqwīm al-īmān*, 157. The argument on *ḥudūth* in this text is more succinct but one finds elements of the probably later argument in *al-Qabasāt*.

⁵¹ Mīr Dāmād, *Taqwīm al-īmān*, 324.8–326.8.

and does not characterize the coming into actuality of essences. Thus Mīr Dāmād suggests an intriguing solution to the problem of a timeless deity acting and creating in time.

Apart from the issue of the nature of the eternal incipience of the cosmos, Mīr Dāmād's notion of time has a proposed solution for the debate on the Shī'ī theological notion of *badā'*, or, to put it crudely, the idea that God changes His mind.⁵² Within the context of the religious polemics of the Safavid period, *badā'* had become a hotly debated topic. The doctrine of *badā'* may be seen as a Shī'ī theodicy and attempt to explain defeat and failure in this world.⁵³ To their opponents, it hopelessly compromised a belief in the absoluteness of the divine decree and divine omniscience and omnipotence. If God's decree and knowledge is absolute in eternity, then there is no scope for a change in events in this world. What the doctrine attempts to do is to divorce the divine will from divine foreknowledge and posit degrees of the processual unfolding of the latter.⁵⁴ Furthermore, it clearly articulates a non-propositional, non-discursive view of divine knowledge: God's knowledge of events is not propositional nor does His knowledge engender a particular disposition within His mind that may alter and change with 'changes' in His knowledge and the unfolding of events.⁵⁵ Divine 'consciousness' does not contain processes of duration and deliberation. An immutable

⁵² Mīr Dāmād, *Nibrās al-dīyā' wa-taswā' al-sawā' fī sharḥ bāb al-badā' wa-ithbāt jadwā al-du'ā'*, ed. H. N. Iṣfahānī (Tehran: Mirāth-i Maktūb, 1995); Mūsavī, Ḥakīm-i Astarābād, 209–14.

⁵³ Mahmoud Ayoub, 'Divine Preordination and Human Hope: A Study of the Concept of *badā'* in the Imāmī Shī'ī tradition', *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 106 (1986), 623–32; W. Madelung, 'badā'', *EIr* iii. 354–5.

⁵⁴ A distinct and instructive parallel can be seen in the notions of natural and 'middle' knowledge associated with Molina and Suarez in the early modern period: see Craig, *Divine Foreknowledge and Human Freedom*, 237ff., and *The Problem of Divine Foreknowledge and Future Contingents From Aristotle to Suarez* (Leiden: Brill, 1988), 169 ff.; cf. Alvin Plantinga, *God and Other Minds* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1967), 140–8; Hasker, *God, Time and Knowledge*, 19–52. Molinism is actually a defence of human freedom whilst retaining divine omnipotence, a compatibilist argument that posits God's true knowledge of counterfactuals such that He knows what any creature may freely choose to do.

⁵⁵ Cf. Kenny's discussion of Aquinas on this issue in *The God of Philosophers*, 42–3. Similarly, Alston argues that God does not have beliefs or dispositions about things or events because such states entail fallibility; rather, divine knowledge is intuitive: see his 'Does God Have Beliefs?' *Religious Studies* 22 (1986), 287–306.

durationless God cannot know by means of tensed (A-series) propositions.

In his theological treatise *Nibrās al-dīyā' wa-taswā' al-sawā'* (*The Lamp of Illumination and Keeping the Balance*) on the explanation of *badā'* and the utility of supplication, Mīr Dāmād deploys his theory of time and of perpetual incipience of the world to explain the notion.⁵⁶ The standard Shi'ī defence of *badā'* is that it is merely a form of *naskh* (abrogation); just as certain verses of the Qur'ān were abrogated whilst remaining part of the text of revelation, so too is the eventuality of certain events set aside after the communication of those events in this world was altered.⁵⁷ Mīr Dāmād accepts this point when he says that the place of *badā'* in creation is like that of abrogation in the revelation.⁵⁸ But he goes beyond it.⁵⁹ God is utterly beyond both time and perpetuity;

⁵⁶ The text is actually a critical rebuttal of Nasīr al-Dīn Tūsī's juridical rejection of the notion. In *Talkhīṣ al-Muḥaṣṣal*, ed. 'A. Nūrānī (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', 1983), 421–2, Tūsī wrote:

[We] do not believe in *badā'*. The doctrine is only found in one narration from Imām Ja'far al-Šādiq which relates to his appointment of his son Ismā'īl as his successor. However, Ismā'īl did not succeed him [i.e. he died in his lifetime]. So he appointed Mūsā as his successor [instead]. He was then questioned about this to which he responded: 'Regarding Ismā'īl, God changed his decree (*badā'*).' There is only one instance of *badā'*, that too an isolated tradition (*khbar wāḥid*). An isolated tradition does not yield knowledge nor can it be relied upon for action. Clearly Avicennan determinism (which in this case amounts to a form of the theological fatalism) is irreconcilable with such a dynamic notion of divine knowledge because drawing on the Aristotelian tradition (in particular the famous discussion of future contingents in *De Interpretatione*, IX), it recognized the problem of reconciling truth values of propositions about future contingents with affirmations of divine omnipotence and omniscience.

⁵⁷ Ayoub, 'Divine Preordination and Human Hope', 624. Mullā Šadrā sets forth an alternative which is to distinguish between two levels of divine knowledge, one that is absolute and another relative and revealed. To this effect, he quotes two *ḥadīth* from the fifth and sixth Imāms who differentiate between a hidden knowledge known only to God and knowledge communicated to His Prophets and Imāms – see *al-Hikma al-muta'āliya fī l-Asfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a*, eds. R. Luṭfī *et al.* (Beirut: Dār Iḥyā' al-Turāth al-'Arabī, 3rd imp., 1981), vi, 399.2–10.

⁵⁸ Mīr Dāmād, *Nibrās al-dīyā'*, 55.18.

⁵⁹ An alternative approach is proffered by Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī, Mīr Dāmād's close friend, who argues that we consider time to be like a rope with only a section available for us to see. Thus for us time is discrete and tensed since we experience time as a past, present and future. However, God's knowledge of things including time is presential (*ḥudūrī*); so the whole of the rope is available to Him: see *Kashkūl* (Beirut: Dār al-Aḍwā', 1981), I, 183.19–24.

He is neither in time nor with time. Existents in this world, however, are limited by extension and duration and are temporal entities, whilst occurring in some form in perpetuity as well.⁶⁰ Every originated thing has a share in three types of *ḥudūth*: essential (*dhātī*), perpetual (*dahrī*) and temporal (*zamānī*).⁶¹ Temporal events that occur in this world are limited by extension but do not have a corresponding extension in perpetuity (and certainly not in eternity where there is no extension). Now God and His attributes (including creation and knowledge) manifest His existence at these three levels of being and time, but their nature varies according to the ontological level of manifestation.⁶² No one event in either time or perpetuity that results from the activity of a divine name is the same as another.⁶³ Thus the appearance of the progression of events in our temporal extension is unlike that of its extension in perpetuity, and quite unlike its cause in eternity. Furthermore, since God's knowledge is timeless, determinism is avoided as events in time are not directly caused by timeless knowledge.⁶⁴ The key ontological level for theodicy is thus neither the absolute and vital realm of eternity and the pure names whose sole referent is the divine essence, nor the temporal realm of events in this world, but rather the mediating realm of perpetuity in which trajectories of events and their sequence is in flux. In this intermediate realm, nothing is determined and nothing is immutable, whilst also being determined and mutable. The doctrine of *badā'* thus needs to be understood at this level, as a compromise between radical libertarianism that would make God subject to the mutability of temporal beings and radical necessitarianism that would place temporal events of this world beyond the pure immutability of the eternal.

The concerns of a theistic metaphysics that seeks to understand the relationship between God and the cosmos, between individual responsibility and ability to discern truth and divine determinism, influences the theories of time in the Safavid period. Dāmād's theory assumes a processual nature of reality in which everything is in flux and all entities are dynamic and not static. While it is a product of his intellectual formation and stands upon the shoulders of the Greeks and classical Islamic thinkers, Mīr Dāmād is not a conventional thinker in

⁶⁰ Mīr Dāmād, *Nibrās al-dīyā'*, 58.17–59.8.

⁶¹ Ibid, 59.9–15.

⁶² Ibid, 62–63.

⁶³ Ibid, 64–65.

⁶⁴ Richard Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum* (London: Duckworth, 1983), 255–8.

the slightest. It might even be tempting to label Mīr Dāmād's views as consistent with late Neoplatonism. But he moved that paradigm and expressed key concerns as a theological thinker from a Shi'ī context reacting to mature Islamic Platonic/Neoplatonic traditions in the Safavid period. What may be significant is that no thinker in the Safavid period upheld the eternity of the world (*qidam al-ʿālam*) as Avicenna and Abū l-Barakāt Baghdādī had. This may be because the notion of philosophy has loosened to encompass theology and mysticism and commitment to a 'religious life', and certainly postulating that the world was eternal seemed to belie the Qur'ān and many famous sayings of the Shi'ī Imāms.

Mīr Dāmād's theory of time appears to be rather satisfactory because he deploys it to useful effect to deal with two key problems: the creation of the world (how did we come to be here?) and divine theodicy (why does the unfolding of events in this world seem so arbitrary?). It also exhibits a higher level of internal consistency across his work. Yet Mīr Dāmād's position, while respected, has usually been neglected by students of later Islamic thought. Even though his major philosophical works are now available, only two articles in almost thirty years have unsuccessfully attempted to explain his theory of time and creation. A full and nuanced analysis of Dāmād's corpus remains to be undertaken. My own attempt is a mere pointer in that direction. We can assess the contributions of the 'school of Isfahan', even appreciate whether it is useful to apply such a label, only after we have critically understood the work of its principal members.

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