

# Ibn 'Arabī on Divine Atemporality and Temporal Presentism

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**Abstract:** Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240) is arguably the most influential philosophical mystic in Islam. He is also a presentist. This paper responds to the arguments of contemporary philosophers, Norman Kretzmann, William Lane Craig, Garrett DeWeese, and Alan Padgett, who argue that divine atemporality and temporal presentism are incompatible, through the temporal ontology of Ibn 'Arabī. Ibn 'Arabī asserts that all entities in the universe are loci of manifestation of God's most beautiful Names. These divine Names constitute sensible reality. The principal response of Ibn 'Arabī to the arguments of contemporary scholars is that the divine Names as they are manifested in the cosmos cannot be conflated with the divine Names as they are in themselves, which, in turn, cannot be conflated with God in His numinous essence. This allows him to simultaneously maintain the atemporality of God and temporal presentism.

**Keywords:** Ibn 'Arabī; Temporal presentism; Divine atemporality; Divine Names; Omniscience

## Introduction

This article investigates how the philosophical mystic many regard as one of the most influential in the Islamic tradition, Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn 'Arabī (d. 638/1240), reconciles the fundamental paradox between an atemporal God and His temporal manifestation as the cosmos (Addas 1993, 1–10; Knysh 1999, 1–5). In order to achieve this, some important issues pertaining to Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical outlook are elucidated, chief among these are Ibn 'Arabī's quasi-monistic notion of the cosmos as a manifestation of God's most beautiful Names (*al-Asmā' al-ḥusnā*) mentioned in Qur'an (Q7:180), and the relationship between the One and the many. This is due to the fact that the former is the basis upon which Ibn 'Arabī constructs his entire *Weltanschauung* and the latter constitutes Ibn 'Arabī's principal philosophical concern; indeed, it is to this that all aspects of his ontology are connected, or as Ronald Nettler puts it,

The issue of the One and the many, unity and diversity, may be seen as the bedrock of Ibn 'Arabī's sufi metaphysics. From here all else issues and to this all returns. (2003, 7)

The way in which the One is diversified as the many profoundly informs Ibn 'Arabī's conception of time; in fact, time is part of the resolution to this conundrum for the Sufi thinker (Yousef 2008, 117–39). Detailed analysis of Ibn 'Arabī's ideas on time are operationalised to formulate responses to contemporary philosophers who believe that temporal presentism (TP) and divine atemporality (DA) are incompatible.

The first argument relies on the assumption that presentism is incompatible with divine omniscience. This issue was discussed by Norman Kretzmann (1966), but has been more specifically debated in the context of presentism by Nicholas Wolterstorff (1982, 181–203). The second argument is elaborated by William Lane Craig in *God, Time, and Eternity* and primarily relies on the assumption that if God comes into a new relation when He creates the temporal universe, He changes extrinsically and becomes temporal, and so DA and TP are incompatible (Craig 2001). The penultimate argument is adduced by Garrett DeWeese in *God and the Nature of Time*. DeWeese's argument assumes that there must be a function that connects an atemporal God to temporal events, and in virtue of this God cannot be atemporal (DeWeese 2004). The final argument under consideration in this study is outlined by Alan Padgett in *God, Eternity and the Nature of Time*. He argues that if DA were compatible with presentism, then it would mean that God is changing because there are different exertions of His power at different times (Padgett 2012). Brian Leftow selects these four arguments and responds to them in his own way (Leftow 2018). The author of this paper responds to the same arguments through the metaphysical outlook of Ibn 'Arabī. It is seen that Ibn 'Arabī's assertion that there is a difference between the manifestation God's Names, as opposed to the divine Names themselves and the divine essence, can be used to reply to the arguments of the aforementioned philosophers. However, before such an undertaking is attempted, the reason Ibn 'Arabī has been chosen needs to be justified.

### **Why Ibn 'Arabī?**

It may be legitimately claimed that to compare the views of Ibn 'Arabī on presentism with those of contemporary Western philosophers, or even to allow Ibn 'Arabī a seat at the table of the debate on presentism is, not only anachronistic, but also problematic because of his reputation as one of the most influential mystics in Islamic intellectual history (Addas 1993; Chodkiewicz 1993a; Chodkiewicz 1993b; Corbin 1997; Hirtenstein 1999; Knysh 1999; Abū Zayd

2002; Corbin 2008; Landau 2008). Nevertheless, to restrict Ibn 'Arabī's worldview to just mysticism would be at best parsimonious, at worst erroneous, for as Nettler notes, Ibn 'Arabī's 'watershed achievement' was the 'intellectualisation' of Islamic mysticism (Nettler 2003, 128). This 'intellectualisation' involved the introduction of many philosophical aspects into mysticism that had theretofore been excluded. Indeed, Shams Inati observes that the mystical thought of Ibn 'Arabī was highly philosophised due to the undeniable influence of arguably the most important philosopher in the Muslim world, Abū 'Alī ibn Sīnā (d. 429/1037) (Inati 1996, 62). Su'ād al-Ḥakīm also remarks on how Ibn 'Arabī borrowed some aspects of Aristotelian ontology in the formulation of his metaphysics (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, 703).

In addition, the influence of the Neoplatonists, especially Plotinus, on Ibn 'Arabī's emanationism is well-documented (Rosenthal 1988). Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical outlook is thus an original synthesis of Aristotelian, Plotinian, and Avicennan trends which makes a compelling case for the philosophical aspects of his thought to be given serious attention (Wolfson 1976, 444–48; Dastagir 2001–02; Dagli 2016). More recent studies have only underscored the influence the philosophical tradition, especially the hitherto lesser-known Aristotelianism as promulgated by Ibn Sīnā, had on Ibn 'Arabī, and the need, therefore, to look past viewing Ibn 'Arabī as 'just a mystic' (Lala 2019a; 2023; Lala & Alwazzan 2023). While this may assuage doubts about whether Ibn 'Arabī should be granted a seat at the table, charges of anachronism still persist. Here the author would like to clarify that in tackling the issues of presentism through the lens of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, the aim is not to somehow insinuate that he presaged the debate on this issue, that would be extreme anachronism and largely untenable. Instead, it is to bracket Ibn 'Arabī in with other 'historical presentists' that Leftow identifies, such as Boethius, Anselm, Aquinas, Augustine, and others (Leftow 2018). Seen in this 'looser' way, many of the methodologic problems of equivocations in Ibn 'Arabī's language due to his mystical slant may be justified, even if they are not eliminated.<sup>1</sup>

In the same way as Boethius, Anselm et. al., then, it is the contention of the author that Ibn 'Arabī was a presentist. Indeed, John Bigelow argues that presentism was ubiquitous until recently, writing that presentism

was believed by everyone, both the philosophers and the folk, until at least the nineteenth century; it is written into the grammar of every natural language; and

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<sup>1</sup> I am very grateful to an erudite reviewer for pointing this out. The reviewer astutely notes that this would then be akin to 'one's claim that Aristotelian logic can solve some problems raised in Fregean logic', which would indeed be how the authors see it.

it is still assumed in everyday life, even by philosophers who officially deny it. (Bigelow 1996, 35)

Prior to looking at how his metaphysical worldview may be employed to respond to the four arguments that suggest TP and DA are incompatible, it is incumbent on the author to demonstrate that Ibn 'Arabī was a presentist and that he believed in DA.

### **Ibn 'Arabī, TP and DA**

Before elucidating how Ibn 'Arabī qualifies as a presentist, the definition of presentism and the two types of presentism under consideration need to be presented. 'Presentism', remarks Theodore Sider, 'is the doctrine that only the present is real' (Sider 1999, 325). Traditional presentists argue that 'always, everything is present' (Deasy 2017, 380). However, as Daniel Deasy points out, there are many interpretations of what 'is present' means (Deasy 2017). Leftow creates a bifurcation between what he classifies as 'universal presentism' (UP) or 'universalism', and TP or 'temporalism'. Proponents of both argue that 'always, everything is present' so it is true that 'universalism and temporalism agree that time is always only as thick as the present', as Leftow puts it, but on top of this, 'universalism adds that time is all there is to reality' (Leftow 2018, 175). According to Leftow's definition, then, universalism is a necessary and sufficient condition for presentism. TP, on the other hand, is a necessary but not sufficient condition for universalism because universalism also requires belief in the proposition that 'time is all there is to reality' (Leftow 2018, 175). This means that while all universalists are presentists, not all presentists are universalists.

Leftow comes up with two definitions of universalism: 'Something is temporal, and existence only plays the role of absolute temporal presentness' (Leftow 2018, 175). He observes that if the world is timeless, then this 'thought is contingently true at best' (Leftow 2018, 175). A second definition of universalism he puts forward is: 'Something is temporal, each time has its own sole class of all real things, and no such class contains anything wholly past, wholly future or atemporal' (Leftow 2018, 175). He notes that this definition is also contingent and 'incompatible with the equal reality of present, past and future, and substantive' (Leftow 2018, 175). Leftow explains that UP and DA are clearly contradictory as they rule out atemporality and 'to assume universalism is to assume that there is no atemporal God' (2018, 175). He believes that 'universal presentism is a late twentieth century phenomenon', and that 'most historical presentists were temporal presentists' (Leftow 2018, 175).

TP is a more restricted view of presentism, says Leftow, that simply asserts, 'something is temporal, and for temporal things, existence only plays the role of

absolute temporal presentness,' or that 'something is temporal, each time has its own sole class of all temporal things, and no such class contains anything wholly past or wholly future' (2018, 175). There are many definitions of presentism, as mentioned, and there are equally as many definitions of TP. Moving forward, it is Leftow's definition of TP that the author adopts. Based on this definition of TP, Ibn 'Arabī falls into the bracket of a temporal presentist (see below) as he believes in DA but also that 'time is always only as thick as the present'. His position is articulated in his *magnum opus*, *The Meccan Revelations (Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya)*, in which he writes that only

the present (*al-ḥāl*) has persistence, so the cosmos continues to be under the determination (*ḥukm*) of the present. And the determination of God *vis-à-vis* the cosmos does not cease to be under the determination of this time. (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 3:529)

Ibn 'Arabī is a temporal presentist as he asserts that only the present 'has persistence' because, as will be explained later, according to Ibn 'Arabī, only present temporal points exist. So this is the reason 'the cosmos continues under the determination of the present'. This means that it is only the present that is real in the sense that (a) it persists, and (b) the world is only made up of the present. Yet what this means in the overall framework of his metaphysics is not yet clear. The finer points of Ibn 'Arabī's temporal presentism are presented in the course of responding to the aforementioned four arguments that suggest TP and DA are incompatible. But before we get to that, Ibn 'Arabī's commitment to DA needs to be explained.

Ibn 'Arabī asserts that God is atemporal (Lala 2019a). It is the atemporality of God that is manifested through the temporal world and this temporalisation of the essentially atemporal divine essence is achieved through temporal manifestations of His most beautiful Names (see below). Mohamed Yousef makes it clear that, for Ibn 'Arabī, God is outside of time and there are no temporal designations that can be applied to the absolute divine essence. This is what God refers to when He describes Himself as the One 'Who is Pre-existent (*Qadīm* or *Azalī*)' (Yousef 2008, 94). He quotes the following passage from Ibn 'Arabī:

The fact of the matter is that the existence of the Real<sup>2</sup> is not determined (temporally) . . . by the existence of the world . . . We can only say that the Exalted Real exists by Himself and for Himself; His existence is absolute, is not confined by any other than Him . . . The world exists through Allah, not by itself or for

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<sup>2</sup> This refers to God because it is only God that has 'real' existence according to Ibn 'Arabī (Al-Jurjānī 1845, 96).

itself. Therefore the existence of the Real Who exists by Himself is a determining condition for the existence of the world, which would not exist at all without the existence of the Real . . . So actually we cannot say, in the true reality of things, that Allah existed before the world—because it has been established that ‘before’ is a time phrase, and there was no ‘time’ (before the existence of the world). (Yousef 2008, 95)<sup>3</sup>

Ibn ‘Arabī makes it clear that the temporal designations of ‘before’ and ‘after’ cannot be meaningfully applied to God because that would mean that He exists in time, which is not the case. This means that God is timeless because He exists without succession. A temporal God would exist with succession, as Ryan Mullins explains,

[A] temporal God has a before and after in His life. He experiences one moment of time after another, just like we do. A timeless God does not experience one moment of time after another. (Mullins 2016, xvi)

God therefore exists without succession and is ontologically prior to the universe and the reason for its existence. Ibn ‘Arabī draws on the argument of Ibn Sīnā who uses it to defend the simultaneous eternity and contingency of the world (McGinnis 2011, 65–83).

Further details on Ibn ‘Arabī’s conception of essential DA and TP, and how he believes they are compatible, are now presented to respond to the first argument that DA does not square with perpetual divine omniscience.

### **Incompatibility of Divine Omniscience and Presentism**

The incompatibility of divine omniscience and presentism is axiomatic. Norman Kretzmann writes, ‘It is generally recognized that omniscience and immutability are necessary characteristics of an absolutely perfect being. The fact that they are also incompatible characteristics seems to have gone unnoticed’ (Kretzmann 1966, 409). He summarises the problem in the following way:

- (1) A perfect being is not subject to change.
  - (2) A perfect being knows everything.
  - (3) A being that knows everything always knows what time it is.
  - (4) A being that always knows what time it is is subject to change.
- Therefore,
- (5) A perfect being is subject to change.
- Therefore,

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<sup>3</sup> The author has chosen to stick to Yousef’s translation here since it is perfectly serviceable.

- (6) A perfect being is not a perfect being.  
 Finally, therefore,  
 (7) There is no perfect being. (Kretzmann 1966, 409)

Historical presentists, such as Augustine, respond to this dilemma by asserting that the modality of God's perception of time is completely different to ours. Augustine writes,

For not in our fashion does He look forward to what is future, nor at what is present, nor back upon what is past; but in a manner quite different and far and profoundly remote from our way of thinking. For He does not pass from this to that by transition of thought, but beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness; so that of those things which emerge in time, the future, indeed, are not yet, and the present are now, and the past no longer are; but all of these are by Him comprehended in His stable and eternal presence. (Augustine 2015, 11:21, 256)

Augustine rules out succession for God in this passage: 'He does not pass from this to that by transition of thought', unlike temporal beings. His mode of perception is 'profoundly remote' from ours because He 'beholds all things with absolute unchangeableness'. Boethius builds on this when he contrasts the temporality of human existence and human knowledge with the eternity of God's existence and the atemporality of His knowledge,

All that lives under the conditions of time moves through the present from the past to the future; there is nothing set in time which can at one moment grasp the whole space of its lifetime. It cannot yet comprehend tomorrow; yesterday it has already lost. And in this life of today your life is no more than a changing, passing moment. . . . What we should rightly call eternal is that which grasps and possesses wholly and simultaneously the fulness of unending life, which lacks naught of the future, and has lost naught of the fleeting past; and such an existence must be ever present in itself to control and aid itself, and also must keep present with itself the infinity of changing time (Boethius 2009, 5:6, 68).

Boethius claims that the modality of God's knowledge is commensurate with the eternal nature of His existence. Since God's nature is outside of time, His knowledge of the universe is likewise outside of it. In other words, God's eternity makes atemporal observation of past, present and future possible. Ibn 'Arabī offers a completely different answer to the conundrum of divine omniscience and presentism. The reason for the creation of the cosmos, says Ibn 'Arabī, is that the ninety-nine most beautiful Names of God, such as the Compassionate, the Merciful, the Avenger, sought manifestation in the world. He writes,

God, may He be praised, wanted to see the essences (*a'yān*) of His most beautiful Names, which cannot be enumerated, or if you want, you can say, to see His essence (*'ayn*), in a comprehensive being (*kawn jāmi'*) that would contain the whole matter, and was characterised by [sensible] existence (*muttasif bi'l-wujūd*). (2002a, 48)

God, therefore, wanted to see Himself in something else that also had existence because the Names of God mentioned in the Qur'an are clearly relational and postulate the existence of the Other (Izutsu 1998, 19; Izutsu 2002, 119–78), such that the Compassionate who has compassion on something, or the Avenger who avenges the wrongdoing of the Other. These Names could not be manifested without existence of the Other ('Afīfī 1963; Ibn 'Arabī 2002b; Sharify-Funk and Rory-Dickson 2013). It is for this reason, says Ibn 'Arabī, that there was an emanation (*fayḍ*) from the divine essence, what he terms 'the holiest outpouring' (*al-fayḍ al-aqdas*) (Lala 2019b, 223–72), that brought forth the cosmos because God no longer wished to remain 'a hidden treasure' (*kanz makhfiyy*) (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 3:260). Much of the language Ibn 'Arabī uses is redolent of Plotinian emanationsim and, as Franz Rosenthal contends, it is 'unavoidable to associate Ibn 'Arabī with some vague mystic neoplatonism' (1988, 5). But Ibn 'Arabī was, at the same time, very original in his thought and the similarities one detects are at times because he 'willingly made use of every pattern of conceptualizing that had been known in Islamdom' in order to articulate his philosophical thought (Hodgson 1974, 2:239).

For Ibn 'Arabī, God's knowledge is not observational as it is for Boethius, it is manifestational. Therefore, God knows all things in the temporal 'now' because all things are manifestations of His divine Names, which are the way in which His atemporal essence is manifested in a temporal world, but they are not what He is in His atemporal unity (Lala 2019a, 57). Ibn 'Arabī is unequivocal on this point when he declares that 'there is still a difference (*lā budd min fāriq*)' between God's essence and the manifestation of His Names 'even if we describe ourselves in every way (*jamī' wujūh*) as He describes Himself' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 54). The hugely influential commentator of Ibn 'Arabī's philosophical outlook, Nūr al-Dīn al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492),<sup>4</sup> explains that since the divine Names are the connective tissue that bind the atemporal divine essence to the temporal world, they are atemporal in themselves but temporal in their manifestation (Al-Jāmī 2005, 70). Ibn 'Arabī alludes to this in the *Fuṣūṣ* when he describes human appeals to

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<sup>4</sup> The mode and style of Al-Jāmī's exegesis is far less philosophical than some of the earliest commentators of Ibn 'Arabī (see below) as is apparent from Sajjad Rizvī's analysis of Al-Jāmī's commentary on the opening chapter of the Qur'an, 'The Existential Breath of al-rahmān and the Munificent Grace of al-rahīm: The Tafsīr Sūrat al-Fātiḥa of Jāmī and the School of Ibn 'Arabī'.



'external causes (*asbāb*)' in the world to alleviate one's suffering, such as asking people for food or drink, as appealing to 'other than God', even though all things are manifestations of God's Names. He goes on to explain that appealing to 'external causes' is tantamount to appealing to 'other than God' because the manifestations of the divine Names are not the same as the divine Names themselves since the former are temporal and the latter are atemporal (Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 174–75).

This means that there are three levels of comprehending the divine. At the highest level is God as He truly is. This God is beyond the ken of human comprehension and beyond spatiotemporal considerations, as stated. It is the 'Nondelimited Being . . . [that] transcends every delimitation and determination' (Chittick 1992, 209). There is then the 'God of the Names'. This God is different to the true essence of God, as Ibn 'Arabī explains when he says, 'The only existence of God is as God . . . in terms of His essence . . . not in terms of His Names' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 104). These Names are the cause for the existence of the cosmos since Ibn 'Arabī claims that the reason the cosmos exists is God 'wanted to see the essences (*a'yān*) of His most beautiful Names . . . characterised by [sensible] existence' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 48). However, these Names, inasmuch as they are the universal cause of the cosmos, are different from the particularised causes of things that happen within the cosmos. William Chittick makes it clear that Ibn 'Arabī refers to the divine Names in two ways: a distinction that was made explicit by his followers. First, there are the divine Names that are atemporal like the divine essence of which they are a differentiation. Then there are the manifestations of those Names in the temporal realm. It is only when the Names seek, and are granted, manifestation of their realities that they enter temporality. The Names themselves, therefore, cannot be temporal since temporality only occurs once the Names are manifested, as this constitutes the cosmos (Chittick 1992, 216). The levels may be summarised thus:

1. Nondelimited Being/ Numinous divine essence—atemporal [this is then differentiated into:]
2. The Divine Names—atemporal [as they have no manifestation and temporality begins with the manifestation of the cosmos. These Names are then differentiated into:]
3. Manifestation of the divine Names—temporal [as this constitutes the cosmos]

Boethius' argument postulates a Creator/creation separation that is vitiated by the unity of being. This means that Ibn 'Arabī does not deny that the manifestations of the Names in the world are changing, but the divine Names are not the same as the manifestations of the divine Names, and the divine Names

themselves are not the same as the divine essence. Ibn 'Arabī repeatedly asserts this in his *Fuṣūṣ*:

The Names of God are infinite<sup>5</sup> because what exists is known through them . . . even though they return to a principle that is finite, which are . . . the planes of the Names (*ḥaḍarāt al-asmā'*). And in truth, there is nothing there but one reality (*ḥaqīqa wāḥida*) that accepts all of these relations and attributions, which are called the divine Names. And this [one] reality permits each Name to be manifested. (Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 65)

Ibn 'Arabī explains here that the proof of the divine Names and the manifestations of those Names being different is that 'the Names of God are infinite', but 'they return to a principle that is finite', which are all the planes of existence. This means that, since the planes of existence are finite, and the divine Names are infinite, not all of the divine Names will be manifested, highlighting that there is a difference between the divine Names and their manifestation. Ibn 'Arabī goes on to say that even though all the divine Names of God derive from 'one reality', which is the essence of God, each Name is separate and demands its own manifestation in sensible reality. But these Names are not the essence of God in His fundamental numinosity, which is completely beyond spatiotemporal considerations and even beyond human comprehension that 'constrains Him with knowledge' (Al-Jāmī 2005, 90). Further, Ibn 'Arabī contends that each momentary manifestation of every divine Name is different because 'there is nothing on the plane of divinity that is repeated, even though it is so extensive' (Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 65). All manifestations of the divine Names, therefore, exist only for an instant and then immediately cease to exist, but the next manifestation of the Names is different from its erstwhile manifestation. However, the difference is small and it is almost identical to its previous counterpart to give sensible reality the semblance of continuity and stability (see below). This does not represent a change in the divine Names since there is a difference between the Name and its manifestation. Some scholars argue that because the subsequent manifestation is a new, and not a renewed, manifestation, it still means the manifestation of the Names does not change (Yousef 2008, 80–81). However, the author believes that this does not preclude the changing manifestation of the Names. In addition, it is precisely through asserting that the manifestation of the Names changes, but the Names and the divine essence do not, that Ibn 'Arabī is able to reconcile the dichotomy of an unchanging God and a changing cosmos that is still nothing but the manifestation of His divine Names.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, God

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<sup>5</sup> Ibn 'Arabi claims that the ninety-nine most beautiful Names of God mentioned in the Qur'an are not the only ones, as this statement makes clear.

<sup>6</sup> I am indebted to an anonymous reviewer who allowed me to clarify this point.

knows all things that occur in the temporal 'now' in the cosmos because they are manifestations of His divine Names, but He does not change as a result of this knowledge because the manifestation of the divine Names are not the divine Names, and the divine Names are not the divine essence. God knows all in virtue of knowing all the divine names, and all states of creation are different manifestations of these Names. This means that Ibn 'Arabī agrees with Kretzmann's premises 1, 2, and 3, but disagrees with premises 4, 5, 6, and 7 because God knows all the divine Names and their temporal manifestations, but is not subject to change since the changing temporal manifestations of the divine Names are not God as He truly is. Ibn 'Arabī explains the reasons for how and why the divine Names are manifested in different ways at different temporal moments by introducing to the concept of the receptacles (see below). Ultimately, though, the temporality of the manifestation of the divine Names and the atemporality of the divine Names themselves and the divine essence, lie beyond the ken of normal human comprehension, according to Ibn 'Arabī, which is why it is only the spiritual elite who are able to apprehend these truths (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, 338; Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 81–83).

It is the same concept of the atemporal divine essence and Names, and the temporal manifestation of the Names that provides the response to William Lane Craig's argument through Ibn 'Arabī's metaphysical worldview.

### **William Lane Craig's Causal Relation Argument**

William Lane Craig argues that presentism and atemporality cannot be compatible due to God's causal relation to the world. He writes, 'Given the reality of tense and God's causal relation to the world, it is, indeed, very difficult to conceive how God could remain untouched by the world's temporality' (Craig 2001, 59). He explains his argument in the following passage:

Suppose, then, that God did not exist temporally prior to creation. In that case He exists timelessly sans creation. But once time begins at the moment of creation, God either becomes temporal in virtue of His real, causal relation to time and the world or else He exists as timelessly with creation as He does sans creation. But this second alternative seems quite impossible. At the first moment of time, God stands in a new relation in which He did not stand before (since there was no before). We need not characterize this as a change in God (perhaps change entails a "before" and "after" for an enduring subject), but this is a real, causal relation which is at that moment new to God and which He does not have in the state of existing sans creation . . . the fact that the world is not sempiternal but began to exist out of nothing demonstrates that God acquires a new relation at the moment of creation. At the moment of creation, God comes into the relation

of sustaining the universe or at the very least that of co-existing with the universe, relations which He did not before have. (Craig 2001, 60)

Craig's argument is that after God creates the universe, 'God stands in a new relation in which He did not stand before' when He was 'in the state of existing sans creation'. He continues that

even if God remains intrinsically changeless in creating the world, He nonetheless undergoes an extrinsic, or relational, change, which, if He is not already temporal prior to the moment of creation, draws Him into time at that very moment in virtue of His real relation to the temporal, changing universe. (Craig 2001, 60)

The new relation God acquires, argues Craig, constitutes an 'extrinsic, or relational, change' in God that 'draws Him into time' and so God becomes temporal. Leftow points out that asserting God becomes temporal when He creates a temporal universe leads to an indissoluble contradiction in which God is both temporal and atemporal since His atemporality cannot, by definition, have ceased to exist. So, because 'that what is atemporally the case is immutably the case' (Leftow 2018, 178), it cannot be the case that temporal creation has thrust God into a temporal relation.

Ibn 'Arabī asserts that God's timeless volition to create the universe means that there is no change in the divine consciousness. All commentators of Ibn 'Arabī agree on this point. Al-Jāmī, for instance, is emphatic about this in his exegesis of the *Fuṣūṣ* when he states that the manifestation of the world from God is not something that He decided in time but rather something that 'was in his eternal will' (*mashī'atih azaliyya*) (Al-Jāmī 2009, 49). The Sufi poet and ethnographer, 'Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), explains that this is because the will of God is not 'confined by time' (*tataqayyad bi-zamān*) (Al-Nābulusī 2008, 1:56). Arguably the most widely read commentator of the *Fuṣūṣ*, Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350),<sup>7</sup> unequivocally states that the use of 'when' in describing God's desire to see Himself in the Other is 'used as a metaphor (*majāzan*) because it denotes a feeling of having a desire after not having it, and that is not the case, because it [i.e. the desire] is sempiternal (*azaliyya*) and eternal (*abadiyya*) (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, 326).

Nevertheless, the manifestation of the divine yearning to be known in the Other, even if it always existed in the divine consciousness, presents a problem for Ibn 'Arabī because the manifestation of that will as sensible reality is still temporal (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 3:260; Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 48). While Ibn 'Arabī's predecessor, who had a great influence on him, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (Rosenthal

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<sup>7</sup> Mohammed Rustom, 'Dāwūd al-Qayṣarī: Notes on His Life, Influence and Reflections on the Muḥammadan Reality', 54-55.

1988), dismisses this temporal relation as a trick of the mind (Hasan 2013, 144), Ibn 'Arabī gets around this issue by maintaining both the temporality of the manifestations of the Names of God and the atemporality of the divine essence, as Al-Jāmī explains:

Know that the immutable perfection (*thubūt kamāl*) of God, be He praised, is in two ways: one of them is His perfection in terms of His essence (*dhāt*), and this is an expression of His immutable existence from it [i.e. His essence], and from nothing else. So it [i.e. His essence] is independent (*ghaniyya*) from anything else in terms of its existence, its subsistence and its endurance. And the second is His particularised perfection (*kamāl tafṣīlī*) in terms of His beautiful Names, which only exist through expression of the effects of . . . the nominal realities (*al-ḥaqā'iq al-asmā'iyya*) and the execution of His decrees in its realms and manifestations. (Al-Jāmī 2005, 70)

The essence (*dhāt*) of God is immutable and independent of anything else, it is constrained neither by time nor space. The divine Names, too, are atemporal. It is only the 'expression of the effects of . . . the nominal realities' that are temporal since they require the existence of the pre-sensible and sensible realms in order to manifest their reality in them.<sup>8</sup> So while God, in terms of His essence, is atemporal, the Names of God can only be manifested in temporal reality, as Al-Jāmī affirms:

God is necessarily existent (*wājib al-wujūd*)<sup>9</sup> in His essential perfection, and His independent oneness (*wāḥidiyya*)<sup>10</sup> sees His essence in His essence essentially, without any addition to His essence nor any separation from it. Also, He sees His Names and His Attributes as an essential connection to it [i.e. the essence] so its matters are not manifest . . . But He wanted to make them manifest in terms of His nominal perfection, and to see them in their loci of manifestation with separate essences and effects. (2005, 70)

The essence of God, thus, is immutable and unmanifested in the world; it is only witnessed by the divine oneness. The divine Names, too, are unmanifest intrinsically, which, again, underscores that the manifestation of the Names are not the Names in themselves. In themselves, the Names are unmanifest and so

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<sup>8</sup> The different realms of existence in the philosophical thought of Ibn 'Arabī lies outside the scope of this study. Although Ibn 'Arabī is characteristically unclear about the different planes (*ḥadarāt*) of existence, expositors of his thought classified them into five distinct levels. For details, see William Chittick, 'The Five Divine Presences: From al-Qūnawī to al-Qayṣarī', 107-28.

<sup>9</sup> See below for details on this term.

<sup>10</sup> This term is closely related to God's unity (*aḥadiyya*). For a detailed exploration of the distinction between them, see Lala, *Knowing God*, 115–116, 135–137, 139–140, 168–169.

are atemporal, and this maintains their connection to the atemporal divine essence, of which they are a differentiation. However, because God wanted to see Himself in the Other, He manifested the reality of the Names as the sensible world, which is why the manifestation of the Names is temporal. This means that the Names of God are atemporal in themselves and thus ‘unmanifested in the world’, which is the way in which they have a connection to the atemporal divine essence. But they are temporally manifested in the world, which is the way in which they are connected to the temporal world. This means that Ibn ‘Arabī agrees with Craig’s assertions, but the mistake Craig makes is that he abandons the initial atemporal status of God. Ibn ‘Arabī at once maintains God’s atemporal essence and atemporal Names, and adopts His temporal manifestations of the Names.

It is the same issue of the temporal manifestation of the divine Names versus the atemporality of the divine essence and the Names themselves that is at the heart of the response to Garrett DeWeese’s ‘function’ argument through the lens of Ibn ‘Arabī’s metaphysics.

### **Garrett DeWeese’s ‘Function’ Argument**

In his analysis of St. Anselm’s concept of eternity, DeWeese writes that

an entity is located in a place only if its spatial extent is bounded by the spatial limits of that place . . . Similarly, an entity is located in time only if its duration is bounded by the temporal boundaries of that time. If it ‘spills over’ into adjacent temporal regions, it cannot be said to be located at—contained by—that time . . . Similarly, an entity is located in time only if its duration is bounded by the temporal boundaries of that time. If it ‘spills over’ into adjacent temporal regions, it cannot be said to be located at—contained by—that time . . . Anselm’s concept seems to be that of God existing in a ‘superdimension’ that contains space and time but transcends them. (DeWeese 2017, ch. 5)

This leads DeWeese to argue that God is ‘omnitemporal’, which means that

an eternal entity may exist but not be subject to temporal limits . . . if it is not contained in, but is present to, time. As such it would be a temporal analogue of an omnispatial entity’. (DeWeese 2017, ch. 9)

An omnitemporal entity thus has the following features:

‘O is an omnitemporal entity iff <sub>def</sub> (i) O is necessarily metaphysically temporal; and (ii) O necessarily exists’. (DeWeese ch. 9)

DeWeese writes that what 'constitutes metaphysical temporality is the same relation that constitutes any other temporality: causation' (DeWeese 2017, ch. 9). This means that 'moments of a temporal world can be placed in a one-to-one correspondence with moments of metaphysical time' (DeWeese 2017, ch. 9). So, because God is omnitemporal, 'a temporal analogue' exists for every atemporal event. In other words, physical time is connected to metaphysical time. If this is the case, Leftow argues, 'a function  $F$  pairs temporal events with positions in  $A$  [its atemporal analogue]' (Leftow 2018, 180). But this cannot be done for future events since they do not exist, according to presentism, which means that either  $A$  is incomplete or it grows, both of which are impossible. DeWeese's argument may be summarised as:  $A \equiv Fe$ , where  $F$  is the constant that connects atemporal  $A$  to the temporal event,  $e$ .

Since Ibn 'Arabī allows the possibility that God's Name is manifested at different temporal locations, then:

$$N \equiv Fep, \text{ so the Name } (N) \text{ is equivalent to } F \text{ and the present event } (ep).$$

DeWeese contends that if the present is all that exists, then there is no future event ( $ef$ ), thus:

$$N \equiv Fef \text{ is not possible because } ef \text{ would be non-existent, which means that } N \text{ is incomplete or grows, and that cannot be the case.}$$

However, as mentioned previously, the divine Names are not equivalent to manifestation of the divine Names ( $mN$ ),  $N \neq mN$ . Therefore, even though it is obvious that the divine Names cannot grow (neither intrinsically, since they are fixed in themselves, nor numerically, since they are already infinite (Ibn 'Arabī 2002a, 65), their manifestations in the world can.

If this is the case, why are the manifestations of the Names not infinite like the Names themselves? This is the same issue alluded to earlier when the reasons for how and why the divine Names are manifested in different ways at different temporal moments was confronted. Ibn 'Arabī answers these questions by introducing the concept of the 'receptacles' (*qawābil*) into the equation. The manifestation of the Names is constrained by the preparedness (*isti'dād*) of the receptacles (*qawābil*) that receive them. The adopted son of Ibn 'Arabī and the only one to be given a formal licence to transmit his *Fuṣūṣ*, Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī

(d. 673/1274),<sup>11</sup> explains that this is the reason for the effect of divine singularity being creational multiplicity:

This [divine] outpouring [that brings everything into existence], in terms of its source and origin, is one, and from this perspective it is called a gift from the essence (*'aṭā' dhātī*), as it emanates from God in accordance with the demands of His essence (*bi muqtaḍā dhātih*), there being no other cause for it. And if the multiplicity of the forms of that gift in receptacles (*qawābil*) are considered and its variation in accordance with them, it is called a gift from the Names (*'aṭā' asmā'ī*). (Al-Qūnawī 2013, 18)

This means that the variation that occurs in sensible reality is a gift from the Names, but it is also mediated through the preparedness of the receptacles that determine which of them will have sensible existence. Al-Jāmī makes this even more explicit when he writes,

The manifestation of the [divine] essence is only in the form of the locus of manifestation, which is the servant, and it is according to their preparedness. . . . And the receptacle (*qābil*) only accepts this gift, meaning, the gifts from God, whether they are from the essence or the Names, according to what it is on, meaning, according to the rank that the receptacle has, of preparedness. For the manifestations [of God's unity] . . . become coloured (*tanbasigh*) when they arrive according to the preparednesses (*isti'dādāt*) . . . of the receptacles. (Al-Jāmī 2005, 85)

The rank of preparedness that each receptacle has, therefore, is the primary determinant of which Names and to what degree the receptacles can manifest the Names, or even, whether they have the capacity to manifest any at all. This is an allusion to Ibn 'Arabī's commitment to orthopraxy (De Cillis 2014, 169) because the preparedness represents the potentiality to manifest the divine Names that may or may not be realised. If it is realised, *mN* grows; if not, it is diminished. The nature of the preparedness itself, however, is divinely determined. Ibn 'Arabī points this out when he asserts,

Preparednesses of the receptacles are among 'the keys of the unseen' (*maḥātīḥ al-ghayb*) because there is nothing but absolute and all-encompassing giving (*wahab muṭlaq 'āmm*) and an outpouring of bounteousness (*fayḍ jūd*) [from God that brings forth existence]. . . it is data (*ma'lūmāt*) that is limitless. Yet there are those who have existence and those who do not, . . . those who have the capacity to

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<sup>11</sup> Even though Al-Qūnawī was the first promulgator of Ibn 'Arabī's thought, his outlook was far more philosophical than that of his Sufi master, as Richard Todd elucidates in *The Sufi Doctrine of Man: Ṣadr al-Dīn al-Qūnawī's Metaphysical Anthropology*.



accept existence and those who do not. ... Preparedness is not earned but divinely given; this is the reason no one knows it but God. (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 3:525)

Ibn 'Arabī acknowledges the glaring dichotomy of the receptacles themselves being products of the manifestation of the divine Names, and yet somehow also being determinants of that very manifestation of which they are the product. This is why, he says, it is from 'the keys of the unseen' that no one knows but God. Further, the Sufi addresses why, even though there is an unlimited outpouring of existentiating mercy from God,<sup>12</sup> there are finite existent entities in the sensible world: it is due to the fact that only some of these receptacles have the preparedness and 'capacity to accept existence' whilst there are others 'who do not'. This leads to the same modalities of existence that were articulated by Ibn 'Arabī's eminent predecessor Ibn Sīnā (Adamson 2016, 126–28). Ibn 'Arabī explains these modalities of existence in the following way:

There is nothing that is necessarily existent (*wājib al-wujūd*) by itself except Him so He is absolutely independent in His essence from all things. . . . [As for the cosmos], either its existence is due to itself or due to another, but it is impossible for its existence to be due to itself for it has already been proven that it is impossible for there to be two beings that are necessarily existent in reality. So the only possibility left is that it exists due to another. (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 1:365)

The first two modalities of existents, then, are God who is necessarily existent and does not depend on anything else for His existence, and the cosmos which has contingent existence since it depends on God for its existence. Then Ibn 'Arabī moves on to impossible existence. Ibn Sīnā had already explained that there are two modalities of impossible existence: that which is contingently impossible (*mustahīl li-ghayrih*), in which case its essence does not preclude its existence but it was not preponderated to exist by God, and so it can exist in the mind, like a phoenix or a centaur. And the thing whose very essence precludes its existence, making it intrinsically impossible (*mustahīl dhātī*), without any mental existence, such as a square circle (Bäck 1992, 217–55; Ibn Sīnā 2016; Thom 2008, 361–76). These modalities of existence mean that many Names of God have no sensible (extramental) or para-sensible (mental) existence. The ones that do enjoy sensible existence have the potentiality to manifest more of the divine

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<sup>12</sup> Ibn 'Arabī distinguishes between the common acceptance of mercy as the act of having mercy on someone, and a divine existentiating mercy which brings the cosmos into existence through God's overflowing mercy. Emotive mercy is therefore a corollary of divine existentiating mercy that brings all things into existence (Nettler, 'Ibn 'Arabī's Conception of Allah's Mercy', 219-29).

Names, which in themselves, are infinite. Therefore,  $N$  is infinite and  $mN$  is not. Ibn 'Arabī declares that the Names have 'no limit', but

from among them, there are some that have existence whilst others that do not, some that are subject to cause and effect [in the cosmos] whilst others that are not, some that are able to acquire existence whilst others that cannot. (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 3:542)

So, because  $N$  is completely unconstrained and infinite, it cannot grow, whereas  $mN$  is not infinite and so it can.

The same difference between the Names and their manifestation can be used to explain the response to Alan Padgett's 'ZTR' argument through Ibn 'Arabī's temporal ontology.

### **Alan Padgett's 'ZTR' Argument**

Padgett argues that 'the power of God is directly involved in any causal sequence in our universe' (Padgett 2012, 21), which theists would agree with. Further, he writes

the direct act by which God sustains the created universe is what I shall call "Zero Time Related" to its effect. Two events are Zero Time Related if and only if no duration occurs between them. God's direct acts, in other words, take no time to be accomplished. (Padgett 2012, 21)

Since God is omnipotent and omnipresent, says Padgett, it makes sense that His actions are not limited by the same temporal constraints as physical causes. This means that 'any direct act must be Zero Time Related to its immediate effect' (Padgett 2012, 21). Further, because God is timeless, His acts are not temporally localised. Now Padgett comes to his argument as to why DA is incompatible with presentism:

Say that God acts such that, at some time  $T_4$ , some episode  $B$  of an object was sustained. Further, at the present time,  $T_5$ , God acts so as to sustain a different object's episode,  $C$ , which is in the same place as  $B$ . Now  $T_4$  and  $T_5$  are some distance apart in time, and not Zero Time Related. Can the same divine, eternal, immutable act sustain both  $B$  and  $C$ ? Since  $T_5$  is not,  $B$  no longer exists, and so is not being sustained, either in our time or in eternity, by any act of God. Since God's sustaining of  $C$  is direct, he cannot (logically cannot) sustain  $C$  by an act whose effect is dated at  $T_4$ , and by some causal chain indirectly sustains  $C$ -at- $T_5$ . Furthermore, the present effect of God's eternal act at  $T_5$  is Zero Time Related with the eternal intention of God: but this same eternal intention and act cannot also be Zero Time Related to  $B$ , since  $B$  and  $C$  are not themselves Zero Time

Related. By a single, timeless act God can sustain *C* and any episode Zero Time Related to *C*. But since the divine sustaining is a direct act which must be Zero Time Related to its effect, the same divine act cannot sustain both *C* and *B*. (Padgett 2012, 72)

As presentism entails that two temporal points, *T4* and *T5*, are not equivalent, argues Padgett, and because episode *B* is only sustained by God at *T4* and episode *C* is only sustained by Him at *T5*, and since *B* is Zero Time Related to *T4* and *C* is Zero Time Related to *T5*, it means that both cannot be sustained by the same divine act. Therefore, if presentism is true, 'God puts forth a different act to sustain each different episode of every object' which means that 'God must change over time, and the traditional doctrine of eternity must be false' (Padgett 2012, 73). The conclusion is that DA and presentism are not compatible.

It was mentioned previously that, according to Ibn 'Arabī, the world is only made up of the present and only 'the present (*al-ḥāl*) has persistence' (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 3:529). In order to understand what Ibn 'Arabī means by this, one needs to get to grips with Ibn 'Arabī's occasionalism. The foundation of Ibn 'Arabī's temporal ontology is the divine metaphysical week (*usbū'*), which is based on the verse of the Qur'an in which God declares that He created 'the heavens and the earth in six days' (Q57:4). The Sufi explains that, since all that exists in the sensible world is simply a manifestation of the Names of God, the days of the creative week are when God's hypostatic attributes of life, knowledge, power, will, hearing, sight, speech, which are the source of His divine Names, are manifested in the sensible world (Yousef 2008, 81–84). This manifestation takes place, all at once, on the seventh day, or 'the day of rest' (*yawm al-sabt*). And this constitutes the smallest constituent of time, which Ibn 'Arabī calls 'the single moment' (*al-zaman al-fard*) (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 1:366).

Ibn 'Arabī asserts that each moment, beginning with the first moment and including all of the moments that make up sensible existence, require the atemporal divine apparatus of the creative week for their manifestation in sensible reality (Ibn 'Arabī n.d., 1:366). In every moment, then, the entire metaphysical edifice behind sensible reality is reconstructed by God, and it is only due to His mercy that He recreates all things with the same properties as their erstwhile manifestation, which give reality the semblance of stability and continuity (Yousef 2008, 159–64). This aspect Ibn 'Arabī's ontology is taken directly from Ash'arite occasionalism. It was the early theologian and logician, Abū Bakr al-Bāqillānī (d. 403/1013), who introduced this concept into Ash'arite theology (Gardet and Anawati 1981, 62–64). Ash'arite theologians following in the wake of Al-Bāqillānī believed the cosmos was made up of 'indivisible particles of bodies' which 'were continually recreated by God' because 'the atom

cannot endure for two instants of time, like the accidents that inhered in it' (Fakhry 1958, 27).<sup>13</sup>

Ibn 'Arabī agrees that the divine act is Zero Time Related to each 'single moment' that is sustained by that act, since the metaphysical divine week, of which the single moment is the culmination, is atemporal. We are now in a better position to understand what Ibn 'Arabī meant when he said that only the present has persistence: it is the recreation of all entities by God, who creates that entity at each successive moment with the same properties as its erstwhile form if that erstwhile form had perdured in a four-dimensional space-time continuum. Ibn 'Arabī, thus, subscribes to a static theory of time (DeWeese 2017, ch. 2). However, even though Ibn 'Arabī agrees with Padgett that the divine act is Zero Time Related to its effect, since the divine act is to manifest the Name and the effect is the manifestation of that Name in the sensible world, this does not mean that God changes between two temporal points, even though the manifestation of the Names is different. To explain in Padgett's terms, Ibn 'Arabī explains that the manifestation of God in the form of *B* and *C* at *T4* and *T5* respectively is different, not because of any change in the Name, *N1* as *B* at *T4*, or *N2* as *C* at *T5*, but because the divine Names and are not the same as the manifestation of the Names. The divine Names stay the same, even as the manifestation changes. This manifestation is determined by the preparedness of the receptacles, as mentioned in the previous section. It is thus the preparedness of the receptacles that cause the change in the manifestation of the Names, and not the divine Names themselves, nor, *a fortiori*, the divine essence. We may thus say:

$$mN1 \equiv BrT4 \text{ and } mN2 \equiv CrT5.$$

In both of these, *mN1* and *mN2* (manifestation of Name) is different, not because there is a difference in the exertion of *N* (which stays the same), but because one of the components that constitute *mN* (*r*, receptacle) has changed from *T4* to *T5*

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<sup>13</sup> For an excellent summary of Ash'arite occasionalism, see Harry Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, 466-525. In the Western tradition, occasionalism is commonly associated with René Descartes who wrote that 'the nature of time is such that its parts are not mutually depended, and never coexist. Thus, from the fact that we now exist, it does not follow that we shall exist a moment from now, unless there is some cause — the same cause which originally produced us — which continually reproduces us, as it were, that is to say, which keeps us in existence' ('Principles of Philosophy', 200). Descartes' occasionalist view was elaborated by Nicolas Malebranche, but the former, it has been argued, was influenced by the ubiquitous Ash'arite theologian, Abū Ḥāmid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), not just in his occasionalist outlook, but also in other aspects of his philosophy (Moad, 'Comparing Phases of Skepticism in al-Ghazālī and Descartes: Some First Meditations on Deliverance from Error', 88-100).

due to its ever-changing preparedness. Thus, the Names themselves remain the same and the manifestation changes.

### **Conclusion**

The foregoing has provided a superficial overview of Ibn 'Arabī's temporal ontology and shown how the arguments of contemporary philosophers who assert the incompatibility of DA and TP fail. The principal response through the lens of Ibn 'Arabī's temporal ontology to these arguments is that the divine Names as they are manifested in the cosmos cannot be conflated with the divine Names as they are in themselves, which, in turn, cannot be conflated with God in His numinous essence. Divine omniscience of a changing world is not brought into conflict with an unchanging creator because the change occurs only in the sensible manifestation of the Names that are not the Names as they are in their unchanging reality. Craig's argument that a temporal creation nudges God into a temporal relation which means He changes extrinsically and thus becomes temporal, likewise, fails because Craig abandons the initial atemporal status of God. Ibn 'Arabī at once maintains God's atemporal essence and atemporal Names, and adopts His temporal manifestations of the Names. DeWeese's function argument fails because he asserts that a function pairs temporal events with an atemporal analogue, but this cannot be done for future events since they do not exist. This means that the atemporal analogue is either incomplete or it grows which cannot be the case. Again, Ibn 'Arabī underscores that the manifestation of the Names of God is not the same as the Names themselves. Therefore, the Names themselves are not incomplete, it is just their sensible manifestation that is incomplete or can grow, and DeWeese's argument fails. Padgett's argument assumes that different events at different times postulate different exertions of God's power, which means that He cannot be unchanging. Ibn 'Arabī circumvents this by, again, attributing the change in the events at different times to the preparedness of the existent beings. This allows him to simultaneously maintain God's unchanging nature whilst acknowledging the changing cosmos.

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