AVICENNA'S CONCEPT OF RATIONAL THINKING AND ITS SIGNIFICANCE FOR PSYCHOLOGICAL HEALTH

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Abstract

This thesis examines the views of Abu Ali ibn Sino (Avicenna, 980-1037) on rational thinking (‘aql) as a foundation of psychological health, drawing primarily on Kitab al-Shifa (The Book of Healing) and Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb (The Canon of Medicine). Avicenna regarded the rational soul as the governing faculty capable of regulating emotion, imagination and bodily temperament, and treated disordered thinking as both a philosophical and a clinical problem. Using a historical-comparative and hermeneutic analysis of primary and secondary sources, the study identifies three interconnected elements of Avicenna’s model: the hierarchy of the soul’s faculties, the psychosomatic link between mental state and bodily humor, and practical therapeutic recommendations such as regulated occupation, moderate emotion and social engagement. The findings show that Avicenna’s integrative approach anticipated several principles of modern cognitive and psychosomatic medicine and retains value for contemporary mental-health education.

Keywords: Avicenna, Ibn Sino, rational soul, psychological health, Kitab al-Shifa, Canon of Medicine, psychosomatic medicine, Islamic philosophy of mind

Introduction

The problem of the relationship between reason and health occupies a central place in the intellectual legacy of Abu Ali ibn Sino, one of the most influential physicians and philosophers of the medieval Islamic world. Long before the emergence of modern psychosomatic medicine, Avicenna had already argued that the rational faculty of the soul (al-nafs al-natiqa) exercises decisive influence over the emotional and physiological state of the human being. His works Kitab al-Shifa and Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb present a unified doctrine in which sound thinking is treated not merely as an abstract philosophical virtue but as a concrete precondition of bodily and mental well-

being. Despite the considerable body of scholarship devoted to Avicenna's metaphysics and logic, his specifically psychological and health-oriented teaching on rational thinking remains comparatively under-studied in contemporary Uzbek and international literature. This thesis aims to clarify the degree to which this theme has been explored and to reconstruct the core structure of Avicenna's argument regarding the link between rational thought and psychological health.

Materials and Methods

The study is based on a hermeneutic and historical-comparative analysis of Avicenna's primary texts, principally the psychological sections of Kitab al-Shifa (De Anima) and the relevant chapters of Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb dealing with the passions of the soul (al-a'rad al-nafsaniyya) and their bodily effects. Secondary sources include the standard historical-philosophical studies of Gutas, McGinnis, Goodman and Afnan, as well as works on the history of Islamic medicine addressing mental health. The method combines close textual reading with a thematic-comparative approach, situating Avicenna's account of rational thinking alongside later psychosomatic concepts in order to assess both its originality and its continuity with the Peripatetic tradition he inherited from Aristotle and al-Farabi.

Results and Discussion

The analysis reveals that Avicenna's doctrine of rational thinking rests on a hierarchical model of the soul, in which the vegetative and animal faculties are subordinated to the rational faculty. According to this model, correct reasoning (fikr) allows the individual to moderate the passions — fear, anger, grief and excessive joy — that would otherwise disturb the balance of bodily humors and produce illness. Avicenna explicitly links unregulated emotional states to physiological disorder, describing, for example, how prolonged sorrow or anxiety can alter the temperament of the heart and brain and precipitate what he terms melancholic conditions.

A second key finding concerns Avicenna's therapeutic recommendations, which combine cognitive, behavioral and social elements strikingly close to later psychosomatic and cognitive approaches to health. He advises regulated daily occupation, engagement in intellectually and morally elevating pursuits, moderation of sensory pleasure, and cultivation of supportive social relationships as means of preserving the health of the rational soul. Music, storytelling and conversation are likewise recommended as instruments for restoring equilibrium to a disturbed mind, illustrating an early recognition of what would now be called behavioral and environmental therapy.

A review of the existing literature confirms that while Avicenna's general psychology has received substantial attention in the history of philosophy (notably in the works of Gutas and McGinnis), the specifically health-oriented and pedagogical dimension of his teaching on rational thinking — that is, its application to the cultivation of sound thought as a form of preventive mental hygiene — remains only partially studied, particularly in Uzbek-language scholarship. This gap justifies further systematic research combining the history of medicine with the history of philosophy.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Avicenna's teaching demonstrates that rational thinking, in his system, is inseparable from psychological and bodily health: sound reasoning stabilizes emotion, and stabilized emotion in turn preserves the balance of the body. This integrative view anticipates central premises of contemporary psychosomatic and cognitive-behavioral medicine. It is recommended that further interdisciplinary research be undertaken to translate and systematize the relevant passages of Kitab al-Shifa and Al-Qanun fi al-Tibb dealing with mental hygiene, and that elements of Avicenna's model be incorporated into the teaching of the history of medicine and medical ethics in Uzbek higher-education institutions, so as to strengthen students' appreciation of the historical continuity between classical Islamic thought and modern mental-health science.

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