

**IBN ARABI'S VIEW ON TIME IN SUFI KNOWLEDGE:
THE INTERCONNECTION BETWEEN THE PAST, PRESENT,
AND FUTURE**

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Annotation: *This article analyzes the intrinsic connection between the past, present, and future from both philosophical and sufistical perspectives. The issues of time and its essence have been deeply explored by Ibn Arabi, with his work “Risalat al-Waqt wa al-An” playing a key role in understanding the nature of time. The sufi interprets time as a “barzakh”, an intermediary between Allah’s attributes of jalal (majesty) and jamal (beauty), viewing it as a fundamental factor in human progression toward perfection. Moreover, for the Sufis, time is not just an abstract concept, but a real notion closely tied to human life and its potential to achieve happiness in both worlds. The article also sheds light on the role of time and movement in existence, as well as the sufistic interpretation of time in relation to humanity’s connection to eternity.*

Key words: *sufism, humanity, perfection, maturity, spirituality, hadith, order, majesty, beauty, mashhad, barzakh.*

It is evident that there is a connection between the past and the future in today’s world. Time consistently encompasses the three forms of existence that transition from one to another: the past, the present, and the future. We are accustomed to perceiving it as something that moves irreversibly in one direction – from the past toward the future. Time is the longest-lasting and, at the same time, the shortest phenomenon in the universe, one that cannot be stopped or reversed. Indeed, time is one-dimensional.

Ibn Arabi paid special attention to the issues of space and time, which are attributes of existence. The sufi wrote a dedicated work on this subject titled “Risalat al-Waqt wa al-An” (“A Treatise on Time and the Moment”). Although this treatise is small in size, it holds significant importance in uncovering the essence and meaning of time. As a Sufi, Ibn Arabi had a profound understanding of the value of time. He approached the explanation of time from a sufistical perspective, grounding his thoughts in Qur’anic verses and hadiths. The treatise begins with praises to Allah and blessings upon the Prophet, followed by an address to the Sufi reader: “O brother, who has been blessed with happiness by the grace of Allah, the One deserving of all praise. Know that the ultimate reliance of the greatest Sufis, who have attained closeness to the Truth, lies in

strictly preserving time, adhering firmly to its rules and principles. Time, as a concept widely employed among Sufis, is a highly complex and delicate matter. Only those endowed with the sacred light of insight, supported by divine grace and the truth of the Almighty, can truly comprehend it" [1].

All creatures, including the animal and plant worlds, are governed by a precise order of time. That is, all processes occur within a strictly defined time frame. Everything is created and destroyed by Time. While we may not know the exact nature of Time in the universe, there is no existence on Earth that is not subject to its reckoning. The infinite Time is divided into finite particles, which are given to beings as their "lifespan".

In Ibn Arabi's view, only those Sufis who have reached closeness to the Divine (Haq) can truly understand the essence of time, and he sees time as a means of connecting with Haq. Sufis, recognizing the value of time, adhere to its spiritual rules and regulations. Therefore, for the representatives of Sufism, the followers of the order (tariqat), and seekers (saliks), time has specific principles of application, and they strictly follow these principles. Ibn Arabi considers time to be a means and intermediary leading to Haq. He expressed the meaning of time, which was revealed to him, in the following way: "We have discovered that time is one of the most exalted things. Time is a "mashhad", meaning a manifestation, but as spiritual states change, it also transforms. In this context, the goal is related to the time of the disciple, which is an intermediary between Allah's majesty and beauty, a barzakh (a liminal space or boundary)" [1].

The Prophet Muhammad (peace be upon him) has narrated several hadiths that highlight the immense value of contemplation: "One moment of contemplation is equal to a year of worship", "One moment of contemplation is equal to seventy years of worship", and "One moment of contemplation is equal to a thousand years of worship". Explaining these hadiths, Abdulqadir Geylani (12th century), the founder of the Qadiriyya Sufi order, elaborates on the concept of contemplation and how it enhances the power of worship.

In Sufi teachings, time can be interpreted in various ways. On one hand, it is classified as knowledge, on the other hand, it is considered an ongoing process of self-accounting and reflection. Time is also seen as the moment, the breath, or the present opportunity between the past and the future, representing a real, immediate possibility. Lastly, it is viewed as a moment of awareness, where one must be vigilant. Understanding and utilizing time in this way impacts a person's state of being and can guide them toward spiritual perfection and maturity.

Ibn Arabi stated, "Time is a "mashhad", meaning time exists in an infinitely vast and immeasurable manner. Therefore, the sufi concluded that "as spiritual states change, time also changes". In philosophical literature, the concepts of movement and change are

fundamental. Every process in the universe occurs due to movement, and any change is a form of movement. Change is not only characteristic of material objects but also applies to spiritual and intellectual entities. The existence of any (material or intellectual) object is manifested through the movements and changes within it. Therefore, movement is the fundamental mode of existence.

As a person advances in spiritual development, their perception of time also evolves. Ibn Arabi, in stating, “The goal here is the time of the disciple”, emphasized the importance of focusing on the true understanding of time, urging one not to be distracted by foreign ideas or irrelevant concepts. This reflects his view that time, like spiritual progress, is not a fixed entity but a dynamic force that transforms as one deepens their connection with the Divine. Abu Ali Ibn Sina described human life as “one or two breaths”. This life, given in a precise measure between one or two breaths, is a trust from the Creator. How are we spending the trust that is in our hands? Indeed, this trust will have its reckoning and accountability.

The Sufi idea that “it is an intermediary between Allah’s majesty and beauty” also carries deep philosophical and spiritual meaning. “Jalal” (majesty) and “Jamal” (beauty) are among the attributes of Allah and are widely used in the sciences of theology and sufism. In his work “Risalai Qudsiya”, Khoja Muhammad Porso presents the importance of the attributes of “jalal” (majesty) and “jamal” (beauty) for seekers who follow the spiritual path, as conveyed by Bahouddin Naqshband: “The seeker should nurture both the qualities of jalal and jamal. Let jalal become jamal for him, and let jamal become jalal for him. When fear overwhelms, let hope prevail, and when hope triumphs, let fear prevail. At the very moment when the quality of jalal appears, the seeker should also be attentive to the quality of jamal” [2].

Thus, the time that the seeker (murid) uses is a path, an intermediary unity between Allah’s two attributes. This intermediary is called “barzakh”. While “barzakh” literally means an intermediary, it is also a religious term referring to the space between this world and the afterlife, lasting until the Day of Judgment. Time, too, is an intermediary between Allah’s attributes of jalal (majesty) and jamal (beauty). The seeker must appreciate the value of this time, making use of every moment, ensuring not even a little space is wasted, and fully understanding this with their entire being.

According to Ibn Arabi: “The time of the seeker indicates the radiance of wakefulness or the dawn of true revelation, pointing to the bow drawn toward Haq (the Truth). This time becomes a light that shows the seeker the door of the spiritual path. It makes the seeker’s existence fade into Haq, and then time itself fades into Haq”. The Sufis have defined time based on a person’s relationship with it. They have placed great emphasis on being present within time, understanding the opportunities that time offers, and living in

the present moment – between the past and the future – in a human state, while maximizing the effectiveness of time. For the Sufis, time is not an abstract concept; it is deeply connected to humanity and represents an objective reality that can guide a person toward happiness in both worlds. Just as time connects humanity to eternity, humans can make time immortal and eternal. The issue of time and its relation to the world has been investigated and analyzed by Ibn Arabi from both philosophical and theological perspectives.

The Sufi's views on time distinguish him from the philosophers, theologians, and sufis who came before him. According to him, time is a relative concept that arises from non-existence, stretches in imagination, and is essentially composed of the present moment, that is, the here and now. We divide time into the past, which has already passed, and the future, which is yet to come. Time is constant, continuous, and ever-renewing. Time is not an entity belonging to existence itself. Time only emerges when the question “when?” is asked [3].

In conclusion, one of the most vital life lessons of today is that time is recognized as a fundamental concept that expresses the intrinsic connection between the past, present, and future. The essence of time and its relationship with divine truth have been deeply philosophically and sufistically analyzed by Ibn Arabi and other thinkers. According to their views, time not only connects humanity to eternity but also serves as a key factor in human striving for perfection. Ibn Arabi interpreted time as a “barzakh”, an intermediary between Allah's attributes of jalal (majesty) and jamal (beauty), urging humans to understand time properly and use it wisely. This is of significant importance not only for worldly but also for spiritual development. For the Sufis, time is an objective reality that guides humanity to happiness in both worlds, and it is emphasized that time should be valued and managed correctly.

As a result, time, from the perspective of the sufis, is the point of connection between human existence and divine truth. Valuing each moment and filling it with knowledge, reflection, and worship is considered the main path to human perfection. Therefore, valuing time and using it correctly is the great responsibility of every individual.

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