

Time in Mullah Sadra's and Henri Bergson's thoughts

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Abstract: "Time" is one of the existential aspects of human and, Man always finds himself bounded by the time, as if man is its captive and has no way out of such captivity. Mulla Sadra and Bergson are two philosophers from two different philosophical schools, who have opened new horizons and masterminded new patterns in their interpretation of time. Mulla Sadra and Bergson believed that the reality of time should be interpreted in relation to existence. Mulla Sadra conceives time as a reality which is abstracted from the existence quality of material being; Bergson also conceives time as being synonymous with motion and calls it a duration (duree), which can be comprehended only through consciousness and pure intuition, and forms the foundation of our existence. In this paper, after elucidating time from viewpoints of these two philosophers, we will try to create proximity between these two points of view and open up a window for conjunction and adaptation.

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1. Introduction

Time is one of the fundamental subject matters that have always engaged Man's thought and mind. The background of the problem of time goes much farther than that of metaphysical thought; and in no historical period of human life it has been pulled out of the hideout of his mind and thought. For him, every moment of time is important and he has bitter and sweet memories of those moments. In every moment, human has paid careful attention to the depth of the reality of time and has sought to discover its untold secret. Time is a subject matter, which in addition to philosophy, has reserved an outstanding place in contemporary art and science. It is a problem which no scientist has been - never and in no period and under no philosophical system - needless of thinking about it. To this end, the problem of time is considered to be a conjunction for many scientists and philosophical schools; and although it has a general meaning, which is apparently comprehensible to the public, its reality is amongst the most unfamiliar and the most unknown aspects of life.

2. Time, from a Historical Approach

The history of thought shows that cognition of "time" and its definition has a long-standing background as such that centuries before the beginnings of philosophical discussions in Greece, followers of Zurvanite religion in ancient Iran believed in two forms of time: 1. The passing time (to which we are captive) 2. The existential time (which is one of hypostases of the Divine Essence, while the other two are: Ahura Mazda and the Devil). According to Zurvanite religion, in the absence of time nothing

could be possible. Basically, by limitation of the "time" in this religion, existence emerges (Ebrahimi Dynani). It should be noted that followers of Zurvanite religion believed in the archetype of time, which was known as "Zurvan"; they considered Zurvan as the first being, an everlasting & eternal subject, and creator of the world.

In Plato's viewpoint, time has come to the existences in association with the creation of the world, and serves as a link between the world of being (eternal) and the world of becoming (temporal). Plato aimed to create a link or connection between the sensible world and the intelligible world and time is playing such a role and will be terminated by the end of the world:

"... The master thought of creating a moving picture of eternity. Striving for this goal and meanwhile trying to create the required order and system in the world, he made a constant picture of eternity – which is incessantly in unity and immobility. This picture is constantly moving on the basis of numerical plurality and is the same thing that we call "time" ... anyway, time and world were created together, so that if one day they are expected to be annihilated, they would be annihilated together ... (Plato).

Aristotle, with his natural and mechanical vision to creation, considered the time as the result of continues and circular motion of the first heaven; a motion which, in his view, penetrates from outside and proves the existence of the Creator. He says:

"We would realize existence of the time only when we recognize motion by diagnosing before and after of the motion; and it is only after recognizing before and after of the motion that we say time has passed" (Aristotle).

Therefore, in Aristotle's point of view, motion justifies existence of time and if we do not perceive the motion, we could not perceive time. Plotinus also believed in stability of the One and nous, but considered the universal soul to be a variable, whose changes are the origin of creating creatures and events in the world. In this perspective time emerges in soul and nature, as if he considered time as continuation and perpetuation of the life of soul (Nasrollah). The Islamic philosophy in its early stages of evolution and prosperity was under the influence of Greek thoughts, especially those of Aristotle's. Accordingly, most definitions are inclined toward the thought of Aristotle, and this is clearly seen in ideas of Alfarabius, Avicenna and, Averroes who usually consider time as an effect of motion and relate it to the first heaven. A few number of Muslim theosophists considered time as an fantasy concept, but some other medieval theosophists and philosophers believed in both spiritual and material time (Najafi). Kant in his philosophy took into consideration the same role for "time" that has been given to "existence" in Islamic philosophy, especially in its Sadrian style (Hadad Adel). Kant considers time as a priori condition for each experience and internal and external sensitive intuition. Heidegger too would consider time as the only possible horizon for emergence of existence and believes that time and existence, are interdependent on each other and thus cannot be separated. In his view, time is neither physical nor cosmic, but has an original and fundamental proportion with "existence" (Heidegger).

As it was mentioned earlier, most Muslim philosophers - especially the Peripatetic philosophers – followed Aristotle in the matter of "time". Avicenna in his "al-Isharat al-Tanbihat (Remarks and Admonitions)," writes about the essence of time as follows:

"And know that renewal (getting new), is not possible without changing the mood; and changing the mood is not possible without a subject possessing the power of changing the mood. This connection is dependent on motion and a moving; that is to say to variation and variable, especially anything, in which connection and non-interruption is possible; that is to say the circular positional motion. This connection is measurable, because "before" is sometimes closer and sometimes farther. Therefore, it is the same quantity that measures variation and transformation. Such a thing [with the said features] is the "time". Time, is the quantity of motion, not in terms of distance, but in terms of transpositions which do not come together" (Avicenna). Accordingly, in view of Avicenna "time" is an essential concept, which is placed in the Aristotelian table of categories and

because of its motion, overcomes the objects. Mulla Sadra usually uses the same statement; but after encountering vague and controversial questions, he suggests a novel theory about the time, and although he does not abandon the Aristotelian physical time, he does not consider it as being authentic. He considers physical time as an offshoot of the existing time.

3. Existence of time

Mullah Sadra in his "Al-Asfar" brings about two reasons to prove the existence of time. He calls one of the two reasons "the physicist argument", in which he tends to prove existence of time through physics, which is the way physicists prove it by using physical preliminaries as discussed below:

1. Suppose that two moving objects start to move together and stop moving together, but the distance they take is not the same. For example, one takes 10 km and the other 15 km.

2. In the second assumption, suppose that both of the moving objects take the same distance but they neither move together nor stop together, or they start moving together but do not stop together, or they do not start moving together but stop together.

Now, in this assumption, we are witnessing two types of quantities. One is the static continuous quantity, which we call distance; and the other is the non-static continuous quantity that is time, which is abstracted from quickness and slowness of motions (Mulla Sadra).

Another reason that Mulla Sadra adduces is called "the theological method", and his purpose of choosing this title is to argue the priory philosophy, which is asserts as follows:

Every contingent thing is precedent to something prior to it, and this priority cannot come together with the subsequence. There is a type of precedence that could neither coincide with us nor come after us. Such precedence is the origin of abstraction of time which is inherently not capable of being converted to subsequent (Mulla Sadra).

4. Whatness of the Time

After discussing existence or nonexistence of the time in Mulla Sadra's thoughts, now we try to find out what the time is and what definition Mulla Sadra has offered in this regard. As it was mentioned earlier, Aristotle and consequently most Muslim philosophers believed that time is the quantity of motion; and motion means an accidental affair; that is to say motion takes place in accidents and not in substance. Therefore time is the same static continuous quantity. However, we will see here that while Mulla Sadra accepts that time is the quantity of motion, his interpretation of time and motion differs

from those of Aristotle and most Muslim philosophers; because, on one hand Aristotle considers motion to be related to the accidents of substance, while Mulla Sadra believes that motion is within the substance itself and not away from it. Furthermore, Aristotle considers time as the quantity of rotating motion of the heaven but Mulla Sadra considers it the quantity of the motion of the substance which stays as the fourth dimension besides the three dimensions of the physical substance. His phrase is as follows:

"So time is a quantity of nature whose essence is renewed in terms of essential precedence and subsequence as such that the mathematical body is the degree of being natural in terms of the acceptance of the three dimensions. Therefore, there are two extensions for the nature (physical substance) and there are two quantities for it; one gradual temporal that accepts division into temporal precedence and subsequent, and the other special repulsive which accepts division into special precedence and subsequent. The ratio of quantity to extension is the ratio of the specified to the vague which are one in terms of existence but are different in terms of consideration" (Mulla Sadra).

He then explains his views, reminding that time is not a biased and independent issue, like darkness and brightness, and its existence is rather inseparable from the existence of motion and consequently from the existence of substance. It is only in our subjective analysis that we separate time from of motion and ultimately from the substance. His statement is as below:

"One, who ponders a bit on whatness of the time, would realize that it has merely an intellectual consideration, and happening of it to a subject in terms of existence, is not like external accidents of the things, like blackness, hotness, etc. Time is rather of analytical accidents of its subject and existence of such accident in outside cannot be separated from existence of their subjects; because, the relationship between them is merely subjective..." (Mulla Sadra). It is however understood from Mulla Sadra's statement that time (and motion) is amongst philosophical secondary intelligible whose origin of abstraction is in the external world, but has no instance there. The external world is as such that mind will abstract time from it with the help of analysis.

But in the world outside of our mind there is no being as time against the physical substance as in the case of motion, what exists in the outside world is the same physical substance that notion of the concept of motion is abstracted from observing its presence in point "A" and comparing it with its existence in point "B".

Therefore, it seems that in the opinion of Mulla Sadra time is neither an objective or biased entity nor a completely subjective entity, like the logical secondary intelligible or illusions that are the outcomes of man's misconception; it is rather a subjective being, derived from the background and origin of objective abstraction.

In fact, in the opinion of Mulla Sadra, time, motion and physical being are of a same existence. He rejects the duality between motion and time, as he does not believe that motion and time are external accidents for the material being. Mulla Sadra has a very precise statement in this regard, which is rooted in his ideas about substance and accident. Mulla Sadra's opinion on the relation between substance and accident is totally different from those of Aristotle and Avicenna. He views accidents and attributes of each object in terms of existence, as the degrees and positions of the existence of substance. According to him, each attribute and accident in an object is exactly attribute and accident of the specific existence of that object. Thus motion of an object is the identity of that object. Accordingly, Mulla Sadra extends the motion to the category of substance and figures it as the amount of motion in substance. From his point of view, time is the essential appraiser of material substance and, therefore, all substances and material phenomena have their own specific time because time is one of the many aspects of their existence (Akbarian). Thus, Mulla Sadra considers time as a visible extension or the fourth dimension of material existence and in his point of view temporality of the objects is an indication of some sort of extension in their existence. In his detailed analysis, objects have two extensions; one in the ground of space and the other in the ground of time. The special traction has three geometrical dimensions and the time traction is resulted from the inner flux of material universe:

"... The nature has two extensions and two quantities; one is gradual and temporal and could be illusively divided into 'before' and 'after' of the time; while the other is expelling and spatial and could be divided into spatial 'before' and 'after'" (Mullah Sadra).

The mentioned phrase is amongst the most important and enlightening expressions of Mulla Sadra about the time. The fact that time is the fourth dimension of material and has no other external existence except for this is a great discovery in discussion over "existence of the time".

Of course, the philosophical term the "fourth dimension" in the Sadrian philosophy should not be mistaken for the physical term "general relativity" of Einstein. The universe having for dimensions in Sadrian interpretation is a metaphysical concept which could be experimented. This dimension is not

a quantitative dimension but an "existential dimension", derived from the state of "being" of the material being and interferes in its "identity". In fact, "time" is a fluid and renewable identity from which the mind is capable of abstracting an intellectual consideration called "time". According to this statement, motion, and consequently time, do not undergo any categories and may not be regarded as an essential concept. It is rather a fluid existence which acts like the motion and fluid existence in the external world; and it is only in the subjective analysis that mind can differentiate them. In order to understand the reality of time which is constantly renewed and is in fluidity and anxiety, one should to it and perceive it intuitive.

"They (substances) are existential identities which are by essence not under substance and quality and quantity other than these categories and species and geniuses; because, they are existences that have been imparted from affairs of the first right, they (pure beings) are effects of intellectual light and illuminating shadows of Him – the Almighty" (Mullah Sadra).

5. Time in Bergson's thought

The theories that have been presented about time before Bergson have usually emphasized on its quantitative aspects. Its qualitative characteristics have neither been a matter of question nor been paid the least attention. Bergson's point of view in the history of Western thoughts in this regard is being considered as a turning point. Bergson opposes the widespread interpretations of time and presents a new pattern. He considers the concept of time, as reflected in the current tradition of philosophy and physical sciences, as a spatial time and believes that these pretend to be measuring the time, while it is indeed the space that measures it. In this attitude, time has transpositions and belongs to the world of objects which is needed for giving order and regulating our motions and activities as such that is appropriates the social environment, but it is not the real time (Wall). Rather, the real time is a much deeper understanding which is in ourselves and belongs to ourselves which Bergson interprets as duration. In his point of view the real time is duration. Duration is absolute fluidity and dynamism. In Bergson's thought duration is being considered as multiplicity of conscious states which has unified his thought from his first philosophical work, "Time and Free Will", where it distinguishes between absolute multiplicity and multiplicity of conscious states, to the creative evolution.

In Bergson opinion, the unreal time is generated from our interpretation of space and in our normal everyday life we measure this time with such

matters as hours and calendar. Separation of time and space from each other and identification of two different times, one the unreal time which is resulted by the adjustment with space and dimension and, in other words, is a quantity and the other which is real time and means that the same duration which is a quality, is among outstanding points in Bergson's philosophy.

"There are two possible conceptions of time; one free from all alloys, the other temporally bringing in the idea of space" (Bergson).

"The concept of conventional time which is used in science, including mathematics, is together with the notion of space and in Bergson's opinion; this common and spatial concept of time is in fact abstracted from the real time, meaning duration. If we refer to our life and true experience of the time, we will find out time as duration; but when we build concepts or try to make an assessment of it we replace it with space and consider time to be spatial. In fact, this concept of time is a spatial or mathematical concept of duration.

For the sound interpretation of duration an example of Bergson himself would be effective:

1 –We imagine the material point "A" moving on a straight line with infinite length.

2. We imagine that "A" is a self-conscious being with intuitive knowledge of a succession which feels its own changes.

3. From this point two modes could be assumed:

a)"A" has an idea of the space.

b)"A" knows nothing about space, which we should accept this assumption in the understanding of duration.

4. We choose the first assumption that "A" is conscious of the space. Based on this assumption, "A" understands its successive approach as a line, because in this case "A" places itself somewhere above the line and thinks in a three-dimension space, because as long as we do not expect ourselves out of the line and become conscious of the free space around it, we could not imagine the line at all. The mistake that is being made by those who consider duration like space, but with a more simple nature, originates from this point. They would put psychic states side by side and make a line or chain out of it and imagine that space is not involved in this operation, while idea of a line in the absence of the involvement of space and perception of the free space around it has no meaning.

5) We choose the second assumption in which "A" has no idea about space. In this assumption "A" will not understand succession of its states and transformations in the form of a line. Instead, sensations will be added together like forces

and become harmonious like consecutive notes of a melody. Therefore, it is clear that a pure duration means a succession of qualitative changes which have influenced each other to the extent that have been melted in each other, there is no boundaries among them, do not tend to separate, and have no proportionality with numbers and counting that could guarantee imagination of space (Bergson).

Bergson considers negligence of the predecessors to the time as their lack of attention to continuity of time and presence of past in present and believes that the predecessors were only concerned about passage and wastage of time. Time for the predecessors was not theoretically significant because "duration" showed nothing but the destruction of their nature; while science deals with the fixed nature (Bergson).

In brief, several characteristics could be outlined for "real time" in Bergson's philosophy:

1 - Real time is a continuous reality whose components are so intermingled with each other that could not be distinguished from one another. There is an unbreakable unity between the past and the present. To further elucidate the problem, Bergson distinguishes two types of multiplicities in "Time and Free Will". The first is absolute multiplicity or distinctive multiplicity, which belongs to material objects that are located in place, and the other is a continuous multiplicity, which belongs to our conscious states and its elements are combined with each other (Bergson).

In Bergson's point of view multiplicity of conscious states is a qualitative multiplicity and absolute multiplicity is quantitative. These two temporal multiplicities would become further clear when we deal with our immediate experience, where Bergson elucidates it by providing an example. He says, for example, take our conscious of the successive strokes of the bell we are hearing, I may count the single strokes "in which case I shall have to separate them, and this separation must take place within some homogeneous medium in which the sounds, stripped of their qualities, and in a manner emptied, leave traces of their presence which are absolutely alike" (Bergson). This homogeneous medium can't be the time, because they can't persist in order to be added to others. Therefore it is space and a multiplicity which accompanies space and takes place in space. Bergson calls it an absolute multiplicity, and the spatial time on this basis is an absolute multiplicity. On the other hand, I may 'I retain each of these successive perceptions in order to combine it with the others and form a group which reminds me of an air or rhythm which I know: in that case, I don't count the sounds, I limit myself to gathering so to speak, the qualitative impression

produced by which series'" (Bergson). In this case, our attention is not towards any sound as a specific external single unit against the total sound; on the contrary we hear a melody or a tune in which single music notes melt or become fluid but join together and form an organic whole. Although sounds come individually and one after another, "we perceive them within each other ... its totality may be compared to a living being whose parts, although distinct, permeate an another because they are so closely connected" (Bergson). Therefore, in addition to the ability of projection of a medium or homogenous mediator which creates some kind of succession of distinct, coherent and unified units, we can this conceive of succession without distinction and think of it as a mutual penetration, an interconnection and organization of elements, each one of which represents the whole, and can't be distinguished or isolated from it except by abstract thought" (Bergson).

According to Bergson, thought this "succession without distinction" which is an indication of continuous multiplicity is basic characteristic of our consciousness and conscience because it is in the state of duration or real continuity. And duration is not a series of separate moments, rather every moment of it flows with other moments and instead of being a distinct and detached piece is a continuous process and constantly every new moment of it would be dipped with whatever it had been before (Bergson).

2. Duration is a pure quality which is only received through immediate intuition. As it was said earlier, duration is multiplicity of the conscious states. "What is duration within us?" a qualitative multiplicity, with likeness to number; an organic evolution which is yet not an increasing quantity; a pure heterogeneity within there are no distinct qualities" (Schwartz).

Heterogeneity is a feature of duration and when we talk about mathematical time we think of a heterogeneous mediator in which self-consciousness states have been put together like a space in order to form a multiplicity.

3. Duration is subsistence and in the light of the attention to the conscious states and life itself, it could be comprehended. The duration which is comprehensible through self-consciousness, because of being immediate of these perceptions is considered of the most irrefutable personal experience. The example that Bergson brings for this problem is that if I want to make a glass of water with sugar for myself, the more I try the less success I will gain, I have to wait until sugar dissolves. This minor point is highly informative. Because the time I have to wait for is no more that mathematical time which is being

imposed throughout the world history ... This conforms with my impatience; that is with part of my duration, which could not be prolonged or shortened deliberately. This is not thinkable, but is subsistence (Bergson).

4. Real time is unified with life and is not out of it, therefore wherever there is a sign of life, time is extensive. Time is real for life as it is for the empty upper part of the sand-glass, and its filled bottom (Bergson). Bergson's most beautiful expression about unity of time with the life is this immortal phrase: "wherever there is something living, a book is opened wherein time is being registered" (Bergson).

Wherever change is evolved, it will have duration as well. But, if motion is denied, duration would no more have a meaning. When each being is the result of its past, it would lose nothing in the passage of time; rather the more time moves on, the more will be added to its perfection and corpulence. Presence of the past in present is tantamount to the presence of all achievements of life in the status of man itself. Duration is not merely a moment replacing another moment; duration is constant progress of the past which gradually moves towards future and gets corpulent with its progress (Bergson).

6. Comparison between Mulla Sadra - Bergson thinking regarding time

1. There is an important distinction and separation in the opinions of the two philosophers. In Bergson's thought, the distinction between the unreal time and the real time is discussed as duration. Duration is undividable but the unreal time is spatial and therefore is dividable. In Mulla Sadra, as was mentioned earlier, unlike the predecessors the quantitative view to time is a curtailed, partial and incomplete interpretation of the time. In the opinion of Mulla Sadra time is within the existence trait of a temporal object which is adopted from the manner of its existence. Time accounts for the fluid reality of material beings. However, it should not be forgotten that the real time (quality time) from Bergson's point of view has been noted with respect to its manner of existence and, in this respect, greatly resembles Mulla Sadra's expression about time.

In the thought of the two philosophers, the unreal time, is quantitative and therefore is measurable and real time as well, has no transposition, before and after, beginning and end, and is not basically capable of having transpositions, while transposition constitutes essence of the unreal time.

2. As it has been mentioned, both the philosophers admit the possibility of access to the reality of time through presence and intuitive perception, which Bergson calls intuitive perception (Mulla Sadra holds

the same idea with regard to perception of the reality; yet he interprets the concept of "existence" a philosophical secondary intelligible like the concept of time). They also emphasize over this point that understanding and perceiving time, through conceptual encounter and reason, is not accessible and acquirable; in Bergson's words, what is obtained through reason in proximity with time is a fabricated time, false and unreal, and mathematical and quantitative not real and true (though Mulla Sadra does not consider conceptual analysis of time fabricated and false like Bergson).

3. In Sadrian philosophy, substantial motion and time acquire a closely intertwined relation to such an extent that in the understanding of each one of them the other cannot be neglected. He brings a reason to prove the substantial motion that one of its preliminaries is based on understanding and perceiving the reality of time. Mulla Sadra, through understanding the reality of time as one of the fluid and transient aspects of the dimensions of material beings, offers a reason on the existence of motion in the substance. On this basis, he considers every material being to be temporal and having time dimension; and because every being which has such a continuation within its essence would be gradually obtainable and would enjoy wide range of components in the span of time, he comes to the conclusion that existence of each physical substance is gradual, transient and renewable and when interfering in a temporal phenomenon, this is the same time of substantial motion; termination of the motion of substance is tantamount to termination of time and no physical substance could be assumed being apart from time. Generally speaking, in this view, the world is a fundamental motion; and this motion and evolution is the same as its existence and identity. In fact, the entire universe is a moving object with a single movement; every existing and every incident is a part of this single motion which is renewed and finds new creature in every single moment. In this case, the exact concept of substantial motion is that all particles of the world are constantly wasted and renewed. This constant wastage and renewal embodies not only all status and accidents of the objects, but also their entire identity and existence. Mulla Sadra also attributed this to human existence. In his opinion, the reality of human existence is a gradual and fluid reality whose motion begins from the first stages and finally, reaches the status of abstraction and understanding of the Holy reality. Time, like existence, has a close relation with the constant and continued creation. Every material phenomenon is transformable in its essence and substance and its existence at any given moment, is different from its existence in another moment;

therefore, the act of "permanent creation" by the divine absolute essence is underway - uninterrupted. Bergson, like Mulla Sadra, views termination of motion in the world as termination of time and, as was mentioned before, stresses that: Human and the world, which are constantly renewing and rehabilitating their existence, are considered as duration. "The world is duration. The more we ponder about the nature of time, the more we will understand that continuation, meaning innovation and creation of forms and constant preparation of issues, is absolutely new" (Bergson). If not exaggerated, some of the expressions of Bergson are so similar with remarks of Mulla Sadra and it seems that they have been quoted from Mulla Sadra's Al-Asfar. From Mulla Sadra point of view, in the turning points of physical and chemical transformations, a substantial evolution occurs and a new "self" is created in the world, but such renewal is a constant and permanent issue which infiltrates every particle of the creatures in the world. Therefore, creatures of this world at any moment achieve a new identity.

4. Among differences between the two philosophers which could be noticed about the time is that Mulla Sadra in addition to the favor shown to the existential dimension of the reality of time, also considers its conceptual, reasonable and quantitative dimensions as well and defines each of them in its special place. But, Bergson terms time, or in his own interpretation, the spatial time as fabricated and false time and not only regards no place for it, but denies it as well.

Of course, since the two philosophers come from two different philosophical schools, perhaps through greater pondering and deliberations, their differences even in the topic of discussion, could be further identified, but in this paper we were after taking steps in the path of comparison leading to conjunction and highlight common views the two philosophers share with each other. Therefore, we relinquish from focusing in detail on the differences of the two philosophers.

7. Conclusion

Given that Mulla Sadra and Bergson, due to their philosophical origins, have no intellectual affinity and background for mental relationship, however, their approach towards time is an indication of a new and fresh look which has not been given any attention by the predecessors. Of course, this does not mean that opinions of the two philosophers are fully compatible with regard to the time. Similarities that exist in the proximity of the two philosophers in this subject and comprehension and perception of time through the passage of presence and intuition, which is in fact the basis and fundamentals for Bergson's

philosophy as well as qualitative look and encounter with it in presence and in existence suggests unanimous look of the two philosophers to this reality, give us and excuse for comparing them. Of course we did not speak of their differences, because with regard to their adherence to two distinctive philosophical schools; addressing the differences would make speech tedious and thus would not realize our purpose and ultimate goal from this written article.

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