

# THE PHILOSOPHY OF JORGE LUIS BORGES

---

ALEXIS KARPOUZOS

---

Luis Borges, the Argentine writer, is renowned for his complex and thought-provoking works that often delve into philosophical themes. While Borges himself was not a philosopher in the traditional sense, his writings frequently explore philosophical concepts, particularly those related to metaphysics, reality, and the nature of time and identity.

Borges' philosophy cannot be pinned down to a single set of beliefs or principles. Instead, it manifests as a playful interplay between fiction and philosophy within his diverse body of work. He delighted in blurring the lines between genres, treating literature as non-fiction and vice versa, and often included invented authors and works within his essays.

His fascination with philosophy, especially metaphysics, sets him apart from his contemporaries. Borges appreciated and formulated rigorous philosophical arguments, but also had the unique ability to present abstract ideas imaginatively through metaphors and symbols. For instance, his stories often feature labyrinths, mirrors, and infinite libraries, which serve as symbols for more profound philosophical inquiries into reality, perception, and the infinite.

In his works, Borges frequently references and engages with the ideas of notable philosophers such as Berkeley, Hume, and Schopenhauer. He uses their concepts as a starting point to further explore and sometimes refute or extend their ideas. For example, in "The New Refutation of Time," Borges discusses Schopenhauer's denial of the reality of our representations and takes it a step further by questioning the reality of time itself.

Overall, Borges' contribution to philosophical literature is significant, and his works continue to inspire and challenge readers and thinkers alike. His approach to philosophy is less about asserting a consistent system of thought and more about exploring the possibilities and paradoxes that arise when one engages deeply with philosophical questions.

The philosophy embedded in Jorge Luis Borges' "El Aleph" is multifaceted, reflecting his deep engagement with metaphysical questions and the nature of reality. The story, which is part of the collection also titled "El Aleph," revolves around a point in space called the Aleph, which contains all other points in the universe. This point allows the observer to see everything

in the universe from every angle simultaneously, without distortion, overlapping, or confusion.

The Aleph symbolizes the concept of infinity and the limitations of human perception and language. Borges uses this narrative device to explore the idea that the universe is ineffable and that experiences shape perception and rationality. The story suggests that language, being sequential, cannot adequately describe the Aleph, which is synchronous and represents an “unimaginable universe” that is infinite.

Borges also touches on the theme of memory and its fallibility. After witnessing the Aleph, the narrator realizes that human memory cannot retain the infinite, and forgetfulness is an inherent part of the human condition. This ties back to the philosophical exploration of time and its inexorable passage, which naturally leads to memories fading away.

In a broader sense, “El Aleph” can be seen as a commentary on the human quest for knowledge and the desire to comprehend the incomprehensible. It challenges readers to consider the limitations of their own understanding and the potential vastness of the universe beyond what can be perceived or described.

Borges’ work often blurs the boundaries between the literal and the metaphorical, encouraging readers to reflect on the philosophical implications of his stories. “El Aleph” is a prime example of this, offering a rich tapestry of ideas about infinity, reality, and the power and limits of human cognition.

Jorge Luis Borges’ essay “A New Refutation of Time” is a profound exploration of the nature of time and its existence. In this work, Borges challenges the conventional understanding of time as a sequence of events that occur in a linear fashion. He argues that the negations of idealism, which suggest that reality is fundamentally mental or spiritual rather than material, can be extended to time itself.

Borges posits that time may not be a real, objective entity but rather a subjective construction of the human mind. He draws upon various philosophical and literary sources to support his argument, suggesting that time, as we perceive it, is an illusion. The essay delves into metaphysical questions about the continuity of time and personal identity, examining how our perception of time shapes our experience of existence.

The philosophy presented in “A New Refutation of Time” is complex and layered, inviting readers to reconsider their understanding of time and its impact on their lives. Borges’ reflections on time have influenced many thinkers and continue to be a topic of discussion in philosophical circles.

In Jorge Luis Borges’ essay “A New Refutation of Time, ” some of the key arguments include:

**The Illusion of Successive Moments:** Borges suggests that our experience of time as a continuity of successive moments is a cognitive illusion, not

an inherent feature of the universe.

**Time and Personal Identity:** He explores the idea that time is the foundation of our experience of personal identity, drawing from philosophical and literary sources to support his views.

**Time as a Mental Construction:** Borges argues that time may not be a real, objective entity but rather a subjective construction of the human mind.

**Berkeley's Idealism and Leibniz's Principle of Indiscernibles:** He uses these philosophical principles to support his argument that time, as we perceive it, is an illusion.

**Parmenides' Proposition:** Borges refers to Parmenides' idea that "what is" never was nor will be because it simply exists, which challenges the traditional concept of time.

**Time and Movement:** He discusses the relationship between time and movement, questioning the conventional belief that time is a measure of change.

**Eternity:** Borges offers a definition of eternity in the form of a rhetorical question, further complicating the concept of time.

These arguments are part of Borges' broader philosophical inquiry into the nature of reality and existence, as he seeks to demonstrate that time, as we understand and experience it, may be nothing more than an elaborate mental construct.