

Nichiren Buddhism

Nichiren Buddhism is based on the philosophical teachings of the Japanese monk Nichiren, who lived during the thirteenth century. One of the main beliefs of Nichiren Buddhism is that since people have an innate Buddha-nature within themselves, they are able to attain enlightenment in this lifetime and in their current form.

Influence of Western Philosophy

The philosophical movement known as the Kyoto School emerged during the twentieth century. The movement was based at Kyoto University and incorporated many ideas of Western philosophy and religion into traditional East Asian ideas. Specifically, the ideas of Hegel, Kant, Heidegger, Nietzsche, and Christianity were used to reformulate moral and religious understanding.

AVICENNA (980–1037)

The most influential philosopher of the Islamic Golden Age

Ibn Sina (also referred to by the Latinized name Avicenna) lived from 980 to 1037 in what is now Uzbekistan. Avicenna was a Persian philosopher and physician, and is considered to be the most important figure of the Islamic Golden Age.

Avicenna was an exceptional physician and wrote medical books that would have an incredible impact on not only the Islamic world, but medical schools and thought across Europe. In addition to his medical writings, however, he also wrote extensively on metaphysics, ethics, and logic, and his philosophies regarding the soul and the essence of existence were incredibly influential in Western philosophy.

AVICENNA AND THE ISLAMIC GOLDEN AGE

The Islamic Golden Age occurred during the Middle Ages, when Europe was deeply involved in religious dogmatism and made relatively little headway in terms of philosophy. While philosophy in Europe was stagnant, philosophy in the Islamic world flourished, largely due to the work of Avicenna. Avicenna is considered to be one of the most important figures of this era, and he was one of the main people to introduce the works of Aristotle, as well as Neoplatonic ideas, to the Islamic world.

AVICENNA'S METAPHYSICS: ESSENCE AND EXISTENCE

Avicenna argued that essence (known as *Mahiat*) is independent from existence (known as *Wujud*), and is eternal and unchanging. He claimed that essence came before existence, and that existence is simply accidental. Therefore, according to Avicenna, anything that comes into existence is the result of an essence allowing for that existence.

His notion of essence and existence is similar to Plato's theory of Forms (the idea that everything that exists falls under a pre-existing archetype and that even when something no longer exists, the archetype remains); however, Avicenna claimed that Allah (the First Reality) is the only thing in the world that was not preceded by an essence. Allah, according to Avicenna, is a necessary being that one cannot define. If one attempts to define Allah, the very act of defining creates opposition. For example, if one were to say, "Allah is beautiful," that must then also mean that "Allah is not ugly," but this cannot be the case because everything comes from Allah.

Logic

Avicenna, a devout Muslim, believed that logic and reason could be used to prove the existence of God, and often, he used logic to interpret the Qur'an. Avicenna claimed that logic can be used to judge those concepts that are acquired via the four faculties of reason: estimation (*wahm*), retention (*al-khayal*), sense-perception (*al-hiss al-mushtarak*), and imagination (*al-mutakhayyila*). Imagination, according to Avicenna, is crucial because it allows for an individual to be able to compare new phenomena to concepts that already exist.

Avicenna also believed logic could be used to acquire new knowledge, make deductions, help an individual judge whether or not an argument is valid, and share knowledge with others. In order for one to attain salvation, Avicenna believed one has to gain knowledge and perfect his intellect.

EPISTEMOLOGY AND THE TEN INTELLECTS

Avicenna's own theory of creation stems largely from the theory of Al-Farabi, another famous Islamic philosopher. According to this theory, the creation of the world followed the First Intellect. The First Intellect begins to contemplate its own existence, and in doing so, the Second Intellect is created. As the Second Intellect begins to contemplate its origins from God, the First Spirit is created, which then sparks the universe, known as the Sphere of Spheres. As the Sphere of Spheres contemplates that it is something that has the potential to exist, it creates matter. This matter fills the universe and creates the Sphere of the Planets.

It is from the triple-contemplation that the early stages of existence emerge. As the process continues, two celestial hierarchies are created as a result of the continuation of emerging intellects: the Inferior Hierarchy (which Avicenna refers to as the "Angels of Magnificence") and the Superior Hierarchy of Cherubim. According to Avicenna, the angels, which are responsible for prophetic visions in humans, are deprived of sensory perception. They do, however, have imagination, and this imagination lets them desire the intellect that they originated from. The angels' journey to rejoin with their respective intellect creates eternal movement in heaven.

The following seven intellects, and the angels created by them, correspond to different bodies within the Sphere of Planets. They are Jupiter, Mars, Saturn, Venus, Mercury, the sun, and the moon (which is associated with the Angel Gabriel, "The Angel"). It is from the ninth intellect that humans emerge (featuring the sensory functions that the angels lack).

Avicenna then claims that the tenth and final intellect is human intellect. He claims that on its own, the human mind is not formed for abstract thought. Avicenna claims that in humans, there is only the potential for intellect, and that this potential can only come about through illumination by The Angel. This illumination can vary in degrees; prophets, for example, have been illuminated so much that they can have rational intellect, imagination, and the ability to pass their information on to others, while other people might have only enough illumination to teach, write, pass down information, and pass laws, and others might receive even less illumination. Here we see Avicenna's view of humanity as having a collective consciousness.

AVICENNA'S FLOATING MAN

To demonstrate the self-awareness and immateriality of the soul, Avicenna created his famous thought experiment known as the "Floating Man." In the Floating Man thought experiment, Avicenna asks the reader to imagine a scenario in which he is suspended in the air. As the individual hangs in the air, he will experience complete isolation from his senses (which means that he will not even have sensory contact with his own body).

Avicenna argued that even with this isolation from the senses, a person would still have self-consciousness. If a person that is

isolated from sense experience still has the ability to determine his own existence, according to Avicenna, this shows that the soul is an immaterial substance that exists independent of the body. Avicenna also claimed that since this scenario is conceivable, it points to the conclusion that the soul is perceived intellectually.

Furthermore, Avicenna believed that the brain is where reason and sensation interact with one another. In the scenario of the Floating Man, the very first knowledge that the individual would have is "I am," which affirms that individual's essence. Because the individual is isolated from sense experience, essence cannot come from the body. Therefore, the very core of a person is the knowledge "I am," which means not only does the soul exist; the soul is self-aware. Avicenna concluded that not only is the soul an immaterial substance; it is perfect.