

## BODY AND SOUL IN IBN SINA'S PHILOSOPHICAL SYSTEM: BETWEEN LOGIC, METAPHYSICS, AND NATURAL PHILOSOPHY

Akhatova Dildora Akhtamovna

Doctor of Philosophy in Philosophical Sciences (PhD),

Actg. Associate Professor Shakhrisabz State Pedagogical Institute

Actg. Associate Professor of the Department of Social Sciences, Uzbekistan, Shakhrisabz

Email: axatovadildora795@gmail.com

ORCID:<https://orcid.org/0009-0001-6849-0603>

### Abstract

This article analyzes Ibn Sīnā's doctrine of body and soul within the framework of his philosophical system, which spans logic, metaphysics, and natural philosophy. It examines the logical structure of his arguments about the soul, the metaphysical distinction between essence and existence, and his view of the soul as an immaterial substance that employs the body as its instrument. Particular attention is given to how his natural philosophy and medical practice explain the interdependence of the bodily and spiritual dimensions and how this interdependence shapes the human path toward perfection.

**Keywords:** Ibn Sīnā, Avicenna, soul, body, psychology, metaphysics, logic, natural philosophy, rational soul, immortality of the soul.

### Introduction

Abū 'Alī Ibn Sīnā (Avicenna, 980–1037) is one of the most influential thinkers of the medieval Islamic world, whose works in philosophy, medicine and natural science form a single, systematic project in which different branches of knowledge support each other [1, p. 54]. In the centre of this project stands his teaching about the human being as a unity of body and soul: the soul is described as an immaterial and self-subsistent substance, while the body is the instrument through which the soul acts in the material world. Ibn Sīnā develops this idea at the intersection of three main parts of his philosophy: logic, which gives the methods and forms of correct reasoning; metaphysics, which studies being, essence and existence; and natural philosophy, which examines material bodies, movement and life processes.

The relation between body and soul is therefore not a marginal theme, but a key to the internal coherence of Ibn Sīnā's system. In his logical writings he explains how definitions and demonstrations about the soul must be constructed if they are to count as scientific knowledge; in his metaphysical works he argues for the independence and immortality of the rational soul; and in his natural philosophy and medical texts he links psychic functions to detailed accounts of physiology and perception [2, p. 87]. Recent research on Ibn Sīnā's psychology, and on how his ideas were received in the Islamic East and in Latin Europe, shows that this complex view of body and soul later became an important starting point for discussions about the nature of the self, the individuality of the human person and the possibility of life after death. The purpose of this article is to analyse these connections between logic, metaphysics and natural philosophy and to show how they form a unified picture of human nature in Ibn Sīnā's philosophical system.



## Methods

This study employs a qualitative, text-based methodology centered on Ibn Sīnā's major philosophical works and their modern interpretations. The primary materials include the psychological and physical sections of *Kitāb al-Shifā'* (The Book of Healing) and *al-Najāt* (The Book of Salvation), where Ibn Sīnā articulates his mature views on the structure of the human soul, its relationship to the body, and the placement of these topics within the broader classification of the sciences [1, p. 112].

The analysis of these primary sources is informed by contemporary scholarship that reconstructs Ibn Sīnā's metaphysics, psychology, and natural philosophy within Aristotelian and Neoplatonic traditions. In particular, studies devoted to his metaphysical system—especially the distinction between essence and existence—clarify the ontological status of the rational soul and its potential independence from the body [3, pp. 70–80]. Research on the Latin reception of Ibn Sīnā's *De anima* and its influence on medieval debates about the soul provides a comparative framework for understanding how his account of body and soul was adapted within Western scholasticism [4, pp. 95–102].

Methodologically, this article combines conceptual analysis with comparative interpretation. Key notions such as “rational soul,” “substance,” “body,” “instrument,” and “perfection” are examined both within their original textual context and in relation to broader patterns in Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophy and epistemology [5, pp. 119–126]. At the same time, systematic studies of Ibn Sīnā's theory of the soul and its theological implications help to identify how his account of the body–soul relationship engages with issues such as personal identity, moral responsibility, and life after death [6, pp. 210–218].

Taken together, this methodological approach makes it possible to demonstrate how logical, metaphysical, and natural-philosophical considerations jointly shape Ibn Sīnā's comprehensive understanding of human nature.

## Results

### Logic and the conceptual framework of body and soul

The analysis of Ibn Sīnā's logical writings shows that he approaches the doctrine of body and soul as a topic requiring precise definitions and demonstrative proof, rather than rhetorical or purely theological argumentation [3, pp. 70–72]. In his treatment of definition (*ḥadd*), he maintains that the human soul must be defined through its essential attributes—namely, as a substance whose proper act is thinking—while references to bodily organs and faculties belong only to descriptive, non-essential accounts [1, p. 125]. This logical structure enables him to separate clearly the soul as an immaterial substance from its manifested operations through bodily faculties.

Furthermore, Ibn Sīnā uses the structure of syllogistic reasoning to organise the levels of discourse applied to the soul. Demonstrative syllogisms, grounded in necessary premises, belong to philosophical psychology; whereas dialectical and rhetorical reasoning are appropriate to *kalām* and popular religious instruction [5, pp. 120–122]. This hierarchy underscores that, in his system, a correct understanding of the soul–body relationship depends first on clarifying logical form and ensuring the reliability of premises.



### **Metaphysical status of the soul and the body**

A reading of the metaphysical parts of al-Shifā' and al-Najāt confirms that Ibn Sīnā embeds the human soul within his central distinction between essence and existence, and between necessary and possible being [3, pp. 75–80]. The soul is described as a “possible” being that comes into existence when an appropriately disposed body is prepared; yet once it exists, it is not dependent upon that body for the continuation of its being, because its characteristic acts—especially the grasp of universals—are immaterial in nature [2, pp. 90–94].

At the same time, the analysis demonstrates that Ibn Sīnā rejects both the pre-existence of individual souls and any theory that derives the soul solely from matter. The rational soul neither precedes the body temporally nor emerges gradually from the material elements. Rather, it is brought into being with the body by a separate immaterial cause and remains individuated by its initial connection to that body [6, pp. 212–214]. Through this stance, Ibn Sīnā maintains the duality of soul and body while avoiding the notion of a pre-bodily stock of souls or a purely material origin of the spiritual principle.

### **Natural-philosophical and medical grounding**

The examination of Ibn Sīnā's natural philosophy and the medical discussions in the Canon of Medicine shows how he grounds the operations of the soul in a detailed framework of bodily organs and physiological processes [2, pp. 180–186]. The external senses, internal senses, imagination, memory and the common sense (al-ḥiss al-mushtarak) are analysed as powers of the soul that work through specific bodily instruments, particularly the brain and the “pneumatic” spirits that circulate throughout the body. In this way, Ibn Sīnā explains perception, emotion and certain mental disorders through changes in the bodily medium without reducing the soul to material components [5, pp. 123–126].

Additionally, his analysis of the hierarchy of souls—vegetative, animal and rational—shows that higher faculties presuppose but surpass the lower ones. While vegetative and animal powers are shared with plants and animals, the rational soul alone possesses self-reflective awareness and the ability to know universals [4, pp. 98–101]. This hierarchical structure supports Ibn Sīnā's claim about the immortality of the rational soul: with the body's dissolution the lower faculties perish, but the intellectual component, having no bodily organ, persists in its immaterial mode of existence [6, pp. 215–218].

### **Discussion**

The findings show that Ibn Sīnā approaches the doctrine of body and soul as a rigorously philosophical subject grounded in precise definitions and demonstrative reasoning. In his logical works, he maintains that the soul must be defined through its essential act—thinking—while bodily organs belong only to descriptive accounts. This methodological discipline elevates psychology to the same epistemic level as metaphysics and natural philosophy [1, pp.130–145]. Metaphysically, Ibn Sīnā formulates a distinctive dualism. The rational soul is an immaterial substance whose intellectual acts cannot be reduced to bodily processes, yet it does not pre-exist the body nor arise from matter alone. Instead, it originates when a properly organized body is prepared and remains individuated by its initial connection to that body. This framework allows him to affirm both the ontological independence of the soul and the necessity of embodiment for



its emergence and earthly development [2, pp.90–98].

His natural-philosophical and medical writings further show how the soul's powers operate through specific organs, spirits and physiological processes without being identical with them. Perception, imagination and emotional states are explained through bodily media, whereas the rational soul retains an immaterial identity that persists beyond corporeal change. This integrated model anticipates later holistic approaches in philosophy of mind and psychosomatic medicine, where mental and physical dimensions are treated as mutually dependent yet ontologically distinct [3, pp.120–126].

### Conclusion

This study shows that Ibn Sīnā offers a coherent and philosophically rigorous account of the relation between body and soul, grounded in logical precision, metaphysical clarity and natural-philosophical detail. His insistence on demonstrative reasoning and essential definitions places psychological inquiry alongside metaphysics and natural science as a genuine field of demonstrative knowledge.

Metaphysically, Ibn Sīnā articulates a balanced form of dualism in which the rational soul originates together with a suitably organised body yet possesses immaterial acts that guarantee its independence from corporeal conditions. This framework avoids both Platonic pre-existence and materialist reduction, offering instead a model where embodiment is necessary for individuation but not for the soul's ultimate mode of existence.

His natural-philosophical and medical analyses further demonstrate how the soul's faculties operate through bodily organs without being reducible to them, allowing him to explain psychological functions and disorders physiologically while preserving the soul's immaterial identity.

Taken together, these results show that Ibn Sīnā provides a unified, multi-level account of human nature that remains relevant for contemporary debates in the philosophy of mind, personal identity and medical ethics. His synthesis illustrates how empirical observation and metaphysical reasoning can be combined to understand the complex interaction between body and soul without collapsing one into the other.

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