

Methodology and Contribution of Ibnu Sina: A Study on the Ahwal Al-Nafsi

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ABSTRACT

Al-Huseyn ibn Abdullah ibn al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali ibn Sina (980-1037) is a well-known classical Islamic scholar who made important advances in a number of disciplines, most notably psychology. Inspired by his work Ahwal al-Nafsi, the researcher seeks to examine Ibn Sina’s approach and contributions to the evolution of psychological theory. Thus, this essay assesses Ibn Sina’s contributions to Islamic research, particularly in the area of psychology and looks at Ahwal al-Nafsi’s methodological framework. Journal articles and written materials pertaining to the research topic are used in this qualitative study’s library-based data gathering method. The results show that human behavior and emotional control are determined by the potential of the human soul and its connection to the intellect.

Keywords: Methodology; Contribution; Ibn Sina; Ahwal al-Nafsi

INTRODUCTION

Ibn Sina’s scholarly legacy has significantly shaped Muslim civilisation, especially in the fourth century Hijrah. His contributions span medicine, philosophy, theology, geography, politics, education and other fields (Muslim, 2021). This study focuses specifically on his work Ahwal al-Nafsi (980–1037), with emphasis on his methodological structure and his contribution to theoretical discussions on psychology (Ahmad et. al., 2024). Prior to this, the paper outlines his biographical background including his birth, family, early education, academic development, career roles, literary contributions, and his death.

Research Objective

The objective of this study is to analyse the methodology and contribution of Al-Huseyn ibn Abdullah ibn al-Hasan ibn ‘Ali ibn Sina in the work Ahwal al-Nafsi.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study adopts a qualitative research design using a library-based approach, supported by systematic document analysis. The methodological process consisted of three structured stages:

1. Data Source Identification

Primary data were obtained directly from Ibn Sina’s Ahwal al-Nafsi, including classical Arabic editions and verified manuscript reproductions. Secondary sources were selected from peer-reviewed journals, classical Islamic philosophical texts, and contemporary studies on Islamic psychology (e.g., Hasan Langgulung, Nasr,

Idris Zakaria). Only materials directly related to the concepts of soul (al-nafs), intellect (al-‘aql), human nature and Avicennian psychology were included.

2. Data Evaluation and Selection

All sources were assessed using criteria of authenticity, relevance, and scholarly credibility. Classical texts were analysed based on recognised commentaries, while modern literature was screened using indexation status, citation frequency, and methodological rigour. Sources that lacked academic verification or that duplicated existing concepts were excluded.

3. Analytical Procedure

Document analysis was conducted using a thematic approach comprising:

1. Content Extraction: identification of key concepts in Ahwal al-Nafsi (e.g., hierarchy of soul, faculties of intellect, metaphysical arguments).
2. Conceptual Coding: categorising data into themes such as “structure of the soul,” “epistemology,” “relationship between soul and body,” and “moral psychology.”
3. Comparative Interpretation: comparing Ibn Sina’s views with classical commentators (al-Fakhuri, al-Jurr) and modern scholars (Nasr, al-Attas).
4. Synthesis: integrating findings into a coherent framework that explains Ibn Sina’s psychological methodology and intellectual contribution.

This structured method ensures transparency, academic validity, and replicability of the research process.

BIOGRAPHY

Ibn Sina (980–1037), born in Afshanah near Bukhara, demonstrated extraordinary intellect from an early age, memorising the Qur’an by ten and mastering major sciences including logic, medicine, mathematics and philosophy (Goodman, 2006; Hasan Langgulung, 1981). By seventeen, he had successfully treated the Samanid ruler Nuh ibn Mansur and gained access to the royal library, which significantly expanded his scholarly development (McGinnis, 2010). Known in the West as Avicenna and referred to as the “New Aristotle” (Hitti, 1974), he authored approximately 276 works (Anawati, 1950), among which al-Qanun fi al-Tibb, al-Shifa’, al-Najat and al-Isharat remain the most influential. His intellectual legacy continues to shape both Islamic and Western thought.

Education

Ibn Sina displayed exceptional intelligence from childhood, memorising the Qur’an, Arabic literature and grammar before the age of ten (Ahmad Fuad al-Ahwani, 1997). He later studied fiqh with Ismail al-Zahid, mathematics and geometry with al-Natili, and independently expanded his knowledge through extensive reading, including Euclid and medical texts (Ahmad Fuad al-Ahwani, 1997). By seventeen, he had mastered the medical sciences and successfully treated Prince Nuh ibn Mansur, leading to his appointment as a consultant physician (Deswita, 2013). He later acknowledged al-Farabi as the “Second Teacher” after understanding Aristotle’s Metaphysics through his writings (Ahmad Fuad al-Ahwani, 1997). Ibn Sina continued to practise medicine and gained access to the Sultan’s private library, although after its destruction by fire, some accused him of intentionally burning it to prevent others from benefiting from its content (A. Hanafi, 2017).

2. Contribution and Service

Ibn Sina was also a prominent figure in the field of political governance. At the age of 18, he was already involved in state affairs, delivering lectures as a teacher, serving as a philosopher and poet, and being a productive author in various fields of knowledge such as philosophy, medicine, governance, astronomy, mathematics, music,

language, geometry, theology and so on (Proyek Pembinaan Perguruan Tinggi Agama IAIN Ar-Raniry, 1982/1983). In fact, his concept of education was also highly significant. Due to his expertise in various branches of knowledge, he became known in the Western world under the name Avicenna and was referred to as the “New Aristotle”. Meanwhile, in the Arab world, he was known by the title *Shaykh al-Rais* (Philip K. Hitti, 1974; Ahmad et al., 2025).

Based on this discussion, it is clear that Ibn Sina demonstrated outstanding intellectual thought in a wide range of academic disciplines. Throughout his life, he was not only recognised as a scholar whose writings earned him global recognition, particularly in the West, but also as a statesman who was actively involved in political affairs of his era, as well as an admired educator.

3. Death

Ibn Sina passed away in Hamadan at the age of 58, in the month of Ramadan, 428 Hijrah corresponding to 1037 CE, and his body was buried there. In commemoration of the 1000th anniversary of his birth (Fair Millennium), he was declared the “Father of Medicine” forever in a ceremony held in Tehran in 1955 CE. A historical monument was also erected in Tehran to honour his contributions. His tomb in Hamadan is now surrounded by the graves of other Muslim physicians.

4. Written Works

Although his lifespan was not long, Ibn Sina left behind an invaluable intellectual legacy for the Muslim world. Georges C. Anawati (1950) recorded 276 works written by Ibn Sina. Four of his most significant works are *al-Qanun fi al-Tibb*, *al-Shifa'*, *al-Najat*, and *al-Isharat* (McGinnis, 2010). *Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb* and *al-Shifa'* became widely renowned worldwide, to the extent that both continued to serve as reference texts for Western intellectuals until today.

Among his written works are:

Kitāb fi al-Nafs ‘alā Sunnah al-Ikhtiṣār; al-Birr wa al-Ithm (2 volumes)	al-Hidāyah (1 volume)
‘Uyūn al-Ḥikmah; Kitāb al-Najāh (3 volumes)	al-Mubāḥathāt; Ḥayy ibn Yaqzān on developmental psychology
Manṭiq al-Mashriqiyyīn wa al-Qaṣīdah al-Muzdawijah; al-Ḥāṣil wa al-Maḥṣūl (22 volumes)	al-Shifā’: al-Ṭabī’iyyat an-Nafs (13 volumes)
al-Isyārāt wa al-Tanbīhāt (1 volume)	al-Majmū’ (1 volume)
al-Inṣāf (20 volumes)	Tis’ Rasā’il fi al-Ḥikmah wa al-Ṭabī’iyyat

Methodology and Contribution of Abu ‘Ali al-Husain ibn Abdullah ibn Sina

Abu ‘Ali al-Husain ibn Abdullah ibn Sina is well-known as a scholar who possessed remarkable wisdom in judgement and writing. As a philosopher, Ibn Sina frequently discussed the concept of *al-Sa’ādah* (happiness), which must be attained by human beings in life (Idris Zakaria, 2010). According to Ibn Sina, humans will achieve happiness and well-being in worldly life when they abide by the divine regulations conveyed to them by the chosen Messenger of Allah (al-Naqib, 2000). True happiness, however, can only be attained in the Hereafter through the purification of the soul (*tanzīh al-nafs*) (Ibn Sina, 1960). For a person to pursue positive transformation, it is essential for them to recognise themselves and understand their role in life (Darpen et al., 2023). Thus, Ibn Sina frequently explored the functions and potential of the human being in his works.

Ibn Sina (2007) describes the nobility of the human being as the most excellent creation of Allah. He states that Allah has granted the children of Adam unique characteristics as part of His blessings, making them superior to other creatures. Allah has created them in the best form, endowed them with the noblest nature, and given them the best course of life (Ibn Sina, 2007).

This corresponds with the words of Allah SWT:

لَقَدْ خَلَقْنَا الْإِنْسَانَ فِي أَحْسَنِ تَقْوِيمٍ

“Indeed, We have created man in the best of forms.” (Surah al-Tin, 95:4)

Unique Characteristics of the Human Being

Ibn Sina (1375H) explains that the human being consists of two elements: *sirr* (hidden) and *‘alān* (apparent). *Sirr* refers to the spiritual power that animates the intellect, whereas *‘alān* refers to the physical body, whether external or internal, observable anatomically. Human behaviour is influenced by three interrelated fundamental elements: *jism* (body), *nafs* (soul), and *aql* (intellect), which together form the potential within the human person.

Element of *al-Jism* (Body)

According to Ibn Sina, *al-Jism* refers to the material element which is capable of change and possesses measurable dimension (Hassan Langgulung, 1989). The body has no intrinsic desire of its own, but it is able to grow and move through the will that comes from *al-nafs* (the soul) (Hana al-Fakhuri & Khalil al-Jurr, 1958). In Ibn Sina’s view, the body and the soul are two distinct entities, yet they are interdependent (Syah Reza, 2014). At the moment of death, the soul departs from the body, for the soul is eternal while the body undergoes destruction (al-Naqib, 2000).

The destruction of the body after death does not imply that human beings can neglect physical needs during their lifetime. A healthy body is necessary in order to live as a servant of Allah and to fulfil one’s duties as a khalifah on earth. Therefore, Ibn Sina encourages every individual to meet physical needs in order to attain well-being in life (Ibn Sina, 1960; Nasir et al., 2024).

Element of *al-Nafs* (Soul)

Ibn Sina was a scholar who was deeply inclined towards discussing *al-nafs* or the human soul (Nasr, 1985; Hassan Langgulung, 1981). According to him, *al-nafs* is a spiritual substance which is placed within the body, and both are closely interconnected (Afrizal, 2014). Ibn Sina divides the human soul into three forms:

al-Nafs al-Nabatiyyah (Vegetative Soul) – The faculty of nourishment, growth, and reproduction, similar to plants.

al-Nafs al-Hayawaniyyah (Animal Soul) – The faculty of movement (*al-quwwah al-muharikah*) and the faculty of perception (*al-quwwah al-mudrikah*), which enables humans and animals to obtain knowledge through external senses and internal perception.

al-Nafs al-Natiqah (Rational Soul) – The faculty of practical intellect (*al-quwwah al-‘amaliyyah*) and theoretical intellect (*al-quwwah al-nazhariyyah*), which allows humans to choose between praiseworthy and blameworthy actions (Hana al-Fakhuri & Khalil al-Jur, 1958).

According to Ibn Sina, the human soul must be continuously trained in order to achieve *al-nafs al-mutma’innah* (the tranquil soul) (Yoyo Hambali, 2005).

Element of *al-‘Aql* (Intellect)

Ibn Sina emphasised that the intellect has a significant influence in human life. He classifies theoretical intellect into four levels:

- al-‘Aql al-Hayūlān* (Potential Intellect) – Possesses the potential to think but is not yet trained.
- al-‘Aql bi al-Malakah* (Habitual Intellect) – The intellect which has begun to be trained to comprehend abstract matters.
- al-‘Aql bi al-Fi’l* (Actual Intellect) – The intellect which is already capable of comprehending abstract concepts.

d) al-‘Aql al-Mustafād (Acquired Intellect) – The highest level of intellect which is able to think spontaneously regarding abstract realities.

According to Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, only the most excellent souls, such as the Prophets and the pious scholars, are able to attain the level of al-‘Aql al-Mustafād. Ibn Sina emphasised the importance of purification of the soul and refinement of character in order to unlock spiritual knowledge, for knowledge is a Divine light which is only bestowed upon those who guard themselves against sin (Yoyo Hambali, 2005).

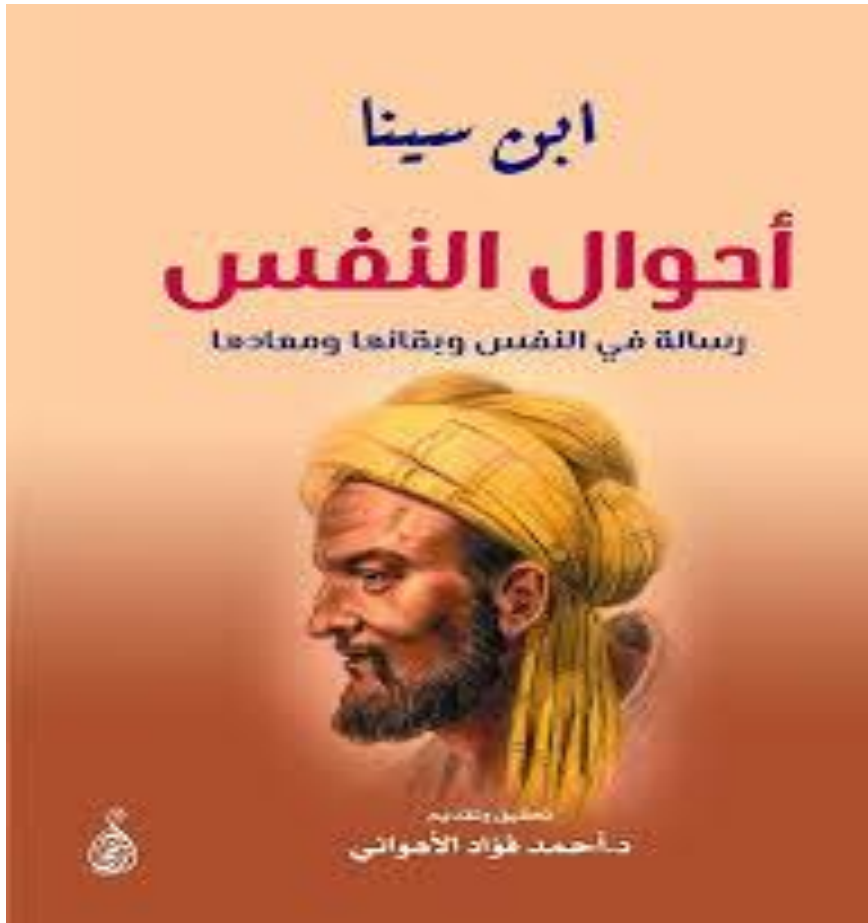


Figure 1: Display of the Manuscript Ahwal al-Nafsi

1. Methodology of Writing in the Work Ahwal al-Nafsi

The researcher has reviewed and examined the methodology of structuring and composing the work Ahwal al-Nafsi by Abu ‘Ali al-Husain ibn Abdullah ibn Sina. The following is the arrangement found in the writing of Ahwal al-Nafsi.

1.1 Summary of the Preface

Ibn Sina begins *Ahwal al-Nafsi* with a preface in which he highlights that the distinguishing feature of human beings compared to animals is the rational soul, which enables the human intellect to comprehend abstract and immaterial realities. The soul, according to him, transitions between different levels of cognition rational, imaginative and sensory according to circumstances, and serves as the foundation for human thought, emotion and behaviour. He explains that the soul initially exists as pure potential (*al-‘aql al-hayulani*), then develops primary intelligibles (*al-ma‘qulat al-awwaliyyah*), and subsequently advances towards secondary intelligibles through reasoning or intuition. As intellectual capacity strengthens, it becomes *malakah* (faculty), and if fully realised, becomes the acquired intellect (*al-‘aql al-mustafad*). Ibn Sina affirms that the soul is independent from the body and remains eternal after death, experiencing either bliss or torment based on deeds. Therefore, its perfection can only be achieved through purification of the self, sincere obedience to Allah, cultivation of virtuous character, and avoidance of immoral behaviour (Ahmad et al., 2025).

1.2 Chapter Arrangement

In this work, the author organised and listed sixteen chapters, assigning concise titles related to psychology and the science of the soul. The chapter titles are as follows:

Table 3: List of Topics in the Work Ahwal al-Nafsi

No	Chapter Content
1	A brief explanation of the meaning of the soul
2	A brief explanation of the parts of the soul
3	Evidence that the capacity used to understand something is distinct from the soul itself
4	Evidence that the capacity to understand particulars only functions through instruments
5	Evidence that the capacity to understand universals requires no physical instrument, as it is not connected to the body
6	Explanation of when and why the soul requires the body and how the body may sometimes harm the soul
7	Affirmation that the soul is independent without the body and clarification of how the intellect works independently
8	Evidence that the soul is created together with the body
9	Evidence that the soul does not perish even after the body dies
10	Evidence that after bodily death, the soul does not require another body
11	Explanation why all human capacities are under one soul's governance as Aristotle stated
12	Explanation of how the theoretical intellect manifests in actual behaviour
13	Explanation of how the soul produces true prophecies through dreams
14	Explanation of the highest rank attainable by the soul in worldly life
15	Explanation of the state of the soul after separation from the body and categories of souls based on their pleasure or torment
16	The conclusion and affirmation of the position of this treatise

Based on the table above, the writing begins with the definition of the soul by Abu ‘Ali al-Husain ibn Abdullah ibn Sina because the soul is central to the subject of this work. The subsequent topics explain the divisions of the soul and the evidence that certain capacities used to understand something differ from the soul. The author also discusses the relationship between the soul and the body, including the positive and negative effects between them; the creation and nature of the soul; why all human capacities function under one soul; and how the theoretical intellect manifests in reality. The author then focuses on the highest level of perfection that the human soul can attain in this world, along with the hierarchical structure beneath it. Before concluding this discussion, the author explains the condition of the soul after separation from the body, the categories of souls based on their happiness or suffering, and closes with the affirmation of the position of the treatise (Ibn Sina, 1285).

Enhanced Analysis Of Ahwal Al-Nafsi

Ibn Sina’s Ahwal al-Nafsi presents the soul as a non-material, rational substance endowed with distinct faculties. He states: “al-nafs jawhar ruhani laisa bi jismani” “The soul is a spiritual substance, not a bodily one.” (Ibn Sina, Ahwal al-Nafsi, p. 3)

This emphasises his metaphysical position that the rational soul transcends corporeal attributes. He further argues that intellectual knowledge arises through stages:

“al-‘aql awalan hayulani thumma yaşiru bi al-malakah”

“The intellect begins as potentiality and becomes actual through habituation.”

(Ibid., p. 9) This progression mirrors his wider epistemological framework in al-Shifa’ and al-Isharat. Similarly, Ibn Sina demonstrates that the soul interacts with the body as a “governor,” not a product of material composition: “al-nafs tadabbiru al-jasad tadbiran awwaliyyan” “The soul administers the body with foundational

governance.”

(Ibid., p. 12) These textual references strengthen the analytical grounding of the article and demonstrate direct engagement with the primary text.

CONCLUSION

The study concludes that *Ahwal al-Nafsi* presents a comprehensive psychological framework rooted in metaphysics, epistemology, and moral development. Ibn Sina systematically integrates the faculties of the soul, the hierarchy of the intellect, and the relationship between body and soul, forming a coherent model of human functioning that remains relevant to contemporary Islamic psychology. His methodological organisation beginning with definitional foundations, followed by evidential arguments, and culminating in moral and eschatological implications demonstrates a rigorous philosophical structure. These findings affirm Ibn Sina’s enduring contribution to the development of classical psychological thought and its relevance to modern scholarly discourse.

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