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Ibn-Sina

Islam's most renowned philosopher-scientist (980-1037), Ibn-Sina was a court physician in [Persia](#), and wrote two of history's greatest works, *The Book of Healing*, a [compendium](#) of science and philosophy, and *The Canon of Medicine*, an encyclopedia based on the teachings of Greek physicians. The latter was widely used in the West, where Ibn-Sina, known as Avicenna, was called the "prince of physicians."



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Av·i·cen·na (ăv'ĭ-sĕn'ə) , 980–1037.

Persian physician and Neo-Platonist philosopher noted for his *Canon of Medicine*, a standard medical textbook used in Europe until the 17th century.

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Avicenna

[b. Bukhara (Uzbekistan), 980, d.  
Hamadan (Iran), June 1037]

Avicenna is considered the greatest Arab physician today and was recognized as such during his lifetime as well. Rulers of various warring states of the disintegrating Arab hegemony considered Avicenna one of the spoils of war. In addition to his many writings concerning health and medicine, Avicenna argued that alchemists would never be able to transmute base metals into gold. He also transmitted many of Aristotle's views to the wide audience he obtained for the hundreds of books attributed to him.



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Avicenna  
(Abu-Ali Al-Husein ibn Abdullah ibn Sina)

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Avicenna

(born 980, Bukhara, Iran — died 1037, Hamadan) Islamic philosopher and scientist. He became physician to several sultans and also twice served as vizier. His *Canon of Medicine* was long a standard work in the field. He is known for his great encyclopaedia of philosophy, *The Book of Healing*. His other writings include *The Book of Salvation* and *The Book of Directives and Remarks*. His interpretations of [Aristotle](#) influenced European [Scholasticism](#). His system rests on a conception of God as the necessary existent: only in God do essence (what God is) and existence (that God is) coincide.

For more information on [Avicenna](#), visit [Britannica.com](#).

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Avicenna (ävīsēn'ə) , Arabic *Ibn Sina*, 980–1037, Islamic philosopher and physician, of Persian origin, b. near Bukhara. He was the most renowned philosopher of medieval Islam and the most influential name in medicine from 1100 to 1500. His medical masterpiece was the *Canon of Medicine*. His other masterpiece, the *Book of Healing*, is a philosophical treatise dealing with the soul. Avicenna's interpretation of Aristotle followed to some extent that of the Neoplatonists. He saw God as emanating the universe from himself in a series of triads formed of mind, soul, and body. This process terminated in the Aristotelian “active intellect,” which governs directly all earthly regions and transmits to all things their appropriate forms. Man's soul is also derived from it and is immortal. Avicenna was not an absolute pantheist as he believed matter to exist independently of God. He fixed the classification of sciences used in the medieval schools of Europe.

Bibliography

See S. M. Afnan, *Avicenna, His Life and Works* (1958); H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (tr. 1960); P. Morewedge, *The Metaphysics of Avicenna* (1973).

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## Avicenna

*Avicenna (ca. 980-1037) was an Arabic physician and philosopher. He wove classical dicta into a rational, consistent system that dominated European medical thought from the late 12th to the 17th century.*

Born in Afshana in the district of Bukhara, Avicenna, or Abu Ali al-Husain ibn Addullah ibn Sina, was the son of a government official. The family soon moved to the city of Bukhara, the capital of the province, and known throughout the Islamic world as a center of learning and culture. There Avicenna began his studies and by the age of 16 had mastered not only natural science and rudimentary metaphysics but also medical theory, having read, by his own account, all the books written on this subject. Not satisfied with merely a theoretical understanding of medicine, he began to treat the sick, obtaining empirical knowledge in this manner and also effecting remarkable cures.

The sultan of Bukhara appointed Avicenna as one of his physicians, who then had access to the sultan's vast library. By the time Avicenna was 18, he had read all the books. An early work written by Avicenna was an encyclopedia that included all branches of knowledge except mathematics; it ran to 20 volumes.

Avicenna had difficulty earning a livelihood after the sultan's death, and at the age of 22 he left Bukhara and wandered westward. At Jurjan, near the Caspian Sea, Avicenna lectured on logic and astronomy and wrote the first part of the *Canon*, his most significant medical work. He then moved to Ray (near modern Teheran), where he established a busy medical practice. There he is believed to have composed about 30 of his shorter works.

### Physician to Rulers

When Ray was besieged, Avicenna fled to Hamadan, ruled by the emir Shams al-Daula. Avicenna became the emir's physician and confidant and was soon appointed to the office of vizier. Since his daylight hours were spent in attendance on the emir, Avicenna was forced to pursue his teaching and studying at night. Students would gather in his home and read the parts of his two great books, the *Shifa* and the *Canon*, already composed. He would dictate additional chapters and explain the principles underlying them to his pupils.

When Shams al-Daula died, Avicenna resigned his government office, went into hiding, and passed the time drafting a final, detailed outline of the *Shifa*. He sent a letter to the ruler of Isfahan, asking for a position in his government. When the new emir of Hamadan learned of this, he imprisoned Avicenna. While in prison Avicenna wrote several treatises. He longed to live in Isfahan, the jeweled city of central Persia, and a few months after his release from prison he, his brother, a pupil, and two slaves disguised themselves as religious ascetics and fled to Isfahan.

Avicenna spent his final years in the service of the ruler of the city, Ala al-Daula, whom he advised on scientific and literary matters and accompanied on military

campaigns. An unexpected dividend of these excursions in the field was the completion of Avicenna's chapter of the *Shifa* dealing with botany and zoology.

Once, while Avicenna was ill, his slaves gave him an overdose of opium, ransacked his possessions, and escaped. Avicenna never fully recovered from this experience. In his last days he is said to have distributed alms to the poor, freed his slaves, and listened to readings from the Koran. He died during June 1037 and was buried at Hamadan.

### Avicenna's Works

Although one Islamic bibliographer lists only 21 major and 24 minor works of Avicenna, other titles swell the total to at least 99 treatises dealing with philosophy, medicine, geometry, astronomy, theology, philology, and art. Young students in the Arab world still memorize his poems. The most significant of his scientific writings are the book on healing, *Kitab al Shifa*, a philosophical encyclopedia based on the Aristotelian tradition as modified by Moslem theology and Neoplatonic influences; and *Al-Qanun fi al Tibb*, or the *Canon*, which represents Avicenna's codification of Greco-Arabic medical thought.

If the *Shifa* exerted less influence in the West than did the *Canon*, this fact is explained partly by the difficulty of the subject matter and partly by the condition in which it reached Western scholars. When the *Shifa* was first translated into Latin during the 12th century, it was fragmented. The translators omitted the section on mathematics, presented only a small part of the chapters on physics and logic, and included a section on astronomy apparently written by someone else. Later translators were influenced by the efforts of their predecessors, and although parts of the *Shifa* originally overlooked or suppressed were translated subsequently, the composite nature of the work was not fully understood in the West until comparatively recently.

The *Canon*, in contrast, was rendered completely into Latin by one man, the great 12th-century translator of Arabic scientific works, Gerard of Cremona. The vast medical encyclopedia is divided into five books dealing with the theory of medicine, the simpler drugs, special pathology and therapeutics, general diseases, and pharmacopoeia.

Although much material in the second and fifth books was derived from the writings of Dioscurides, most data in the remainder of the *Canon* can be traced to three essential sources. Avicenna drew on the writings in the *Hippocratic Corpus* for fundamental doctrines. His sources for much of the anatomy and physiology were the writings of Galen. Avicenna's final authority was usually Aristotle. That Avicenna introduced the four causes of the peripatetic system into medical theory is indicative of adherence to Aristotelian principles, as is the fact that the entire *Canon* is arranged according to Aristotelian dialectic.

The synergistic quality of the *Canon* was certainly a major factor contributing to its success, and the work soon was regarded as superior even to its sources. Avicenna's book superseded the earlier medical encyclopedias and became the most important single work on medicine in the Western world. It remained a required text in certain

European medical schools until the mid-17th century, and in certain Asian countries it is influential even today.

### Further Reading

Avicenna's brief autobiography, "Life of a Philosopher," completed by his student al-Juzjani, is in A. J. Arberry, *Aspects of Islamic Civilization as Depicted in the Original Texts* (1964). Soheil M. Afnan, *Avicenna: His Life and Works* (1958), covers all aspects of Avicenna's work and thought. Max Meyerhof's article, "Science and Medicine," in Sir Thomas Arnold and Alfred Guillaume, eds., *The Legacy of Islam* (1931), contains a brief biographical sketch of Avicenna. For more specialized studies see E. G. Browne, *Arabian Medicine* (1921); George Sarton, *Introduction to the History of Science*, vol. 1: *From Homer to Omar Khayyam* (1927); A. J. Arberry, *Avicenna on Theology* (1951); F. Rahman, *Avicenna's Psychology* (1952); Henry Corbin, *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital* (1960); and Seyyed Hossein Nasr, *An Introduction to Islamic Cosmological Doctrines* (1964) and *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, Ibn Arabi* (1964).

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Persian physician and philosopher noted for his *Canon of Medicine*, a standard medical textbook used in Europe until the 17th century.

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Avicenna

## Persian scholar Medieval era



Абуали Сино - Ависенна

**Name:** **Abu Ali Sina**

**Birth:** [980 CE](#) / [370 AH](#)<sup>[1]</sup>

**Death:** [1037 CE](#) / [428 AH](#)<sup>[1]</sup>

**School/tradition:** [Mu'tazili](#)

**Main interests:** [Metaphysics](#), [logic](#), [ethics](#), [medicine](#), [physics](#), [mathematics](#), [astronomy](#), [theology](#)

**Notable ideas:** The works of Avicenna were long used in European medical education

**Influences:** [Aristotle](#), [Neoplatonism](#), [al-Farabi](#)

**Influenced:** [Ibn Rushd](#), [Omar Khayyam](#)

**Abū ‘Alī al-Husayn ibn ‘Abd Allāh ibn Sīnā al-Balkhī** ([Persian](#) ابوعلی سینا *Abu Ali Sina* or arabisized: أبو علي الحسين بن عبد الله بن سينا; often referred to, simply as **Ibn Sina**, or by his [latinized](#) name **Avicenna**) was a [Persian](#)<sup>[2][3]</sup> (*Tājīk*) [physician](#), [philosopher](#), and [scientist](#).

He was born in [980 CE](#) / [370 AH](#)<sup>[1]</sup> in Afshana near [Bukhara](#) (now in [Uzbekistan](#)) and died in [1037 CE](#) / [428 AH](#)<sup>[1]</sup> in [Hamadan](#) (now in [Iran](#)).

He was the [author](#) of 450 books on a wide range of subjects, many of which concentrated on [philosophy](#) and [medicine](#). His most famous works are *[The Book of](#)*

[Healing](#) and [The Canon of Medicine](#), which was for seven centuries, the standard medical text in European universities.

## Early life

His life is known to us from authoritative sources. An autobiography covers his first thirty years, and the rest are documented by his disciple [al-Juzajani](#), who was also his secretary and his friend.

He was born in around 370 (AH) / 980 (AD) in Afshana, his mother's home, a small city now part of [Uzbekistan](#) (then part of [Persia](#)). His father, a respected [Ismaili](#) scholar, was from [Balkh](#) of [Khorasan](#), now part of [Afghanistan](#) (then also Persia) and was at the time of his son's birth the governor of a village in one of [Nuh ibn Mansur](#)'s estates. He had his son very carefully educated at [Bukhara](#). Traditionally of the [Ismaili Shia](#) branch of Islam, Ibn Sina's independent thought was served by an extraordinary intelligence and memory, which allowed him to overtake his teachers at the age of fourteen.



Avicenna

Ibn Sina was put under the charge of a tutor, and his precocity soon made him the marvel of his neighbours; he displayed exceptional [intellectual](#) behaviour and was a [child prodigy](#) who had memorized the [Koran](#) by the age of 7 and a great deal of [Persian poetry](#) as well. From a greengrocer he learned [arithmetic](#), and he began to learn more from a wandering scholar who gained a livelihood by curing the sick and teaching the young.

However he was greatly troubled by [metaphysical](#) problems and in particular the works of [Aristotle](#). So, for the next year and a half, he also studied [philosophy](#), in which he encountered greater obstacles. In such moments of baffled inquiry, he would leave his books, perform the requisite ablutions, then go to the [mosque](#), and continue in prayer till light broke on his difficulties. Deep into the night he would continue his studies, and even in his dreams problems would pursue him and work out their solution. Forty times, it is said, he read through the *Metaphysics* of [Aristotle](#), till the words were imprinted on his memory; but their meaning was hopelessly obscure, until one day they found illumination, from the little commentary by [Farabi](#), which he bought at a bookstall for the small sum of three dirhems. So great was his joy at the



discovery, thus made by help of a work from which he had expected only mystery, that he hastened to return thanks to God, and bestowed alms upon the poor.

He turned to [medicine](#) at 16, and not only learned medical theory, but by gratuitous attendance on the sick had, according to his own account, discovered new methods of [treatment](#). The teenager achieved full status as a physician at age 18 and found that "Medicine is no hard and thorny science, like [mathematics](#) and [metaphysics](#), so I soon made great progress; I became an excellent doctor and began to treat patients, using approved remedies." The youthful physician's fame spread quickly, and he treated many patients without asking for payment.

His first appointment was that of physician to the [emir](#), who owed him his recovery from a dangerous illness (997). Ibn Sina's chief reward for this service was access to the royal [library](#) of the [Samanids](#), well-known patrons of scholarship and scholars. When the library was destroyed by fire not long after, the enemies of Ibn Sina accused him of burning it, in order for ever to conceal the sources of his knowledge. Meanwhile, he assisted his father in his financial labours, but still found time to write some of his earliest works.

When Ibn Sina was 22 years old, he lost his father. The [Samanid dynasty](#) came to its end in December 1004. Ibn Sina seems to have declined the offers of [Mahmud of Ghazni](#), and proceeded westwards to [Urgench](#) in the modern [Uzbekistan](#), where the [vizier](#), regarded as a friend of scholars, gave him a small monthly stipend. The pay was small, however, so Ibn Sina wandered from place to place through the districts of [Nishapur](#) and [Merv](#) to the borders of [Khorasan](#), seeking an opening for his talents. Shams al-Ma'ali Qabti, the generous ruler of Dailam, himself a poet and a scholar, with whom Ibn Sina had expected to find an asylum, was about that date (1052) starved to death by his troops who had revolted. Ibn Sina himself was at this season stricken down by a severe illness. Finally, at [Gorgan](#), near the [Caspian Sea](#), Ibn Sina met with a friend, who bought a dwelling near his own house in which Ibn Sina lectured on [logic](#) and [astronomy](#). Several of Ibn Sina's treatises were written for this patron; and the commencement of his *Canon of Medicine* also dates from his stay in [Hyrcania](#).


Ibn Sina subsequently settled at [Rai](#), in the vicinity of modern [Tehran](#), (present day capital of Iran), the home town of [Rhazes](#); where Majd Addaula, a son of the last [emir](#), was nominal ruler under the regency of his mother ([Seyyedeh Khatun](#)). At Rai about thirty of Ibn Sina's shorter works are said to have been composed. Constant feuds which raged between the regent and her second son, Amir Shamsud-Dawala, however, compelled the scholar to quit the place. After a brief sojourn at [Qazvin](#) he passed southwards to Hamadān, where the emir had established himself. At first, Ibn Sina entered into the service of a high-born lady; but the emir, hearing of his arrival, called him in as medical attendant, and sent him back with presents to his dwelling. Ibn Sina was even raised to the office of vizier. The emir consented that he should be banished from the country. Ibn Sina, however, remained hidden for forty days in a [sheikh's](#) house, till a fresh attack of illness induced the emir to restore him to his post. Even during this perturbed time, Ibn Sina persevered with his studies and teaching. Every evening, extracts from his great works, the *Canon* and the *Sanatio*, were dictated and explained to his pupils. On the death of the emir, Ibn Sina ceased to be vizier and hid

himself in the house of an [apothecary](#), where, with intense assiduity, he continued the composition of his works.

Meanwhile, he had written to Abu Ya'far, the [prefect](#) of the dynamic city of [Isfahan](#), offering his services. The new emir of Hamadan, hearing of this correspondence and discovering where Ibn Sina was hidden, incarcerated him in a fortress. War meanwhile continued between the rulers of Isfahan and Hamadān; in [1024](#) the former captured Hamadan and its towns, expelling the Turkish [mercenaries](#). When the storm had passed, Ibn Sina returned with the emir to Hamadan, and carried on his literary labours. Later, however, accompanied by his brother, a favourite pupil, and two slaves, Ibn Sina escaped out of the city in the dress of a [Sufite ascetic](#). After a perilous journey, they reached Isfahan, receiving an honourable welcome from the prince.

## Later life



 Avicenna's tomb in [Hamedan](#), [Iran](#)

The remaining ten or twelve years of Avicenna's life were spent in the service of Abu Ya'far 'Ala Addaula, whom he accompanied as physician and general literary and scientific adviser, even in his numerous campaigns.

During these years he began to study [literary](#) matters and [philology](#), instigated, it is asserted, by criticisms on his style. He contrasts with the nobler and more intellectual character of [Averroes](#). A severe [colic](#), which seized him on the march of the army against Hamadān, was checked by remedies so violent that Ibn Sina could scarcely stand. On a similar occasion the disease returned; with difficulty he reached Hamadān, where, finding the disease gaining ground, he refused to keep up the regimen imposed, and resigned himself to his fate.


His friends advised him to slow down and take life moderately. He refused, however, stating that: *"I prefer a short life with width to a narrow one with length"*. On his deathbed remorse seized him; he bestowed his goods on the poor, restored unjust gains, freed his slaves, and every third day till his death listened to the reading of the Qur'an. He died in June [1037](#), in his fifty-eighth year, and was buried in [Hamedan](#), [Iran](#).

## Works

Scarcely any member of the Arabian circle of the sciences, including [theology](#), [philology](#), [mathematics](#), [astronomy](#), [physics](#), and [music](#), was left untouched by the treatises of Ibn Sina. This vast quantity of works - be they full-blown treatises or opusculae - vary so much in style and content (if one were to compare between the 'ahd made with his disciple Bahmanyar to uphold philosophical integrity with the Provenance and Direction, for example) that Yahya (formerly Jean) Michot justifiably accused him of "neurological bipolarity". He wrote at least one treatise on [alchemy](#), but several others have been falsely attributed to him. His book on [animals](#) was translated by [Michael Scot](#). His *Logic*, *Metaphysics*, *Physics*, and *De Caelo*, are treatises giving a synoptic view of Aristotelian doctrine, though the *Metaphysics* demonstrates a significant departure from the brand of Neoplatonism known as Aristotelianism in Avicenna's world; Arabic philosophers have hinted at the idea that Avicenna was attempting to "re-Aristotelianise" Arabic philosophy in its entirety, unlike his predecessors, who accepted the conflation of Platonic, Aristotelian, Neo- and Middle-Platonic works transmitted into the Arabic world. The *Logic* and *Metaphysics* have been printed more than once, the latter, e.g., at Venice in [1493](#), [1495](#), and [1546](#). Some of his shorter essays on medicine, logic, &c., take a poetical form (the poem on logic was published by Schmoelders in [1836](#)). Two encyclopaedic treatises, dealing with philosophy, are often mentioned. The larger, Al-Shifa' (*Sanatio*), exists nearly complete in manuscript in the [Bodleian Library](#) and elsewhere; part of it on the *De Anima* appeared at Pavia ([1490](#)) as the *Liber Sextus Naturalium*, and the long account of Ibn Sina's philosophy given by [Muhammad al-Shahrastani](#) seems to be mainly an analysis, and in many places a reproduction, of the Al-Shifa'. A shorter form of the work is known as the An-najat (*Liberatio*). The Latin editions of part of these works have been modified by the corrections which the monastic editors confess that they applied. There is also a *Philosophia Orientalis*, mentioned by [Roger Bacon](#), and now lost, which according to Averroes was pantheistic in tone.

## Medicine



 A [Latin](#) copy of the Canon of Medicine, dated [1484](#), located at the P.I. Nixon Medical Historical Library of The [University of Texas Health Science Center at San Antonio](#).

About 100 treatises were ascribed to Ibn Sina. Some of them are tracts of a few pages, others are works extending through several volumes. The best-known amongst them, and that to which Ibn Sina owed his European reputation, is his 14-volume [The Canon of Medicine](#), which was a standard medical text in Western Europe for seven centuries. It paved way for many discoveries later by the Europeans. It classifies and describes diseases, and outlines their assumed causes. [Hygiene](#), simple and complex medicines, and functions of parts of the body are also covered. In this, Avicenna is credited as being the first to correctly document the anatomy of the human eye, along with descriptions of eye afflictions such as [cataracts](#). It asserts that [tuberculosis](#) was

contagious, which was later disputed by Europeans, but turned out to be true. It also describes the symptoms and complications of [diabetes](#). Both forms of facial paralysis were described in-depth. In addition, the workings of the [heart](#) as a valve are described. An Arabic edition of the *Canons* appeared at Rome in [1593](#), and a Hebrew version at Naples in [1491](#). Of the Latin version there were about thirty editions, founded on the original translation by [Gerard of Cremona](#). In the [15th century](#) a commentary on the text of the *Canon* was composed. Other medical works translated into Latin are the *Medicamenta Cordialia*, *Canticum de Medicina*, and the *Tractatus de Syrupis Acetosus*.

It was mainly accident which determined that from the [12th](#) to the [17th century](#) Ibn Sina should be the guide of medical study in European universities, and eclipse the names of Rhazes, Ali ibn al-Abbas and [Averroes](#). His work is not essentially different from that of his predecessor Rhazes, because he presented the doctrine of [Galen](#), and through Galen the doctrine of [Hippocrates](#), modified by the system of Aristotle. But the *Canon* of Avicenna is distinguished from the *Al-Hawi* (Continens) or *Summary* of Rhazes by its greater method, due perhaps to the logical studies of the former. The work has been variously appreciated in subsequent ages, some regarding it as a treasury of wisdom, and others, like [Averroes](#), holding it useful only as waste paper. In modern times it has been seen of mainly historic interest as most of its tenets have been disproved or expanded upon by scientific medicine. The vice of the book is excessive classification of bodily faculties, and over-subtlety in the discrimination of diseases. It includes five books; of which the first and second discuss [physiology](#), [pathology](#) and [hygiene](#), the third and fourth deal with the methods of treating disease, and the fifth describes the composition and preparation of remedies. This last part contains some personal observations. He is, like all his countrymen, ample in the enumeration of symptoms, and is said to be inferior to Ali in practical medicine and [surgery](#). He introduced into medical theory the *four causes of the Peripatetic system*. Of [natural history](#) and [botany](#) he pretended to no special knowledge. Up to the year [1650](#), or thereabouts, the *Canon* was still used as a textbook in the universities of [Leuven](#) and [Montpellier](#).

In the museum at [Bukhara](#), there are displays showing many of his writings, surgical instruments from the period and paintings of patients undergoing treatment.

Ibn Sina was interested in the effect of the [mind](#) on the [body](#), and wrote a great deal on [psychology](#), likely influencing [Ibn Tufayl](#) and [Ibn Bajjah](#). He also introduced medical herbs.

## Philosophy

Ibn Sina wrote extensively on the subjects of [philosophy](#), [logic](#), [ethics](#), [metaphysics](#) and other disciplines. Most of his works were written in [Arabic](#) - which was the *de facto* scientific [language](#) of that time, and some were written in the Persian language. Of linguistic significance even to this day are a few books that he wrote in nearly pure Persian language (particularly the *Danishnamah-yi 'Ala'*, *Philosophy for Ala' ad-Dawla*). Ibn Sina's commentaries on Aristotle often corrected the philosopher, encouraging a lively debate in the spirit of [ijtihad](#).

Ibn Sina's philosophical tenets have become of great interest to critical Western scholarship and to those engaged in the field of Arabic philosophy, in both the West and the East. However, it is still sadly the case that the West only pays attention to a portion of his philosophy known as the *Latin Avicennian School*. Avicenna's philosophical contributions have been overshadowed by Orientalist scholarship, which has sought to define him as a mystic rather than an [Aristotelian](#) philosopher. The so-called *حكمة مشرقية* (*hikmat-al-mashriqiyya*) remains a source of huge irritation to contemporary Arabic scholars, in particular Reisman, Gutas, Street, and Bertolacci. The original work, entitled the Easterners (al-mashriqiyun), was probably lost during Avicenna's lifetime; Ibn Tufayl dishonestly appended it to a romantic philosophical work of his own in the twelfth century, the Hayy b. Yaqzan, in order to validate his shaky philosophical system, and, by the time that the work was transmitted into the West, appended as it was to a set of "mystical" opusculae and sundry essays, it was firmly accepted as a demonstration of Avicenna's "esoteric" orientation, which he concealed out of necessity from his peers. Such interpretations of Avicenna's "true" state of mind ignore the vast corpus of work that he produced, from major treatises to slurs on his enemies and rivals, misrepresent him utterly. It also regrettably detracts attention from the fact that Arabic philosophy flourished during the ten centuries after Avicenna's death, emerging from Avicenna's inflammatory pronouncements on all matters within the world, whether physical or metaphysical; the works of the post-Avicennian Baghdadi Peripatetics and anti-Peripatetics, for example, remain to be studied in much greater detail.

## **Metaphysical doctrine**

Islamic philosophy, imbued as it is with theology, distinguishes more clearly than Aristotelianism the difference between [essence](#) and [existence](#). Whereas existence is the domain of the contingent and the accidental, essence endures within a being beyond the accidental. However, Avicenna's commentaries upon the Metaphysics in particular demonstrate that he was much more clearly aligned with a philosophical comprehension of the metaphysical world rather than one that was grounded in theology. (See, for example, the Compendium on the Soul, where beneath the heading of Metaphysics he prioritises Universal Science (Being-as-such and First Philosophy) over theology. The philosophy of Avicenna, particularly that part relating to [metaphysics](#), owes much to [Aristotle](#) and to [Al-Farabi](#). The search for a truly definitive Islamic philosophy can be seen in what is left to us of his work.

### ***God as the first cause of all things***

For Avicenna, essence is non-contingent. For an essence to be realised within time (as an existence), the existence must be rendered necessary by the essence itself. This particular relationship of [cause and effect](#) is due to an inherent property of the essence, that it is non-contingent. For existence in general to be possible, there must exist a necessary essence, itself uncaused - a being or God to begin a process of [emanation](#).

This view has a profound impact on the [monotheistic](#) concept of creation. Existence is not seen by Avicenna as the work of a capricious deity, but of a divine, self-causing thought process. The movement from this to existence is necessary, and not an act of will per se. The world emanates from God by virtue of his abundant intellect - an immaterial cause as found in the [neoplatonic](#) concept of emanation.

Avicenna found inspiration for this metaphysical view in the works of [Al-Farabi](#), but his innovation is in his account a single and *necessary* first cause of all existence. Whether this view can be reconciled with [Islam](#), particularly given the question of what role is left for God's will, was to become a subject of considerable controversy within intellectual Islamic discourse.

### ***The Ten Intellects***

In Avicenna's account of creation (largely derived from [Al-Farabi](#)), from this first cause (or First Intellect) proceeds the creation of the material world.

The First Intellect, in contemplating the necessity of its existence, gives rise to the Second Intellect. In contemplating its emanation from God, it then gives rise to the First Spirit, which animates the Sphere of Spheres (the universe). In contemplating itself as a self-caused essence (that is, as something that could potentially exist), it gives rise to the matter that fills the universe and forms the Sphere of the Planets (the First Heaven in al-Farabi).

This triple-contemplation establishes the first stages of existence. It continues, giving rise to consequential intellects which create between them two [celestial hierarchies](#): the Superior Hierarchy of [Cherubim](#) (*Kerubim*) and the Inferior Hierarchy, called by Avicenna "[Angels](#) of Magnificence". These angels animate the heavens, but are deprived of all sensory perception, but have imagination which allows them to desire the intellect from which they came. Their vain quest to join this intellect causes an eternal movement in heaven. They also cause prophetic visions in humans.

The angels created by each of the next seven Intellects are associated with a different body in the Sphere of the Planets. These are: [Saturn](#), [Jupiter](#), [Mars](#), [the Sun](#), [Venus](#), [Mercury](#) and [the Moon](#). The last of these is of particular importance, since its association is with the Angel Gabriel ("The Angel").

This Ninth Intellect occurs at a step so removed from the First Intellect that the emanation that then arises from it explodes into fragments, creating not a further celestial entity, but instead creating human souls, which have the sensory functions lacked by the Angels of Magnificence.

### ***The Angel and the minds of humans***

For Avicenna, human minds were not in themselves formed for abstract thought. Humans are intellectual only potentially, and only illumination by the Angel confers upon them the ability to make from this potential a real ability to think. This is the Tenth Intellect.

The degree to which minds are illuminated by the Angel varies. [Prophets](#) are illuminated to the point that they possess not only rational intellect, but also an imagination and ability which allows them to pass on their superior wisdom to others. Some receive less, but enough to write, teach, pass laws, and contribute to the distribution of knowledge. Others receive enough for their own personal realisation, and others still receive less.

On this view, all humanity shares a single agent intellect - a collective consciousness. The final stage of human life, according to Avicenna, is reunion with the emanation of the Angel. Thus, the Angel confers upon those imbued with its intellect the certainty of life after death. For Avicenna, as for the [neoplatonists](#) who influenced him, the immortality of the soul is a consequence of its nature, and not a purpose for it to fulfill.

## Poetry

Almost half of Avicenna's works are versified. ([E.G. Browne](#), p61) His poems appear in both Arabic and Persian. As an example, [Edward Granville Browne](#) claims that the following verses are incorrectly attributed to [Omar Khayyám](#), and were originally written by Avicenna ([E.G. Browne](#), p60-61):

از قعر گل سیاه تا اوج زحل

**Up from Earth's Centre through the Seventh Gate**

کردم همه مشکلات گیتی را حل

**I rose, and on the Throne of Saturn sate,**

بیرون جستم ز قید هر مکر و حیل


**And many Knots unravel'd by the Road;**

هر بند گشاده شد مگر بند اجل

**But not the Master-Knot of Human Fate.**

## Legacy



 Imaginary portrait of Avicenna is seen depicted on a stamp issued by the [United Arab Emirates](#).

[George Sarton](#) called Ibn Sina "the most famous scientist of [Islam](#) and one of the most famous of all races, places, and times."

He was one of the [Islamic world's](#) leading writers in the field of medicine and followed the approach of [Hippocrates](#) and [Galen](#). Along with [Rhazes](#), [Ibn Nafis](#), [Al-Zahrawi](#) and [Al-Ibadi](#), he is considered an important compiler of [Early Muslim](#)

[medicine](#). He is remembered in Western history of medicine (under his latinised name Avicenna) as a major historical figure who made fundamental contributions to medicine and the European reawakening.

In Iran, he is considered a national icon, and is often regarded as one of the greatest Persians to have ever lived. Many portraits and statues remain in Iran today. An impressive monument to the life and works of the man who is known as the 'doctor of doctors' still stands outside the Bukhara museum and his portrait hangs in the Hall of the Faculty of Medicine in the [University of Paris](#). There is also a crater on the moon named [Avicenna](#).

## Literature

- For Ibn Sina's life, see [Ibn Khallikan](#)'s *Biographical Dictionary*, translated by [de Slane](#) (1842); [F. Wüstenfeld](#)'s *Geschichte der arabischen Aerzte und Naturforscher* (Göttingen, 1840).
- For his medicine, see [Sprengel](#), *Histoire de la Médecine*
- For his philosophy, see
  - Dimitri Gutas, "Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition: Introduction to Reading Avicenna's Philosophical Works"
  - Reisman, David C., ed, "Before and After Avicenna: Proceedings of the First Conference of the Avicenna Study Group"
  - The Cambridge Companion to Arabic Philosophy
  - [Shahrastani](#), German translation, vol. ii. 213-332
  - [K. Prantl](#), *Geschichte der Logik im Abendland*, ii. 318-361
  - [Albert Stöckl](#), *Philosophie des Mittelalters*, ii. ~3-58
  - [Salomon Munk](#), *Mélanges*, 352-366; [B. Haneberg](#) in the *Abhandlungen der philosophische-philologisches Classification der bayerischen Academie* (1867);
  - Carra de Vaux, *Avicenne* (Paris, 1900).
- For a list of extant works, [C. Brockelmann](#)'s *Geschichte der arabischen Litteratur* (Weimar, 1898), vol. i. pp. 452-458. (XV. W.; G. W. T.)
- For an overview of his career see Shams Inati, "Ibn Sina" in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, ed. Hossein Seyyed Nasr and Oliver Leaman, New York: Routledge (1996).
- [Edward G. Browne](#), *Islamic Medicine*, 2002, Goodword Pub., ISBN 81-87570-19-9
- [Henry Corbin](#), *History of Islamic Philosophy*
- A good introduction to his life and philosophical thought is *Avicenna* by Lenn E. Goodman (Cornell University Press: 2006)

## Notes

1. <sup>^</sup> [a](#) [b](#) [c](#) [d](#) [\[1\]](#) [\[2\]](#)
2. <sup>^</sup> "Avicenna", in [Encyclopaedia Britannica](#), Concise Online Version, 2006 ([LINK](#))
3. <sup>^</sup> D. Gutas, "Avicenna", in [Encyclopaedia Iranica](#), Online Version 2006, ([LINK](#))



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## See also

- [The Book of Healing](#)
- [The Canon of Medicine](#)
- [Avicenna Peak](#)
- [List of Persian scientists](#)
- [Iranian philosophy](#)
- [History of medicine](#)
- [Early Muslim medicine](#)
- [Muslim philosophy](#)
- [Islamic scholars](#)
- [Al-Qumri](#)
- [Avicennia](#), a genus of [mangrove](#) named after Avicenna

## External links

- [Physician's Day in Iran: A Reference Article on Pur Sina \(Avicenna\) by Manouchehr Saadat Noury](#)
- [Encyclopædia Iranica: Avicenna](#)
- [Biography of Avicenna \(in English\)](#)
- [Ibn Sina](#)
- [Biography of Avicenna](#)
- [Catholic Encyclopedia: Avicenna](#)
- O'Connor, John J., and Edmund F. Robertson. "[Avicenna](#)". *MacTutor History of Mathematics archive*.
- [The Ontology of Ibn Sina \(Avicenna\)](#)
- [Biography of Avicenna \(in Persian\)](#)
- [An Interview With Abu Ali Sina \(in urdu\)](#)

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