IBN SINĀ (500–573 AH) was a prominent philosopher and theologian who significantly influenced Islamic thought. His works, including *Tahāfut al-falāsīf* (The Incoherence of the Philosophers), written ninety years earlier but still influential among Muslims, Ibn Rushd’s reply, which he entitled *Tahāfut al-tahāfut* (The Incoherence of The Incoherence), takes the form of lengthy quotations from al-Ghazālī’s book, followed by point-by-point refutations of his arguments. These wide-ranging dialogues discuss the creation of the world, the attributes of God, including his will and his knowledge, the nature of causation, and the fate of the soul, among many other topics. Al-Ghazālī’s aim had been a negative one, to show that the philosophers al-Fārābī (873–950) and Ibn Sinā (980–1037) had failed to prove twenty theses about God and the world that were irreligous or at least heretical from the viewpoint of Islam. These penetrating criticisms had remained unanswered. Ibn Rushd came to the defense of the original, pure philosophy of Aristotle and often repudiated in the process the arguments of the two Muslim philosophers.

As a result of his open teaching of Aristotelian philosophy and science and, no doubt, his attacks on the traditional theologians, he and a small group of fellow scientists in Cordova were indicted in 1195 on charges of irreligion. He was convicted and sentenced to exile for a few years, until he was taken by the reigning prince to Marrakesh, where he died.

In spite of his Aristotelian writings and the trial in Cordova, Ibn Rushd has generally been regarded as a sincere Muslim, as witnessed by his long career as an Islamic judge (qāḍī), a book he wrote on jurisprudence, and his own conviction about himself. Although he had few disciples or even readers in Muslim countries over the following centuries, he continued to be honored as a learned scholar on Aristotle who had made a heroic but vain effort to reconcile that philosopher with Islam. Only in the last century has interest in him revived in the Muslim world, owing largely to fresh studies by Western scholars and a revival of interest in rationalistic philosophers among an educated Muslim public.

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IBN SINĀ (AH 370–428/980–1037 CE), more fully Abū ʿAlī al-Husayn ibn ʿAbd Allāh ibn Sinā, known in Latin as Avicenna; Muslim philosopher and physician. Ibn Sinā 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 Sinā’s father worked.

**Education.** Ibn Sinā 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 Sinā 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 Qurʾān 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 Ismāʿīlī branch of Shiʿī Islam, which encouraged the study of hermetic philosophy, Neoplatonism, and mathematics. Ibn Sinā did not become an Ismāʿīlī 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 Sinā 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 Sinā. In his attack on both Ibn Sinā and al-Fārābī, the great theologian al-Ghazālī (d. 1111 CE) was to consider their views virtually identical.

**Public Life.** Ibn Sinā’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 influ-
ential 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 Aristo-
tle'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 influ-
ential of his works, Al-qānūn fī al-tibb (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-
nāmāh-i 'Alā' ("Ala's") Philosophy, and oversaw the
translation of some of his earlier Arabic treatises into
Farsi. In all, more than 130 works by Ibn Sīnā have sur-
vived to this day, many of them found only in manu-
script form in Middle Eastern libraries.
Ibn Sīnā was interested in all branches of knowledge,
religious and secular. Once, in order to avenge a slight-
ing remark about his knowledge of Arabic philology, he
spent three years studying the subject, then wrote sev-
eral 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 pre-
sented more systematically in his major works: the
Shifā', the Naqīd (Salvation [from Error]), a selection of
the most important parts of the Shifā'; Ishārāt wa-al-
tanbīhāt (Instructions and Remarks), the last of his ma-
jor writings; and the Dānish-nāmāh-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, Neoplaton-
ism, 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 vege-
tative, animal, and rational souls and the material basis
of the sublunar world. This emanation is necessary,
since it is implicit in the nature of the Necessary Exis-
tent, as is its absolute goodness.

The Necessary Existent is the only exception to Ibn
Sīnā's absolute distinction between essence and exis-
tence. 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 ema-
nation. Thus he employs Neoplatonic ideas in his at-
tempt to harmonize the theory of Aristotle, which re-
gards 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 ac-
cused 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. Pass-
ing back through the various stages of emanation,
which Ibn Sīnā compares to passing through the stages
of the mystical path, the individual intelligence ulti-
mately 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 re-
lationship 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 Sūfī,
or mystical, view of the divine-human relationship. His mysticism differs from that of most Sūfis, however, in his argument that the *ārif ("knower," or, perhaps, "gnostic") can attain the maʿriqaṭ Allah ("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 Muhammad and 'Ali 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 *Šifāʾ* 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 refuse 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 *Šifāʾ*. Neither Ibn Sīnā nor Roger Bacon wished to compare each point of view with the views of the ancient philosophers; as Ibn Sīnā told his chief disciple, Jāzānī, "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 Sinā'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 Isḥāqī (Illuminationist) school of Sufism founded by Shihāb al-Dīn Yaḥyā Suhrwardī (1153–1191). The source of this influence was not his great encyclopedia of philosophy, the Shīrāzī, but rather several short treatises, Hāfiẓ ibn Yaḥyā’s Sunnāt, The Bird, On Love, and Sāmān and Abūal, as well as the last sections of his Isḥārāt. There is a dispute among contemporary scholars concerning the extent to which Ibn Sinā intended these works to be interpreted esoterically as mystical treatises. The Isḥāqī Sūfīs, however, read them in this way and combine them with the obviously mystical theosophy of Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn al-ʿArabī (1165–1240) and the ideas of his contemporary Suhrwardī to form the most influential school of mystical philosophy in the Farsi-speaking Islamic world.

The aspect of Ibn Sinā’s writings that attracted Suhrwardī and his followers was his Eastern (muḥshiqīyah) philosophy. The Arabic words for “Eastern” and “Illuminationist” (muḥshiqīyah) are written identically; according to Suhrwardī they mean the same thing in Ibn Sinā’s works. Unfortunately, the most important of his writings on Eastern philosophy, Judgment, was lost, but his references to the East in Hāfiẓ ibn Yaḥyā’s Sunnāt, which he called Western Exile. In his basic treatise Hikmat al-īṣrāḥ (Illumination Wisdom), Suhrwardī points out that the sources of wisdom that Ibn Sinā lacked were precisely those writings of Zoroastrianism, Pythagoreanism, and Hermetism which were both Eastern and Illuminationist. He rejects Ibn Sinā’s distinction between essence and existence, saying that existence has no reality outside the intelligence that abstracts its essence. Ibn Sinā’s view of form and matter, similar to that of Aristotle, is transformed by Suhrwardī into light and darkness; the human soul is composed of light. He interprets Ibn Sinā’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 Isḥāqī tradition was most influential in Iran after the establishment of the Safavid regime (1499–1722) and its adoption of Shiʿī Islam as the official state religion. In Isfahan, the Safavid capital after 1598, the two greatest exponents of the Isḥāqī school were Mīr Dāmād (d. 1631) and his pupil Mullā Sadrā (1571/2–1640). Mīr Dāmād wrote a commentary on the metaphysics of the Shīrāzī in which he combined the teachings of Ibn Sinā and Suhrwardī, particularly in the area of angeology. Mullā Sadrā, the greatest of the Isḥāqī theosophers, founded a school that continues to the present day. His synthesis of philosophy, revelation, and illumination follows Ibn Sinā’s principle of the primacy of existence and its division into necessary, possible, and impossible existents. He departs from Ibn Sinā’s views and relies more on Ibn al-ʿArabī, 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 Sinā’s thought, the philosophical/scientific, the Isḥāqīyah selected only the other aspect, the mystical, for inclusion in their system of belief.

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The best account of Ibn Sinā’s life and works is his brief autobiography and its continuation by his disciple Ḥozjānī, which I have edited and translated as The Life of Ibn Sinā (Albany, N.Y., 1974). A survey of his writings and their influence on the European and Islamic worlds is found in Soheil M. Afshar’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 Metaphysics of Avicenna (Ibn Sīnā) (New York, 1973), which is a translation of the Hikmat (Metaphysics) of the Dānīš-nāma-i ‘Alīī with an extensive commentary and comparison with Ibn Sinā’s other works on metaphysics. The negative side of the debate over interpreting his works esoterically is presented by Amélie-Marie Guichon in such works as the introduction and notes in her French translation of the Isḥārāt: Livre des directives et remarques (Paris, 1951) and Le récit de Hāfiẓ ibn Yaḥyā (Paris, 1959). The case for an esoteric interpretation is made in Henry Corbin’s Avicenna and the Visionary Racial, translated by Willard R. Trask (New York, 1960); the connection between Ibn Sinā and the Isḥāqī school is shown in Seyed Hossein Nasr’s Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrwardī, Ibn ‘Arabī (Cambridge, Mass., 1964).

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IBN TAMIYAH (AH 661–728/1263–1328 CE), more fully Taqī al-Dīn Abū al-ʿAbbās Ahmad ibnʿAbd al-Halim ibnʿAbd al-Salām al-Harrānī al-Dimashqī, jurisconsult, theologian, and Sūfī. 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 Tamiyah devoted himself from early youth to various Islamic sciences (Qurʾān, hadith, 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.

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