

A New Approach to the Problem of Temporal Finitude of the Universe, on the basis of the Transcendent Philosophy of Mulla Sadra

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Abstract: In the history of Islamic thoughts, Kalām specialists mostly believed in the temporal coming-into-being of the universe. On the other side, Islamic philosophers mostly believed in the temporal eternity of it. But in contrast, “Mulla Sadra” as an Islamic philosopher, on the basis of the “renewing creation” based on the “substantial motion”, believed in the temporal coming-into-being of the universe in every moment. Meanwhile, he rejected the temporal finitism. In this paper, after reconsidering the concepts of “temporal coming-into-being” and “temporal finitude” of the universe, I criticize the most important arguments against the temporal finitism, using the framework of Mulla Sadra’s transcendent philosophy. So I show that one can accept Mulla Sadra’s philosophical framework and his “renewing creation”, but reject his arguments against temporal finitism. Finally, I argue that not only there is no contradiction between transcendent philosophy and temporal finitism, but also this framework helps a lot for a coherent and valid explanation of both the temporal coming-into-being of the universe and the temporal finitude of it. Accordingly, I have introduced a new picture for temporal coming-into-being, in which the universe has both temporal beginning and renewing creation. One could call this theory “The temporally finite renewing universe”. This model in addition to enjoying the benefits of the fruitful framework of transcendent philosophy, helps to solve some of the interdisciplinary problems and possible conflicts.

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Introduction: The “temporal coming-into-being of the universe” (TCBU, *hudūth zamānī*), or “temporal incipience”, is one of the most controversial concepts in the history of Islamic thoughts, for it is vastly correlated with the theological and religious concepts, including “creation of the universe” and “the divine attributes”. The Kalām specialists (*Mutikallimīn*) mostly believed in TCBU, and the Islamic philosophers (*Falāsifa*) mostly denies it. The prevalent definition of TCBU was that “the universe’s existence succeeds its non-existence, *temporally*” (Tabātabā’ī, 1387SH pp. 394-399). Philosophers posed some arguments against TCBU, including the below four important ones:

a) **Making a preference without a criterion for the preference is impossible.** This is one of the most fundamental principles in the Islamic philosophy that

is equivalent to the Leibniz’s “principle of the sufficient reason”. Philosophers argue that the TCBU contradicts this principle: If there is a unique special moment for the beginning of the universe, what criterion preferred that moment among the (exactly similar) infinite other moments before and after that? (Sabzivārī, 1372 SH: Vol.2/302-304)

b) **The effect necessarily exists when its sufficient cause exists.** God is the sufficient cause of the universe and he is eternal. Consequently, his effect, namely the universe, must be existent in all times. Therefore, its existence cannot be preceded by his non-existence temporally, simply because there was no time in which it did

not exist. (Ibn Sīna, 1375 SH, p. 107)

c) **The limitlessness of divine**

emanation: God is omnipotent, omniscient and omnibenevolent and he never withhold his emanation and grace (*Fayḍ*). But temporal finitude of the universe means that he has withheld his emanation for the (infinite) time before creating the universe. (Mullā Sadrā, 1409 AH: Vol.3, p. 162).

d) **The temporal coming-into-being of anything is necessarily preceded by its**

potentiality. According to a widely accepted principle in the Islamic philosophy, every temporally created thing has had a potentiality before its coming-into-being, otherwise it was impossible to be created. This potentiality is an *accident* and needs a *material substance*. This material substance, in turn, is another temporally created thing.

Therefore, the temporal chain of material things has no beginning, so the universe cannot have a temporal beginning. (Ibn Sīna, 1375 SH, p. 106)

Instead, the early Islamic philosophers, including Avicenna (*Ibn Sīnā*), believed in another kind of incipience, namely *hudūth dhātī*, which means that the cosmos succeeds God by its essence.

But Mullā Sadrā (1571–1636 AC), as a revolutionary Islamic philosopher, believed in TCBU. He argues that the motion not only occurs in accidents, but also in substances. This “substantial motion” is an inherent attribute of the “material existence”. In fact, the “time” is the measure of this motion, so, alongside with the space, it can be considered as another dimension of material bodies. The inherent substantial motion implies that the substance of any material body in every moment differs from the substance of it in the

previous moment, so it has a completely new existence and needs a new creation in every moment. This leads to the concept of “the renewing creation of the universe”. This satisfies the definition of TCBU, because the existence of the universe in every moment, succeeds the non-existence of it in the previous moments. Although, Mullā Sadrā believes in TCBU, he denies the temporal beginning of the universe because of the last two arguments above. So, according to him, the temporal chain of renewed universes has neither beginning nor end. (Mullā Sadrā, 1409 AH: Vol.3/124-125).

The main purpose of this paper is to show that one can redefine the notion of incipience of the universe by means of Mullā Sadrā’s “transcendent philosophy” (TP), so that it can circumvent all of the four arguments above. So there is no need for denying the temporal beginning of the universe, as Mullā Sadrā himself did.

Methodology According to the TP, the time is the fourth dimension of the material bodies, so that it is meaningless to talk about the time before the beginning of the universe. Therefore, as Al-Ghazālī mentioned before, the true meaning of TCBU is that there was a moment (i.e. the beginning of the universe) which has not any previous moments. Then, we reevaluate the robustness of the above arguments, considering this new definition.

Findings: It turns out that if the universe and the time have been created together, the arguments are not valid because:

- a) there is not an infinite time before the universe to choose (prefer) the beginning time within;
- b) it is meaningless to say that the perfect cause of the universe existed temporally before it (and without it);
- c) divine emanation has not been withheld in the times

before the creation, simply because it is meaningless to talk about the time before the beginning of the universe;

d) there is no time before the first moment to talk about any potentiality (or non-potentiality) in that time.

Discussion and Conclusion:

Given the arguments, we can defend the validity and coherency of a “temporally finite renewing universe” on the basis of TP. This is in good concordance with the modern picture of the universe in the standard big-bang model of cosmology, namely the expanding universe that evolves substantially in time, which is its 4th dimension, and through this evolution it incorporates new complexities and emergent properties like the life. The singularity theorems and the 2nd law of thermodynamics strongly suggest that this universe has been created, nearly 13.7 billion years ago, in an event that is also the beginning of the time itself.

Finally, I conclude that the “temporally finite renewing universe” can be considered as the common and coherent picture of the universe in physics, philosophy and theology; and can initiate many fruitful interdisciplinary research programs.

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