

Avicenna

Biography / Overview

Avicenna (c. 980 – 1037 CE), known in the Islamic world as Ibn Sina, was a Persian thinker whose influence spanned philosophy, medicine, science, and theology. Born near Bukhara in the village of Afshana (modern Uzbekistan), he displayed remarkable intellect early on—memorizing the Quran and mastering diverse sciences by age 16.

Widely hailed as one of the greatest minds of the Islamic Golden Age, Avicenna authored over 450 treatises, with around 240 surviving today. His most enduring legacies lie in his integration of Aristotelian philosophy with Islamic theology and his systematic contributions to medicine. His two magnum opuses—*The Book of Healing* and *The Canon of Medicine*—shaped scholarly discourse in both the Islamic world and medieval Europe for centuries.

Philosophically, Avicenna is noted for his exploration of metaphysics, particularly his concepts of essence versus existence and his argument for the existence of a Necessary Being—a foundational concept for later Islamic and Christian thought.

Sources

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy
Encyclopedia Britannica

Bibliography / Primary Sources

Major Works

The Book of Healing: A vast philosophical encyclopedia covering logic, natural sciences, mathematics, and metaphysics.

The Canon of Medicine: A comprehensive medical guide that became the gold standard for medical training in Europe and the Islamic world up until the 17th century.

Remarks and Admonitions: A mature synthesis of Avicenna's philosophical thought, touching on metaphysics, logic, and mystical psychology.

On the Soul: A philosophical treatise analyzing the nature, faculties, and immortality of the soul.

Manuscript Legacy

Many of Avicenna's texts were translated into Latin and Hebrew during the medieval period,

profoundly impacting Western thinkers like Thomas Aquinas, Albertus Magnus, and the Jewish philosopher Maimonides.

Birth Date / Death Date

Born: ca. 980 CE, Afshana (near Bukhara, present-day Uzbekistan)

Died: June 1037 CE, Hamadan (modern-day Iran)

Notable / Best-Known For

Writing *The Canon of Medicine*, a foundational text in both Islamic and Western medicine.

Introducing a pivotal distinction between essence and existence in metaphysics.

Proposing a philosophical demonstration of God as the Necessary Existent.

Merging Aristotelian thought and Neoplatonic elements with Islamic theology.

Acting as a conduit for classical Greek philosophy into medieval Europe.

Famous Quotes

“The world is split between those with intellect but no faith, and those with faith but no intellect.”

“Medicine is the discipline that enables us to understand the body in both health and illness.” —
The Canon of Medicine

“Knowing the soul is the key to knowing the self.” — *On the Soul*

Major Works / Textual Contents

The Canon of Medicine

Structured in five volumes covering general medical principles, pharmacology, diagnostics, therapies, and compound remedies.

Introduced clinical observation and concepts of contagion and quarantine.

The Book of Healing

A sweeping philosophical encyclopedia covering logic, physics, mathematics, and metaphysics.

Offers his most systematic treatment of existence, being, and the Necessary Existent.

Remarks and Admonitions

An influential work on logic, metaphysics, psychology, and mysticism.

Widely studied by later Islamic and Latin philosophers.

On the Soul

Defends the soul's immaterial nature and eternal survival.

Famous for the "Flying Man" thought experiment, demonstrating innate self-awareness.

Influences / Intellectual Context

Avicenna drew deeply from Aristotle and Neoplatonism, as well as earlier Islamic philosophers like al-Farabi and al-Kindi. His work represents a fusion of Greek rationalism and Islamic theological inquiry, forming a cornerstone of both philosophical and mystical traditions.

His influence extended far beyond the Islamic world—shaping Latin Scholasticism and thinkers like Aquinas and Scotus.

Legacy and Modern Significance

Avicenna's contributions continue to resonate in modern philosophy and the history of science. His *Canon of Medicine* shaped medical instruction for a long period of time, while his philosophical ideas remain central to Islamic and Western metaphysics.

In the Islamic world, he is revered as "The Prince of Physicians" and "The Second Teacher" (after Aristotle). His name and ideas are honored in academic, cultural, and medical institutions across the globe.

Modern Moments / Impact on 21st-Century Society

Philosophy: Avicenna is still studied in courses on Islamic thought, metaphysics, and comparative philosophy.

Medicine: Though no longer medically current, *The Canon* is a key historical reference.

Digital Access: His writings are widely available in translation and online.

Recognition: UNESCO and various nations commemorate his intellectual legacy; statues and institutions bear his name.

Suggested Reading and Resources

Scholarly Works

Gutas, Dimitri. *Avicenna and the Aristotelian Tradition*. Brill, 2001.

Nasr, Seyyed Hossein. *Avicenna and the Visionary Recital*. Princeton University Press, 1964.

McGinnis, Jon. *Avicenna*. Oxford University Press, 2010.

Online Resources

Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Avicenna

Internet Encyclopedia of Philosophy: Avicenna

Islamic Philosophy Online: <https://www.muslimphilosophy.com>

World Digital Library: Avicenna Manuscripts