

## **AVICENNA AS A GREAT PHILOSOPHER OF MEDIEVAL SCIENCE**

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### **Annotation**

This article explores the life and creative heritage of one of the prominent thinkers of the Islamic world, the medieval East, philosopher, scientist, founder of medicine Abu Ali ibn Sina. In modern philosophical debates of East and West, Avicenna's ideas occupy a significant place in the scientific world. Avicenna's work contains invaluable ideas about the moral and physical education of the individual. The authors of the article reflect on the role and significance of philosophical thought, Avicenna's works in the process of educating today's youth on the basis of Eastern traditions and moral heritage.

**Key words:** scientist, modern science, philosophy, soul, mind, Sufism.

### **Introduction**

Avicenna was a prominent philosopher of a medieval science whose ideas are still topical until nowadays. In modern philosophic debates between East and West his ideas take central place. Contemporary philosophers and researchers analyze his works and interpret them in accordance with modern requirements. Oriental medieval philosophic culture, especially Iranian-Tajik and Arabic philosophy, is used as a source equally with western antique and medieval philosophic ideas in solutions to the many modern philosophic problems. In spite of the active development of science, the researches appeal to the studies of ancient thinkers including Arabian-Muslim philosophers (like Iranian-Tajik) while finding the solutions to many social-cultural and philosophic problems. French philosophy, like the whole western one, sees more humanistic, advanced, and adequate views in middle aged Arabian philosophy. Avicenna was one of the thinkers of Islamic world whose philosophy is known to the Europeans. Almost all medieval French thinkers living after the XII century were not only acquainted with Ibn Sino's philosophy, but were strongly affected by it. They interpreted his philosophy differently. The most important were his materialistic ideas. For example, the schools by Sigerius de Brabantia and École de Chartres. Though, such prominent thinkers, like Albert the Great (German) and Saint Thomas Aquinas (Italian) considered him, first of all, as a philosopher-theologian. Contemporary French philosophers interpret Ibn Sina's philosophy differently. There is no single opinion for his philosophy.

Some scholars (like Goishon) consider the essence of his philosophy in materialism. Some others, like Luis Gardet, prove philosophic theological character. Henry Corbin characterizes his philosophy as the philosophy of striking, as well as emanation and mystical philosophy. However, all modern French scholars insist that Ibn Sina's philosophy is a continuation of Plato and Aristotle philosophy.

**IBN SINA, ABU ALI** (Lat. Avicenna) (980-1037) a scientist-encyclopaedist, doctor, philosopher. He was born in Afsona near Bukhara on the August 16<sup>th</sup>, 980. His father, an official in Bukhara, originated from Balha (the capital of Greek-Bactrian Empire at that time) gave his son systematic home education having excited him with a thirst for knowledge. Later on, Abu Ali excelled his teachers and began self-study in physics, metaphysics, and medicine, having appealed to the works by Euclid, Ptolemy, and Aristotle. If the "Beginnings" by Euclid and "Almagest" by Ptolemy were not very difficult for Ibn Sina, Metaphysics by Aristotle required much effort from him. Up to forty times he began reading that work, but was not able to the deep of its content until come across the work by al-Faraby "About the aims of metaphysics, commentaries to the work by Aristotle". "I came back home, - told Ibn Sina in Lifedescription – and hastened to read it. At once the aim of the book was revealed for me as I learnt it by heart". During these years he wrote his own treatises and even began scientific correspondence-dispute with al-Biruni. In 1002-1005 he was in Khorezm in Academy of Mamun (scientific society). From 1008 he had to wander depending on the favour or caprice of emirs and sultans, palace intrigues. In 1030 during the aggression of deputy of Gaznevid sultan Masud to Isfakhan Ibn Sina's house was pillaged and most of his books were lost. Hardship of stressful life undermined his health and on the June, 10 1037 he died. He was buried in Hamadan (North Iran)

Scientific heritage of Ibn Sina includes different spheres of knowledge: philosophy, medicine, mathematics, astronomy, mineralogy, poetry, music, etc. The exact amount of his works was not stated (it is considered up to 456, including 23 in Farsi). The main work by Ibn Sina is "The canon of medicine science" (Kanun at-tibb, written in 1013-1021). In this fundamental work the information about pharmacology, detailed description of heart (the first beginning), liver (the second beginning), brain (also the second beginning) was given, as well as the statement the crystalline lens is the source of eye-sight was refuted while the fact that retina gives the vision was proved in this fundamental work. Avicenna differentiated plague and cholera, pleurisy and pneumonia, gave the description of leprosy, diabetes, stomach ulcer, etc.

The experienced surgeon Ibn Sina gave a detailed anatomic description of a human being, however, his main contribution was the description of brain. Having been translated in the XII century into Latin, the Canon served as the main guidance book for the European doctors up to the XVII century.

His another work, included different spheres of knowledge, “The book of healing” (Kitab ash-shifa) was also very popular. The main part of it was devoted to the “Book of soul”. Under the title Liber de Anima it became known in Europe from the middle of the XII century when it was translated by Dominique Gundisalvi into Latin. Nowadays, there are up to 50 manuscripts of Latin translation; the first publishing was in Padua in 1485. His philosophic views Ibn Sina expounded in Farsi in the “Book of knowledge” (Danish-name). The “Instructions and directions” (al-Isharatva-t-tanbihat) summarizing his philosophic thoughts was written in 1035-1036.

Being a philosopher, Ibn Sina belonged to the school of “falsafa”, oriental peripatetism. He did much for compilation of Arabian and Persian dictionaries. Upholding the principles of Aristotle, Ibn Sina paid much attention to logics, first reason, material and form, cognition, categories, principles of arranging thoughts and knowledge in his works. In Ibn Sina’s conception two approaches to the description of world are constantly presented: physical and metaphysical. When he argues as “physics”, he depicts the picture of being in categories of movement, space, time, natural determinism, arranges being in the order from simple to complex, from not-living to living and finishes with the most complicated rational body, human being. Within this picture we consider the mind as closely connected to the body, matter: “Souls appear when body matter appropriate for soul appears” (“The book of soul”). This matter is brain which different parts refer to different psychological processes. “The storage of general feeling is the power of imagination, which is located in the front part of the brain. That is why when this part is deformed, the sphere of imagination is broken. The storage of something that perceive the idea is the power named memory and it is located in the back part of the brain. The middle part of the brain serves for the place for power of imagination”. Considering different psychological conditions and phenomena, Ibn Sina appealed “to reveal the nature of all of these considering nature laws”.

When Ibn Sina argued as metaphysics, he built the picture of the world beginning from the limited, most general concepts: primary, that very idea of being and the concept of the Unity (God) giving the general notion about existence and expressing monistic (monotheistic) view on the being on the whole. “The First does not have any resemblance, or antipode, or gender, or definition. It is impossible to point it other than with the help of gnoses” (Instructions and directions).

The conception of ordered world dependent on the laws of determinism was one of the central points of Avicenna’s philosophy. The row of reasoned dependence raising from one generating reason to another finishes with the first reason which, being the active beginning (will), releases its potential and as a result mediate by a number of levels, a created world appears. Solving the problem of not only reality of the world, but also its independence of the Creator, Ibn Sina paid central attention to the theme of possible and necessary. The main idea of Arabian peripatetists was the idea of a world, in the possibility of the content of the

Unite and the power of this eternal to the Creator. Following the peripatetic tradition in the study of the reasoning, Ibn Sina refused the idea of rigid determinism: existence is not necessary on its own, but becomes as a result of changing a will of necessary existence as the first reason giving the beginning to the following existences and making them necessary. First, the Beginning is the only that is necessary by itself. All the others are the derivations from it, so they are possible. However, there is the reason realizing the possibility, the last becomes, in its turn, the necessity and the necessary reason for the next generation. Thus, the First reason is only the first impulse, further, the world of existence is defined by the reason of dependence inside of it.

Another important point of Ibn Sina's philosophy is the study of soul. Noticing indispensable connection of mind and body matter, Ibn Sina, in contrast to Aristotle, was interested in mind as well as the special non-somatic substance that, existing in the body, is different from it and dominates over it. It is not only the form existed in body substance, it is not joined with the body, but (in the terms of peripatetism) creates human body as a creator, is the reason of body. "Potential" mind, thanks to the education, gaining the knowledge, becomes "actual". Achieving the highest stage, having obtained abstract forms and the strength of "active" intellect, it becomes "acquired". At this stage the work of brain cannot depend on external impressions and the condition of a body; thinking about the thinking process the connection with body, matter, more likely impedes. Such a mind does not need the study of understandable existences – it understands them intuitively. "In a gained mind human potential becomes similar to the first beginnings of all beings" (About the soul). A human being is a free, independent creature. His mind is not only the perception of external impressions, but also purposeful subject projecting ideas. The independence of the mind from the body Ibn Sina proved by its indivisibility, as well as the ability for activity and even strengthening under the weakening of body's activity, feelings, etc. The bright illustration here is the introspective experiment described by Ibn Sina that was the image of "soaring man". "If we imagine that our being was created with healthy brain and perfect form at once and admit that its part are hidden from the view and do not touch each other but separated from one another and flying in the open air in a distance, then we will find out that it forgets about everything other than the proof of its individuality consisted in mind" (Instructions and directions). In this experience a person will recognize that "me is me, and even if I did not know that I have a leg or arm, or any other organ, I would be the same as I am now even if I did not have them" (About the soul). Being non-material, the soul is eternal; being material, it is individual forever (the conception of individual immortality). Correspondingly, human knowledge about themselves (introspection) is irrecoverable individually. Such interpretation of mind and forms of cognition was elaborated under the influence of Sufism and personal experience of "tarikah" (Sufic way to the God). It was also reflected on the works like,

“Treatise about Haya, Yakzan son”, “Epistle about birds”, “Salman and Absal”, and some others.

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