

## Understanding the Soul: Abu Bakr al-Razi’s Foundational Contributions to Psychology

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### ABSTRACT

*This article examines the foundational contributions of Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi (854-925 CE), a 9th-century Persian polymath, to the development of psychological thought, with a focus on his conceptualisation of the soul (nafs) and human behaviours. Unlike later scholars such as Fakhr al-Din al-Razi, Abu Bakr al-Razi advanced a holistic framework that integrated physical, mental, and spiritual dimensions of human life. The article employs a conceptual and historical analysis of his writings in medicine, philosophy, and ethics to illuminate the epistemological, ontological, axiological, and teleological (EOAT) foundations of his psychology. Epistemologically, al-Razi emphasised reason, systematic observation, and clinical experience, advocating knowledge grounded in evidence rather than speculative metaphysics. Ontologically, he proposed a layered understanding of the soul, namely rational, animal, and vegetative, highlighting the dynamic interplay between body and psyche. His axiology underscored moral integrity, moderation, and compassion in human interactions, particularly in patient care, while his teleological perspective linked human flourishing with ethical conduct, mental well-being, and societal welfare. Al-Razi pioneered early principles of psychotherapy and psychosomatic medicine, introduced humane medical practices, and articulated a sophisticated model connecting mental and physical health. By revisiting his legacy, this article demonstrates how classical Islamic thought provides a culturally grounded, spiritually informed framework for contemporary psychology, especially in integrating ethical, cognitive, and affective dimensions. The study affirms the enduring relevance of al-Razi’s holistic vision for scholars and practitioners seeking to advance human-centred, ethically guided psychological theory and practice.*

**Keywords:** *Abu Bakr Al-Razi, Epistemology of Psychology, Medicine of the Soul, Islamic Psychology, Soul*

### INTRODUCTION

Psychology has emerged as a field of knowledge dedicated to understanding, explaining, and predicting the nature and dynamics of human functioning. Traditionally, it concerns the study of the human mind and behaviours, exploring mental processes, emotions, cognition, motivation, and actions. Over time, the scope of psychological inquiry has evolved, reflecting shifting paradigms, worldviews, and intellectual traditions across different historical periods. While contemporary psychology often emphasises empirical research rooted in Western epistemology, a broader historical view reveals that various civilisations have made significant contributions to the development of psychological thought (Deuraseh & Abu Talib, 2005).

Despite its advancements, mainstream psychology faces notable limitations. Current approaches, often grounded in “General Psychology,” have been criticised for their ethnocentric and decontextualised nature, as they predominantly rely on research conducted with Western, educated, industrialised, rich, and democratic (WEIRD) populations (Henrich, Heine, & Norenzayan, 2010). This focus risks overlooking the rich diversity of human experiences shaped by non-Western cultures, philosophical traditions, and religious worldviews (Kim, Yang, & Hwang, 2006). Furthermore, the field tends to privilege measurable, observable behaviours, frequently marginalising subjective dimensions such as consciousness, spirituality, meaning-making, and existential concerns. Such limitations underscore the need for integrating culturally grounded and spiritually informed perspectives, including insights derived from the Islamic intellectual heritage (Allwood, 2011; Marsella, 2010).

One particularly influential scholar from the Islamic Golden Age (8th–14th century) is Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariya Al-Razi (854-925 CE), a Persian polymath, physician, and philosopher. His work provides foundational insights into the understanding of the human psyche, grounded in medicine, philosophy, and ethics. Al-Razi conceptualised human beings as integrated wholes, encompassing the body, soul (*nafs*), reason, and moral character. His holistic approach to psychology predates many modern discussions on mental health, well-being, and the ethical dimensions of human behaviours.

Despite the growing recognition of cultural and spiritual factors in human behaviours, mainstream psychology remains largely dominated by secular, reductionist paradigms. This dominance creates a significant knowledge gap in understanding the human psyche in a holistic and ethically grounded manner. The limited integration of non-Western and spiritually informed perspectives in contemporary psychological theory therefore necessitates a study that analyses the work of Muslim scholars whose contributions offer valuable insights into the holistic nature of human beings.

The objective of this article is to present the findings of a study that focused on the conceptual and theoretical analysis of Al-Razi’s contributions to psychology, with particular emphasis on his understanding of the soul (*nafs*), its role in human behaviours, and its broader epistemological, ontological, and axiological implications. Rather than engaging in empirical investigation, this study seeks to revisit, interpret, and critically assess Al-Razi’s ideas in order to enrich contemporary discourse.

The contribution of this article lies in demonstrating the relevance of Al-Razi’s holistic framework for contemporary psychology, particularly in integrating spiritual, ethical, and cultural dimensions into the study of human behaviours. By revisiting his work, the article provides a foundation for culturally and spiritually informed psychological theory, offering an alternative to the reductionist and secular approaches that currently dominate the field. Ultimately, this analysis underscores the value of interdisciplinary scholarship and highlights how historical perspectives can inform modern psychological theory and practice, enriching both conceptual understanding and applied approaches to human well-being.

## METHODOLOGICAL FRAMEWORK

This study employs a historical-conceptual methodological approach to examine Abu Bakr al-Razi's contributions to psychology, particularly his understanding of the soul (*nafs*) and human behaviours. By integrating historical analysis with conceptual interpretation, the study traces the intellectual and cultural context of the 9<sup>th</sup>-10<sup>th</sup> century Islamic Golden Age, situating al-Razi's work within the medical, philosophical, and ethical discourses of his time. The historical-philosophical lens allows for a critical assessment of al-Razi's writings, including *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī*, *Kitāb al-Manṣūrī*, and *Kitāb al-Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, as well as his engagement with classical Greek sources such as Aristotle, Plato, and Galen, and with Islamic scholarly traditions.

Conceptual analysis focuses on elucidating the epistemological, ontological, axiological, and teleological (EOAT) dimensions of al-Razi's psychology. The study systematically examines how al-Razi integrated reason, empirical observation, and ethical reflection to construct a holistic understanding of human functioning. Sources are assessed based on their authenticity, coherence, and relevance to al-Razi's psychological framework, considering both primary texts and authoritative secondary literature. Comparative analysis is employed selectively to highlight distinctions and parallels with contemporaneous scholars, such as Ibn Sina and Al-Balkhi, thereby clarifying al-Razi's originality and contributions.

## PERSONAL AND EDUCATIONAL BACKGROUND

Al-Razi (865–925 CE / 251–313 AH), known in the Latinised world as *Rhazes*, was one of the most celebrated Muslim polymaths of the Islamic Golden Age. Born in the ancient city of Rayy (present-day Rey, near Tehran, Iran), Al-Razi lived during a period of flourishing intellectual activity across the Muslim world. He died at the age of 73 in 925 CE in his hometown after a long and productive life as a physician, philosopher, and scientist (Nayernouri, 2008).

### *Multidisciplinary Scholar*

Al-Razi's scholarly contributions spanned a wide range of disciplines, including medicine, chemistry (alchemy), philosophy, ethics, and psychology. He was initially trained in music and reported to have worked as a jeweller and money changer, a background which helped him develop skills in observation and precision. Later, after suffering from an eye condition resulting from chemical experimentation, he sought medical treatment that piqued his interest in medicine. This marked the beginning of his journey into the medical sciences (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007; Badawi, 2004).

He formally studied medicine under the renowned scholar Ali ibn Rabban al-Tabari, author of *Firdaws al-Hikmah* (Paradise of Wisdom), and completed his medical training at Muqtadiri Hospital in Baghdad, one of the leading centres of medical learning at the time. He eventually became chief physician at both the hospitals in Rayy and Baghdad, earning recognition for his innovative and holistic approach to healing (Haque, 2004).

### *Career and Legacy*

Al-Razi is regarded as one of the greatest physicians of the medieval Islamic world. His most famous medical work, *Kitab al-Hawi* (The Comprehensive Book), served as a major medical reference in Europe for several centuries. He also authored *Man la Yahduruhu al-Tabib* (For One Without Access to a Physician), a pioneering manual for self-care that addressed common ailments and treatments accessible to laypeople (Nutton, 2004).

A unique feature of Al-Razi's medical approach was his emphasis on psychological well-being alongside physical health. He understood that emotional and mental states could significantly affect physical illness and recovery, a perspective far ahead of his time. His holistic view of healing combined medication, ethical conduct, and mental clarity, elements central to both physical and psychological treatment.

He is widely acknowledged as one of the earliest practitioners of psychotherapy, having written extensively on the relationship between physical and mental health. He utilised cognitive and moral techniques to treat emotional disturbances, thus integrating psychology into the broader practice of medicine (Haque, 2004).

### ***Zeitgeist (Intellectual Environment)***

Al-Razi lived during the height of the Abbasid Caliphate, a time when Baghdad became a hub of knowledge production, particularly in medicine, philosophy, and the natural sciences. Hospitals, libraries, and translation centres like the *Bayt al-Hikmah* (House of Wisdom) provided fertile ground for scholars to engage with Greek, Persian, and Indian sciences. Medical knowledge, especially from Greek sources such as Galen and Hippocrates, was being critically examined and expanded upon by Muslim scholars. Al-Razi played a significant role in this transformation, often challenging the doctrines of Greek medicine and promoting empirical observation over blind adherence to ancient authorities (Tschamoureff, 2006).

Philosophically, this era was dominated by Aristotelianism, which many Muslim philosophers, such as Al-Farabi, Ibn Sina (Avicenna), and later Ibn Rushd (Averroes) sought to reconcile with Islamic theology. However, Al-Razi stood apart in his more Platonically inspired perspective, especially concerning the nature of the soul. He often criticised Aristotelian dogma and emphasised reason and observation as the primary tools for understanding the world (Druart, 1996).

### ***Influences and Intellectual Positioning***

Al-Razi's thought was influenced by both Islamic and classical Greek sources. His primary influences included Ali ibn Rabban al-Tabari, from whom he learned both medicine and spiritual philosophy. The other scholar is Al-Balkhi, an early pioneer in mental health, likely influencing Al-Razi's approach to psychosomatic medicine (Badawi, 2004). He was also influenced by Socrates and Plato, whose ethical and metaphysical ideas, especially on the soul, shaped Al-Razi's psychological framework. Aristotle was also an influence though engaged critically, as Al-Razi opposed some of Aristotle's metaphysical assertions (Druart, 1996).

Unlike many of his contemporaries who merged Aristotelian philosophy with Islamic theology, Al-Razi maintained a rationalist stance. He avoided metaphysical speculations that

lacked empirical grounding and was critical of prophetic revelation as the sole source of truth. This led to strong opposition from other Islamic philosophers and theologians, some of whom accused him of excessive rationalism or even heresy (Shawar, 1973; Adamson, 2021). The latter refers to *a belief or opinion that goes against established religious doctrine* (Esposito, 2003). Nevertheless, his originality lay in his independent and critical thinking, which allowed him to lay the foundations for early psychological theory, rooted not just in faith or tradition, but in observation, ethics, and scientific reasoning.

## **HIS SCHOLARSHIP IN PSYCHOLOGY**

Al-Razi (was a pioneering Muslim scholar whose vast intellectual legacy encompasses over 200 works in philosophy, alchemy, astronomy, theology, logic, and particularly medicine and psychology (Haque, 2004; Amr & Tbakhi, 2007). Among Muslim physicians of the 9th and 10th centuries, Al-Razi stands out not only for his scientific rigour but also for his psychological insight, which anticipated concepts in modern mental health and psychotherapy.

Al-Razi's contribution to psychology is embedded in his integrative view of health, which saw the human being as a composite of body, soul, mind, and morality. He was one of the earliest physicians to explore the emotional and cognitive dimensions of illness and to advocate psychological interventions in addition to physical treatments. His concern for mental health was ahead of his time and had a significant influence on both Islamic and later Western medical traditions (Haque, 2004; Badawi, 2004).

### ***Psychological Perspective in a Medical Framework***

Al-Razi's approach to psychology was grounded in his clinical experience and philosophical worldview. He maintained that emotions such as anxiety, sadness, envy, anger, and desire could disrupt physical health and must therefore be addressed as part of the healing process. He believed that reason and self-discipline were essential tools for regulating such emotions and achieving mental well-being. Thus, his work represented one of the earliest integrations of cognitive, behavioural, and ethical principles in therapeutic practice (Gutas, 2001).

Al-Razi did not separate mind and body but rather viewed them as interdependent components of the human being. In contrast to modern dualist approaches, he embraced a holistic understanding of the self, echoing themes found in both Greek philosophy and Islamic thought. His insights filled a critical epistemological gap in understanding the human soul (*nafs*) and its connection to behaviour and illness, especially in the medical context (Pormann & Savage-Smith, 2007).

### ***Intellectual Conflicts and Criticism***

Despite his originality, Al-Razi's views were controversial. His critique of Greek philosophers such as Aristotle and Plato, especially their metaphysical assumptions, was seen as radical. Unlike his contemporaries, who sought to harmonise Greek thought with Islamic teachings, Al-Razi insisted on empirical observation and rational inquiry over speculative

reasoning. This brought him into intellectual conflict with figures like Ibn Sina (Avicenna) and Al-Biruni, who criticised his rejection of metaphysical hierarchy, his scepticism of mathematics in scientific explanation, and his independent rationalism (Shawar, 1973).

Ibn Sina, for instance, accused Al-Razi of being overly speculative and lacking originality in his metaphysical arguments, while Al-Biruni challenged his religious and philosophical positions. Nonetheless, these critiques testify to Al-Razi's intellectual independence, and his works continued to circulate widely in both the Islamic and European worlds (Shawar, 1973; Gutas, 2001).

## **KEY WORKS RELATED TO PSYCHOLOGY**

### ***Kitab al-Mansuri fi al-Tibb (The Book of Medicine for al-Mansur)***

This ten-volume medical encyclopaedia was written for the Samanid ruler Al-Mansur ibn Ishaq and became widely known in Europe as *Liber Al-Mansuri*. It presents an extensive treatment of medical topics based on Al-Razi's clinical experience and critical engagement with earlier Greek medical authorities. In this work, Al-Razi combined observational medicine with philosophical reflections. He discussed the role of the soul in health and illness, challenging the ideas of Aristotle and Plato. He also introduced innovative medical theories while emphasising the need to integrate mental and emotional well-being into treatment. The book demonstrates his interdisciplinary approach, where the mind and soul are essential to understanding disease causation and recovery (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007; Pormann & Savage-Smith, 2007).

### ***Kitab al-Hawi (The Comprehensive Book)***

Also known as *Liber Continens* in Latin, *Kitab al-Hawi* is a monumental compilation of Al-Razi's medical notes, case histories, and clinical observations, coupled with excerpts and critiques of other medical writings. Though not structured as a formal textbook, it served as a practical manual for physicians. The book includes detailed descriptions of neurological and psychiatric disorders, such as melancholia and mania. He records early medical case histories, providing psychological observations of patients. The book contains the earliest known clinical description of smallpox and measles, illustrating his attention to detail and observation (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007; New World Encyclopaedia, 2015). The book also critiques Aristotle's and Plato's metaphysical assumptions in favour of empirically driven reasoning. This compilation was widely used in Europe during the Middle Ages and significantly shaped early European medical psychology.

### ***Kitab al-Tibb al-Ruhani (The Medicine of the Soul)***

This treatise stands as Al-Razi's most direct engagement with psychological and ethical issues. In *Kitab al-Tibb al-Ruhani*, he argues that the soul, like the body, requires healing and care. The book outlines the importance of reason and ethical conduct in regulating emotions and desires. Besides, it also discusses practical advice on combating negative traits such as anger, grief, envy, arrogance, and greed. The book provides a form of early cognitive-

behavioural intervention, advocating rational reflection and ethical self-awareness as tools for psychological health. In this regard, Al-Razi's psychological framework integrates moral philosophy, spiritual development, and mental health. His ethical and psychological reflections were not only therapeutic but also aimed at fostering personal growth and self-regulation (Shawer, 1973; Haque, 2004).

### ***Al-Razi's Lasting Impact on Psychology***

Al-Razi's scholarship in psychology laid the groundwork for integrative, person-centred approaches to mental health. His contributions bridged medical and psychological knowledge, pioneering the practice of integrating emotional, behavioural, and ethical considerations in health care. He advocated for rational self-governance, moral virtue, and critical reflection as central to healing and well-being. He also critiqued dominant philosophical paradigms and established an independent framework that emphasised empirical observation and practical application. His influence extended beyond the Islamic world, shaping medieval European medicine and psychology, especially through Latin translations of his major works. By acknowledging the centrality of the soul (*nafs*), reason, and ethical behaviour in human functioning, Al-Razi emerges as a foundational figure in the development of psychological thought, offering insights that remain relevant in contemporary psychology.

## **AL-RAZI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE EPISTEMOLOGY OF PSYCHOLOGY**

Al-Razi, who is recognised as one of the greatest Arabic-Islamic physicians and philosophers, made substantial contributions to both the physical and psychological dimensions of human well-being. His medical innovations enhanced the quality of life for individuals and communities, while his rationalist philosophy influenced scientific and intellectual developments not only in the Islamic world but also in medieval Europe (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007). His contributions to the epistemology of psychology, the theory of how psychological knowledge is acquired, offer valuable insights into the interplay between reason, empirical observation, and ethics.

### ***Understanding Al-Razi's Epistemological Orientation***

Epistemology, in the context of psychology, refers to the sources, methods, and justification for acquiring knowledge about the human psyche, behaviours, and mental processes. Al-Razi's epistemological framework was grounded in reason (*'aql*) and empirical observation, diverging from speculative metaphysics and mystical traditions that were prevalent among some scholars of his time.

#### **1. Primacy of Reason in Acquiring Knowledge**

Al-Razi asserted that reason is the central tool for understanding the world and the human condition. He emphasised that knowledge must be grounded in rational inquiry, supported by observation and experimentation. According to Al-Razi, reason was not merely an abstract philosophical principle but a practical method of inquiry applied across medicine, ethics, and psychology (Shawer, 1973). He believed that rational thinking allows individuals to distinguish between truth and falsehood and forms the foundation of scientific progress. He stated that

reason is the gift of God to humans, enabling them to grasp the truths of this world and attain mental and physical health (Shawar, 1973).

Al-Razi also recognised the limitations of reason. He argued that rational thought should not be applied to matters of the unseen (*ghayb*), such as metaphysical realities beyond human perception, because such domains transcend empirical verification. Therefore, he cautioned against the excesses of speculative reasoning and rejected mysticism (*tasawwuf*) that relied on esoteric or subjective experiences to claim knowledge (Druart, 1996).

## 2. Empirical Observation and Clinical Evidence

In addition to rational analysis, Al-Razi relied heavily on empirical data, gathered through his medical practice. His use of case histories was especially pioneering. In his medical treatises, particularly *Kitab al-Hawi*, he documented numerous clinical cases that reflected not only physical symptoms but also psychological and emotional states (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007). These case studies served both as diagnostic tools and pedagogical models for future practitioners. This approach to psychology was evidence-based, emphasising the role of direct patient observation, systematic documentation, clinical reasoning, and individualised treatment plans. In doing so, Al-Razi laid the groundwork for what would later be recognised as clinical psychology and psychosomatic medicine.

## 3. Ethical Rationalism and Psychological Well-being

Al-Razi believed that psychological balance could be achieved through rational ethics. In his work *Kitab al-Tibb al-Ruhani* (The Medicine of the Soul), he argued that emotional disorders such as grief, anxiety, and envy stemmed from irrational thoughts and moral failings. Moral failings occur when reason (*'aql*) does not moderate impulses, desires, or emotional responses. Thus, his epistemology extended to the moral domain, where ethical reflection and character development were integral to mental health. His approach resonates with the cognitive-behavioural tradition in contemporary psychology, which also identifies distorted thinking and maladaptive beliefs as causes of emotional dysfunction (Haque, 2004).

This epistemological framework directly informs Al-Razi’s conceptualisation of the tripartite soul, where the rational, animal, and vegetative components of the human psyche are understood not only through moral and ethical reasoning but also through empirical observation, clinical experience, and systematic reflection, illustrating how knowledge acquisition and the understanding of human nature are inseparably intertwined.

Table 1: Key Principles of Al-Razi’s Epistemology in Psychology

<b>Principle</b>	<b>Description</b>	<b>Modern Equivalent</b>
Rational Inquiry	Knowledge must be pursued through reasoning and logic.	Rationalism / Cognitive Approaches
Empirical Observation	Clinical practice and documentation form the basis for understanding illness and behaviour.	Evidence-Based Practice
Case-Based Analysis	Use of patient histories for diagnosis, treatment, and learning.	Clinical Case Studies
Ethical-Moral Cognition	Psychological health is tied to ethical reasoning and self-discipline.	Moral Psychology / CBT

Caution Toward Metaphysics	Avoidance of speculative interpretations of unseen realities.	Philosophical Naturalism / Empirical Skepticism
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Al-Razi's contribution to the epistemology of psychology reflects a balanced, rigorous, and humanistic approach to understanding mental and emotional life. He emphasised reason as the gateway to truth, insisted on empirical validation through observation and clinical experience, and integrated moral and ethical considerations into psychological well-being. His rejection of speculative metaphysics and mysticism positioned him as a rationalist physician-philosopher, whose epistemological stance helped define a scientific and ethical framework for psychology, centuries before the discipline formally emerged.

Scholars have debated Al-Razi's position within Islamic intellectual history, particularly accusations of excessive rationalism or even heresy, due to his emphasis on reason and empirical observation over strict adherence to traditional dogma (Druart, 1996; Pormann & Savage-Smith, 2007). Some argue that his rationalist tendencies reflected a tension between philosophy and revelation, challenging orthodox views of prophetic knowledge, while others contend that Al-Razi harmonised reason and faith by treating revelation as a complementary source of guidance for moral and spiritual development (Nasr, 2007).

Another point of critical discussion concerns Al-Razi's stance on prophecy and divine knowledge. While he advocated for rational inquiry and empirical investigation, he did not dismiss the authority of revelation outright; rather, he interpreted scriptural teachings through the lens of reason, suggesting a dynamic epistemological approach where intellect and revelation mutually inform human understanding (Druart, 1996). Al-Razi's intellectual relationship with contemporaries such as Ibn Sina (Avicenna) further illustrates scholarly debates. Some interpret Al-Razi as a rival to Ibn Sina, particularly in metaphysics and psychology, criticising Ibn Sina's Neoplatonic leanings as overly speculative. Others highlight how Al-Razi's empirically grounded approach complemented Ibn Sina's philosophical framework, offering alternative pathways for integrating medicine, ethics, and the study of the soul (Pormann & Savage-Smith, 2007). By engaging with these differing perspectives, scholars can better appreciate the complexity and nuance of Al-Razi's thought. This critical approach situates his work within broader epistemological, ontological, and axiological debates in Islamic psychology, demonstrating how historical interpretations inform contemporary understandings of the soul, morality, and holistic human well-being.

### **AL-RAZI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE ONTOLOGY OF PSYCHOLOGY**

Ontology in psychology concerns the nature, structure, and components of human existence, including mind, soul, emotions, and behaviour, and how these elements interrelate. Al-Razi made a profound contribution by conceptualising the human being as an integrated entity comprising body, soul, intellect, and moral agency. Unlike many physicians of his era who focused primarily on the physical, Al-Razi expanded medical inquiry to encompass spiritual and rational dimensions (Druart, 1996). His ontological framework, while engaging with Platonic and Galenic thought, offered an original, holistic perspective that anticipated contemporary integrative approaches to mental health and well-being.

### ***Three Components of the Soul***

Al-Razi categorised the soul into three interrelated but distinct components: rational (divine) soul, animal (irascible) soul, and vegetative soul (Druart, 1996; SEP, 2012).

#### ***The Rational (Divine) Soul (al-nafs al-nātiqa / al-nafs al-ilāhiyya)***

The rational soul is the highest dimension, seat of reason, intellect, moral judgement, and self-awareness. It resides in the brain, which functions as its instrument, facilitating sensation, voluntary motion, imagination, cognition, and memory. The rational soul itself is immaterial, self-subsistent, and survives death, seeking spiritual purification through knowledge, virtue, and moral discipline. Its faculties include:

- a. *Al-wahm* (imagination): Receives data from the five senses.
- b. *Al-fikr* (cognition): Responsible for reasoning and understanding.
- c. *Al-hifz* (memory): Responsible for retention and recall.

Al-Razi emphasised rational-spiritual therapy alongside medical treatment, highlighting the need for moral and intellectual cultivation.

#### ***The Animal (Irascible) Soul (al-nafs al-ghaḍabiyya)***

Situated in the heart, the animal soul governs emotions, instincts, and motor responses. Its operations are mediated through bodily humours, which influence temperament and behaviour (Pormann & Savage-Smith, 2007). The functions of this soul include:

- a. Voluntary motion, including intentional actions like walking or speaking.
- b. Sensation, encompassing the perception through the five senses.
- c. Imagination, memory, and passion, entailing processing mental images, retaining knowledge, and triggering emotional drives.

Though instinctual and subject to corruption via humoral imbalances, the animal soul informs unconscious behaviour and emotional reactions while remaining subordinate to rational guidance.

#### ***The Vegetative Soul (al-nafs al-nabātiyya)***

Located in the liver, the vegetative soul regulates biological growth, reproduction, digestion, and metabolism. Active in plants, animals, and humans, it underpins higher-order functioning by maintaining the body's life processes (Druart, 1996; SEP, 2012).

### ***The Brain in Al-Razi's Psychology***

Al-Razi recognised the brain as the central organ for perception, thought, and movement, but stressed its subservience to the rational soul. Knowledge and learning were thus intellectual and spiritual necessities. Al-Razi advanced early neuroanatomical and clinical insights into lesions (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007):

- a. Identified 7 cranial nerves and 31 spinal nerves.
- b. Classified spinal nerves into cervical, thoracic, lumbar, sacral, and coccygeal segments.
- c. Employed clinical observations to localize nervous system.

His integration of empirical neurology, ethics, and spiritual ontology laid the foundation for psychosomatic medicine and highlighted the interdependence of rational, emotional, and physiological dimensions. This intricate interplay between the brain as a physiological instrument and the rational soul as the guiding immaterial entity is further illustrated in the following synthesis table, which summarises Al-Razi's tripartite ontology of the soul, detailing each component's location, functions, vulnerabilities, and ethical-psychological roles.

### ***Distinctions Between Soul, Nafs, and Psyche***

In psychological and philosophical discourse, terms such as soul, *nafs*, and psyche are often used interchangeably, but their meanings and implications differ across intellectual traditions. Clarifying these distinctions is essential for understanding Al-Razi's contribution to the study of human nature and behaviour.

#### *Soul (Rūh)*

In classical Islamic and philosophical thought, the soul (*rūh*) is considered the immaterial, divine component of human existence. The soul is often associated with life-force, spiritual consciousness, and the capacity for moral and intellectual development. Unlike the body, which is perishable, the soul is immortal and accountable before God (Qur'an, 17:85). In Al-Razi's framework, while the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nātiqa*) is distinct from bodily functions, it operates in harmony with the body, guiding ethical behaviour, intellectual reasoning, and spiritual development. The *rūh* is thus the overarching, unifying principle that transcends biological or emotional states.

#### *Nafs*

The Arabic term *nafs* is often translated as "self" or "psyche," but in Islamic psychology, it denotes the composite of psychological, emotional, and ethical dimensions of a human being. Al-Razi elaborated a tripartite model of *nafs*:

- a. Rational (Divine) *Nafs (al-nafs al-nātiqa)*: It is responsible for reasoning, ethical discernment, and intellectual pursuits. Located in the brain, it guides self-regulation and moral behaviour.
- b. Animal or Irascible *Nafs (al-nafs al-ghaḍabiyya)*: It governs emotions, desires, and instinctual drives. Situated in the heart, it interacts with bodily humours and affects temperament.
- c. Vegetative *Nafs (al-nafs al-nabātiyya)*: It regulates fundamental life processes such as growth, reproduction, and metabolism, located in the liver.

The *nafs*, therefore, refers to the dynamic, functional aspects of the soul that mediate between bodily needs, emotional impulses, and rational thought. It is the operational

manifestation of the soul in everyday life, integrating cognition, emotion, and ethical reasoning (Druart, 1996; Pormann & Savage-Smith, 2007).

*Psyche*

The term psyche, rooted in Greek philosophy, broadly refers to the mind or the totality of mental functions, including consciousness, cognition, perception, emotion, and will. Modern psychology adopts the term to study mental processes empirically and theoretically. In a sense, the psyche is analogous to the *nafs* in that it encompasses cognitive and affective dimensions; however, it does not inherently include the ethical or spiritual dimension that *nafs* carries in Islamic thought. While the psyche emphasises mechanisms of mental functioning and observable behaviour, the *nafs* situates these functions within a moral, ethical, and teleological framework.

Table 2: Distinctions and Overlaps of the Terms Ruh, Nafs, and Psyche

Concept	Core Meaning	Key Function	Emphasis
Soul ( <i>rūh</i> )	Immortal, divine essence	Spiritual consciousness, ultimate moral and intellectual development	Transcendence, immortality, metaphysical
<i>Nafs</i>	Self or psyche in functional terms	Cognition, emotion, instinct, moral regulation	Integration of body, mind, and ethics; operational human life
Psyche	Mental or psychological processes	Cognition, emotion, perception, volition	Empirical, behavioural, and cognitive mechanisms

Al-Razi’s conceptualisation aligns with the Islamic understanding of the *nafs* while bridging classical notions of the soul with early notions of psychology (*ilm al-nafs*). Unlike purely secular or Western frameworks, his model emphasises moral development, rational reflection, and spiritual purification, integrating the functional (*nafs*), experiential (psyche), and transcendental (*rūh*) dimensions of human life.

Al-Razi’s model anticipates contemporary integrative approaches in psychology, including biopsychosocial and mind-body frameworks. The *nafs*, like the psyche, interact with biological systems, emotions, and cognition. Yet, unlike secular psychology, it incorporates ethical reasoning and spiritual purpose (*tazkiyah*), linking mental health to moral and spiritual well-being (Haque, 2004). His distinction between the rational, animal, and vegetative components parallels modern discussions of cognitive, affective, and physiological domains while situating them within an Islamic teleology oriented toward human flourishing. In sum, Al-Razi provides a holistic model where the soul (*rūh*) represents the eternal, transcendent dimension, the *nafs* operationalises the soul in cognition, emotion, and behaviour, and the psyche corresponds to observable and measurable mental processes. This framework does not only clarify terminological distinctions but also demonstrates the value of integrating ethical, spiritual, and cultural dimensions into the scientific study of human psychology.

Table 3: Al-Razi’s Ontology of the Soul

<b>Soul Component</b>	<b>Location</b>	<b>Key Functions</b>	<b>Vulnerabilities</b>	<b>Role in Ethics and Psychology</b>
Rational (Divine)	Brain	Reason, cognition, imagination, memory	Moral corruption if untrained	Guides moral development; seeks spiritual purification
Animal (Irascible)	Heart	Emotions, instincts, voluntary motion, sensation	Emotional imbalance due to humoral disturbances	Influences behaviour; must be moderated by rational soul
Vegetative	Liver	Growth, reproduction, nutrition, metabolism	Biological fragility	Supports life systems, enabling higher-order functioning

The above table outlines the components of the soul according to Al-Razi’s tripartite model, depicting his ontological framework and illustrating the distinct functions of each aspect of the human psyche. The “location” column indicates the physical or conceptual locus associated with each soul component. While the soul itself is immaterial in Al-Razi’s philosophy, the assigned “locations” link mental or spiritual faculties with anatomical structures, reflecting his psycho-physiological approach. This demonstrates the connection between abstract psychological concepts and bodily functioning, bridging philosophy, medicine, and psychology. The “Key Functions” column specifies the primary roles and activities of each soul component, highlighting their functional differences and interdependencies. The “Vulnerabilities” column identifies potential weaknesses or imbalances in each component, emphasising the need for interventions, ethical guidance, and self-discipline. Understanding these vulnerabilities clarifies the sources of psychological or moral failure and justifies strategies to promote holistic well-being. Finally, the “Role in Ethics and Psychology” column explains how each soul component influences moral behaviour, psychological health, and human development. This linkage illustrates the practical implications of Al-Razi’s theory, showing how each aspect of the soul affects behaviour, ethics, and psychological functioning, making his framework relevant for contemporary psychology and the management of human behaviour.

Al-Razi’s ontological framework positions the human being as a multi-layered, integrated entity, where body, soul, and intellect interact in a complex, interdependent system. The rational soul governs ethical and intellectual faculties, the animal soul modulates emotions and instinctual drives, and the vegetative soul sustains biological life. His model bridges spiritual philosophy, medical theory, and ethical psychology, emphasising the balance among these dimensions for holistic well-being. By linking the tripartite soul to neurological and humoral systems, Al-Razi offers an interdisciplinary approach that resonates with contemporary integrative psychology. The EOAT (epistemological, ontological, axiological, teleological) dimensions are evident throughout: knowledge is gained through observation and reason (epistemology), the human being is a composite of rational, emotional, and biological elements (ontology), moral and ethical excellence is prioritised (axiology), and the ultimate goal is spiritual purification and human flourishing (teleology). This framework underscores the value of classical Islamic thought in informing modern psychology, particularly in fostering a holistic, ethically grounded, and spiritually sensitive understanding of human behaviour.

## **AL-RAZI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE AXIOLOGY OF PSYCHOLOGY**

The term axiology refers to the study of values, including ethics (what is right) and aesthetics (what is desirable or good) (Frankena, 1973). In psychology, axiology underlies the moral orientation of scholars and practitioners, influencing how they acquire knowledge, apply methods, and treat individuals (Hill, 1997). Al-Razi's contributions to axiology are deeply embedded in his rationalist ethics, balanced worldview, and humanistic medical practice (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007; Druart, 1996). He advocated for a psychology that integrates scientific knowledge, moral virtue, and compassionate care. These values are evident in his writings such as *Kitab al-Tibb al-Ruhani* (The Medicine of the Soul) and his holistic approach to mental and physical health (Shawer, 1973; Gutas, 2001).

### ***His Value System (Ethics)***

Al-Razi's work was informed by a value system rooted in reason, moderation, and human dignity. He rejected extreme asceticism (or self-denial), excessive mysticism (or overly spiritual practices), and dogmatic religiosity (rigid belief or narrow interpretation) that, in his view, distorted the role of human intellect (al-'aql) in navigating life (Druart, 1996; Haque, 2004). He followed an eclectic approach, combining the thoughts of Plato, Aristotle, and Galen while maintaining critical independence (SEP, 2012). The following points highlight Al-Razi's notion of the soul,

- a. **The Immortality of the Soul and Its Need to Liberate Itself from Bodily Passions.** Al-Razi held that the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqā*) is immortal, self-subsisting, and distinct from the body. It survives death and has an existence independent of physical form. For Al-Razi, the soul originally existed in a pure, cosmic state but became contaminated due to its entanglement with the material world and bodily passions (Druart, 1996). Liberation of the soul involves freeing it from excessive attachment to corporeal desires, which cloud its rational function and moral clarity. This spiritual liberation is not achieved through mysticism or extreme asceticism, but through the right use of reason, ethical discipline, and philosophical reflection (Shawer, 1973; SEP, 2012).
- b. **The Importance of Knowledge, Discipline, and Balanced Living as Tools for Soul Purification.** Al-Razi emphasised that the soul can only return to its pure state through knowledge (*'ilm*), moral discipline, and moderate living. He regarded philosophy as a vital tool in soul purification because it cultivates rationality and detachment from bodily temptations. This is elaborated in his work *Kitāb al-Tibb al-Rūḥānī* (The Medicine of the Soul), where he discusses the spiritual and ethical healing of the soul through self-knowledge, restraint, and reflection. A disciplined life, grounded in wisdom and moderation, helps align the soul with truth and divine order (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007; Al-Razi, in Gutas, 2001).
- c. **The Idea that Happiness is Not in Extremes but in Moderation and the Right Proportion of Pleasures and Needs.** Al-Razi advocated for a life of moderation (*i'tidāl*), believing that true happiness (*sa'ādah*) arises not from indulgence or denial, but from balance. He rejected both extreme asceticism and excessive indulgence, arguing that both distort the soul's rational capacity and disrupt mental and physical well-being (Shawer, 1973). His ethical outlook was grounded in the

principle of the golden mean, where pleasures are acknowledged but must be pursued in proportion and with ethical intent. This balance is crucial to nurturing the soul's harmony and fulfilling its divine purpose (Druart, 1996).

Al-Razi classified diseases into three types, (a) easily curable, (b) treatable, and (c) incurable. According to him, not all illnesses could be addressed through medication. He emphasised good nutrition, healthy thinking, and emotional assurance as integral to healing (Ahmed, 2010). He criticised overly rigid asceticism and instead promoted a rational and joyful life, known as "*happinessism*", where material comfort is not rejected but moderated with virtue (Afesh, 2018).

### ***Valuable Practices (Aesthetic Dimension)***

Al-Razi's ethical values translated into practices that reflected humane, empirical, and therapeutic care, making him a precursor to modern psychosomatic and psychotherapeutic methods.

#### **a. Holistic Approach to Illness**

Al-Razi believed in the interplay between physical health and mental integrity. He argued that an imbalance among the three souls would result in mental disorders, such as delusions, obsessions, or irrational behaviours (Afesh, 2018). Rational neglect, such as ignoring the pursuit of knowledge, would lead to emotional and physiological deterioration. He advocated the following (Haque, 2004):

- i. Psychological support as part of physical treatment.
- ii. Gentle and simple medication, if necessary.
- iii. Patient-centred assurance and verbal encouragement to boost recovery.

#### **b. Treatment of Mental Illness**

Al-Razi established a dedicated department for mental illness in the Baghdad hospital that he led. It was one of the earliest such institutions in history. He treated patients with epilepsy, hydrocephalus, paralysis, and psychosomatic conditions. His work marked a shift from mysticism to science-based mental health care (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007).

#### **c. Empathy and Respect in Patient Care**

He practised core humanistic values by providing financial aid to patients upon discharge, resembling today's psychiatric aftercare. Another practice is by offering free treatment to the poor, guided by compassion. He also provided training for students through direct patient interaction and structured learning pathways.

#### **d. Training of Medical Professionals.**

Al-Razi introduced tiered clinical training, where medical students learned through practical patient engagement in "circles of responsibility": The first circle dealt directly with patients, the second circle involved unresolved cases, while the third is when Al-

Razi himself intervened if prior levels failed. This system illustrates experiential learning, patient-focused care, and organisational clarity. They are applicable today in medical education and Industrial/Organisational psychology settings.

## **AL-RAZI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE TELEOLOGY OF PSYCHOLOGY**

Teleology concerns the purpose or goal of human life. In psychology, it refers to the ultimate aims of psychological well-being, behaviour, and human existence. Al-Razi's teleological outlook was anchored in the belief that the human soul is meant to be liberated from worldly entanglements through the use of reason, ethical living, and knowledge acquisition. He viewed the rational soul as an immortal, self-subsisting entity that strives toward purification and return to its original, untainted state. Rational soul is free from bodily passions and material distractions (Druart, 1996; Shaver, 1973). This liberation aligns with a higher spiritual purpose, reflecting Al-Razi's integration of moral philosophy and metaphysical psychology within a teleological framework.

### ***The Ultimate Purpose of the Soul***

According to Al-Razi, the rational soul is eternal and divine, temporarily encased in a body to undergo moral and intellectual refinement. Its ultimate goal is to attain intellectual perfection; free itself from bodily desires; and return to its original, cosmic state. This is aligned with God's mercy and transcendent truth (Druart, 1996). Stated another way, Al-Razi believed the soul's journey toward liberation and perfection is part of a divine plan, guided by God's compassion and ultimate reality. The rational soul has the ability to think, seek knowledge, and purify itself as a gift of divine mercy. God, out of His compassion, equips the soul with reason and moral responsibility so that it can rise above bodily temptations and fulfil its higher purpose. This vision is not only metaphysical but practical in that the soul must struggle against base desires and imbalances by cultivating virtues, rational thought, and compassionate action.

### ***Integration of Psychology and Moral Development***

Al-Razi viewed psychology not merely as a science of behaviour, but as a means to elevate character through self-regulation; guide individuals toward a virtuous and moderate life; and help the soul to fulfil its divine purpose. This befits with Islamic notions of *tazkiyah al-nafs* (purification of the soul), though Al-Razi's approach remained rationalist and philosophically universal, allowing his insights to benefit both Muslim and non-Muslim intellectuals.

### ***Philosophy as the Means to Liberation***

According to Al-Razi, philosophy (*hikmah*) is the primary instrument through which the rational soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqah*) can attain liberation from ignorance, moral weakness, and attachment to bodily desires. He considered philosophy not merely as an abstract discipline, but as a practical and transformative path toward personal purification and intellectual elevation (Druart, 1996). Through rigorous engagement with natural sciences, logic, ethics, and metaphysics, the soul gradually strengthens its reasoning capacity and moral clarity, which are the essential qualities for achieving its full potential.

Al-Razi urged individuals to study the sciences and cultivate wisdom as a way of achieving intellectual and spiritual refinement. In his view, the pursuit of knowledge is a sacred duty, and philosophical inquiry plays a central role in healing the soul from false beliefs and harmful passions. This intellectual path leads to what he saw as three key teleological aims in psychology:

- a. Health and Psychological Equilibrium. Philosophy helps in achieving mental balance, which is necessary for the treatment of emotional and psychological disorders. This includes understanding the causes of mental distress and applying reason and moderation to restore harmony within the self (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007).
- b. Moral Guidance and Character Building. Al-Razi emphasised the ethical function of philosophy. By practising virtues such as temperance, justice, and sincerity, the individual develops good character (*akhlāq*) and lives in harmony with others. Philosophy, in this sense, becomes a method of moral education (Shawer, 1973).
- c. Transcendence and Soul's Return to the Divine. The ultimate purpose of philosophical discipline, according to Al-Razi, is to liberate the rational soul from bodily constraints and allow it to return to its original, divine state. He believed that this return was possible only when the soul reaches intellectual perfection and detachment from worldly distractions, aligning with the truth and God's mercy (Druart, 1996; SEP, 2012).

Al-Razi's contributions to axiology and teleology reveal that his psychological thought was both scientific and spiritually purposive. He emphasised balance and moderation in ethical life; human dignity, care, and empathy in treatment. The rational and spiritual development of the individual as the purpose of existence. These principles resonate with both classical Islamic thought and contemporary holistic psychology, making Al-Razi a foundational figure in the ethics and aims of mental health and personal development.

### **AL-RAZI'S CONTRIBUTION TO THE SCIENCE OF THE SOUL ( *'ILM AL-NAFS* )**

Based on the comprehensive material above, Al-Razi's contribution to the understanding of the Science of the Soul ( *'Ilm al-Nafs* ) is both foundational and multifaceted, integrating philosophical inquiry, medical expertise, and spiritual insights. His work provides one of the earliest systematic treatments of the soul from an Islamic perspective. Below is a highlight of his contributions:

- a. Defining the soul as central to human existence by emphasising that the soul (*nafs*) is not secondary to the body but its principal and governing element. He rejected a purely materialistic view of human nature. As discussed earlier, he proposed a tripartite structure of the soul, namely
  - i. Rational/Divine Soul (*al-nafs al-nāṭiqa* or *al-nafs al-ilāhiyyah*), located in the brain, responsible for reasoning, ethics, self-control, and knowledge.
  - ii. Animal Soul (*al-nafs al-ḥayawāniyya*), located in the heart, responsible for emotions, anger, and passions.
  - iii. Vegetative Soul (*al-nafs al-nabāṭiyya*), located in the liver, governing biological processes like growth and nutrition.

- b. Bridging psychology and medicine, evident in his major medical encyclopaedias, *Kitāb al-Ḥāwī* and *Kitāb al-Manṣūrī*. Al-Razi operationalised his understanding of the soul in the diagnosis and treatment of both physical and mental disorders. This holistic approach indicates an understanding of the mind-body-soul connection long before such models were developed in modern psychology.
  - i. He was among the first physicians to document case histories of mental illnesses, thereby contributing to empirical psychiatry (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007).
  - ii. He advocated for special hospital wards for mental illness, introducing what we may now call early psychiatric care (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007).
  - iii. He emphasised the use of reassurance and encouragement in treatment, prefiguring contemporary psychotherapeutic methods (Haque, 2004).
- c. Rational inquiry and spiritual liberation by championing rationalism and empirical inquiry as tools for understanding the human condition (Shawar, 1973). His epistemological framework was grounded in intellectual discipline (*'aql*), moral conduct, and spiritual purification (*tazkiyah al-nafs*). He believed that the rational soul is self-subsisting and immortal, capable of liberation from the body's entanglement through knowledge and moral development. This liberation journey, which mirrors the Qur'anic narrative of the soul's return to its Creator, reveals the teleological orientation of his psychology (Druart, 1996; Haque, 2004).
- d. Integrating ethics in soul sciences. In *Kitāb al-Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* (The Medicine of the Soul), Al-Razi directly addressed the axiology of psychology, including the regulation of passions (e.g., anger, greed, lust); the cultivation of virtues like compassion, humility, and moderation; and a balanced lifestyle that avoids both hedonism and extreme asceticism. He saw ethical training as therapeutic, asserting that the moral rectitude of the soul influences physical and mental well-being (Shawar, 1973; Haque, 2004; Druart, 1996).
- e. Pioneering neuroanatomical study in understanding the soul, as seen in his detailed observations of the brain. Al-Razi linked specific faculties of the soul, such as perception, imagination, and memory, to corresponding brain functions, demonstrating an early recognition of the relationship between mental processes and neurological structures. He described the cognitive triad, namely imagination (*wahm*), cogitation (*fikr*), and memory (*ḥifẓ*) (SEP, 2012). He documented cranial and spinal nerves, pioneering applied neuroanatomy in clinical settings (Amr & Tbakhi, 2007). His model shows an early form of a biopsychosocial-spiritual approach, where physiological, mental, and spiritual health are interrelated.

Based on the above, it could be concluded that Al-Razi's contributions to the Science of the Soul (*Ilm al-Nafs*) are profound and enduring. This shows that Al-Razi is not only a physician and philosopher but as one of the foundational figures in the development of psychology from an Islamic perspective, a discipline deeply rooted in revelation, reason, ethics, and purpose. His legacy includes:

- a. An integrated model of the soul based on Islamic metaphysics and Greek rational traditions.

- b. Pioneering work in clinical psychology and psychiatry, emphasising case-based reasoning and humane care.
- c. Ethical and spiritual principles that informed both the practice and purpose of soul sciences.
- d. A vision of human flourishing (*falāḥ*) that harmonises physical health, moral character, and spiritual ascension.

## CONCLUSION

Al-Razi stands as a towering figure in the intellectual history of Islamic civilisation whose contributions continue to inspire modern scholarship in psychology. Unlike many of his contemporaries who focused predominantly on physical health, Al-Razi emphasised the centrality of the soul as an essential component of human existence. His tripartite model of the soul, comprising the rational (or divine), animal, and vegetative souls, offered a holistic framework that integrates mental, physical, and spiritual dimensions of human life.

Epistemologically, Al-Razi championed the use of reason, observation, and clinical experience as pathways to psychological understanding. He rejected excessive mysticism and unfounded speculation, promoting a rationalist but ethically grounded approach to human nature. Ontologically, he expanded the field of psychology by emphasising not only behaviour or cognition but also the immaterial and eternal aspects of the human soul.

Axiologically, Al-Razi's ethical orientation shaped his practices. He viewed healing as a moral act requiring empathy, balance, and intellectual integrity. His approach to treatment went beyond physical symptoms to include emotional support, patient dignity, and the promotion of moderate, virtuous living. He was a pioneer in recognising the psychosomatic connection, promoting psychotherapy-like interventions centuries before the term was coined. His belief in the soul's capacity for liberation through intellectual and moral cultivation reflects a deeply teleological view of human purpose.

Moving forward, Al-Razi's legacy provides a valuable model for integrating spirituality, ethics, and scientific rigour in the study and practice of psychology. In today's fragmented and often materialistic psychological paradigms, revisiting his contributions offers an opportunity to reimagine a more comprehensive, human-centred psychology, one that recognises the soul, mind, and body as an integrated whole. His work invites contemporary scholars, particularly within Islamic and global non-Western contexts, to decolonise the discipline of psychology and reclaim indigenous intellectual heritage. By advancing research and practices that are culturally anchored, spiritually aware, and ethically robust, we not only honour Al-Razi's pioneering contributions but also revitalise the moral and metaphysical dimensions of modern psychology.

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