

**IBN SĪNĀ** (AH 370–428/980–1037 CE), more fully Abū 'Alī al-Ḥusayn ibn 'Abd Allāh ibn Sīnā, known in Latin as Avicenna; Muslim philosopher and physician. Ibn Sīnā was born in Afshana, a village near Bukhara. Today a city in the Uzbek Soviet Socialist Republic, Bukhara was at that time the capital of the Samanid rulers, for whom Ibn Sīnā's father worked.

**Education.** Ibn Sīnā grew up in a bilingual environment; his native language was Farsi (Persian), but the language of his education was Arabic. The heritage of these two cultures was to lead to the two very different lines of his influence on later thinkers.

The education provided for Ibn Sīnā by his father was very wide-ranging, encompassing both Muslim religious studies and secular subjects from the Arabic, Greek, and Indian traditions. He began by memorizing the Qur'ān and much of the didactic literature known as *adab*, then went on to study Muslim jurisprudence (*fiqh*). His father and brother were followers of the Ismā'īlī branch of Shi'ī Islam, which encouraged the study of hermetic philosophy, Neoplatonism, and mathematics. Ibn Sīnā did not become an Ismā'īlī but did study these subjects, as well as "Indian calculation," probably meaning the use of the Hindi (Arabic) numerical system. When he reached ten years of age, his father hired a tutor to teach him Greek philosophy and science. For the next several years he studied Aristotle's logic, Euclid's geometry, and Ptolemy's astronomy and quickly surpassed his tutor in his knowledge of these subjects.

From age fourteen or fifteen Ibn Sīnā continued his studies on his own, reading the texts and commentaries in the natural sciences, metaphysics, and medicine. He excelled in this last subject, to the point that he was practicing and teaching it by the time he was sixteen. He completed his education in the following year and a half, reviewing and mastering all the branches of philosophy: logic, mathematics, natural science (or physics), and metaphysics. He was helped in his understanding of metaphysics by the commentary of Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950 CE), whose commentaries on Greek philosophy and original writings had a great influence on Ibn Sīnā. In his attack on both Ibn Sīnā and al-Fārābī, the great theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 1111) was to consider their views virtually identical.

**Public Life.** Ibn Sīnā's entry into public life began during this period of study, when he was summoned to treat the Samanid emir in Bukhara and then became part of his court. He was to spend the rest of his life—the next forty years—as a courtier, with all of the vicissitudes of fortune which that position usually entails. He held both medical and political positions in a number of courts in areas that are today part of Iran and

Soviet Central Asia, usually being forced to leave a given territory by "necessity," as he laconically calls it. At several courts he was an important minister, but the jealousy of rivals and an undoubtedly arrogant attitude toward his intellectual inferiors (virtually everyone he met) brought about his downfall and imprisonment or hasty escape from most of these courts.

During the time of this active political involvement, Ibn Sīnā was also engaged in writing a large and influential corpus of works on medicine and all branches of philosophy. Many of these works have been lost, and many that exist today are unedited, so we cannot speak with certainty about his philosophical development. Most of his major writings have survived, however, with the exception of *Al-inṣāf* (The Judgment), in which he compared the Eastern and Western views of Aristotle's philosophy. This work was lost during his lifetime; it might have answered some of the questions about his philosophy which exist even today. The two most influential of his works, *Al-qānūn fī al-ṭibb* (The Canon of Medicine) and *Al-shifā'* (The Healing [of the Soul]), were written over a period of years and were intended to be compendia of their subjects, medicine and philosophy. Most of his other major writings that can be dated were composed during the last thirteen years of his life, which he spent in Isfahan or on campaign with its ruler, as his official physician and courtier. During this period he composed some works in Farsi, such as the *Dānish-nāmah-i 'Alā'ī* ('Alā'ī Philosophy), and oversaw the translation of some of his earlier Arabic treatises into Farsi. In all, more than 130 works by Ibn Sīnā have survived to this day, many of them found only in manuscript form in Middle Eastern libraries.

Ibn Sīnā was interested in all branches of knowledge, religious and secular. Once, in order to avenge a slighting remark about his knowledge of Arabic philology, he spent three years studying the subject, then wrote several letters imitating exactly the greatest prose stylists in the language, and concluded his study by writing a book on the subject. Most of his surviving writings are of this sort: accounts of one aspect or another of the learning of his time, often in response to questions posed by his contemporaries. His philosophy is presented more systematically in his major works: the *Shifā'*; the *Najāt* (Salvation [from Error]), a selection of the most important parts of the *Shifā'*; *Ishārāt wa-al-tanbihāt* (Instructions and Remarks), the last of his major writings; and the *Dānish-nāmah-i 'Alā'ī*. The *Shifā'*, for example, is divided into four parts, treating logic, physics, mathematics, and metaphysics; the first three parts are further subdivided, thus covering virtually all of the subjects of philosophy.

**Thought.** As can be seen from his major writings, Ibn Sīnā wished not merely to study all knowledge but to synthesize it as well. Aristotle's philosophy, Neoplatonism, Islamic religious teachings, and quite possibly Zoroastrian concepts were all present in his intellectual background, and traces of all of these traditions can be found in his thought. In his cosmology, for example, he adopts the Neoplatonic theory of emanation from a Necessary Existent through a series of Intelligences to the Active Intelligence, from which emanate the vegetative, animal, and rational souls and the material basis of the sublunary world. This emanation is necessary, since it is implicit in the nature of the Necessary Existent, as is its absolute goodness.

The Necessary Existent is the only exception to Ibn Sīnā's absolute distinction between essence and existence. For the Necessary Existent, essence and existence are identical; for all other existents they are separate. Even though the Necessary Existent is the Prime Cause of the created universe, the latter is independent of the Necessary Existent, which has no control over the good and (necessary) evil resulting from the process of emanation. Thus he employs Neoplatonic ideas in his attempt to harmonize the theory of Aristotle, which regards matter as coeternal with the Prime Mover, and the belief in creation by God *ex nihilo* held by Muslims. He was later criticized by Ibn Rushd (Averroës; d. 1198) for not following Aristotle more closely and was accused of heresy by al-Ghazālī for not accepting creation *ex nihilo*.

In his exposition of the relationship between human beings and the Necessary Existent, Ibn Sīnā likewise advocates a position that draws upon Neoplatonism to synthesize the various positions current in his time. Each human being, he states, is composed of body, soul, and intelligence. The highest aspect of the human being, the intelligence, desires to reach its perfection, to return to the source from which it has emanated. Passing back through the various stages of emanation, which Ibn Sīnā compares to passing through the stages of the mystical path, the individual intelligence ultimately achieves union with the Necessary Existent. There are similarities between this view and Aristotle's position that the greatest human happiness is found in the godlike activity of contemplation. However, in no sense could a part of the human soul become identified with the Prime Mover in Aristotle's system. Ibn Sīnā is closer to an Islamic position in his discussion of the relationship of humans to the Necessary Existent. But it is not the orthodox theological doctrine, which stresses the absolute separateness of human beings and God, that he approaches in his account. Rather, it is the Sūfi,

or mystical, view of the divine-human relationship. His mysticism differs from that of most Ṣūfīs, however, in his argument that the *ʿārif* ("knower," or, perhaps, "gnostic") can attain the *maʿrifat Allāh* ("knowledge of God") by his own will; he does not need God's grace to achieve this state of illumination.

In recent years, students of Ibn Sīnā's religious thought have found traces of Zoroastrian influence, in addition to the influences of Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and Islamic ideas. His theory of the role of the Intelligences in the universe bears a resemblance to the angelology of Zoroastrianism, and much less to the traditional Islamic view of angels as God's vicegerents and messengers. The individual must awaken to the knowledge that his intellect is a part of the world of the angels; at that point the mystical journey begins. Ibn Sīnā's view of the material universe as eternal, evil (mixed with good), and completely determined is related not only to the tenets of gnosticism and Manichaeism that still survived in the Iran of his time, but also to the late Zoroastrian doctrine of Zurvanism, which held even God to be bound by fate. In his development of a philosophical vocabulary in Farsi, he shows a knowledge of Zoroastrian terminology and adapts it to his own system.

**Influence on the West.** In canto 4 of his *Inferno* Dante includes Ibn Sīnā with the great pagan writers of antiquity in Limbo, the highest circle of Hell. Muslims were generally seen as schismatics—Dante in fact puts Muḥammad and ʿAlī among the schismatics in canto 28—so it is surprising to encounter Ibn Sīnā alongside Homer, Plato, and Aristotle. Dante placed him in this high position quite likely because of the great influence his writings had exerted on Christian thought over the previous century and a half. His influence on Dante's ideas was especially strong.

Ibn Sīnā's influence in the West began almost as soon as his works began to be translated in twelfth-century Spain. Most of the *Shifāʾ* was translated into Latin before 1150, and it presented Christian thinkers with their first exposure to a completely coherent cosmology and system of metaphysics. It had a seductive attraction because of its comprehensiveness and was in some respects easier to accept than Aristotle's philosophy. Because Aristotle's works were being translated at the same time as those of Ibn Sīnā, and because some Neoplatonic works were attributed to Aristotle (e.g., the *Liber de causis*, a collection of extracts from Proclus's *Elements of Theology*), it was not always easy to distinguish the ideas of the two philosophers. During the thirteenth century, however, students of their works and commentators on them were able to separate the two men and identify the spurious works attributed to them.

At this point it was discovered by Christian theologians, as al-Ghazālī had alleged over a century earlier, that Ibn Sīnā's cosmology and metaphysics posed a danger to orthodox monotheism, whether Christian or Muslim.

Ibn Sīnā's philosophical system was too well constructed to refute completely and too widespread to ignore. Virtually all of the scholastic theologians accepted some of his ideas, although none went so far as to become "Latin Avicennists." The Christian writer who came closest to adopting his philosophy completely was his twelfth-century translator, Dominicus Gundissalinus, who wrote a number of works which borrowed heavily from the psychology and metaphysics of Ibn Sīnā, which Gundissalinus had translated into Latin. Gundissalinus's works, as well as those of Ibn Sīnā, were viewed critically by William of Auvergne (or William of Paris, c. 1180–1249). He accepted Ibn Sīnā's distinction between essence and existence but strongly rejected his emanationist creation theory, including the hierarchy of Intelligences existing between humans and God. In this rejection he was followed by Albertus Magnus (1206–1280) and Thomas Aquinas (1224–1274).

The two most important Christian thinkers strongly influenced by Ibn Sīnā were the British Franciscans Roger Bacon (c. 1214–after 1292) and John Duns Scotus (c. 1265–1308). Bacon did not compose a systematic theology but, rather, wrote a scientific encyclopedia resembling in many ways Ibn Sīnā's *Shifāʾ*. Neither Ibn Sīnā nor Roger Bacon wished to compare each point with the views of the ancient philosophers; as Ibn Sīnā told his chief disciple, Jūzjānī, "If you would be satisfied with my composing a work in which I would set forth what, to me, is sound in these sciences, without debating with those who disagree or devoting myself to their refutation, I would do that" (Gohlman, 1974, p. 55). Bacon also believed that Ibn Sīnā was, after Aristotle, the prince of philosophy. Even so, Bacon could not follow Ibn Sīnā completely: he substitutes God for Ibn Sīnā's creating Active Intelligence, for example. Duns Scotus adopted Ibn Sīnā's definition of metaphysics as the study of being *qua* being, and his discussion of universals was largely based on that of Ibn Sīnā as well.

**Influence in the Muslim World.** Ibn Sīnā had a number of disciples who continued studying and teaching his philosophical system. The orthodox Islamic revival of the eleventh century CE, however, crowned by al-Ghazālī's attack on the philosophers, limited the spread of his ideas to those areas not under the control of the Seljuk dynasty. The fact that he did not found a school like the Academy of Lyceum also restricted his influence to the occasional scholar or group of scholars. It is ironic that his philosophical writings became a part of the curriculum of European universities but not of the

*madrasahs* (colleges) established in the Muslim world.

Ibn Sīnā's influence on Muslim writers, especially in the Farsi-speaking area of the Muslim world, was, nevertheless, important. The most significant impact of his thought was on Sufism, more specifically on the Ishrāqī (Illuminationist) school of Sufism founded by Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrawardī (1153–1191). The source of this influence was not his great encyclopedia of philosophy, the *Shifā'*, but rather several short treatises, *Ḥayy ibn Yaqqān*, *The Bird*, *On Love*, and *Salmān and Absāl*, as well as the last sections of his *Ishārāt*. There is a dispute among contemporary scholars concerning the extent to which Ibn Sīnā intended these works to be interpreted esoterically as mystical treatises. The Ishrāqī Ṣūfīs, however, read them in this way and combine them with the obviously mystical theosophy of Muḥyi al-Dīn ibn al-'Arabī (1165–1240) and the ideas of his contemporary Suhrawardī to form the most influential school of mystical philosophy in the Farsi-speaking Islamic world.

The aspect of Ibn Sīnā's writings that attracted Suhrawardī and his followers was his Eastern (*mashriqīyah*) philosophy. The Arabic words for "Eastern" and "Illuminationist" (*mushriqīyah*) are written identically; according to Suhrawardī they mean the same thing in Ibn Sīnā's works. Unfortunately, the most important of his writings on Eastern philosophy, *Judgment*, was lost, but his references to the East in *Ḥayy ibn Yaqqān* and *The Bird* convinced Suhrawardī that Ibn Sīnā was on the right track. Suhrawardī translated the latter into Farsi and wrote a companion work to *Ḥayy ibn Yaqqān*, which he called *Western Exile*. In his basic treatise *Hikmat al-ishrāq* (Illumination Wisdom), Suhrawardī points out that the sources of wisdom that Ibn Sīnā lacked were precisely those writings of Zoroastrianism, Pythagoreanism, and Hermetism which were both Eastern and Illuminationist. He rejects Ibn Sīnā's distinction between essence and existence, saying that existence has no reality outside the intelligence that abstracts its essence. Ibn Sīnā's view of form and matter, similar to that of Aristotle, is transformed by Suhrawardī into light and darkness; the human soul is composed of light. He interprets Ibn Sīnā's treatises to be symbolic accounts of the return of the soul/light to the Supreme Light, and wrote several treatises that describe this journey of the soul to God.

The Ishrāqī tradition was most influential in Iran after the establishment of the Safavid regime (1499–1722) and its adoption of Shī'ī Islam as the official state religion. In Isfahan, the Safavid capital after 1598, the two greatest exponents of the Ishrāqī school were Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631) and his pupil Mullā Ṣadrā (1571/2–1640). Mīr Dāmād wrote a commentary on the metaphysics of the *Shifā'* in which he combined the teachings of Ibn

Sīnā and Suhrawardī, particularly in the area of angelology. Mullā Ṣadrā, the greatest of the Ishrāqī theosophers, founded a school that continues to the present day. His synthesis of philosophy, revelation, and illumination follows Ibn Sīnā's principle of the primacy of existence and its division into necessary, possible, and impossible existents. He departs from Ibn Sīnā's views and relies more on Ibn al-'Arabī, the Neoplatonists, and Islamic revelation in holding that the sciences of the "otherworld," learned by illumination and revelation, are true knowledge and far superior to the sciences of this world. Just as the Europeans had accepted only one aspect of Ibn Sīnā's thought, the philosophical/scientific, the Ishrāqīyah selected only the other aspect, the mystical, for inclusion in their system of belief.

#### BIBLIOGRAPHY

The best account of Ibn Sīnā's life and works is his brief autobiography and its continuation by his disciple Jūzjānī, which I have edited and translated as *The Life of Ibn Sīnā* (Albany, N.Y., 1974). A survey of his writings and their influence on the European and Islamic worlds is found in Soheil M. Afnan's *Avicenna: His Life and Works* (London, 1958); a work emphasizing his influence on Christian and Jewish thought is *Avicenna: Scientist and Philosopher*, edited by G. M. Wickens (London, 1952). The best analysis of his metaphysical theories is Parviz Morewedge's *The Metaphysica of Avicenna (ibn Sīnā)* (New York, 1973), which is a translation of the *Ilāhiyāt* (Metaphysics) of the *Dānish-nāmah-i 'Alā'i* with an extensive commentary and comparison with Ibn Sīnā's other works on metaphysics. The negative side of the debate over interpreting his works esoterically is presented by Amélie-Marie Goichon in such works as the introduction and notes in her French translation of the *Ishārāt: Livre des directives et remarques* (Paris, 1951) and *Le récit de Hayy ibn Yaqqān* (Paris, 1959). The case for an esoteric interpretation is made in Henry Corbin's *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York, 1960); the connection between Ibn Sīnā and the Ishrāqī school is shown in Seyyed Hossein Nasr's *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardī, Ibn 'Arabī* (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).

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**IBN TAYMĪYAH** (AH 661–728/1263–1328 CE), more fully Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-'Abbās Aḥmad ibn 'Abd al-Ḥalīm ibn 'Abd al-Salām al-Harrānī al-Dimashqī; juriconsult, theologian, and Ṣūfī. He was born in Harran, and at the age of six he fled with his father and brothers to Damascus during the Mongol invasions. Ibn Taymīyah devoted himself from early youth to various Islamic sciences (Qur'ān, *ḥadīth*, and legal studies), and he was a voracious reader of books on sciences that were not taught in the regular institutions of learning, including logic, philosophy, and *kalām*.