

## Negative Approach in Soul Research

### Unraveling Avicenna's Negative Inquiry into the Essence of the Soul

Forough Rahimpour<sup>1</sup> 

1. Associate Professor, Department of Islamic Philosophy and Theology, University of Isfahan, Isfahan, Iran. Email: [f.rahimpour@ltr.ui.ac.ir](mailto:f.rahimpour@ltr.ui.ac.ir)

#### Abstract

Understanding the reality of entities can be approached through two methods: a) positively, to discern the essence of the object, and b) negatively, to delineate what the object is not. This study investigates Avicenna's perspective on the essence of the soul. While previous research has extensively explored the positive attributes, this study delves into the less organized negative attributes, shedding light on the soul's distinctions from nature, the Spirit of vapor, temperament, body, corporeality, intellect, and vitality. The significance of the soul's divergence from corporeality lies in its implicit deviation from temperament, the Spirit of vapor, the physical body, and other material elements. Notably, disassociating the soul from intellect is essential to prevent misunderstandings, avoiding the misconception of the human soul as a purely abstract concept. Furthermore, examining the soul's connection with vitality elucidates shared attributes and encompasses a diverse spectrum of entities characterized as living.

**Keywords:** Avicenna, Negative Approach in Soul Research, Corporeality, Intellect, Vitality.

#### Introduction

Exploring the philosophies of ancient thinkers can be enriched through diverse methodologies, such as posing novel inquiries to their perspectives or exploring their texts from alternative angles to reveal overlooked insights. This article endeavors to deepen our comprehension of the soul by employing these varied approaches to analyze Avicenna's discourse on its essence. Consequently, the inquiry "What is the soul not?" is approached from a Sinian viewpoint, subjecting it to rigorous examination from a negative stance. This methodological approach expands the epistemological horizon by acknowledging the limitations of human cognition in grasping affirmative knowledge, proving particularly valuable in deciphering intricate subjects like the human soul, which elude straightforward understanding.

#### Research Findings

This study delves into Ibn Sina's perspective on various assertions concerning the soul, affirming its divergence from corporeality, the body, temperament, the spirit of vapor, essence, nature, intellect, and life itself.



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-The distinction between the soul and corporeality is established through a negational approach, showcasing how each reason supporting the soul's transcendence negates its mere physicality.

-Avicenna elucidates the duality of body and soul in human existence, arguing that the essence of humanity transcends mere physicality. His arguments delineate the soul's essence from the body, emphasizing the distinctiveness of the human "self" from its physical form.

-The association between the soul and temperament, as well as the spirit of vapor, is grounded in philosophical and medical discourse. Avicenna disentangles these associations by elucidating the nature and function of the spirit of vapor, nature, and temperament, demonstrating that the soul transcends these entities.

-Avicenna challenges the common conflation of the soul with complete intellect, highlighting distinctions between the rational soul or faculty of humans and the incorporeal intellect. By contrasting their natures and characteristics, he establishes the proposition that "The intellect is not the soul."

-Comparing the effects of life with those of the soul reveals a notable similarity, prompting inquiry into the congruence between soul and life. Avicenna addresses this question through indirect examination of their relationship, as well as through direct arguments asserting the soul's distinctiveness from life itself.

## Conclusion

The findings of this research, rooted in Avicenna's negative perspective on the attributes of the soul, yield significant insights:

1. Understanding the soul involves both affirming certain characteristics and denying others, leading to a more comprehensive comprehension of its essence.
2. Among the attributes examined for disparity with the soul, three stand out:
  - a) The disparity between the soul and the body holds significance as affirming it negates the soul's alignment with the spirit of vapor, nature, temperament, and other bodily entities.
  - b) Affirming the disparity between the soul and intellect is crucial for addressing ambiguities arising from misinterpretations of Avicenna's views on essential psychological topics.
  - c) Acknowledging the disparity between the soul and life is essential due to the observed similarity in their effects, posing challenges in distinguishing entities possessing life from those possessing a soul.
3. Avicenna employs rational arguments to discuss disparities between the soul and body or intellect, but resorts to conscience and personal experience when addressing disparities between the soul and body.
4. Avicenna's viewpoint on the disparity between the soul and life categorizes entities: basic elements and minerals lack both soul and life, plants, animals, humans, and celestial bodies possess both soul and life, while God and incorporeal transcendental beings lack a soul but

possess the highest form of life. This categorization underscores that being alive entails having a soul and emphasizes that the soul is distinct from life itself.

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**Cite this article:** Rahimpour, F. (2024). Negative Approach in Soul Research: Unraveling Avicenna’s Negative Inquiry into the Essence of the Soul. *Philosophy and Kalam*, 57 (1), 83-102. (in Persian)

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**Publisher:** University of Tehran Press.

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DOI:<https://doi.org/10.22059/jftp.2024.370047.523464>



**Article Type:** Research Paper

**Received:** 23-Dec-2023

**Received in revised form:** 14-Mar-2024

**Accepted:** 12-Apr-2024

**Published online:** 12-Apr-2024