

Ibn Sina’s Classical View of Soul through the Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Philosophical Framework, and Its Contemporary Relevance

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ABSTRACT

Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Abdullah ibn Sina was one of the great Muslim thinkers and philosophers in the Islamic Golden Era. Narratives of his early life influences that set the stage for his later development and some of his major works are presented. The depiction of soul by Ibn Sina is outlined in comparison to Aristotle, setting the stage for the discussions of his philosophical framework of soul, the ontological, epistemological, and the axiological contexts. Ontologically, the soul is depicted as a form (surah) of the body, claiming the vegetative, animal, and rational faculties. Epistemologically, the soul acquires knowledge through the abstraction process and will experience an ultimate interaction with the Agent or Active Intellect (al-‘aql al- fa’al), ascending from potentiality to actuality. Axiologically, the soul’s value lies in its potential for perfection, ascension towards divine realities via a value-based journey. The contemporary relevance of Ibn Sina’s axiology, ontology, and epistemology framework of the soul to contemporary psychology, particularly offering a distinctive alternative to the dominant paradigms are presented.

Keywords: *Axiology, Epistemology, Ontology, Ibn Sina*

INTRODUCTION

“*Shaykh al-Rāʾis*,” or “Leader among Wise Men,” is the famous appellation commended to Abu Ali al-Husayn ibn Abdullah ibn Sina (970-1037CE), presenting him as the greatest Islamic philosopher-scientist and a seminal figure in the realm of arts and science (Nasr, 1968). He was born in Afshana, a village adjacent to Bukhara, the capital city of the Samanid dynasty, within the Transoxiana region (Inati, 2001). His father, Abdullah ibn Sina, was a governor in Kharmayathnah, a suburban village of Bukhara (Rizvi, n.d.; Inati, 2001; Gutas, 2016). His mother Sitarah was a Tadjik woman in origin, and she bore two other siblings to al-Husyan or Ibn Sina, Ali and a brother, Mahmud, five years younger than him (Inati, 2001; Goodman, 2006; Amr & Tbakhi, 2007). Ibn Sina spent his last few years in Isfahan, died there, but was buried in Hamadan, the capital city of Hamadan province in Iran (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007; Gutas, 2016).

INTELLECTUAL NURTURING: THE ROLE OF FAMILY AND CULTURE

Ibn Sina’s intellectual development and contributions were profoundly shaped by the scholarly influence of his father and the flourishing intellectual milieu of the Samanid Dynasty (819 – 999 CE) (Bosworth, 1996), which together provided a critical foundation for both his theoretical and practical advancements in knowledge. Assuming the pivotal role of a father

who recognised his son's exceptional intellect at an early age, he took deliberate steps to nurture it. As a provincial governor and a follower of the Ismaili sect, his father actively created a stimulating intellectual environment by inviting scholars to their home, transforming it into a “meeting place for men of learning” (O'Connor & Robertson, 2003). This exposure offered young Ibn Sina early access to scholarly discourse and cultivated his intellectual curiosity. In addition, his father arranged for him to receive instruction in Arabic literature and the Qur'an, which he had fully memorised by the age of ten (Britannica Encyclopedia, n.d.; Gutas, 2014). Upon learning of Mahmud Massahi, an Indian greengrocer reputed for his skill in arithmetic, his father ensured that Ibn Sina received tutelage under him (Gutas, 2014). At the age of thirteen, Ibn Sina began studying medicine – combining theoretical learning with practical experience in treating patients – and continued until the age of sixteen. Two physicians, Abū-Manṣūr al-Ḥasan ibn-Nūḥ al-Qumrī and Abū-Sahl 'Īsā ibn-Yaḥyā al-Masḥī, were among his primary teachers during this period, evidence that he did not learn medicine on his own (Ullmann, 1970, as cited in Gutas, 2014). His father also invited a philosopher, Abū-'Abdallāh an-Nātilī to stay in their home purposefully to educate his children with the philosophy subject. While learning philosophy with an-Nātilī, he also learned *Eisagoge*, a publication on the Byzantine Law, Euclidean geometry and mathematics, and Ptolemy *Almagest*, a second century mathematical and astronomical treatise, strengthening his knowledge of logic, physics, and mathematics (Gutas, 2014). He even managed to outdo an-Nātilī in many aspects of his philosophical and logic understanding and mostly were left alone to comprehend the subjects of his study. He also studied *fiqh* or Islamic Law with Isma'il al-Zahid, a notable Hanafi jurist who resided in the same town of Bukhara (Goodman, 2006).

In his effort of comprehending philosophy, he utilised the major instrument common to the philosophy curriculum – logic, to reach the truth and avoid misconceptions. Syllogism, a form of logical reasoning, was central to this. Ibn Sina experimented with categorical syllogism, built up of two premises and a conclusion (Rizvi, n.d.; Gutas, 2016). Practically he will find the common or middle term that is shared by both premises but did not appear in the conclusion. For example, in the syllogism “All men are mortal” and “Socrates is a man,” the middle term is “man.” It connects the major term (“mortal”) and the minor term (“Socrates”) to reach the conclusion that “Socrates is mortal.” Ibn Sina extensively studied and improved upon Aristotle's logical works, including his syllogistic (Rizvi, n.d.). He also developed a system of hypothetical logic, which was more advanced than the previous systems. While Aristotle had briefly mentioned the need for further study of syllogisms based on hypothesis, Ibn Sina's work took this seriously and created a systematic framework for them (Gutas, 2014). This allows him to steadfastly incorporate the Islamic theology into his philosophical understanding of the Aristotelian and Neo-Platonism, thus contributing to his own conception and formulation of philosophical understanding unlike that of Aristotle nor that of the Neo-Platonism.

Ibn Sina also extensively reviewed the Aristotelian treatises, comprehending its content on being, substance, cause, essence, and first principles (Politis, 2021). He faced grave difficulties understanding the Aristotelian materials even after 40 times reviewing and memorising them (Gutas, 2014). Only after he was exposed to the document prepared by al-Farabi on the synthesis of the Aristotelian work, did he manage to comprehend it in its totality. Al-Farabi's work provided a structured framework and commentary that likely helped Ibn Sina synthesise complex Aristotelian concepts into a coherent system.

The Samanid Dynasty environment on the other hand provided him the foundation for his significant academic and practical experiences by offering access to elite libraries, learned contemporaries, scholarly discourse, and leadership position as well as medical practice opportunities where he was able to exert his influential outlook of knowledge to others and explicitly practised his medicinal skills. At the age of 18, he secured his first post as a physician at the Samanid court during the reign of Nuh Ibn Mansur (Gutas, 2014). The Samanid court is very active in recruiting and attracting scholars and physicians, thus Ibn Sina was provided with direct patronage and access to the highest echelons of knowledge and power. These opportunities shaped his early works and career as a philosopher-physician. Within the period of 17 to 21-years of age, he was described as owning the privilege of unparalleled access to a vast, organised repository of global knowledge, enabling him to develop comprehensive synthesis capability and original thought. He was granted an unlimited access to the Sultan's library that housed some rare manuscripts apart from its massive book collection.

He began writing at the age of 17, completing the "Compendium on the Soul" (Majmū'), composed of 10 chapters of short treatises on the soul, dedicated to his employer, Nuh Ibn Mansur (Goodman, 2006). At the age of 21 (around 991 CE), he completed Philosophy for Arūdī (Al-Hikma al-Arūdiyya), written for the essayist Abū-Hasan al-Arūdī, 20 volumes of "The Import and the Substance" (al-Hāsil wa'l-Mahsūl – A jurisprudence work), and "Good Work and Evil" (al-Birr wa'l-Ithmn – a work on ethics) for Abu Bakr al-Baruqi (Afnan, 1958; Goodman, 2006; Reisman, 2013). His life journey along the years reaching up to the 1000 CE was portrayed as depicting numerous correspondence and disputes between him and prominent scholars such as al-Biruni (Montgomery & Wilson, 2024). This is evidence that the Samanid era fostered free exchange of ideas and scholarly networks between cities. The culture of intellectual debate and peer interaction contributed to Ibn Sina's refined arguments and expanded perspectives. The cumulative effect of a supportive ecosystem allowed sustained, deep, and broad intellectual output. The two major factors of his family tutelage and the Samanid Dynasty's dynamic cultural and intellectual environment created a polymath of him, authoring hundreds of works across philosophy, medicine, astronomy, and mathematics, to name a few.

Based on his experiences, Ibn Sina no doubt developed himself to be a worthy scholar. The output of his studies was a unique synthesis of these intellectual traditions. During his childhood, although he was exposed to the Isma'ili doctrine, he ultimately did not subscribe to it (Inati, 2001; Gutas, 2014). Despite reading Aristotle's *Metaphysics* over 40 times and studying al-Farabi's commentary (*On the Objects of Metaphysics*) on the subject, Ibn Sina developed his own distinct metaphysical system, which was more than a mere repetition of their ideas (Gutas, 2014; Falcon, 2021; Politis, 2021). While he staunchly subscribed to the Neoplatonic theory of emanation, his version was not deterministic. He integrated the concept of a Creator with Divine Volition, making his emanationist cosmology unique (Inati, 2001; Swanstrom, 2013).

MAJOR WORKS

Ibn Sina is an eminent polymath having made profound and original contributions to a massive array of discipline of knowledge – medicine, metaphysics, philosophy, astronomy, mathematics, psychology, logic, music, poetry, and other natural sciences (Gutas, 2024;

Flannery, 2025). He authored an estimated 450 works, with roughly 240 surviving today (O’Conner & Robertson, 2003).

His monumental work is primarily evident in his two major writing of the “Canon of Medicine” (Al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb) and “The Book of Healing” (Kitāb al-shifā’). These two books had profoundly shaped the scientific and philosophical thoughts for centuries. The writing process of these two *magnum opuses* marked an itinerant episode of life for Ibn Sina where he moved from place to place – from Bukhara to Gurganj (Khwarizm), Gorgan (Jorjan), Rayy, Isfahan, and Hamadhan – searching for employment, stable living environment, and patronage (Afnan, 1958; Reisman, 2013). His intellectual prowess was indeed tested when the Samanid Dynasty collapsed in 1004 CE, creating a turbulent time for him. Many accounts stated that his writing process was never smooth, coloured by constant move to multiple places and effort to sought support of the *Emir* of the intended places for “political” safety and patronage (Afnan, 1958, Gutas, 2016).

It was claimed that he started writing the “Canon of Medicine” in 1012 CE (when he was 32 years of age) while in the city of Gorgan (also known as Jorjan) – in the Caspian region in Iran, then continued his writings in Rayy – a medieval city south of modern Tehran, and completed it in Hamadhan where he died (Nasser, Tibi, & Savage-Smith, 2009). This *magnum opus* housed some of his pioneering work in identification of the contagiousness of such diseases as tuberculosis and dysentery (Hajar, 2013). His methodological rigour is captured in the book, emphasising treating patients in a controlled environment to deter any confounding variables and understanding the nature and quality of drugs, which resulted in the introduction of seven rules, a crucial groundwork for what is now known as evidence-based medicine (Nasser, Tibi, & Savage-Smith, 2009).

His second *magnum opus* “The Book of Healing” (Kitāb al-shifā’) presented a unified classification of all knowledge. Considered as a major philosophical and scientific work, it is an encyclopaedia covering three major divisions of Logic, Theoretical Philosophy, and Practical Philosophy (Gutas, 2024). The Logic section is divided into nine parts. The Theoretical Philosophy division is further divided into three major parts of Physics (subdivided into eight parts – part six dedicated to Soul, based on Aristotle de-Anime), Mathematics (divided into four parts), and Metaphysics (entailing two parts – Universal Science based on Aristotle metaphysics which studied the being as being, first philosophy, and natural theology, and metaphysics of the rational soul). The practical Philosophy division is further divided into four parts (Gutas, 2024). He likely began composing “The Book of Healing” around 1014 CE and completed it by 1020 CE, a period corresponding with his years of relative stability in Isfahan (Goodman, 1992). This book practically synthesised Greek and Islamic thought into a coherent system. The content was influenced by the synthesis of the ancient Greek philosophers such as Aristotle, Hellenistic thinkers such as Ptolemy, and earlier Persian/Muslim scientists and philosophers, such as Al-Kindi, Al-Farabi, and Al-Bīrūnī, to result in a unique Ibn Sina’s own conception and conclusion.

After “The Book of Healing,” he was asked to write a brief account of the philosophical subjects, which he did by collecting and putting together – at times even splicing together – material from his earlier writings and produced “The Deliverance” (al-Najāt) (Rahman, 1952). “The Deliverance” is also divided into four parts of Logic, Physics, Metaphysics, and Mathematics – The first three prepared by Ibn Sina and the last prepared by his disciple Abu Ubayd al-Jūzjānī (Inati, 2001). Ibn Sina’s contribution to the conception of soul, and indirectly

to the body of knowledge of *'ilm al-nafs*, largely was from “The Book of Healing” – part six on the soul and Book II, Chapter VI of “The Deliverance” (Rahman, 1952).

He wrote “General Observations” (Kitab al-Arsād al-Kulliyya) and “Provenance and Destinations” (Kitab al-Mabda' wa'l-Ma'ād) around 1012 or 1013 in Jurjan (Goodman, 2006; Hashemi & Esmaili, 2022). The “Provenance” part of the “Provenance and Destinations” book basically dealt with “... place of origin of all being” while the “destinations” part dealt with the “... place of return of the rational soul” (Gutas, 2014, p. 20). This book is considered as his ultimate independent metaphysics work though initially, he was extremely exposed to Aristotle’s metaphysics and this stand of his was mostly repeated in “The Book of Healing” and “The Deliverance” (Afnan, 1958; Gutas, 2014).

“The Book of Remarks and Admonitions” (al- Ishārāt wa 'l-Tanbīhāt) is another of Ibn Sina's most profound and comprehensive works, often considered the culmination of his philosophical thought. The book was attempted around early 1030s and was divided into four parts – Logic (Part One), Physics (Part Two), Metaphysics (Part Three), and Part Four (Mysticism)(Godman, 2006). The presentation of the content was either in the form of “Remarks” (Ishārāt) or “Admonitions” (Tanbīhāt). When Ibn Sina uses *Ishārāt*, he is presenting his own views and insights, offering “pointers” to the reader. When he uses *Tanbīhāt*, he is providing “admonitions” or “warnings” against the common errors and faults of other philosophers.

DEFINITION OF SOUL

Man is created of dual nature – the material (organic body) and immaterial (inorganic body - soul) (Rahman, 1952; al-Attas, 2024). A major concern for this dual nature notion is how do both agencies interact with one another. The definition of soul by both Aristotle and Ibn Sina will be reflected before further deliberation is made on the interactions between the two agencies. Aristotle’s definition is included to illustrate how Ibn Sina’s conception of the soul differs from that of Aristotle’s. For Aristotle, the soul (psyche) is defined as the "first entelechy" or actuality of a natural, organic body that has the potential for life (Sachs, n.d.; Inati, 2001; Wisnovsky, 2005). This definition emphasised two principal elements in a human being: 1) potentiality (*dynamis* or a real existing power within a thing) and 2) actuality (*entelecheia/energeia* or being-at-work – active ongoing process of a thing fulfilling its purpose) (Britannica, n.d.; Cohen, 2020; Mahoney, 2020). Soul is thus, a form or system to the body’s matter, the very essence of the body’s life and being. It is simply the organising principle that enlivens the body (it provides the material body the capacity to perform its functions, such as growing, sensing, and thinking), hence it is thus inseparable from the body (Black, 2006). A corpse, for instance, still has all its physical parts of a living body, but it has lost its organising principles, thus, it is no longer a living being. Similarly, a soul cannot exist independently of the body it gives life to.

The *dynamis* element depicts any raw material that has inherent ability to be actualised or the potentiality, capacity, or power of a thing to be something else (Inati, 2001; Cohen, 2020; Mahoney, 2020). For instance, a piece of wood has the potentiality (*dynamis*) to become a table and a human being, by its nature, has the potentiality for life. This potential is a real capacity within these entities that can be developed under the right circumstances.

The *energeia* element, on the other hand, depicts the realisation of the *dynamis* or the active ongoing process of a thing or an entity fulfilling its purpose of being. For instance, the actuality of the piece of wood is when it has been made into a table. It has realised its potential to become a finished object. The actuality of the human being is when it is alive. The soul is the first actuality that makes the body living and gives it the capacity for life. The living of a human being is the fulfilment of the potential for life inherent in the body's physical components. In specific, the soul is the “first entelechy” when it is responsible to animate the living being even though no activities are happening in a particular point of time – a human being in deep sleep still has an intact soul (his first “actuality”) even though the body is not actively performing its functions. The actual performance of the body, such as thinking, pondering, or any other physical activities are specifically known as the “second entelechy” (Inati, 2001; Cohen, 2020). A person's ability to think is the first entelechy, while the act of thinking itself is the second entelechy. The second entelechy is the actual performance or dynamic realisation of a potential, in contrast to the first entelechy, which is the stable capacity for that performance. A person has the first entelechy of sight (the stable, underlying capacity to see) but the act of seeing something is the second entelechy – a merely passing, dynamic activity that is fully realised only when it is happening (hence it is considered as temporary and dynamic, not a permanent state of being). Once the act is over, the person returns to the state of owning the capacity for sight but not actively seeing.

If the command of Aristotle’s first and second entelechy are taken as the comparison milieu to the extant content of mainstream psychology as a science that focuses on observable and measurable context of human being’s mental processes and behaviour, indeed, the second entelechy has been successfully addressed, empirically. Nonetheless, the normative failure here seemingly is to bring about the first entelechy to comprehensively encapsulate the essence of a human being. Thus, men are being described and dealt with as discreet entities merely tied down to their functionalities without having a stable and solid essence to which those functionalities are tied. In other words, men are not dealt as a whole, but rather, as entities displaying an array of discreet functions.

Ibn Sina defined soul as the first perfection of a natural organic body capable of accomplishing the activities of life (Sebti, 2012; Baghirov, 2024). When Aristotle used the term ‘form’ of an organic body in describing soul, Ibn Sina used ‘perfection’ of a body instead, indicating his diversion from Aristotle. A form must be inherent in a matter thus inseparable from the matter. When the soul is described as a perfection, an argument of substance dualism can be used to describe its possibility of independency of the body (McGinnis, 2010; Baghirov, 2024). The term first perfection is a translation from the term *al-kamal al-awwal*. The use of the term ‘perfection’ by Ibn Sina gives a slightly different connotation than the term ‘actuality’ used by Aristotle. The former is a more evaluative term implying an ideal, finished, or complete state of a thing’s nature or purpose (Innati, 2001). The latter, on the other hand, implies a neutral actuality, a condition of a thing’s nature that is actualised, but there still can be some form of imperfection in the quality of its actuality. ‘Perfection’ implies a state of ideal and complete realisation, the highest form of actuality, one that is fully complete and without defect. ‘Actuality’, on the other hand, is seemingly neutral, and it merely connotes that a potential has been fulfilled regardless of the quality of the fulfilment. For example, a student who completes his degree has actualised his potential to learn, but if he graduates with poor grades, that

actuality is imperfect. Perfection would be the ideal state of a student who has fully mastered all his subjects and achieved the highest possible level of knowledge and skill.

In this regard, when comparing Ibn Sina's conception of soul via the worldview of 'perfection' to the extant worldview context of the mainstream psychology, the former is assumed as fundamentally metaphysical and teleological. Ibn Sina's view is deeply rooted in an idealist understanding of a unifying and a complete soul in its wholeness. The latter is fundamentally empirical (therefore a science), hence, less metaphysical and teleological (Inati, 2001). It is more of a descriptive science operating by fragmenting and breaking its construct of study focusing on the intricate, interconnected, and often contradictory parts of the human experience, unlike Ibn Sina who focused on a single, unifying ideal of being.

Another major difference between Ibn Sina and Aristotle is on the immortality nature of soul. When Aristotle described the soul as an actualised form of the body, thus inseparable, it is thus immortal (Inati, 2001; Black, 2006). Ibn Sina promoted the notion of immortality of the soul since it is described as an immaterial substance independent of the body (substance dualism paradigm). While the soul depends on the body for its initial creation, it does not depend on it for its continued existence. Upon death, the soul is claimed to retain its individuality and persist living (Black, 2006). Illustrating the context of the soul retaining its individuality is this example; The soul of a person who dedicated his life to virtue and scholarship will retain the specific perfections he had achieved, and his soul's state will be distinct from that of someone who lived a corrupt life. This means that after death, souls are not uniform but exist at different levels of perfection, providing a philosophical basis for the concepts of a final judgment or afterlife.

In the context of 'second actuality' proposed by Aristotle, Ibn Sina similarly proposed a slight variation to it – 'second perfection' (Rahman, 1952; Inati, 2001). The first perfection is the soul itself, which gives the potential for life activities, while second perfection is the actual performance of those life activities. A sleeping person still has a soul. His body is not actively sensing or thinking, but it has the potential to do so because it is informed by the soul. The soul is the 'first perfection' that makes the person a living human being, even when they are not actively doing anything. The 'second perfection' is the actual activity that the soul enables. It is the real-time execution of the powers given by the first perfection. When an individual is thinking, his intellect is in operation and when he is seeing or hearing, his senses is in operation. As the term perfection connotes the most idealistic situation where an individual can actualise himself, the 'first perfection', the highest level, will be conceptualised as the specific, ultimate, and ideal form that allows an individual to function perfectly according to the *fitrah* of being a human being (Rahman, 1952). Since 'first perfection' is specific to an individual being, the 'second perfection' indicates the degree of which an individual can actualise that will vary in comparison to another individual. A soul's 'second perfection' in an individual's life, is a process where he will strive to his level of ideal perfection.

IBN SINA'S PHILOSOPHICAL FOUNDATIONS OF THE SOUL ONTOLOGICAL FOUNDATIONS

Ontology concerns the nature and structure of being or existence (Guarino, Oberle, and Staab, 2009). In philosophical inquiry, it examines what kinds of things exist and what it means

for something to exist, whether in physical or non-physical form. Within the scope of this paper, the ontological discussion of the soul explores its nature and mode of existence, its relationship with the body, and the question of its immortality.

Ibn Sina described soul as the ‘first perfection,’ a substance with duality as its nature, and posited it as an immaterial substance separate from the body (Black, 2006). He argues that the soul is not merely a function of the body, but an independent entity that governs it and can survive its death (Inati, 2001). The soul is also postulated as a self-subsistent substance holding a unique creation of the active or agent intellect (al-‘aql al-fā’āl), the true cause of the human existence (Black, 2006).

The Nature and Existence of the Soul – Actuality and Potentiality

Ibn Sina begins by defining the soul as the “first perfection” of a natural, organic body (Sebti, 2012). This means the soul is the form that gives a body the potential to perform life activities (such as growth, sensation, and thought). This is a functional definition that establishes the soul's role as the principle of life. The discussion on the actuality and potentiality may be referred in the previous section of “Definition of Soul.”

Substance Dualism, Immortality, and Conjunction

Ibn Sina also argues that the human soul is an immaterial substance, not a body or a power within a body and able to exist independently of the body (Black, 2006; Kaukua, 2015). His most famous argument for this is the “Flying Man” thought experiment. The explication of this experiment posed a major question of when a man is completely deprived of any sensory stimulation, would he still be able to affirm his existence. Even in this state, the person would be conscious of their own existence, without being aware of their physical form. Ibn Sina claimed that a man would affirm his self (dhāt) or “thatness” (annīya), but they would not affirm any of their limbs, organs, or external things (Mc Ginnis, 2010; Gutas, 2013; Kaukua, 2015). In other words, one would affirm his self without affirming any physical dimensions either in length, breadth, or depth. This proves that the soul is a substance distinct from the body and is not dependent on physical experience for its existence. The soul is a complete substance in itself, not a quality or accident of the body. Its existence is not contingent upon matter, allowing it to be immortal and unchangeable. The soul acts as the efficient, formal, and final cause for the body's activities, but it is not a matter from which the body is made.

Agent or Active Intellect, Concomitant Creation, and Individuality

Ibn Sina's stand on the immortality of the soul is also connected to the notion that it does not pre-exist the body (as suggested by Plato) (Avicenna, 2009). Soul is created at the moment when the body is ready to receive it and thus, each soul is unique and is tied to the specific body from its inception – capturing the individuality aspects of the soul (Black, 2006). The human soul is perfected or created by the Agent or Active Intellect (al-āql al-fā'al) (McGinnis, 2010; Gutas, 2024). Agent intellect creates the human soul at the same exact time a physical body is biologically ready to receive it. It is a process of simultaneous (concomitant) creation where the soul is brought into existence to inform or give life and form to a specific, unique body (Marmura, 2008). The immortality of the soul is a condition whereby it endures

or survive the death of the physical body it ensouled, a body that was originally created in conjunction with it.

Since it is stated that the agent intellect creates the human's soul, ontologically, there is a connection between it and the soul. Agent intellect is described as a distinct and separate divine substance, the final and direct cause for the human soul (Avicenna, 2009; Marmura, 2008). It is not a form of power or energy that belongs to human, instead, it is a separate immaterial substance in its own self that acts upon the human intellect, bringing about the process of intellectually establishing perception. It is, however, the lowest of the other separate immaterial intelligences (the other nine celestial intelligences) on Ibn Sina's emanative cosmology (Avicenna, 2009; McGinnis, 2010). Nevertheless, the agent intellect is the highest level of intellection that the human soul can connect with, in comprehending intelligible and universal. It is the bridge between the immaterial, divine world and the material, sublunar world of human experience. The human soul, through its intellectual faculties, strives to unite with the agent intellect to actualise its potential for knowledge. Similar to the agent intellect, all of these intelligences are pure immaterial minds and are not physical bodies or forces. Their perpetual intellectual activities allowed them to understand intelligible (anything that can be grasped by the intellect) and universals (specific types of intelligible). Their very act of existence can be described as that of act of thought. The human soul by nature is able to reach the intelligible realm and, in particular, to create contact with the active intellect, in its quest to comprehend intelligible and universal (Menn, 2013). Hence, the agent intellect serves as the major cause for the actualisation of all human knowledge (Avicenna, 2009).

Soul and Eschatology

Ibn Sina also posited that the establishment of the perfection state of the soul in the afterlife is not uniformed, dependent upon how it established itself in its worldly life (Marmura, 2008). This differentiated afterlife context serves as the foundation of the final judgment and the hereafter, fashioned in support of the very nature of man's soul. Man can either achieved intellectual perfection or moral perfection as the soul's afterlife state (Black, 2006; Marmura, 2008). The former depicts the soul's achievement in perfecting or actualizing its intellectual potential by acquiring knowledge and grasping intelligible and universals, while the latter merely depicts the soul's success in purifying itself from the bodily desires, passions, as well as vices (Black, 2006). Based on these dual perfection notions, soul attains its perfection via the simple but abstract terms of happiness and pain in the hereafter (McGinnis, 2010). Hereafter happiness in the soul perfection context is accustomed to the achievement of both intellectual and moral perfection, where the soul managed to discipline its earthly existence and attained a pure intellectual state of contemplating the higher intelligences, and ultimately God – a perfect and purified soul (Black, 2006; McGinnis, 2010). Hereafter pain on the other hand is the opposite of happiness where the soul managed to achieve its perfection to a certain extent, retaining its complete sense of self, but still aware of its inability to achieve pure intellectual state it should achieved due to its spiritual impurities – perhaps suitable to be labelled as imperfect or sullied soul (Marmura, 2008; Avicenna, 2005). Perhaps, an ultimate state of a man's soul can possibly be described as to perfect itself by acquiring all possible intelligible and universal truths and achieve unification with the state and nature of the agent intellect.

EPISTEMOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

Epistemology is the part of philosophy that studies the nature, origin, and limits of human knowledge itself – what it is, where it comes from, and what we can know (Britannica, 2024). In the context of this paper, it is referring to how the soul acquires knowledge and what does that process reveals about the soul's nature. It is a theory that connects how we know things with what and who we are.

Hierarchical Organisation of the Soul and Its Faculties

Ibn Sina suggested his epistemological understanding of the soul by positing that the soul is the seat of perception, imagination, and intellection (McGinnis, 2010). He described soul as a single immaterial substance with various powers or faculties in a hierarchical organisation from the lowest vegetative soul, animal soul (owning the perception and imagination power of faculties), to the highest tier of the rational soul (possessing the intellection faculty or power) (Avicenna, 2009; Black, 2006; McGinnis, 2010). Vegetative soul is the most basic level of soul responsible for essential bodily functions such as reproduction, growth, and nutrition, and this part of the soul dependent upon its bodily matter and cannot function or even exist without it (Rahman, 1952; McGinnis, 2010). The animal soul will subsume the faculty of the vegetative soul and uphold additional faculties of motive and perceptive (sometimes the terms power of sensation, imagination, and voluntary movement are interchangeably used) (Rahman, 1952; McGinnis, 2010). Likewise, it is also dependent upon the bodily matter to function. Rational soul or what Ibn Sina termed as intellect is the highest level of human's soul. It possesses all lower faculties plus its unique defining faculties of practical versus theoretical intelligences (McGinnis, 2010; Gutas, 2014). The rational soul is considered immaterial and does not need a bodily organ for its core activity of comprehending universals (Rahman, 1952).

Ibn Sina described the “animal soul” as owning two faculties – the motive and perceptive faculties (McGinnis, 2010). The motive faculty uphold two different functions of: 1) generating impulses or appetite (or appetite), which is triggered when a desired or disliked image is registered in the imagination. This appetency has two sub-faculties – one for seeking things imagined to be pleasant or useful and desirable (desire) and another for avoiding things imagines to be harmful or destructive (anger); 2) executing active functions of distributing physical power through the nerves and muscles to result in the execution of one's movement (Rahman, 1952).

The perceptive faculty on the other hand is responsible for apprehending the external world and is divided into external and internal senses. The external senses are the five familiar senses – sight, hearing, touch, taste, and smell, faculties located in specific organs and nerves in the brain that perceive the forms of things transmitted to them (e.g., the eye as an external sense organ perceives the form of the tree – its shape, size, and colour based on how these forms are transmitted to one's eye. The perception happens when the forms are imprinted on the eye's internal structures, allowing one's visual faculty to register them. Ibn Sina described the internal sense of the animal soul perceptive faculty as a bridge between the external senses and the rational soul, each of them hold a specific function and a designated location in the ventricles of the brain (Rahman, 1952; Gutas, 2024). There are five faculties of the internal

senses: 1) common sense (*al-hiss al-mushtarak*) (also labelled as “fantasia”), 2) retentive imagination (*al-khayaliyya*) (or also known as form-bearing faculty), 3) compositive imagination (transformed into cogitative faculty in man) (*al-mutakhayyila*), 4) estimative (*al-wahmiyya*), and 5) memorative/recollective (*al-hafiza*) (Avicenna, 2005; McGinnis, 2010).

Ibn Sina described the rational soul as an immaterial and indivisible substance with a structure that is not defined by physical parts but by its functional stage of development and its relationship with a separate divine entity known as active or agent intellect (Rahman, 1952; Avicenna, 2005; McGinnis, 2010). This is his major break from Aristotelian philosophy that emphasised the soul as the form of the body, thus inseparable.

The structure of the rational soul, thus, can be understood as a developmental process with each stage representing a transition from potentiality to actuality in comprehending universal knowledge (this is unlike the transition from potentiality to actuality discussed in earlier sections that represent the actualisation of material existence). This developmental process is also known as the internal structure of the rational faculty and they are hierarchical in nature, where each stage represents a progressive ascension from a state of pure potential to one of full actuality, with each level or stage building upon the one before it (Rahman, 1952; Avicenna, 2005). McGinnis (2010) deliberated the three stages as: 1) Material or potential intellect (*al-‘aql al-hayūlānī*) – the lowest of the three stages representing pure potentiality akin to a blank slate that has no knowledge but only the capacity to acquire it. It is considered the foundational stage on which all other intellection development is built; 2) Dispositional intellect (sometimes labelled as in habitu intellect) (*al-‘aql bi'l-malakah*) – the intermediate level where it has actualised some of its potential by acquiring basic, self-evident truths. It is no longer a pure blank slate because it has acquired some intellection “habit” and is always contemplating and considering universal truths. The knowledge now resides in the soul, ready to be used (it is still considered as “latent”). The knowledge is stored, or “present,” in a state of potentiality that can be triggered into actuality when needed; and 3) Acquired intellect (*al-‘aql al-mustafād*) – an advanced state of potentiality. This is where the human intellect is “actually” thinking and has a richer repertoire of concepts and systematic knowledge. At this point the soul no longer just possesses knowledge as a latent “habit,” it is now actively contemplating and in direct union with the universal truths (the intellect has yet to achieve its final and perfect conjunction with the agent or active intellect). Davidson (1992), on the other hand, though in agreement with McGinnis (2010) on Ibn Sina’s work on the developmental process of the rational soul, utilised the term “actual intellect” (a translation of *al-‘aql al-fi’li*) in place of acquired intellect. He stated that Ibn Sina utilised another term, “acquired intellect with culmination” (or “holy intellect”), to indicate the human intellect achieving a perfect disposition and can readily establish a conjunction or unification with the agent or active intellect. Hence, in totality, there are actually four level of the rational soul developmental process: 1) material or potential intellect, 2) dispositional or in-habitu intellect, 3) actual intellect, and 4) acquired or holy intellect (Davidson, 1992).

The intellectual development of the rational soul is not a purely internal or self-contained process but is dependent on an external, immaterial being as well, the agent or active intellect (*al-aql al-fa'al*) (Avicenna, 2005; Hasse, 2013). This is a crucial part of the soul's epistemological structure. Ibn Sina proposed that the agent or active intellect – the final entity of the celestial intelligences, is the ultimate source of all intelligible forms. The human intellect

does not abstract these forms from material objects as Aristotle believed (Shields, 2020). For Aristotle, the universal concept is inherent in the particular object. The human intellect, through its sensory faculties and internal senses, actively abstracts the universal form directly from the sensory data of a physical object. The form of “horseness,” for example, is latent within every individual horse. The intellect's job is to strip away the matter (e.g., this specific horse's colour, size, and location) to reveal the universal or common form of a horse, despite all other attached characteristics to it, which is then only intelligible to the mind. In this model, the human intellect is the sole and active agent of abstraction. Unlike Aristotle, Avicenna, who was influenced by Neoplatonism, proposed a different model. He believed that the agent intellect, a separate, immaterial entity, is the ultimate source of all universal forms (Davidson, 1992; McGinnis, 2010; Hasse, 2013). The human intellect's role is not to abstract the universal from entity of matter, but to prepare itself to receive the universal concept. The process of abstraction, using the internal senses, will make ready the human soul. Once the soul has been sufficiently prepared, the agent intellect emanates the universal form, illuminating the human mind with the concept. Avicenna likened the agent intellect to the sun, which illuminates both the universal concepts and the human intellect, making knowledge possible (Rahman, 1952). The sun (agent intellect) is the source of light (knowledge), and the eyes (the internal senses) must be open and ready to receive that light, but they don't produce it themselves.

Active and Passive Power of Human Intellect

In Ibn Sina's epistemological paradigm, the relationship between the passive and the active power is central to the understanding of how the human soul and intellect acquire knowledge. The passive powers handle the initial reception and storage of sensory data, while the single active power manipulates this data to prepare the soul for higher, universal knowledge. Ibn Sina postulated the main idea that human soul prepares itself to receive knowledge from the active intellect, which acts as a “giver of forms” (wāhib al-ṣuwar)(Davidson, 1992). Thus, the process of knowing is not merely an internal, self-sufficient process but an external, celestial one where the human soul prepares itself to receive knowledge from a divine, external source of the agent or active intellect.

In this context, Ibn Sina epistemologically deliberated the intellect in terms of its nature of activity, differentiating between its active and passive states or power (McGinnis, 2010). The passive powers – the common sense, formative imagination, estimative faculty, and retentive/recollective faculty – belong to the animal soul and are tied to the physical body and its senses. These faculties are the foundational, preparatory stage for all knowledge. They are passive because their function is to merely receive and store impressions from the material world. For example, the common sense simply unifies what the eyes see and what the ears hear, while the imagination simply stores these unified images. They do not generate new information from scratch but serve as a source for sensory experience. The passive power is what makes the transition from not knowing to knowing possible for the rational soul. Of the five faculties of the internal senses, the faculties of common sense and retentive passively receive forms and retain forms consecutively, while the estimative and retentive faculties passively perceive and retain intentions successively (Davidson, 1992; Hasse, 2013).

The compositive imagination faculty of the internal senses is the bridge between the animal and rational souls (Davidson, 1992). It is the only active power among the internal

senses. It manipulates the passive data and thus, it begins to emulate the creative function of the rational soul. Its role is to take the passively received and stored “forms” and “intentions” (like a horse and the idea of wings) and actively combine or separate them to create a new, imaginative idea (like a winged horse). The active power of the intellect basically will advance the perceptual process by eventually acting upon it. The intellect with its active power moves beyond simple perception and storage toward a more complex, creative function. Its ability to combine and separate forms (e.g., creating an image of a fictitious winged horse based on the understanding of the characteristics of a horse and the ability of a common winged animal) is a vital step. In reference to the soul, this active manipulation prepares the soul to move beyond mere sense perception, its ultimate core characteristic. It is the part of the soul that comprehends intelligible forms (universal concepts) which are not derived from the senses but are received from the Agent or Active Intellect (Rahman, 1952). The active and passive powers of the animal soul provide the necessary raw material and practice in manipulation, preparing the rational soul to achieve its highest perfection, the final and complete conjunction or unification with the Agent or Active Intellect, the source of all true knowledge (McGinnis, 2010).

AXIOLOGICAL (VALUE-BASED) FRAMEWORK

Axiology is the philosophical study of value (Britannica, n.d.). It investigates the nature of what is good, desirable, and valuable, as well as the standards for judging the value. For Ibn Sina, a good life is not just about being a good person, it's the way one's soul gets better and finds its way back to God. The best thing one's soul can do is to become perfect, and to do that, it has to be ethical and wise.

The Perfection of Soul as the Ultimate Good

Ibn Sina depicted the axiological framework when he described the soul embracing a value that it has to be perfected to achieve its “ultimate good” (al-khāyir al-aqṣā) as stated in the *Metaphysic of Healing* book, Book Nine - “On the emanation of things from the first governance and the return to Him,” Chapter Two - “That the proximate mover of the heavens is neither a nature nor an intellect but a soul, and that the remote principle is an intellect,” item 17 stated that the “... ultimate good necessitates the [state of] remaining at the highest degree of perfection that belongs to a thing permanently.” (Avicenna, 2005, p. 314). The final destination of the soul, thus, can be concluded as to gain Divine or Holy Intellect, a state of “acquired intellect with culmination or conjunction” (Davidson, 1952). On this note, the understanding of the soul has to be not that of a static entity; instead, it is a dynamic substance that begins in an empty state of potentiality, ready to be fully actualised. Its purpose is to ascend a value-based hierarchy of existence, moving from a low state of potentiality to a high state of perfection. This perfection is achieved through the soul's own activity and is considered the ultimate purpose of human existence. This state of perfection is never tied to any forms of material gains, instead, it is tied to the soul's development of intellection and ethical virtues.

The Return of Soul to Divinity, an Ethical Self-Cultivation Journey

The soul's journey to perfection is profoundly ethical in its nature. The soul has to strive to embrace moral virtues, which in turn can purify it, making it more capable of intellectual and spiritual ascension (Davidson, 1992). The soul ultimate purpose, what known as the

perfection, is to free itself from the bodily influence and connect or return to its divine origin. This is supported by the exact statement in *The Metaphysics of Healing*, Book Nine - "The emanation of things from the first governance," Chapter Seven, titled "Concerning 'the return,' [the hereafter]," item 25 specified that "... if the soul is separated from the body with no previous attachment to the direction above them, indicative of not attaining perfection and higher happiness, thus it remains unfulfilled, it will suffer a real misery when all the bodily dispositions being directed downwards, there will be no celestial materials for the soul's action" (Avicenna, 2005, p. 356). This statement clearly depicts the value of soul is connected to its divine origin with the phrase "... previous attachment to the direction above them indicative of not attaining perfection and higher happiness, thus it remains unfulfilled ..." The phrase "celestial materials" is also indicative that the soul can't be detached from its divinity element or its spiritual origin, the true depiction of the soul's nature. When an individual practices ethical self-cultivation, such as practising justice, patience, and self-restraint, he is preparing his soul to receive knowledge from the Agent or Active Intellect. This process finishes in a state of "conjunction" (*ittiṣāl*) or unification with the divinity, representing the soul's ultimate value and its return to its purest of spiritual origin (McGinnis, 2010).

CONTEMPORARY RELEVANCE OF IBN SINA'S CONCEPTION OF THE SOUL

Contemporary mainstream psychology is primarily a scientific and empirical field that focuses on the study of behaviour and mental processes (Myers & DeWall, 2020). It is largely rooted in a biopsychosocial model which views human experience as a product of interacting biological, psychological, and social factors (Frankel, Quill, & McDaniel, 2003). Such context of the extant mainstream psychology implied the rigorous use of research method in its commitment to scientific and empirical approaches. Its heavy biologically grounded emphasis a strong orientation on neuroscience, genetics, and neurochemistry to explain human's actions and thoughts. The emphasis on measurable phenomena leads to a preference for observable data and quantifiable processes, exhibiting reductionist tendencies (Gleitman, Fridlund, & Reisberg, 2011). Such tendencies inclined to break down complex phenomena like consciousness and personality to simpler, more fundamental components like neural pathways or chemical reactions. If consciousness and personality, for instance, are reduced to its fundamental component of neural pathway or chemical reactions, the subjective, qualitative richness of human experiences is lost. Such scientifically rigorous approach almost always fails to answer fundamental questions that largely relate to consciousness, such as, why does a particular neural activity produce specific subjective personal experience associated with it. Additionally, a chemical reaction does not have a purpose, but yet, humans are driven by a sense of purpose and meaning. By reducing human motivation to biological drives, psychology may overlook the teleological and axiological dimensions of human life. In summary, the focus on what is easily measured can create a most profound loss on the unique human aspects of the soul and mind, such that the extant psychology discipline offers a precise, but potentially incomprehensive picture of what is meant to be a human.

Ibn Sina's philosophical framework of the soul is largely not aligned with the extant mainstream psychology's current materialist and empirical focus. His concepts of an immaterial soul, an external Agent Intellect, and a value-based cosmic hierarchy exist outside the typical scope of modern psychological inquiry. However, his work can add to contemporary psychology by offering a more holistic and comprehensive framework for understanding the

human person. Mainstream psychology is fundamentally committed to the scientific method, focusing on observable behaviour, neural processes, and measurable mental states. Ibn Sina's core ideas, such as the immateriality of the soul proven by the "Floating Man" thought experiment, are metaphysical claims that cannot be empirically tested. The concept of an external Agent or Active Intellect as the source of universal knowledge also falls outside the bounds of a science that seeks internal, biological explanations for cognition. Despite the fundamental differences, there are points of conceptual resonance. Ibn Sina's emphasis on the senses as the starting point of knowledge acquisition aligns with empirical psychology (Avicenna, 2005). His recognition of distinct internal faculties like the compositive imagination and memory anticipates modern cognitive psychology's modular view of the mind.

Ibn Sina's framework can enrich contemporary psychology by reintroducing a holistic, purposive dimension to the study of the human being. By positing the soul as an immaterial substance distinct from the body, Ibn Sina's philosophy challenges the reductionist tendency to equate the self with the brain. This can open up a more profound discussion on consciousness, identity, and the mind-body problem, issues that mainstream psychology often finds difficult to address. Mainstream psychology, particularly fields like positive psychology, is increasingly interested in concepts like well-being and meaning. Ibn Sina's axiological framework, where the soul's progression toward perfection is the ultimate good, provides a rich, teleological model for this. It suggests that psychological health is not just the absence of illness but the active pursuit of one's highest potential. Ibn Sina's view that ethical self-cultivation is essential for intellectual development offers a model for integrated therapeutic practices. It suggests that psychological well-being is not separate from moral development, encouraging a more holistic approach that considers a person's values and spiritual life as integral to their mental health.

The argument that psychology must be strictly materialistic to be scientific is a philosophical assumption, not a scientific law. Sayer's (1992) work provides a critique of reductionism across the social sciences. He argues that reducing complex phenomena to their simplest physical components is a methodological choice, not a necessary condition for scientific inquiry. In the context of psychology, this means that a scholar's decision to focus solely on neural pathways or chemical reactions is based on a philosophical commitment to materialism, not on the inherent limitations of the scientific method itself. The scientific method can, in principle, be applied to non-material phenomena through systematic observation of subjective experience and its effects, which is a key point in philosophical debates about consciousness. In this context, a certain understanding had to be built up emphasising that science is not limited to the physical phenomenon only. The scientific method that entails the processes of observation, hypothesis, and verification, while often applied to the physical world, its principles can be adapted. For example, in fields like consciousness studies, subjective experience can be systematically observed and analysed, even if it's not a physical and empirical entity. Another instance of the extant mainstream psychology focusing only on the brain, will create a form of reductionism, where complex phenomena are oversimplified. As Avicenna's "Floating Man" argument suggests, the immediate awareness of the self cannot be reduced to a physical brain, indicating a reality beyond mere material-based understanding.

The situation calls for a more comprehensive science that is not about rejecting science but about what should be included in a true science of a being. A true comprehensive discipline of psychology should not shy away from certain immaterial aspects of a being and his experiences. What it takes is to redefine the scope of extant psychology. Ibn Sina's framework for instance suggested a more integrated approach that studies the human being as a whole – to include the body, the mind, and the soul. This broader definition allows for the study of phenomena like spirituality, purpose, and selfhood, which are central to human well-being and cannot be fully explained by brain activity alone. Incorporating Ibn Sina's idea does not mean that the mainstream psychology's focus on neuroscience and empirical research should be abandoned. His framework can provide guiding questions for research. For example, his concept of ethical self-cultivation can be a framework for studying the psychological benefits of virtue, and his idea of the soul's purpose can inform research in positive psychology and meaning making, which has now been considered a fundamental human process (Cleveland Clinic, n.d.; Seligman, 2011).

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Ibn Sina's philosophical genius, cultivated in the rich intellectual environment of his youth, culminated in a profound and systematic conception of the soul that continues to resonate today. His work on the soul's ontological independence, its epistemological ascent, and its ultimate axiological purpose provides a comprehensive framework that is notably absent from much of contemporary psychology.

While mainstream psychology has provided invaluable insights through its commitment to empirical science and the biopsychosocial model, it often falls short in addressing the most fundamental questions of human existence. By reducing consciousness to neural pathways and purpose to chemical reactions, it overlooks the very aspects of life that make it most meaningful. Ibn Sina's framework, in contrast, offers an alternative – a robust model that not only acknowledges the self as an immaterial reality but also embeds ethics and spiritual purpose as integral to human well-being.

Ultimately, a more comprehensive and inclusive science of the human being demands that we look beyond the confines of purely physical inquiry. The enduring legacy of Ibn Sina lies in his timeless wisdom, reminding us that to truly understand the human mind, we must also understand the nature of the soul. By integrating his holistic framework into modern psychological thought, we can transcend the limitations of reductionism and embark on a new, more complete journey to understand the human psyche in all its complexity.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

Part of this study was funded by the International Institute of Islamic Thought – IIIT East and Southeast Asia (Grant Number: SPI21-053-0053).

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