

## ORIGINAL ARTICLE

# Eternity, perpetuity, and time in the cosmologies of Plotinus and Mīr Dāmād

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## Abstract

The present piece focuses on the influence of Plotinus' understanding of time and eternity as articulated in Plotinus' third and fifth *Enneads* upon Mīr Dāmād's (d. 1631–2) conception of eternity, perpetuity, and time found in his *Book of Blazing Brands (Kitab al-Qabasāt)*. Although Mīr Dāmād's conception of eternity, perpetuity, and time resembles that of Plotinus' cosmology and ontology, he departs from Plotinus' hypostases in establishing strict parameters for each domain. Unlike Plotinus, Mīr Dāmād argues that the realm of eternity is reserved for God alone, while the realm of Perpetuity contains the Platonic Forms. For Mīr Dāmād, the realm of time is an effect of the realm of Perpetuity and a tool for human beings to understand how to measure events in the temporal world. Unlike many other Shī'ite philosophers, Mīr Dāmād's articulation of these three cosmological realms incorporates thought found in the works of both prominent Sunni and Shī'ite scholars such as Ibn Sīnā, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghāzālī, Suhrawardī, and Naṣīr al-Dīn Ṭūsī. Although his most successful student, Mullā Ṣadrā Shirazī, had ultimately disagreed with his teacher's cosmological doctrine, he remained influenced by the multitude of sources that his teacher had used.

## 1 | INTRODUCTION

The interrelatedness of time, perpetuity, and eternity has been a cornerstone of metaphysics in almost all philosophical and religious traditions. Both Greek and Muslim philosophers were

concerned with the ontological and cosmological relationship between the world, the cosmos, and their origin and with the problem of how an unchanging and unmoving Being could be related to the changing nature of the world. The Eleatic, Pythagorean, and Pluralist philosophers first developed doctrines regarding this issue, which were received and addressed by Plato (d. 347 BCE) and Aristotle (d. 322 BCE).<sup>1</sup> Plotinus (d. 270 CE) developed Plato's doctrine,<sup>2</sup> and Proclus (d. 485 CE) elaborated on it further.<sup>3</sup> Aristotelian, Stoic and Epicurean thinkers also influenced Neoplatonic doctrine with regard to this issue.<sup>4</sup>

The Muslim philosophers received translated summaries of Plato's dialogues, plus copies of many of the works of Aristotle, a paraphrase of the last three *Enneads* of Plotinus under the pseudonym *The Theology of Aristotle*, and a summary of Proclus' *Elements of Theology*, known as *The Book of Causes* (Latin: *Liber de Causis*). Because of this intellectual heritage, they were able to tackle the issues of time, perpetuity, and eternity through the combined lens of Greek philosophical thought and Islamic religious doctrine.

The concepts of time and eternity had humble beginnings in the Qur'ān. The roots d-h-r, which later correspond to perpetuity in Islamic philosophy, occur twice in the Qur'ān (45:24 and 76:1) refer only to temporality in the physical world. The roots s-r-m-d also occur twice in the Qur'ān (28:71 and 28:72) but refer to eternity as later philosophers would use it. The term for time (ar. *zāman*), as used by philosophers, does not appear in the Qur'ān.

The early Muslim philosopher Abū Yūsuf Ya'qūb al-Kindī (d. 259/873) addresses this issue in his cosmological doctrine, declaring time to be the motion of the sphere.<sup>5</sup> He also states that the heavens are the Creator's living, eternal and moving proximate cause,<sup>6</sup> and subject to destruction only by the Creator.<sup>7</sup> In addition, Kindī declares in his *First Philosophy* that God is eternal and is the First Cause from which all proceeds.<sup>8</sup> The so-called Second Teacher (after Aristotle), Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (d. 340/951), holds a similar position to Kindī regarding time, perpetuity, and eternity.<sup>9</sup> The greatest development with regard to this question came with Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, d. 428/1037), who addressed it extensively in three works, *The Cure* (*Kitāb al-Shifā*), *The Book of Deliverance* (*Kitāb al-Najāt*), and *Directives and Remarks* (*al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbihāt*). Ibn Sīnā's writings on time, perpetuity, and eternity were expanded and defended by his students and intellectual successors until the School of Isfahan, where it reached its culmination.

One of the founders of the school of Isfahan, Burhān al-Dīn Muḥammad Bāqir, known as Mīr Dāmād (d. 1041/1631–2), treated the issues of time, perpetuity, and eternity extensively in his magnum opus, *The Blazing Brands of Objective Certainty on the Creation of the World* (*Qabasāt Ḥaqq al-Yaqīn fī ḥudūth al-'alam*), known in short as *The Book of Blazing Brands*

<sup>1</sup>For an introduction to Plato and Aristotle's doctrines of time and eternity see Sorabji, *Time, Creation and the Continuum*; Stamatellos, *Plotinus and the Presocratics: A Philosophical Study of the Presocratic Influences in Plotinus' Enneads*.

<sup>2</sup>For an introduction to Plotinus' thought, and an introduction to his approach to time and eternity, see Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism*, 47.

<sup>3</sup>For a study of Proclus' elaboration on the doctrines of time and eternity, see Proclus, *Proclus: Commentary on Plato's Timaeus: Volume 5, Book 4*, 3–12; Sorabji, *The Philosophy of the Commentators, 200–600 AD: Physics*, 196–225.

<sup>4</sup>For a study of the influence of other schools upon Plotinus' doctrine of time and eternity, see Guthrie, *The Presocratic Tradition from Parmenides to Democritus*, 120–130.

<sup>5</sup>Pormann and Adamson, *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindi*, 159.

<sup>6</sup>Ibid.

<sup>7</sup>Ibid., 180.

<sup>8</sup>Ibid., 11.

<sup>9</sup>Afterman, "Time, Eternity and Mystical Experience in the Kabbalah," 164–167.

(*Kitāb al-Qabasāt*).<sup>10</sup> Mīr Dāmād completed this work in 5 months, starting on the birth anniversary of the Prophet Muḥammad in 1223/1625.<sup>11</sup> Upon completion of the work he declared:

I made my heart the treasure of Divine Secrets. In the world of Intellect I reigned. In *al-Qabasāt* I became the sea of certitude. The script of doubt and uncertainty I destroyed.<sup>12</sup>

The *Book of Blazing Brands* was written in Arabic and arranged with section titles called “blazing brand” (*qabas*), “flash” (*wamḍa*), and “gleam” (*wamīd*). The title of the book and the titles of each section refer to the famous encounter of Moses and the burning bush, as described in the Qur’ān:

(Remember) when Moses said unto his household: “Lo! I spy afar off a fire; I will bring you tidings thence, or bring to you a borrowed flame (or blazing brand) that ye may warm yourselves”. (Qur’ān 27:7)

Furthermore, Mīr Dāmād states in his Introduction:

But, lo! I shall carry out what the questioner has requested and fulfill his hopes through these “blazing brands” (*qabasāt*), each of which contains “flashes” (*wamḍāt*) and “gleams” (*wamīdāt*), in hopes of obtaining a glimpse of the face of God, the All-Bountiful.<sup>13</sup>

Based on previously existing arguments as expounded by the Muslim Peripatetics (*al-Mashshā’iyyūn*),<sup>14</sup> so-called Eastern sources (which he terms *Yamanī*), and the Qur’ān, Mīr Dāmād posited three containers of ontological reality, known as Eternity (*sarmad*), Perpetuity (*dahr*), and Time (*zamān*). He stated that God’s Essence could only exist in the container of eternity, while the Intelligible Forms and the World exist both within and between the realms of perpetuity and time. Mīr Dāmād’s fundamental thesis is that everything is in a state of perpetual creation.<sup>15</sup> In addition, only temporal things can exist in the realm of time. In making this argument, he breaks from his Muslim Peripatetic predecessors, who believed that the world was eternal,<sup>16</sup> and moves away from the theological position that the world exists in time.<sup>17</sup>

<sup>10</sup>For an introduction to the life and works of Mīr Dāmād, see Rizvi, “Mir Damad (d.1631) and *al-Qabasat: The Problem of the Eternity of the Cosmos*”; see also, Mīr Dāmād, *The Book of Blazing Brands*, ix-3.

<sup>11</sup>Mīr Dāmād, *The Book of Blazing Brands*, trans. Keven Brown, xv.

<sup>12</sup>Dabashi, “Mīr Dāmād and the Foundation of the School of Iṣfahān,” 605.

<sup>13</sup>Mīr Dāmād, *The Book of Blazing Brands*, 2.

<sup>14</sup>The term *mashshā’ī* literally means “walker.” Thus, it is a literal translation of *peripatetic*, which refers to the school of Aristotle and the fact that he and his pupils used to walk among the colonnades (*peripatoi*) of the Lyceum. However, the Mashshā’ī tradition of Islamic thought was not only Aristotelian, but both Neoplatonic and Aristotelian, following the example of Alexander of Aphrodisias and other antecedents in late antique Greek philosophy.

<sup>15</sup>Mīr Dāmād, *The Book of Blazing Brands*, 24.

<sup>16</sup>Ibid.

<sup>17</sup>Ibid.

The *Theology of Aristotle* and the *Book of Causes* had a major impact upon Mīr Dāmād's thought compared with the typical Aristotelian sources that his Peripatetic predecessors used. Despite his deep respect for Aristotle, Mīr Dāmād makes his debt to Plato, Plotinus, Proclus<sup>18</sup> and the *Theology of Aristotle* clear as well.<sup>19</sup> His work draws extensively upon many who were expositors or revivers of the Platonic school in the Islamic world, such as Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī (d. 587/1191) and Quṭb al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 711/1311).<sup>20</sup> He also draws upon from some unorthodox sources for a Shiite scholar, such as the Sunnī theologian Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 544 AH/1149 CE).<sup>21</sup>

In what follows I will show Plotinus' influence on Mīr Dāmād's understanding of Eternity, Perpetuity, and Time, in his *Book of Blazing Brands* as expounded in the third, fourth, and fifth *Enneads*. I will argue that although Mīr Dāmād's understanding of Eternity, Perpetuity, and Time is generally Neoplatonic, he also establishes a doctrine of perpetual creation, which helps him articulate the relationship between Perpetuity and Time as containers of ontological reality.

## 1.1 | Eternity and time in Plotinus' philosophy

Plotinus' approach to eternity, and time was influenced mainly by Plato, although he also drew from other sources, such as Aristotle and the Stoics.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, he was quite aware of the Presocratic philosophers and developed their ideas in a manner that can be

<sup>18</sup>Ibid, 30–31.

<sup>19</sup>Ibid. For example, Mīr Dāmād writes “The leader of philosophy, the divine Plato, and the six philosophers preceding him, are the seven primary philosophers. These philosophers and others who followed them believed that this Great Man, which is the cosmos—with all of its parts and members, whether concrete or intelligible, material or spiritual, in other words, everything in the two realms of Command and creation—was created (*Hādīth*) and not eternally existent (*mutasarmad al-wujūd*), and that the true Creator is both its Originator and its Fashioner. The teacher of the Greek Peripatetics, Aristotle, and a number of his followers and supporters, like the Greek Master [Plotinus], Proclus, Themistius, Alexander of Aphrodisias, and Porphyry, and their followers, believed that part of the cosmos, like the individual originated existents and the unqualified natures of the species and the genera, is eternally existent (*qadīm al-wujūd*) and eternally perpetual (*mutasarmad al-dawām*) in actuality, and that the First Maker is their Originator, while the only created part of the cosmos are the individual generated, material existents, which are subject in essence and existence to dispositional possibilities, and nothing else, and that the Agent Maker is their Fashioner.” (Wamīd 1.7.2).

<sup>20</sup>Suhrawardī, known by his titles “Master of Illumination” and “the Murdered/Martyred Master” was the founder of the School of Illumination in Islam. He was responsible for re-aligning Islamic philosophy with Platonism, Hermeticism, and Persian thought and therefore introduced a form of mystical philosophy in the Islamic world. For studies on Suhrawardī, see Aminrazavi, *Suhrawardī and the School of Illumination*; Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages*, 52–83; Ziai and Walbridge, *The Philosophy of Illumination*; Walbridge, *The Wisdom of the Mystic East: Suhrawardi and Platonic Orientalism*. Quṭb al-Dīn al-Shirāzī was a major commentator to Suhrawardī's thought. For an introduction to his life and works, see Walbridge, *The Science of Mystic Lights: Qutb al-Din Shirazi and the Illuminationist Tradition in Islamic Philosophy*.

<sup>21</sup>For an introduction to the life and works of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, see Kafrawi, *Methodology of Qur'anic Interpretation: Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī's Exegetic Principles*.

<sup>22</sup>This discussion will not focus on any other influence upon Plotinus than that of Plato, Aristotle, and certain of the Presocratics. All translations from Plato's dialogues are taken from Cooper, *Plato's Complete Works*. All translations of Aristotle's dialogues are taken from Barnes, *The Complete Works of Aristotle*. All translations from Plotinus' *Enneads* are taken from Armstrong, *Plotinus Enneads I-VI*. When citing from Plato's dialogues, I employ the Stephanus pagination in conjunction with the title of the dialog and the Bekker pagination in conjunction with the title of the treatise from Aristotle's works. When I quote from Plotinus' *Enneads*, I employ the standard *Ennead*-chapter-section found in works on Plotinus. When I quote from Mīr Dāmād's *Book of Blazing Brands*, I employ Brown's “Blazing Brand (Qabas)—Gleam (wamḍa)—spark (wamīd)” division as found in his translation. For example, *Blazing Brands* 1.4.3 would correspond to the first Blazing Brand, the fourth gleam, and the third spark.

differentiated from that of Plato and Aristotle. At the beginning of the fifth *Ennead*, Plotinus declares:

These statements of ours are not new; they do not belong to the present time, but were made long ago, not explicitly, and what we have said in this discussion has been an interpretation of them, relying on Plato's own writings for evidence that these views are ancient.<sup>23</sup>

Like Plato, Plotinus places the One and the Intellect (which contains the Forms), respectively, beyond eternity or in the realm of eternity. However, Plotinus clearly delineates the difference between eternity and time, even quoting Plato directly in his exposition of these important concepts. In order to best understand his approach, I will discuss his views on the nature of the One and the Intellect separately, noting the influence of Plato and Aristotle when necessary and summarizing their ontological and cosmological place with regard to eternity. When I cite from Plotinus' thought, I will borrow directly from the Arabic Plotinus texts (*The Theology of Aristotle (Uthūlūjiyā Aristāṭālīs)*, *the Treatise on Theology (ʿilm al-ilahī) (or the Divine Science)*, and *the Sayings of the Greek Sage (al-shaykh al-yūnānī)*), or other related texts since Mīr Dāmād had access to these sources and not the original Greek.

The *Theology* describes the One in the following way:

Now our aim in this book is the discourse on the Divine Sovereignty, and the explanation of it, and how it is the first cause, eternity and time being beneath it, and that it is the cause and originator of causes, in a certain way, and how the luminous force steals from it over mind and, through the medium of mind, over the universal celestial soul, and from mind, through the medium of soul, over nature, and from soul, through the medium of nature, over the things that come to be and pass away.<sup>24</sup>

In both the *Theology of Aristotle* and the *Enneads*, Plotinus defines the One as perfect whose product is less than itself,<sup>25</sup> and then maps the One onto Plato's "Form of the Good" (ἡ τοῦ ἀγαθοῦ ἰδέα).<sup>26</sup> He articulates the relationship between the primary hypostases by indicating that "[Plato] also often calls Being and Intellect Idea: so Plato knew that Intellect comes from the Good and Soul from Intellect."<sup>27</sup> Immediately following, he addresses Plato's Presocratic predecessors, making clear that Parmenides, Empedocles, Anaxagoras, and Pythagoras principally agreed with this model. Here, although the One does not have attributes. Intellect, the second principle receives attributes from the One, that is, becoming good-like, in cognizing the One as follows: "The first created intellect does not possess a

<sup>23</sup>*Ennead* V.I.8.10-15.

<sup>24</sup>Henry and Schwyzer, *Plotini Opera*. This is similar to how Plotinus would describe the One in the following: "Everything which is moved must have some end to which it moves. The One has no such end, so we must not consider that it moves. If anything comes into being after it, we must think that it necessarily does so while the One remains continually turned towards itself. When we are discussing eternal realities we must not let coming into being in time be an obstacle to our thought" (*Ennead* V.1.6.15-25).

<sup>25</sup>But the dependence on Him of some things is greater and clearer, while the dependence on Him of other things is less and more obscure (*Treatise on Theology, 353*) and *Ennead* V.1.6.15-25.

<sup>26</sup>*Ennead* V.I.8.15.

<sup>27</sup>*Ibid.*

form. Through contact with the First Creator, it comes into the possession of a form, because it comes to a limit. It, thus, is shaped and comes into the possession of shape and form.”<sup>28</sup> It is thus clear that Plotinus’ One is unmoved, perfect,<sup>29</sup> infinite in its attributes, and identified with the Good.

Plotinus’ second principle, known as Intellect, is the realm of the Platonic Forms. This hypostasis is important for Plotinus’ cosmology. He defends his thesis as follows: “The forms are in the intellect, and the intellect is in the forms. The forms got into the intellect and have broken forth from it and entered the soul, because the intellect is the cause of the lower things.”<sup>30</sup> Throughout the *Enneads*, Plotinus describes the Intellect as “the father of the cause,”<sup>31</sup> the “craftsman,”<sup>32</sup> “that which “thinks itself,”<sup>33</sup> and that which is “not a plurality of compositions, but its actions are the multiplicity.”<sup>34</sup> He thus encapsulates the Platonic Forms within the hypostatic Intellect and equates Aristotle’s Unmoved/Prime Mover with the Intellect. Although Plotinus fundamentally agrees with Aristotle’s concept of the Unmoved Mover, he criticizes the descriptions of the Unmoved Mover found throughout Aristotle’s *Physics*, *Metaphysics*, and *on the Heavens (de Caelo)*.<sup>35</sup> Aristotle’s conception of the Unmoved Mover as a single, unmoving, ontological being that is the first Being,<sup>36</sup> is interpreted by Plotinus as the Intellect. Given the simple nature of the One, and the complex nature of the Intellect, Plotinus finds that the concept of the Unmoved Mover is best placed in the Intellect. Kevin Corrigan sums up some of the perspectives that make up the nature of the Intellect:

In the hypostasis of intellect many influences coalesce: the Platonic Ideas (or what is truly real in itself), Aristotle’s Unmoved Mover from *Metaphysics* XII; the demiurge, or craftsman, of Plato’s *Timaeus*, and Aristotle’s active intellect from *De Anima* III, 4–6. What prompts these identifications? Evidently, if the Platonic Ideas are just what they are in virtue of themselves (and not by virtue of anything else), then they must constitute “real being,” or “primary” substance, as Aristotle calls the Unmoved Mover (among other things, souls and compounds included).<sup>37</sup>

Plotinus’ Intellect serves a multitude of roles, ranging from the efficient cause of the universe to its governor. Furthermore, the Intellect is the unified entity that contains the multiplicity of the Platonic Forms.<sup>38</sup> It would seem that by comparison in Plato’s cosmological doctrine, Plotinus’ One employs the Intellect and the Forms contained within it to create the world. His descriptions of the One show

<sup>28</sup>*The Greek Sage*, 487. This is similar to *Ennead* V.6.5.12-15 where Plotinus writes ““For when what is other than the Good thinks it, it does so by being like the Good, and having a resemblance to the Good, and it thinks it as Good and as desired by itself, and as if it had a mental image of the Good.”

<sup>29</sup>*Ennead* V.6.2.15.

<sup>30</sup>*Theology of Aristotle*, 281. This is similar to *Ennead* V.9.3.5-8 where Plotinus writes the following: “it is perhaps ridiculous to enquire whether there is intellect in the world; though there are, it may be, people who would dispute even this. But it is more disputable if it is the sort of Intellect we say it is, and if it is a separate one, and if it is the real beings and if the nature of the Forms is there: this is our present subject.”

<sup>31</sup>*Ennead* V.1.8.5.

<sup>32</sup>*Ennead* V.1.8.5.

<sup>33</sup>*Ennead* V.3.8.40.

<sup>34</sup>*Ennead* V.3.12.1-5.

<sup>35</sup>*Ennead* V.9.1.9-15.

<sup>36</sup>In book VIII of the *Physics*, 254b7-260a2, Aristotle makes clear the nature of the objects of movement and the need for a prime mover that is “unmoved, eternal, one, and unchangeable.”

<sup>37</sup>Corrigan, *Reading Plotinus: A Practical Introduction to Neoplatonism*, 34.

<sup>38</sup>*Ennead* V.5 focuses on the fact that Forms exist only in the Intellect.

that it is pre-eternal and makes it clear that the Intellect's eternal nature rests on the One's pre-eternity.

The *Theology of Aristotle* states that the First Cause exists in the realm of eternity.<sup>39</sup> In *Ennead* III.7.5, Plotinus describes eternity in the following way:

Eternity is a majestic thing and thought declares it identical with the god (Armstrong comments on this god being Intellect or Real Being, the second hypostasis); it declares it identical with this god. And eternity could be well described as a god proclaiming and manifesting himself as he is, that is, as being which is unshakeable and self-identical, and [always] as it is, and firmly grounded in life. Eternity is endless in the strict and proper sense, because it never expends anything of itself. And if someone were in this way to speak of eternity as a life which is here and now endless because it is total and expends nothing of itself, since it has no past or future—for if it had, it would not now be a total life—he would be no near to defining it.<sup>40</sup>

Plotinus also makes clear the eternal nature of the Intellect, and the fact that it lives in Eternity, with no past or future. Regarding the One's relationship to eternity, Plotinus states:

Eternity lives in one, the intention of which is not merely that eternity brings itself into unity with relation to itself, but that it is the life, always the same, of real being around the One; this, then is what we are seeking; and abiding like this being eternity.<sup>41</sup>

Here, Plotinus argues that the One provides the power to Intellect to subsist in the realm of eternity. A geometrical analogy might clarify the relationship between these two hypostases. Here, the One is represented as a point. Its first emanation, the Intellect, creates a line segment. From Intellect, the Platonic Forms, which are contained within the line segment, manifest themselves. The analogy of a line segment works because of the fact that the One and Intellect are ontologically very close. The *Sayings of the Greek Sage* confirm this analogy when it describes the relationship of First Good to the Intellect in the following manner:

Only, supposing that soul and intellect are two circles, the circle of the intellect never is in motion. It always is stationary, similar to its center. The circle of the soul, on the other hand, moves in its center, the intellect. Only, the circle of the intellect, even though it is similar to its substance, moves in a motion of desire, since it has a desire for its center, the First Good.<sup>42</sup>

Although Intellect is a single existential entity, its essence entails multiplicity through the reality of the Forms. Through the One's emanation of the Intellect and its Forms as means, the generation of the universe occurs in the realm of Soul. Soul does not subsist in the realm of eternity. But since Soul is, as Plato says, "made in its image,"<sup>43</sup> it nonetheless participates in the realm of eternity.

<sup>39</sup>*Theology of Aristotle*, 487.

<sup>40</sup>*Ennead* III.7.11.5.

<sup>41</sup>*Ennead* III.7.11.6.

<sup>42</sup>*Sayings of the Greek Sage*, 389.

<sup>43</sup>*Timaeus*, 37d.

Plotinus' cosmological doctrine is discussed in *Ennead* II.1, where he speaks about the hypostatic Soul's generation of the fixed stars, the planets, and the everlastingness of the universe.<sup>44</sup> Soul has two functions: to represent non-eternal life and to be the means by which the One and Intellect can bring about life in the temporal world. Plotinus extrapolates the first function through his doctrine of the universe's everlastingness via the term τὸ αἰεῖ.<sup>45</sup> The second function can be seen in the way in which the Soul is the "space" in which the One employs Intellect to bring about life in the universe. The important issue of the relationship between the World Soul and individual souls will not be addressed here since it is beyond the subject of this paper.<sup>46</sup> In the section below, I will first address the ontological and cosmological importance of the Soul and then its place with respect to eternity and time.

*Ennead* V.1.3 argues that Soul is an "image of Intellect" "whose establishment in reality comes from Intellect."<sup>47</sup> The *Sayings of the Greek* sage says something similar in the following:

The impression of the intellect is the soul. The intellect contains that which is in the soul, but the soul contains what is not in the intellect, because the soul is more than two. The soul, therefore, shows inclination and enterprise. Its enterprise is its thought.<sup>48</sup>

Plotinus also uses Plato's allegory of the "mixing bowl" to describe Soul,<sup>49</sup> plus the notion of Soul as "One-Many," from Plato's *Parmenides*,<sup>50</sup> to illustrate the complex nature of this hypostasis. A central component of Soul is its movement. Other hypostases do not undergo movement, but Soul "does not remain unchanged when it produces: it is moved and brings forth an image. It looks to its source and is filled, and going forth to another opposed movement generates its own image."<sup>51</sup> This helps to indicate the complex nature of Soul as a hypostasis, since it is in the realm of the Intellect and yet produces an everlasting, moving universe.

*The Theology* and *Ennead* II chapters 1–3 address the cosmological configuration of Soul, where Plotinus explains the Soul's nature and its relation to the unchanging and everlasting nature of the superlunary heavens. The *Theology of Aristotle* states that the First Cause (i.e., the One), the Intellect, and the Soul are everlasting: "You must understand that mind and soul and the other intelligible things are from the first originator, not passing away or disappearing, on account of their originating from the first cause without intermediary."<sup>52</sup> In *Ennead* II, Plotinus states: "If one takes into account the sovereign cause, the soul, along with bodies of the kind which exist in heaven, pure and altogether better than those on earth, one will have a solid conviction about the immortality of the heavens."<sup>53</sup> He also states: "But if the heaven must last as a

<sup>44</sup>Also known as the World Soul in some readings.

<sup>45</sup>Plotinus uses this term throughout his works for both eternity and everlastingness, but his cosmological doctrine in the second *Ennead*, leads one to believe that he originally meant to attribute 'everlastingness' to this hypostasis.

<sup>46</sup>For an introduction to the relationship between the World Soul and individual souls, see Corrigan, *Reading Neoplatonism*, 41-2.

<sup>47</sup>*Ennead* V.1.3.15-16.

<sup>48</sup>*Sayings of the Greek Sage*, 489.

<sup>49</sup>*Ennead* V.1.8.7.

<sup>50</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>51</sup>*Ennead* V.2.1.20-3.

<sup>52</sup>*Theology of Aristotle*, 297.

<sup>53</sup>*Ennead* II.1.4.7-10.



whole, then its parts, the stars in it, must last too; how could it be if they do not last that we last as well? (The things under heaven are no longer part of heaven; if we assumed that they were, then heaven would not stop at the moon).<sup>54</sup> These passages confirm the everlasting nature of the heavens, which “derive their being from God.”<sup>55</sup>

When Plotinus’ ontology and cosmology are examined in detail, it becomes clear that the Soul is the nucleus of the universe and its governor. The Soul is the entity within which the heavens are formed and exist, the governor of the motion of the planets and stars, and the guarantor of their everlasting nature. The Soul thus occupies two realms at once: by creating the universe, it becomes its governor and puts “itself into time.” Thus, Soul extends into the realm of time. Plotinus argues for the eternal nature of the universe by stating that Soul created time as an image or likeness of Eternity. In addition, according to both Plato and Plotinus, it is through the notion of time that the heavens and the sublunary world are understood. In the lines that follow the passage from the *Timaeus* quoted above, Plato states:

This number, of course, is what we now call “time.” For before the heavens came to be, there were no days or nights, no months or years. But now, at the same time as he framed the heavens, he devised their coming to be. These all are parts of time, and all that was and will be are forms of time that have come to be.<sup>56</sup>

Plotinus confirms Plato’s notion of time as the governor of the motions of the heavens: “The heavenly circuit shows time in which it is. But time itself cannot have something in which it is, but it must first of all be itself what it is, that in which the other things move and stand still evenly and regularly.”<sup>57</sup>

Plato makes three things clear. First, time and the universe are born together. Second, the motions of the sun, the moon, and the five planets provide the context for time. Plotinus confirms this model in general terms by referring to the orbital motions of the stars and planets together: “What is measured by the circuit—that is, what is shown—will be time, which is not produced by the circuit but manifested.”<sup>58</sup> Finally, Plato states that one counts time through the measure of number.<sup>59</sup> The nature of number for both Plato and Plotinus is rooted in Pythagorean thought. For Plato, number is not a material entity, but a form.<sup>60</sup> Plotinus addresses this extensively in his sixth *Ennead*.<sup>61</sup> This is an important issue for the understanding of time, as it clearly breaks with Aristotle’s notion of time as the mere measure of motion.<sup>62</sup> For Plotinus, time can be measured but it cannot be defined in terms of measurement or as a time like any other time:

For since it was not possible for Soul to delimit time itself, or for men by themselves to measure each part of it since it was invisible and ungraspable, particularly as they

<sup>54</sup>*Ennead* II.1.5.5-8.

<sup>55</sup>*Ibid.*

<sup>56</sup>*Timaeus*, 37d-e.

<sup>57</sup>*Ennead* III.7.13.

<sup>58</sup>*Ennead* III.7.12.36-40.

<sup>59</sup>The nature of Number in Plato’s philosophy is a topic far beyond the reach of this paper. For an extensive study on the nature of Number in Plato, Aristotle, Stoic, and Plotinus’ philosophical see Slaveva-Griffen, *Plotinus on Number*.

<sup>60</sup>*Ibid.*, 54–58.

<sup>61</sup>*Ennead* VI.6.36-40.

<sup>62</sup>Cooper, *Time for Aristotle: Physics IV. 10–14*, 132–133.

did not know how to count, the god made day and night, by means of which, in virtue of their difference it was possible to grasp the idea of two, and from this Plato says, came the concept of number. Then, by taking the length of the interval between one sunrise, and the next, since the kind of movement on which we base our calculations is even, we can have an interval of time of a certain length, and we use this kind of interval as a measure; but a measure of time, for time itself is not a measure.<sup>63</sup>

Plotinus thus reframes Plato's approach to time by viewing the fixed stars and planets (acting in imitation of Soul, their creator) as the governors and indicators of time. His treatment of time reflects his overall goal of recognizing time for what it is: not just the mere measurement of planetary rotations, but as something inherently connected to Soul, Number, and the greater ontological realities.

How precisely, then, is time generated for Plotinus? Plotinus describes this in the following passage from III 7:

Soul, making the world of sense in imitation of that other world, moving with a motion which is not that which exists There, but like it, and intending to be an image of it, first of all put itself into time, which it made instead of eternity, and then handed over that which came into being as a slave to time, by making the whole of it exist in time and encompassing all its ways with time.<sup>64</sup>

For Plotinus, time is not simply the image of eternity (as in Plato's *Timaeus*) or the measure of motion, as for Aristotle's *Physics*, for in the first instance, the nature of an image or statue connotes something static, and in the second instance, a measure of something implies a cosmic and hypercosmic standard. In Plotinus' case, the measure can only be dynamic, a substantial movement of the soul itself. In other words, time is not simply a horizontal phenomenon restricted to the sensible cosmos but a dynamic movement from one form of life to another form of life, a movement from intelligible to sensible (cf. III 7, 11, 43–45) that makes its everlastingness ( $\tau\acute{o} \acute{\alpha}\epsilon\iota$ ) dynamic.

## 1.2 | Mīr Dāmād's conception of eternity, perpetuity, and time

I can think of no philosopher who reflected 'Alī ibn Abī Ṭalib's (d. 40/661) famous maxim, "It is not who said it, but what is said," more than Mīr Dāmād.<sup>65</sup> Throughout his *Book of Blazing Brands*, he quotes from a wide variety of sources ranging from the Greek philosophers to Sunni theologians. He does not simply use these sources to defend his ideas, but integrates them into his philosophical doctrines. Utilizing seemingly contradictory sources was not unheard of for the scholars of the "School of Isfahan."<sup>66</sup> Mīr Fendiriskī (d. 1040/1640) translated works from

<sup>63</sup> *Ennead* III.7.12.30-5.

<sup>64</sup> *Ennead* III.7.11.25-30.

<sup>65</sup> Shah-Kazemi, *Justice and Remembrance: Introducing the Spirituality of Imam Ali*, 7.

<sup>66</sup> For an introduction to the School of Isfahan, see Nasr, *Islamic Philosophy from Its Origin to the Present*, 209–259; Dabashi, "Mīr Dāmād and the Founding of the School of Isfahan," 597–635.

Sanskrit and integrated them into his own works.<sup>67</sup> Bahā' al-Dīn al-Āmilī (d. 1030/1621) frequented Sufi lodges and borrowed from their ideas.<sup>68</sup> The leading exponent of the Philosophy of Illumination (*ḥikmat al-ishrāq*), Ṣadr al-Dīn Muḥammad al-Shirāzī (d. 1040/1640) followed the teachers mentioned above in integrating and then critiquing every major philosopher, theologian, and mystic of Islam in his major work, *The Transcendent Theosophy in the Four Intellectual Journeys* (*al-Hikma al-muta'aliyya fī-l-aṣfār al-'aqliyya al-arba'a*). Regarding the Greek philosophers, Mīr Dāmād stated:

Shahrastānī, the most erudite of the theologians, has stated in his book *Nihāyat al-Aqdām*: The belief of the people of truth in every religion is that the world was created and fashioned. It had a beginning, which the Creator (exalted be He) created and originated after it was not. "God was alone, and nothing was with Him." A number of the pillars of wisdom and ancient philosophers, such as Thales, Anaxagoras, and Anaximenes from Miletus, and Pythagoras, Empedocles, Socrates, and Plato from Athens, as well as a number of other sages, poets, and ascetics agree in this regard. We have explained the particulars of their beliefs on the manner of creation and the differences of their views on the first principles in our book named *al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*. In *al-Milal wa'l-niḥal*, in expounding upon the words of Proclus and mentioning his arguments for the eternity of the world, [Proclus] says: The doctrine of the eternity of the world and the pre-eternity of motions, after establishing the Fashioner and the doctrine of the First Cause, only appeared following Aristotle, because he clearly differed from the ancient philosophers [on this question], and he devised this theory based on syllogisms which he considered to be a proof and a demonstration. Several of his students followed in his footsteps and elaborated upon his doctrine, such as Alexander of Aphrodisias, Themistius, and Porphyry. Proclus, who is affiliated with Plato, wrote a book on this subject in which he presented these arguments. However, the ancient philosophers only expressed about it what we have already reported.<sup>69</sup>

Mīr Dāmād's interest in the issues of Eternity, Perpetuity, and Time was not unprecedented. Time was a major issue in the history of Islamic philosophy, and it turned into a controversial issue in the writings of Ibn Sīnā. Two of the major issues that caused the Sunni theologian Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111) to accuse Ibn Sīnā of infidelity were his arguments for the eternity of the world and God's knowledge of particulars only as universals. These issues were also related to Mīr Dāmād's concept of perpetual creation. A more thorough understanding of Mīr Dāmād's ontological and cosmological doctrines will allow us to have a better understanding of this concept.

One of the fundamental differences between Mīr Dāmād and his predecessors among the *falāsifa* was on the question of the eternity of the universe. Throughout the text of *The Blazing Brands*, Mīr Damad states, "God was alone and nothing was with Him."<sup>70</sup> In section 1.3, he intro-

<sup>67</sup>For information on Mīr Fenderiski, see Sajjad H. Rizvi, "MIR FENDERESKI."

<sup>68</sup>For information on Bahā' al-dīn al-Āmilī, see Kohlberg, "BAHĀ'-AL-DĪN 'ĀMELĪ".

<sup>69</sup>*Blazing Brands* 1.7.4. Although Mīr Dāmād does not mention Plotinus in this passage, his presence is quite pervasive in his works through the influence of the *Theology of Aristotle*.

<sup>70</sup>This is first found in 1.7.2, but four other exact reiterations of this line is found in the *Qabasāt*, and he paraphrases it throughout.

duces the concepts of Eternity, Perpetuity, and Time, by referencing Ibn Sīnā's book *Annotations (al-Ta'līqāt)*. In this work, Ibn Sīnā declares Eternity (*sarmad*) to be the "changeless being with the changeless," "which encompasses Perpetuity."<sup>71</sup> Ibn Sīnā also states, "The relationship of the First (exalted be He) to the Active Intellect or to the Heavenly Sphere is not a quantifiable or temporal relationship, but an eternal one. The relationship of eternal to eternal is called 'Eternity' or 'Perpetuity' (*dahr*)."<sup>72</sup> In his discussion of these notions, Mīr Dāmād quotes a number of philosophers and theologians, who either affirm or refute Ibn Sīnā. These arguments demonstrate his awareness of the Aristotelian roots of the argument for the eternity of the world. In 1.4.1, he states:

It can be summed up from all of [these arguments] that the true Creator and Necessary Being (lauded be He), in all His aspects and attributes, exists in the domain of Eternity (*sarmad*), not in Time (*zamān*) and not in Perpetuity (*dahr*). Nay, He is exalted above all of them and sanctified from their concomitants, their affections, their properties, and their laws. He is the Ever-Living, eternal in the past, eternal in the future.<sup>73</sup>

In 1.4.3, Mīr Dāmād prepares the reader for his discussion of the difference between Eternity, Perpetuity, and Time by breaking down the concept of Eternity into different sub-types. Here, he posits the concepts of "temporal Eternity," "essential Eternity," "eternal Eternity," "real eternal Eternity," and "true Eternity":

Essential Eternity (*qidam dhātī*) is actuality, not being essentially preceded by the non-being of potentiality and nullification whatsoever, and existence, not being essentially preceded by the non-being of privation and negation at all. Its prerequisite is the essential necessity of the essence and its existence, just as the prerequisite of essential creation is the possibility of the essence and the nature of essential contingency [or essential possibility] (*al-imbkān bi'l-dhāt*).<sup>74</sup>

Among them essential Eternity necessarily corresponds to eternal Eternity (*al-qidam al-sarmadī*), also expressed as "real eternal pre-eternity" (*al-azaliyya al-ṣarīḥa al-sarmadiyya*), which is sanctified from temporal Eternity. In truth, is not essential Eternity none other than the essentially Necessary Being, immensely exalted above the worlds of Time and Perpetuity? So, without a doubt, it is impossible to ascribe to Him temporal Eternity, whereas He must have the permanence of true Eternity (*dawm al-qidam al-ḥaqq*) and the eternity of true pre-eternity (*al-sarmadiyya al-azaliyya al-ḥaqq*). In like manner, the temporally eternal can only be associated with time and place, and it is impossible for it to be qualified by essential eternity or real unquantifiable Eternity.<sup>75</sup>

<sup>71</sup>Blazing Brands 1.3.

<sup>72</sup>Blazing Brands 1.3.

<sup>73</sup>Blazing Brands 1.4.1.

<sup>74</sup>Blazing Brands 1.4.3.

<sup>75</sup>Blazing Brands 1.4.3.

In this passage, Mīr Dāmād argues that only the Essentially Necessary Being, and nothing else, can exist in the realm of true Eternity, due to the fact that Eternity is where nothing but pure Essence and Being can subsist. In other words, there is no notion of Time per se in this realm (Time is in the realm of “temporal Eternity”), and therefore, no room for creation or any other type of change. Furthermore, no created beings or objects can exist in Eternity. In 1.7.2, Mīr Dāmād delineates the difference between Plato and Aristotle with regard to the subjects of Eternity and Perpetuity *qua* the universe, stating that (like him) Plato and his school argued that only the Creator exists in the domain of Eternity, whereas Aristotle and his followers believed that the Creator and the universe existed in Eternity together.<sup>76</sup> In a footnote, Keven Brown, the translator of *The Blazing Brands*, notes that Mīr Dāmād’s student, Sayyid Ahmad al-‘Alawī (d.1060/1650), commented on Mīr Dāmād’s agreement with Plato, stating, “What our teacher stated upon this question is that [the school of Plato] are our fellow believers. In truth, we thirst for them and hold fast to their hands”.<sup>77</sup>

In another passage, Mīr Dāmād explores further the question of whether any created being can coexist in Eternity with God. He asserts that if a created thing has as an attribute anything more than a beginning and end in measurable Time (*zamān*), it must exist in a special place, the realm of Perpetuity (*dahr*). This is because the realm of Eternity (*sarmad*) is reserved for God alone—The First and Eternal Real Existent. In the following passage, Mīr Dāmād rejects any notion of the eternal objectivity (*al-mā’iyya al-sarmadiyya*) of a contingent domain, but appears to allow for the idea of the Platonic Forms by positing a secondary realm of “real perpetual objectivity” (*al-mā’iyya al-dahriyya*), in which all things exist *in potentia* after their non-existence in the realm of Perpetuity (*dahr*):

There is no reality to eternal objectivity (*al-mā’iyya al-sarmadiyya*) in the opinion of the Family of God and the partisans of reality, inasmuch as the First Real Existent (exalted be His sovereignty) is the sole possessor of eternal priority. He has eternal priority in relation to the secondary existents created in Perpetuity, which are the whole of what is other than Him and dependent upon His essence (glorified be He). However, there is a real perpetual objectivity (*al-mā’iyya al-dahriyya*), which belongs to the essences of the secondary existents, in which one and all exist after their non-existence in Perpetuity. [The Peripatetics] believe in the eternity (*sarmad*) of the primary originated things (*al-mubda’āt*) and claim that His essence (glorified be He) allows for an eternal objectivity with respect to the unchanging, primary originated things. This is a groundless, misguided conjecture conceived by a self-deceiving opaque mind. In the judgment of a clear and logical mind, however, only God, the true First Maker, exists in Eternity prior to Perpetuity with an eternal and essential priority. All the possible things (*al-mumkināt*), which are His effects and the things He has made in their entirety, whether changeless or changing, exist by reason of His fashioning (*ṣan’*) and His primary origination [or creativity] (*ibdā’*) in Perpetuity, which is posterior to Eternity with a perpetual (*dahri*) posteriority. Nothing among the things that are possible exists in Eternity, since they in their entirety are posterior to Eternity and are encompassed by it. Nor does the Essentially Necessary Real Existent exist in Perpetuity, because He is in Eternity prior to Perpetuity, encompassing it, and

<sup>76</sup>*Blazing Brands* 1.4.4.

<sup>77</sup>*Blazing Brands* 1.7.2.

transcending it. You know that Perpetuity (*dahr*) is the container for the entire extension of measurable Time (*zamān*), for it is encompassed by Eternity and follows it. The Eternal Real Existent exists in Eternity prior to both Time and Perpetuity, and prior to all things. He is exalted above occurrence in both Time and Perpetuity. Let this be reflected upon.<sup>78</sup>

He then clarifies:

The existence of God is not in Perpetuity (*dahr*), for His essence transcends [both] Time (*zamān*) and Perpetuity. It is evident and clear then that Eternity is restricted to God (glorified be He), and no possible things exist there at all. The Necessary Being is essentially exalted above occurrence in Perpetuity.<sup>79</sup>

The fourth chapter of Mīr Dāmād's *Qabasāt* is dedicated to Qur'anic verses, Prophetic statements (Hadith), and reports from the Prophet's family regarding the different ontological realms or "containers." This chapter is significant, as it marks another key aspect of the School of Isfahan, which integrated Qur'anic statements and Hadith quotations into philosophical works. In addition, Mīr Dāmād borrows from both Sunni and Shī'ī sources without prejudice, so long as they support his arguments. In his discussion of Eternity, he quotes from the tenth-century CE Shī'ite scholar Abū Ja'far ibn Bābawayh al-Qummī (d. 381/991), popularly known as Shaykh Ṣaduq, who cites the following from the Shī'ī Imam Ja'far al-Ṣādiq (d. 148/765):

Among [these reports] is one passed down by al-Ṣaduq, the Sure Handle of Islam, Abū Ja'far Ibn Bābawayh (may God the Exalted be pleased with him) in *Kitāb al-Tawhīd* in a sound transmission from Abū Baṣīr from Abū 'Abdullāh al-Ṣādiq (peace be upon him), who said: "God (blessed and exalted be He) cannot be qualified by time, place, motion, transferal, or rest, for He is the creator of time, place, motion, and rest. Immeasurably exalted is He above what the oppressors ascribe to Him!"<sup>80</sup>

By combining philosophical arguments with Islamic scripture and traditions, Mīr Dāmād makes clear that it is impossible for anything, whether potentially or actually, to coexist with God. God alone is in Eternity and nothing else can share his occurrence there with him.

The realm of Perpetuity (*dahr*) is where Mīr Dāmād posits his thesis of perpetual creation (*hudūth dahrī*). As noted above, the concept of the realm of Perpetuity appears to have been influenced by the ideas of Plato and Plotinus, and perhaps by Aristotle as well. However, Mīr Dāmād changes the contours of his metaphysics from those of his predecessors to better appease Islamic theological concerns. For example, he seems to place the Platonic Forms in the realm of Perpetuity, thus leaving room for the Creator to act as the proto-Efficient Cause for the creation of the world. In the following discussion, I will first quote from Mīr Dāmād's chief figure of influence, Ibn Sīnā, and then address his approach to the concept of Perpetuity. In section 1.3 of *The Blazing Brands*, he quotes Ibn Sīnā as follows:

<sup>78</sup>*Blazing Brands* 3.7.4.

<sup>79</sup>*Blazing Brands* 3.7.17.

<sup>80</sup>*Blazing Brands* 4.6.

The Second is the existence of a being with time, which is called Perpetuity. This state of being surrounds Time, and is the Heavenly Sphere, which exists together with Time. Time is connected to this state of being because it is produced from the motion of the sphere. This is the relation of the changeless to the changeable. Nevertheless, the estimative [or imaginative] faculty (*wahm*) is unable to grasp it,<sup>81</sup> since it views each thing in a particular time, and the notions of “was” and “will be,” of past, present, and future, possess it.<sup>82</sup>

The relationship of the First (exalted be He) to the Active Intellect or the Heavenly Sphere is not a quantifiable or temporal relationship, but an eternal one. The relationship of eternal to eternal is called “Eternity” (*sarmad*) and “Perpetuity” (*dahr*). Time includes within it that which is changeable. The relationship of eternal to Time is Perpetuity. Time is changeable while eternal is unchangeable.<sup>83</sup>

Ibn Sīnā addresses the relationship between Perpetuity and time from the perspective of the measurement of time, the movement of the spheres, and the location of non-temporal objects. However, Mīr Dāmād differs from Ibn Sīnā in his belief that only God exists in the realm of Eternity, while the immutable substances (another name for the Platonic Forms) exist in the realm of Perpetuity. This perspective is reflected in the following passages:

Eternity in Perpetuity (*qidam dahrī*), also called “Eternal Timelessness” (*azaliyya sarmadiyya*), is existence occurring actually, without being preceded by real non-existence in the realm of Perpetuity. It is pre-eternal existence in the real world.<sup>84</sup>

The immutable substances, insofar as they have attributes and affections consisting of obligatory and supererogatory perfections, exist in Perpetuity, but not in Eternity nor in time in any respect whatsoever.<sup>85</sup>

For Mīr Dāmād, the immutable substances can only exist in Perpetuity, which is posterior to Eternity but prior to the realm of temporal existence. On the basis of two verses of the Qur’ān, he equates the domain of Perpetuity with the “Mother of the Book,”<sup>86</sup> and the immutable substances with “the treasures that are present in a purely changeless state in Perpetuity, for the quantifiable sending down [of substantial things] is through fate (*qadar*), with respect to

<sup>81</sup>For an introduction to Ibn Sīnā’s concept of *wahm* (prehension, imagination), see Morewedge, *The ‘Metaphysica’ of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā): A Critical Translation-commentary and Analysis of the Fundamental Arguments in Avicenna’s ‘Metaphysica’ in the ‘Dānish Nāma-i-’alā’ī* (“The Book of Scientific Knowledge”), 321–324.

<sup>82</sup>*Blazing Brands*, 1.3.

<sup>83</sup>*Blazing Brands* 1.3.

<sup>84</sup>*Blazing Brands* 1.4.3.

<sup>85</sup>*Blazing Brands* 1.4.1.

<sup>86</sup>*Blazing Brands* 4.5; Qur’ān 13:39.

quantitative things in time.”<sup>87</sup> In a longer statement, Mīr Dāmād summarizes his thesis that the domain of Perpetuity is the place where the act of creation occurs, with God being its Primary Efficient Cause. In the realm of perpetuity, the Efficient Cause brings about creation by means of the immutable substances:

Insofar as it is settled by the rational method that the container of the changeless, which is the domain of Perpetuity, is free of the estimation of extension and non-extension and division and non-division, and insofar as it is established by way of demonstration that the Essentially Necessary Being is necessary in all respects, and that He is pure actuality transcending the impurities of potentiality in all circumstantial modes, it is evident that what is admissible to Him with respect to general possibility exists with Him actually and is essentially necessary. [...] His relation to the totality of what is outside Himself, which is the sum of the things He has made and His effects, is an everlasting encompassing relation, unquantifiable, immutable, without any progression or renewal on the side of the True Agent, for renewal, subsequence, progression, and succession are only on the side of the effects. What is renewed is the effect itself, not a state or a condition belonging to its emanating, Eternal Maker. It is clear that the entire system of existence derives from the effects created in Perpetuity from the front of pre-eternity to the rear of post-eternity, and from the beginning of primary origination to the end of generation. The true Efficient Cause and Originator produced them and originated them in the domain of Perpetuity all at once and perpetually, just as He will continue to produce them perpetually and without interruption, not according to the temporal flow. As for the relations of position and belonging to generated things, these are in the fixed spatial extension occurring from the center of the world until the circumference of the outermost sphere [the Active Intellect]—certainly not in His locus and His place—and in the un-fixed, temporal, flowing extension, consisting of the motion which regulates the day from the beginning until the end of time, and certainly not in His “time” and His “when.” As for the things that are separate from the worlds of time and space, including the intelligible lights, the spiritual substances, and other primary originated things, these belong to the heart of objective reality and the real world, certainly not to His pure being and His pure existence, which is not in a particular time, place, position, locus, where, or when. He, God, is the agent of existence and the perpetual sustainer of the system of existence in this way. Were He to withhold Himself from making and emanating [the things of creation], the immutability of Perpetuity would disintegrate and the structure of the universe would collapse. Blessed then be God, the Lord of all the worlds.<sup>88</sup>

<sup>87</sup>4.5; Qur’ān 15:21. Mīr Dāmād calls the Platonic Forms in *Blazing Brands* 5.4.7, “Lords of the Species.” He states: “With respect to establishing the species forms as intelligible substances, which are Lords of the Species (*arbāb al-anwā*), [these are] in charge of all the bodies of the individuals of the species by way of management (*tabīr*) and subjugation (*taskhīr*), just as the incorporeal soul manages a particular individual body. The soul is nothing but a kind of incorporeal angel and the vicegerent for a particular Lord of the Species. The particular corporeal nature and the substantial impressed form is thus a kind of corporeal angel.” In *Blazing Brands* 5.4.9, Mīr Dāmād comments on the notion of the Neoplatonic Forms found in the *Theology of Aristotle*, stating, “Perhaps [the author] means by ‘intelligible man’ the Lord of the Species, whose relation to all the individuals [of the species] is like the relation of the incorporeal soul to the individual body.” Here he means that individual incorporeal souls exist along with the temporal body. Mīr Dāmād makes clear that the soul is in the temporal realm along with the human body and that it undergoes change, unlike the Platonic Forms, which exist only in the realm of perpetuity.

<sup>88</sup>*Blazing Brands* 3.7.20.



Mīr Dāmād's thesis of perpetual creation was novel to the world of Islamic philosophy. However, it is similar in many ways to concepts found in the *Receptacle of Becoming* in section 52a of Plato's *Timaeus*, as I will argue below. Mīr Dāmād defends his theory with verses from the Qur'ān, which describe the act and place of creation and the relationship between the Creator and His creations. These verses are used by Mīr Dāmād to establish the goal of proving a correspondence between the teachings of the Greek philosophers, his Peripatetic and Ishrāqī predecessors among the Islamic philosophers, and the Qur'ānic scripture.

[God] says (exalted be His majesty) in several places [in the Qur'ān]: "His command when He desires a thing is to say to it: 'Be!' and it is." He has expressed the act of primary origination and existentiation; in other words, His bringing forth [of things] from the abyss of real non-existence and sheer non-being into the domain of existence and changelessness in [the realm of] Perpetuity, by the Command (*al-amr*) and the word "Be!" (*kun*). Often, this is referred to as "The Breath of the Merciful," among other terms. And He has expressed the act of generation, which is production in the horizon of elapsing and renewal, i.e., of Time, by "the sending down" (*inzāl* and *tanzīl*) [of creation]. These are among the most consummate allusions and the most perfect expressions. The referent of "when" is definite, with a necessary applicability to the multiplying, repeating, progressing "whatever," since the estimation of progression and change in conditions and states in relation to the court of God is not permissible. [...] The reality of corporeal death is the transferal of the substance of the rational soul from the domain of time to the world of Perpetuity, from apparent life to real life. [God] says in the Sūra of the Cave: "They will say: 'Woe to us! What a book is this! It leaves nothing out, small or great, but it takes account thereof. They will find all that they have done present before them. Thy Lord does not treat anyone unjustly.'" This is because the book is a perpetual book, not a temporal book. The soul will return to the vastness of the intelligible world from the narrow confines of the sphere of nature. What the wise Qur'ān expresses using the past tense for events that are expected to occur in future time—such as "We have separated them," "We have sent to them," "The companions of the garden have called out to the companions of the fire," "Your prayer has been granted, O Moses," and other numerous examples—conceal the basis of the affair and the criterion of the secret. In other words, all of these events have already occurred actually in [the domain of] Perpetuity, even though they do not yet exist in time. The past, the future, and the present are all present to the true Seer, who encompasses all things in one stage and in one way. We have explained to you that the Agent-Emanator forever pours the water bucket of bounty and the sprinkling of generosity into the container of changeless existence, which is Perpetuity, as a single pouring forth. Consequently, He never ceases to originate, fashion, act, and make, not by an outflow or by starting something anew, but with constancy and changelessness. Thus He emanates the worlds in their entirety simultaneously and in a single non-temporal moment. As for the world of Command and Praise, it is in the core (*kabid*) of the actual world and is the "text" (*matn*) of objective reality, not in time, nor in a now, nor in a spatial substratum or place. As for the world of [physical] creation (*khalq* and *mulk*), it appears in "times," "nows," spatial substrata, and places, and every entity in its individuality occurs at a certain time and in a certain spatial substratum in its particularity.<sup>89</sup>

<sup>89</sup>Blazing Brands 4.4.

By using these verses of the Qur'ān, Mīr Dāmād argues that the Creator, as the Efficient Cause (He is also known by other names that act as pseudonyms), perpetually creates the world in the domain of Perpetuity. By contrast, the effects of His actions are understood by human beings in the realm of time. For Mīr Dāmād, only the act of creation itself occurs in the domain of Perpetuity. A Platonic theme is noticeable here. Mīr Dāmād first declares that God, through His command "Be," creates the domain of Perpetuity out of pre-existence. Likewise, in 29d of the *Timaeus*, Plato delineates that from a place of disorder or chaos (this is also a place where things are mixed or jumbled together) the world comes into existence:

Desiring, then, that all things should be good and, so far as might be, nothing imperfect, the god took over all that is visible-not at rest, but in discordant and unordered motion-and brought it from disorder into order, since he judged that order was in every way the better.

Mīr Dāmād's statements in the long passage quoted above and his choice of verses from the Qur'ān treat the domain of Perpetuity in a way that is comparable to Plato's discussion of the receptacle. In each of these cases, the universe comes into existence out of a pre-existent state of chaos. This is comparable to Mīr Dāmād's use of the term, "abyss," to describe the inner state of this realm. In each case as well, the creation of the world is depicted as occurring as the result of an act of mercy, compassion, and/or speech. For Mīr Dāmād, the realm of Perpetuity is the beginning and end place for rational souls and created substances. It is the location of the "Mother of the Book" (*Umm al-Kitāb*), which exists with God. There is no difference between God's foreknowledge of things in His Essence and what is present from pre-eternity in the Mother of the Book.

Mīr Dāmād's concept of the realm or "container" of Perpetuity acts as a foundation for his doctrine of perpetual creation. On one hand, he disagrees with the proponents of the Peripatetic *falsafa* tradition, who argue that either the world was created in eternity or that it eternally exists. On the other hand, he also disagrees with the *kalām* theologians, who argue that the world was created in time and ends in time. Instead, he posits that the world is originated in the "container" of Perpetuity, which is a realm of timelessness that governs the domain of time. Instead of seeing the intelligible substances or "Lords of the Species" (the Platonic Forms) as existing in the realm of Eternity, as in traditional Greek philosophy, Mīr Dāmād places these in the realm of Perpetuity, where they are employed in the act of creation. It is in this realm where God acts as the Efficient Cause, as recorded in the Mother of the Book, which contains knowledge of past, present, and future. Finally, it is to the realm of Perpetuity that rational souls and physical substances return after their bodily termination or destruction occurs. This doctrine reflects a genuine and significant correspondence between Platonic, Aristotelian, and Neoplatonic teachings in a manner rarely found in the history of Islamic philosophy. Such correspondences can also be found in his approach to Time.

Mīr Dāmād's domain of Time (*zamān*) plays two different roles in his philosophy. The first role follows the framework of his ontological-cosmology, where he declares Time the domain of temporality. The second role hints at a spiritual doctrine that has so far not been addressed in this paper. Mīr Dāmād quotes from Shihāb al-Dīn al-Suhrawardī in *The Book of Exchanges* (*Kitāb al-Muṭārahāt*), who states, "The domain of Perpetuity is on the horizon of Time, and Time is like an effect of the domain of Perpetuity."<sup>90</sup> Since time is an effect of the domain of Perpetuity, it is ap-

<sup>90</sup>Blazing Brands, 1.3.

appropriate to consider it the arena of temporal objects, which range from the infinitely moving physical cosmos to objects in the sublunary world. Mīr Dāmād calls Time “the container of measurable, flowing existence or measurable, continuous non-existence belonging to changeable beings insofar as they are changeable.”<sup>91</sup> For Mīr Dāmād, Time is the domain in which motion is perceived by created beings. He again quotes Ibn Sīnā’s *Annotations (al-Ta’līqāt)*, which states that Time is the measurement of a changeable, temporal event, which undergoes motion and movement:

By our saying “when” and “where” is not meant something being in a place or time in a compound way. We mean here by a “composite” the subject (*mawdū’*) [of a thing] together with a relation [to something else]. Indeed, the relations themselves are intended. Therefore, the relation itself is the “where,” not the related and the object of relation, and not the sum of the relation and the two things related. Similarly, the state (*ḥāl*) pertains to a relation, like fraternity. “When” is being in Time, and one time in fact may be a time for a large number [of things] in actuality. But the “when” of each of them is contrary to the “when” of each other, so that each one of them being in that time is different [in some way] from the being [in that time] of the other. “Where” is something being in place, meaning its existence in it, where “existence” is a relational existence, not an absolute existence which is contrary to it. Therefore, “Zayd’s being at the market” is different from “Umar’s being at it.” Being in time is not the same as Time itself. If one thing’s being in a particular time ceases, the being of another in it does not cease. Time does not exist in a particular time. Similarly, it does not cease to exist in a particular time. Time includes within itself that which is changeable. Whatever is located in Time is divisible, such as motion and what possesses motion. Contiguity (*mumāssa*) occurs at the divider (*ṭaraf*) of time, and the divider itself is not divisible. Non-contiguity only occurs in Time because it is the parting of contiguity, and parting is a motion.<sup>92</sup>

Mīr Dāmād clarifies that the realm of Time is the domain of the measurement of motion, and adds (following the *Uṣūlī* theology of Imāmī Shī’ism) that no causality can occur in it.<sup>93</sup> Time is the only realm where motion can be measured. He further clarifies:

Time is not one of the individualizing aspects, except for motion, because motion, in the nature of its existent essence, does not exist in separation from speed and slowness, and these two are not separated from Time, rather from its specification, since the specification of specified speed in its particularity only pertains to a particular time.<sup>94</sup>

It is not possible for body, insofar as it is body, to occur in Time, nor insofar as it is existent, since only the unfixed state occurs in Time, and this is motion. Thus body, insofar as it is body, is in a place; insofar as it is existent, it occurs in Perpetuity; and

<sup>91</sup> *Blazing Brands* 1.3.

<sup>92</sup> *Blazing Brands* 1.3.

<sup>93</sup> *Blazing Brands* 6.12.

<sup>94</sup> *Blazing Brands* 6.12.

insofar as it changes and moves, it occurs in Time. Motion with respect to itself occurs in Time essentially, and insofar as it is an existent, it is in Perpetuity, as with Time itself. It has continuity through Time, and continuity is related to it also through continuous distance. Temporal anteriority and posteriority without a doubt correspond to Time, either through the parts of Time, which is itself both the before and the after, or through something else, but with respect to time encompassing the before and the after.<sup>95</sup>

Mīr Dāmād again quotes Ibn Sinā's *Annotations* and Suhrawardī's *Exchanges*, explaining that the relationship between Time and motion is like "the measuring stick to that which is measured."<sup>96</sup> For Mīr Dāmād, no two motions are the same. Time is the measurement of a single particular motion and can only apply to that particular event. He uses geometry to give an example of this:

Any two parts of Time are the two edges of a particular now, just as any two parts of a continuous fixed quantity are the two edges of a particular [starting] point. One of these two parts, which is the one in the direction of lapsing, is a past in itself, and it is in its own being (*huwiyya*) both a prior and a priority in two respects, not by a priority added to its being or accidental to it. The other part, which is in the direction of renewal, is a future in itself, and it is in its own being both a posterior and a posteriority in two respects, not by a posteriority added to its being and accidental to it. The same applies to any two parts of a continuous fixed quantity. One of them is prior in spatial extension in its own being, whereas the other is posterior in spatial extension in its own being.<sup>97</sup>

Mīr Dāmād then relates his definition of Time to the movements and measurement of the cosmos, according to the astronomical knowledge of his day:

It is necessary for the substratum of Time to be the fastest of the motions and the most superior of them in order for all motions in their entirety to be measured by it, and it is necessary for the bearer of that motion which is the substratum of Time to be a universally encompassing body in order for all temporal and spatial things to be located within it. Time, therefore, was certainly made to be the measure of the motion of the outermost sphere and to inhere within it. Thus, you call the parts of the area of its motion, by which all the heavenly things are moved and which is the regulator of the phases of the day, "periods of Time" (*azmān*), and you call the measure of the rising of its fifteen parts "sidereal hour" (*sā'at mustawīyya*). It is clear to us from the rules of astronomy that what is moved by [Time] intersects the number of degrees belonging to the concave surface of the outermost sphere (the number of its declinations is 9,343,093) in a third of a fifth of a sidereal hour and in one nine-hundredth of it.<sup>98</sup>

<sup>95</sup> *Blazing Brands* 3.7.8.

<sup>96</sup> *Blazing Brands* 1.3.

<sup>97</sup> *Blazing Brands* 10.4.

<sup>98</sup> *Blazing Brands* 3.2.

In other words, Time is both the arena of the infinitely moving cosmos, and the domain in which human beings can study the relationship between the movement of the stars and a particular event on earth. The human intellect is able to classify specific events on earth by identifying and categorizing discrete moments of Time according to temporal beginnings and ends. Mīr Dāmād's concept of Time thus combines the Platonic definition of Time as that which is governed by the movement of the cosmos with the Peripatetics' definition of time as the measurement of motion. In this way, Time becomes both the existential realm of temporality and the instrument by which humans can measure the movements of the cosmos for their own purposes.

Mīr Dāmād's approach to the realm of Time also implies a spiritual method. First, his belief that the bodily essences coexist with Time leads the seeker of truth to consider contemplating the realm of the pre-existent and changeless (i.e., Perpetuity). Mīr Dāmād agrees with Suhrawardī's conception of Time as "an effect of Perpetuity." He also agrees with Ibn Sīnā's conception of time as the arena of "the essences (*dhawāt*) of changeless things and the essences of things that are changeable in one respect and changeless in another. [These] do not exist in Time, but rather [exist] through Time." By combining these approaches to the realm of Time, Mīr Dāmād urges his students to inquire contemplatively into the origins of Time. His agreement with Ibn Sīnā that Time is a "weak mode of existence due to its being unfixed and flowing,"<sup>99</sup> directs the seeker of truth to the realm of Perpetuity, where one can contemplate the archetypes of the world of created things.

While Mīr Dāmād does not diminish the importance of Time in the temporal world, he states: "The substance of the reality of Time is merely the measure of a continuous unfixed state. It has no quiddity except for the continuity of [modes of] elapsing and renewal, no being other than the quantity of falling behind and overtaking, and no essence besides the measure of the flow of change."<sup>100</sup> He clearly emphasizes that the domain of time is more of an effect of the realm of Perpetuity and a tool for human beings rather than a reality to be sought after. However, while the concept of Time is primarily important for the human understanding of temporal events, it also has an importance beyond the material world. Therefore, Mīr Dāmād urges his students to look beyond the understanding of Time as the realm of the measurement of the movement of the stars and contemplate instead Time's origin in the realm of Perpetuity, where the Mother of the Book and the immutable substances exist in themselves.

## 2 | CONCLUSION

This paper has compared the concepts of Eternity and Time in the philosophies of Plotinus and Mīr Dāmād. It addressed the difference between Mīr Dāmād's understanding of these concepts and that of Plotinus by presenting Mīr Dāmād's belief that only God can exist in Eternity, and that the realm of Perpetuity is the site of creation, the location of the archetypal "Lords of the Species" or Platonic Forms, and the place of the *Mother of the Book*. By contrast, Plotinus argues that the Intellect (which contains the Forms) subsists in eternity, while the realm of Time is the location of the physical cosmos, and the domain in which the measurement of the movement of the spheres occurs. Mīr Dāmād's concept of the realm of Perpetuity is related to his notion of the realm of Time in a similar way to Plotinus' view of

<sup>99</sup>*Blazing Brands* 1.3.

<sup>100</sup>*Blazing Brands* 3.4.

Soul as existing in eternity yet functioning as the governor of Time through the motions of the heavens. In both philosophies, Time is the realm where material origination and destruction occurs. From the human perspective, it is the place where the measurement of the motions of the stars and planets occurs.

Mīr Dāmād's philosophy can be understood from various perspectives. For example, his students read him from two seemingly opposing perspectives. One group saw him as a successor and defender of the *Mashshā'ī* or Peripatetic school of Islamic philosophy, which was a form of Neoplatonic Aristotelianism.<sup>101</sup> The other group saw him as an *Ishrāqī* or Illuminationist thinker, who urged his followers to seek wisdom through inner contemplation and other spiritual practices. I believe that Mīr Dāmād tried to combine both perspectives. In his guise as a *Mashā'ī* philosopher, he attempted to correct the errors made by previous Peripatetic philosophers and *Kalām* theologians. In his guise as an *Ishrāqī* mystic, he taught a doctrine that urged his followers to venture contemplatively and spiritually beyond the world of temporality and materialism.

I do not believe that Mīr Dāmād would object to this characterization. His pen name was "*Ishrāq* (Illumination)," and he clearly gave great importance to the mystical philosophies and theologies of Plato, Plotinus (through the *Theology of Aristotle*), al-Ghazālī, and Suhrawardī.<sup>102</sup> The comprehensiveness of his teachings caused him to be honored as the "Third Teacher" (the First and Second Teachers were Aristotle and al-Fārābī) by his students and successors. Mīr Dāmād did not merely engage intellectually with his predecessors. He both integrated and modified their ideas to suit his own philosophical system. Previous studies of his works have revealed his interest in constructing a coherent metaphysical and cosmological system that exploited the mystical doctrines of Platonism and Sufism. Hamid Dabashi observes that Mīr Dāmād regularly engaged in ascetic and mystical practices and combined them with "a precocious attention to philosophy."<sup>103</sup> Toshihiko Izutsu describes Mīr Dāmād in the following way:

[He was] a many sided thinker, a unanimously recognized authority on all the traditional sciences that have been cultivated in Islam such as philosophy (in all its branches, beginning in logic and culminating in metaphysics), theology, natural sciences, mathematics, law, the theory of jurisprudence, the science of *ḥadīth*, and the exegesis of the Qur'ān. Besides being a philosopher, marked by a rigorously rational way of argumentation, he was a mystic who, through his ecstatic

<sup>101</sup>On the *Mashshā'ī* tradition and its relationship to other schools of Islamic philosophy, Seyyed Hossein Nasr states: "In Islamic philosophy we can distinguish at least three schools that have dealt extensively with the methodology of knowledge and the full amplitude of the meaning of the intellect in its relation to intuition: Peripatetic (*mashshā'ī*) philosophy, Illuminationist (*ishraqī*) philosophy, and the 'transcendent theosophy' of Ṣadr al-Dīn Shirāzī. Although the *mashshā'ī* school in Islam drew most of its teachings from Aristotelian and Neoplatonic sources, it is not a rationalistic school as this term is usually understood in Western philosophy. The *mashshā'ī* school is based on a view of the intellect that is properly speaking metaphysical and not only philosophical and distinguishes clearly between the reflection of the intellect upon the human mind, which is reason, and the intellect in itself, which transcends the realm of the individual and which is a substance (*jawhar*) of luminous nature with several levels of reality." Idem, *Islamic Philosophy from its Origins to the Present: Philosophy in the Land of Prophecy*, 98. In addition to the three philosophical schools mentioned by Nasr, I would also argue for an Ismā'īli school of Islamic philosophy, which emphasized the amalgamation of *Mashshā'ī* and mystical doctrines.

<sup>102</sup>Dabashi, "Mīr Dāmād and the Founding of the School of Isfahan," 602.

<sup>103</sup>Ibid., 604.

experiences, was well acquainted with the secrets of the world of archetypal images. The basic philosophy of Mīr Dāmād consists in a kind of harmonious combination of rational thinking and visionary experiences. His philosophy will best be characterized as ‘gnostic’ in the sense that the intellectual activity of the mind is conducive towards the experience of spiritual visions while the visionary experience stimulates the function of rational thinking giving birth to new concepts and ideas. There is thus in the very structure of his philosophical thought a very close correspondence between rational thinking and mystical intuition. As a result, we see in the person of Mīr Dāmād as an Islamic philosopher a peculiar unification of the purely scholastic aspect of Avicenna and the visionary illumination of Suhrawardī.<sup>104</sup>

Just as Plotinus claimed loyalty to Plato, Mīr Dāmād claimed loyalty to Ibn Sīnā. Throughout his philosophical writings, the starting point for his arguments was most often Ibn Sīnā. He also refrained from directly criticizing Ibn Sīnā. Like Plotinus, Mīr Dāmād departed when necessary from the prevailing opinions of the philosophers or the theologians to establish his ontological, cosmological, and spiritual doctrines. Like his successors in the School of Isfahan, he borrowed from any source that seemed compatible with his own thought. Perhaps his intellectual and spiritual stature can best be understood through a sample of his poetry, where he describes himself in terms that are far from modest:

I am the Lord of Virtues, the Prince of Knowledge.  
 Intellect is my throne, wisdom is my seat.  
 If like the moon kings borrow,  
 There majesty flows from the crown and the throne.  
 I make my crown from my knowledge of the Divine,  
 Of natural sciences I make my throne.  
 My fortress is my knowledge of subjects in Arabic,  
 My palace is my knowledge of sciences in poetics.  
 I am like aged wine: the universe is my container.  
 I am like pure wine: the world is my bottle.<sup>105</sup>

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## CONFLICT OF INTEREST STATEMENT

There are no conflicts of interest.

<sup>104</sup>Izutsu, “Introduction: Mīr Dāmād and His Metaphysics,” 2–3.

<sup>105</sup>Dabashi, “Mīr Dāmād and the Founding of the School of Isfahan,” 620.

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