

The Ontology, Epistemology, and Axiology of Fakhr Al-Dīn Al-Rāzī’s Work on Soul and Its Relation to Character Development

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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the concept of the soul and its relation to character development (akhlak) based on the works and thoughts of Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, a renowned 12th-century Islamic scholar and theologian of the Ash‘arite school. By visiting the literature and Al-Rāzī’s work, especially Kitab al-nafs wa’l-ruh. Al-Rāzī’s understanding of the soul is examined through ontological, epistemological, and axiological lenses. Ontologically, Al-Rāzī presents the soul as a unique, immaterial substance that governs the body, distinct from physical organs yet intimately connected to human behaviour. Epistemologically, his methodology is deeply rooted in the Qur’an and Hadith, yet supported by rational inquiry, scientific observation, and philosophical dialectics. He locates the soul in the heart (qalb), arguing its centrality in perception, belief, and character. Axiologically, Al-Rāzī views the soul as inherently inclined toward moral perfection, with moral character functioning as the manifestation of the soul’s ethical disposition. Moral excellence, he argues, is not innate but can be cultivated through knowledge, discipline, and spiritual exercise—reflecting his positive outlook on the soul. Al-Rāzī’s tripartite model of the soul—vegetative, animal, and rational faculties—forms a framework through which ethical character development is possible. Ultimately, the paper argues that Al-Rāzī’s theory of the soul integrates metaphysics, psychology, and ethics, offering a holistic view of human nature that is still relevant today. This paper discusses the application of Al-Rāzī’s work to organisational and individual moral development through a psychological lens and suggests considering religious, spiritual, and moral aspects when approaching psychological issues.

Keywords: *Character, Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, Ilm al-nafs, Moral excellence, Psychology*

INTRODUCTION

Fakhr al-Dīn Al-Rāzī, or Al-Rāzī, is a prominent figure, theologian, and philosopher in the Muslim world. Besides religion and sciences, he was also an expert in philosophy, history, jurisprudence, astronomy, mathematics, and medicine. Nevertheless, he is well known primarily in theology and exegesis.

Al-Rāzī’s expertise in exegesis is brilliantly portrayed through his magnum opuses, such as the 32-volume *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (the Great Commentary) and the nine-volume *Al-Matālib al-‘Āliyyah min al-‘ilm al-ilahī* (Exalted Topics of Inquiry within Divine Science). In his The Great Commentary, he has provided an extensive commentary of the Quranic verses based on the linguistic aspects and comprehensive elaboration of the verses by relating them with other Quranic verses, the hadith, and prophetic history of the prophet and his companions,

as well as science in a way that the current time could understand the meaning and context of the verse (Saeed, 2018). Owing to his immense knowledge, sharp linguistic skills, and outstanding memory, he produced a holistic picture of the Quranic verses.

Aside from Quranic exegesis, Al-Rāzī also wrote several works that are significant to the field of psychology, particularly in understanding the soul and its relation to character development (*akhlak*). This paper aims to understand Al-Rāzī's works, their application and implications for psychology. This paper starts with introducing Al-Rāzī, followed by an analysis of Al-Rāzī's philosophical thoughts and approaches, and is followed by explaining the theory of the soul to apprehend the complexity of the human psyche. Consequently, this paper also suggests the application of Al-Rāzī's work in the psychology field. Finally, this paper concludes by providing suggestions to the psychology field based on Al-Rāzī's work.

BACKGROUND

His name is Abu 'Abd Allah Muhammad ibn 'Umar b. Al-Husayn Al-Rāzī Abu 'Abd Allah al-Qurashi, al-Bakri, al-Taymi, al-Tabaristani al-Rāzī, born in Rayy, Iran on Ramadhan 25th, 544H/1149M (d. 606H/1210M). Although he was born as a Persian, his lineage can be traced back to the prophet's companion Abu Bakar as-Siddiq, meaning he is of Arab descent (Kafrawi & Djati, 2004).

Al-Rāzī was brought up under the influence of the Shāfi'ite and Al-Ash'arite sects. His father, Dīyā' al-Dīn, had taught him theology and jurisprudence from an early age. He also learned from other prominent scholars from his hometown in jurisprudence and theology, and the chain of his teachers extends back to Imam Shāfi'i in jurisprudence & Imam Abū l-Hasan al-Ash'ari in theology. Nevertheless, as a thinker, he did not limit himself to these two sects, and sometimes chose other methods, such as philosophy as opposed to the two (Griffel, 2011), indicating openness in his methods, which he developed through private reading and learning, arguing, in describing many issues, including the soul. The significance of Al-Rāzī's works and contributions to preserving the Islamic tradition, as well as his description of the soul, can be understood through the zeitgeist, or intellectual climate, of his time, his life experiences, and his career.

Intellectual Climate

During Al-Rāzī's time, the Sunni caliphate of the Abbasid Empire favoured the Hanbali school, while opposing and persecuting other movements including Ash'arites and Mu'tazilites (Leaman, 2015). The opposition led many scholars to migrate from Baghdad to other regions beyond the control of the caliphate, such as Jibal, Khurasan, and Transoxiana (Griffel, 2007). Many of these regions were ruled by sultans who welcomed these scholars. Concurrently, Al-Rāzī's contemporaries include Ibn al-Rūshd and Ibn Al-Arabi, indicating that vibrant scholarly activities marked the period. The flourishing of scholarship in this era allowed for the exchange of knowledge through intellectual debates and extensive writings.

During Al-Rāzī's period, the Ash'arites gained considerable support from the eastern Islamic world (Griffel, 2007). Concurrently, it is also worth highlighting that the Muslim world was grappling with numerous theological disputes among various sects, including the

Maturidites, Ismailites, Hanbalites, Mu'tazilites, and Karramites sects. Al-Rāzī played a significant role in addressing these disputes, striving to revive Islam and bring Muslims back to the authentic foundation of the faith—free from the influence of the Mu'tazilites' excessive rationalism and the Shi'ites' doctrinal innovations (Ceylan, 1996). His critiques provoked strong opposition, with followers of some sects even threatening his life (Ceylan, 1996).

Nevertheless, the tensions provided an opportunity for Al-Rāzī to engage in scholarly debates with the local scholars. His intellectual pursuits took him across the Muslim world, where his remarkable scholarship and debating skills raised his reputation, attracting the sultans to approach him and enabling him to establish a patronage relationship with two contested powers: the Khwarazm and the Gūrid dynasty. These relationships granted him greater authority, allowing him to influence religious policies, teach students, and guide rationalists into Sunni Muslims (Griffel, 2007). For more information on his patronage, please refer to Griffel (2007). The detail of his scholarship is described in the following section.

Life Experiences and Career

Al-Rāzī's intellectual journey began after the demise of his father, when he travelled to Nishapur and encountered the works of Ibn Sina, which introduced him to philosophy and set him on the path (Griffel, 2011). The influence of philosophy is reflected in his work *al-Mabāḥith al-mashriqiyya fī 'ilm al-ilāhiyyāt wa-l-ṭabī'īyyāt* (Eastern Points of Investigation on Metaphysics and Physics), as he used Ibn Sina's method of argument in approaching theological issues (Janssens, 2012). However, Al-Rāzī remained critical of Ibn Sina's theological positions (Ceylan, 1996; Janssens, 2012). After his travel to Nishapur, learning about philosophy, he returned to his hometown.

Al-Rāzī also studied under the renowned scholars such as al-Kamāl al-Simnānī in jurisprudence (Ceylan, 2006; Shihadeh, 2006) and theologian-philosopher, Majd al-Dīn' Abd al-Razzaq al-Jīlī (Shihadeh, 2006), with whom he travelled to Maragha and completed his study at a madrasah there. After completing his study, he taught in several regions such as Marand, Hamadan, and Rayy (Griffel, 2011) and authored early works like *al-Isharah fī 'ilm al-kalam* (*The Guiding Principle of Science of Kalam*). Later, Al-Rāzī travelled to Khwarazm and Transoxiana, which led to a patronage relationship with the Sultan Tekish of Khwarazm, and later with the Sultan of Gūrid, Ghiyāth al-Dīn of Ghazna and his successor, Shihāb al-Dīn. Due to Al-Rāzī's scholarship, the sultans welcomed and supported him by utilising the Ash'arites approach for their religious policy (Griffel, 2007). From this patronage relationship, he settled in Herat, established a madrasah and got paid for his teaching and intellectual activity. Here is where he started writing his magnum opus, The Great Commentary.

Known for his sharp intellect and confrontational style, Al-Rāzī frequently debated scholars from various sects, successfully converting many to Sunni Islam. His unrelenting approach frequently led to public backlash and forced relocations. He passed away in Herat in 1220 CE, probably due to poisoning by followers from other sects. Further details of his life and scholarly journey can be found in Ceylan (1996), Griffel (2011), and Shihadeh (2006).

CONTRIBUTIONS AND NOTABLE WORKS

Al-Rāzī's contribution and works extended beyond theology. According to Al-Baghdadi (1990), Al-Rāzī authored many books covering a wide spectrum of disciplines, including exegesis, theology, logic, philosophy, ethics, Islamic jurisprudence, history, mathematics, cosmology, medicine, astrology, and encyclopaedia. This section highlights the four most distinguished works, which reflect the breadth and depth of his knowledge, befitting his title as the *Hujjatul Islam* (proof of Islam).

- i. Quranic exegesis. Al-Rāzī's magnum opus, *Maḥatib al-Ghayb* or *al-Tafsīr al-kabīr* (The Great Commentary) was composed in his final days. Al-Rāzī utilised both logic and narrative approaches to interpret the Quran (Cooper, 1998). The tafsir weaves together prophetic tradition, philosophical analysis, and theological discourse, as well as other disciplines of knowledge and is celebrated for its comprehensiveness.
- ii. Philosophy and ethics. In *Kitab al-naḥs wa 'l-ruh wa sharh quwahuma* or *Kitab al-naḥs wa 'l-ruh* (Book on the Soul and the Spirit and their Faculties), Al-Rāzī discusses the human psychology based on Islamic philosophies of ethics and metaphysics. He emphasised that the soul is the core driver of human behaviour and distinguished humans from animals by their possession of rational and moral faculties that require us to live morally and ethically. At the same time, he acknowledges the tendency of the soul to become corrupt. He also provides the 'treatment' for such issues (Shihadeh, 2006). In this book, he called for a life guided by ethical principles.
- iii. Logic. In *Kitab al-Mantiq al-Kabir* (Major Book on Logic), Al-Rāzī offers a critical assessment of Aristotelian and Avicennian logic. Furthermore, Al-Rāzī also pointed out the flaws in deductive reasoning while explaining his preference for inductive reasoning.
- iv. Cosmology. In *Matalib al-'Aliya* (The Higher Issues), Al-Rāzī focuses on the discussion of the physical reality of the world. In this book, he opposes the single geocentric model of the universe (i.e., our universe exists as the centre of the universe) (Elkaisy-Friemuth, 2015) and postulated the idea of a multiverse, based on the Quranic verse in *Surah Al-Fatihah*: "All praise belongs to God, Lord of the Worlds" (The Quran, 1:2), which he believed is supported by the Ash'arite theory of atomism (the universe is made of many tiny physical atoms).

From these works, it is evident that Al-Rāzī was well-versed in the vast array of knowledge of his time. He played a significant role in reconciling revelation and reason within the Islamic tradition. Although his early works emphasised on rationalism, he has also shown an inclination towards revealed knowledge in his later years (Cooper, 1998), as he realises the way of the *kalam* was unable to satiate his thirst for the answer, as he described in his own words: "I have experienced all the methods of theology and all the way of philosophy, but I did not find in them the benefit (*kalam*) which could equal the benefit I derived from the reading of the exalted Quran" (Ceylan, 1996; Ibn Abi Usaybi'ah, 1965).

The following section explores Al-Rāzī's understanding of the soul by examining the ontological, epistemological, and axiological approaches based on the Book on the Soul and the Spirit and their Faculties.

AL-RĀZĪ'S PHILOSOPHICAL THOUGHTS AND APPROACHES

Al-Rāzī's Ontological Approach

Al-Rāzī describes the wisdom behind the creation of man as indicating Allah's perfection of generosity and mercy. The former is when Allah created man from dust that bears Divine lights. As for the latter, Allah entrusted man's heart with the light of gnosis, tongue with recitation of tawhid, eyes to see His sign, and ears to hear His speech, although man is composed of appetite, anger, and blameworthy habits.

Furthermore, Al-Rāzī's work covers a wide range of metaphysical concepts, ranging from the existence of God, the universe, the soul, and the living and non-living creatures. Prior to illustrating the existence of man, Al-Rāzī (1992) outlines that the existence of being can be divided into four types based on the principle of causality. They are:

a. Either affects or is not at all affected in any way

The first type of existent that affects but is not at all affected refers to Allah, the Ultimate Creator, a Necessary Being in the chain of creation for all other beings to exist. Without Allah as the primal force behind the creation of the universe, it is impossible to explain the origin of the universe without being stuck in a loop (infinite regression) (Al-Rāzī, 1992). Unlike contingent being, Allah is completely independent and self-sufficient, unaffected by anything external, requires no partner and is not subject to cause and effect. It is absurd to believe that Allah must have a creator because a Necessary Being is not defined by its predecessor (to be created is to be affected), but its capability to exist solely as its own essence. Therefore, it does not matter whether humans believe in God or not, since the existence of the Necessary Being is not dependent on the subjects that depend on its effect (Al-Rāzī, 1992). This is in line with the Quran, as mentioned in *Surah Al-Fatir* verse 15: "O mankind, you are those in need of Allah, while Allah is free of need, the Praiseworthy." (The Quran, 35:15). This type of being is usually referred to as the First Cause in the *kalam* cosmological argument for Allah as a Necessary Being for creating the universe (Kafrawi & Djati, 2004). In other words, Allah gives effect to His creation but is not affected by any of the creations.

b. Receives effects but does not affect anything in any way

The second type of existent, which receives effects but does not affect others, refers to matter (Al-Rāzī, 1992). According to Al-Rāzī (1992), this includes the incorporeal universe as it is made up of a collection of atoms that are indivisible. It is an existent that does not necessarily occupy space, but its form is receptive to space and time, such as cold, hot, moist, dry, and others. All matters are, by nature, contain absolute receptivity, obedience, and submission, as mentioned in *Surah Al-Hajj* verse 18: "Do you not see that to Allah prostrates whoever is in the heavens and whoever is on the earth and the sun, the moon, the stars, the

mountains, the trees, the moving creatures, and many of the people?” (The Quran, 22:18). Thus, matter on its own need to receive effects from others to function or mean anything of value.

c. Affects and is also affected at the same time

According to Al-Rāzī (1992), the third kind, which affects and is at the same time affected, refers to the universe of spirits and souls. It has been established in the Islamic sciences that spirits receive effects from something else and are able to affect others as well. For instance, in *Surah Al-Dhariyat* (verses 1 to 4), the angels administer the world affairs (of winds scattering dust, clouds loaded with rain, ship gliding ease) by Allah’s command. In this context, angels receive command from Allah, the highest power and their ‘administration’ affects man.

Al-Rāzī (1992) also made it clear that the world of spirit is of different ranks, between the Divine world and the Physical world. The highest one is the one that has lost itself in the light of Allah and hardly finds time in the corporeal world; they are the angels. The lower rank belongs to the terrestrial spirit, ranked based on nobility and debasement. The highest is the human spirit, followed by the animal spirit and vegetative faculties.

d. Neither affects nor is affected at all

The fourth kind is an existent that neither affects nor receives an effect that cannot exist for the human mind to comprehend. This type of being may be asserted as something which has no end or duration (Al-Rāzī, 1992). However, due to its mysterious nature and lack of proper means to assert its existence, Al-Rāzī stated that it exists merely as a concept and is not worth discussing since there is no example that can be referred to.

The four types of existence are the basis that Al-Rāzī uses to support his theory; human action is the act of the soul, and that the soul is immaterial, independent from the body, but makes instrumental use of the body to move (Janssens, 2012). For the ontology of the soul, we shall focus on the third kind of existence. Al-Rāzī illustrates this in *Book on the Soul and the Spirit*, “just as, the carpenter, for example, performs different deeds through different instruments; similarly, the soul sees with eyes, hears with ears, thinks with brain and acts through the heart. Therefore, all body parts are instruments and tools for the soul” (Al-Rāzī, 1992, p. 92).

As the soul is in the third kind of existence, where it causes change and can change, the soul can further be classified into three ranks based on appetite: the highest position belongs to those who constantly attend to the Divine World and sink themselves in the presence of Allah (Al-Rāzī, 1992). This is described in *Surah Al-Waqiah* verse 11: “These will be those Nearest to Allah.” (The Quran, 56:11).

Next, the middle position admits those souls who attend to both the Divine and corporeal worlds. Souls that belong to this position can move upward via obedience and devotion. However, it is also possible for the souls to move downward as they deal with the affairs of the world and exercise sway over it (Al-Rāzī, 1992). Perhaps, humans possessing this

type of soul are considered the right-hand (*ashabul yamin*) or righteous and balanced people (The Quran, 56:27).

Lastly, the souls that belong in the last rank are those who attend to the lower world and are exceedingly occupied in seeking its pleasures. They may be described as the people of the left-hand (*ashabul syimal*) and are transgressors (The Quran, 56:41).

To conclude, humans are made up of two existents: the body (matter) and the soul (immaterial). The body or matter is unable to provide any effect as it receives effects from others to perform any motion or action. Whereas the soul acts as the main operative, which by merits of its existence allows it to give effect to the human body (matter) while also being affected by the repercussions/consequences made by the body (matter). Therefore, the body serves as an instrument for the soul to move and act, justifying human action as the act of the soul.

Man is also perfect and imperfect. As the soul is ranked, the highest will always seek Allah's pleasure and reach perfection as they are with the angels. Meanwhile, the lowest one strives only to fulfil corporeal pleasures and can descend to the level of cattle or a pig for attending appetite, or like a biting dog, a violent camel if they attend to anger (Al-Rāzī, 1992). A man can manifest all those conflicts through his character and actions. Yet, man bears to remember that he is a traveller in a world that is a temporary halt, while the goal is the hereafter and paradise, hence he needs to steer his actions towards the goal. Therefore, striving for excellence in morality and righteousness is necessary to guide one towards the goal.

Al-Rāzī's Epistemological Approach

Epistemology concerns on how knowledge is acquired and what makes it valid (Aysha et al., 2024) as well as ways a topic was study (Rahman, 2020). This section discusses the approaches Al-Rāzī adopted in outlining his understanding of the soul.

As a polymath well-versed in various disciplines, Al-Rāzī adopted a holistic approach to discuss the soul. Drawing from both revealed (*naqli*) and acquired (*aqli*) knowledge, he integrates theology, philosophy, medicine, and lived human experience. Nevertheless, his Ash'arite background shapes his prioritisation of the divine sources as the foundation of the theory of the soul.

Following his ontological view that the soul is connected to the body, he posits that the soul is placed in the heart (*qalb*) rather than brain, through which it is connected with the rest of the body. He presented six main arguments based on the Quran and Hadith. For instance, based on *Surah Al-Shu'ara*, he argues that the heart is the addressee of God and bears the consequences of human deeds. Furthermore, he added that the heart is the locus of remembrance and understanding, based on *Surah Al-Zumar*, verse 21 (The Quran, 39:21). Additionally, in his fourth argument, he argued that the objection of the commandment, prohibition, reward, and punishment is the heart, as in there lies the intellect. The argument was supported based on several *Surahs* such as *Al-Hajj* (verse 46), *Al-Araf* (verse 178), *Al-Baqarah* (verses 7, 10, 88), and *Al-Nisa* (verse 155) (The Quran, 22:46; 7:178; 2:7, 10, 88; 4:155), which indicate that the heart is the place of intellect, understanding, ignorance, and

negligence. He further strengthens his thesis with the sixth argument, taken from both the Quran such as from *Surah Al-Maidah* verse 41 and *Al-Nahl* verse 106 (The Quran, 5:41; 16:106) and Hadith, based on Sahih Bukhari and Muslim, that the word “belief” is attributed in the heart; therefore, the agent (i.e., soul) must also be in the heart (Al-Rāzī, 1992, p. 124). Al-Rāzī presented evidence from the revealed sources to show that the soul is connected with the body through the heart. Nevertheless, this does not mean he ignored rational evidence in justifying his theory.

Beyond revealed texts, Al-Rāzī employed rational and scientific evidence, especially from medical sciences. For instance, he mentioned that the heart is the first organ to develop in a foetus and unites with the rest of the other organs in the body, making the heart the “chief organ” of the human physique (Al-Rāzī, 1992, p. 126). Thus, the soul’s attachment in the heart precedes the attachment with other organs. Contemporary research supports this claim that the human heart is one of the first organs to develop and the first to display function in the embryonic stage (Bulatovic et al., 2016; Tan & Lewandowski, 2020). Hence, it is clear that Al-Rāzī integrates revealed knowledge with rational and scientific evidence to support his thesis that the heart mediates the connection between soul and body.

Al-Rāzī’s holistic approach lies in his methods of argument. He favours detailed dialectic consideration for each topic he discusses by providing elaborated arguments, counterarguments, counter-counterarguments, and carefully listing and evaluating them (Adamson, 2016). In his Book on the Soul and the Spirit, Al-Rāzī begins the discussion about the human soul by introducing the types of existence, helping readers grasp the essence of existence and its character, before delving into the relationship between the soul and the body. Then, Al-Rāzī also presented not less than ten arguments to support his thesis; that the soul is different from the body by investigating the quiddity of the souls. One of them is in the second argument (i.e., man is [not] an expression of his body) to justify his thesis; the soul is one.

If it were so that man was the expression of his body, man would have either possessed in every one of his parts, life, knowledge, power, and volition or not. Either of the two hypotheses is absurd. It is, therefore, absurd to say that man is an expression of this body. The first case is absurd because it requires that every part of the body must be living, knowing, intending, and showing energy independently, and this necessitated that man is not one living being, one powerful being, rather, he is many livings, learned and powerful beings. In this case, there will remain no connection between one man and many individuals who are related to some others by one chain. But we evidently know the absurdity of this expression, since I find myself as one essence, one living being and not many, and since by supposing that every part of this body is alive independently, none of the parts would have the knowledge of its fellow parts. It would thus be possible that one intends to move to one side, and the other to the other side. This would then, cause some parts of one and the same body to oppose some other parts, as happens between two individuals. That this is absurd is known evidently. The second case is equally absurd as it requires that one quality should exist in many places. This is evidently known as absurd. If it were permissible that one quality at a time in many places, every particle shall then be living, knowing, having power, and that matter would turn to this that one particular body should be many people and not

one. When once the absurdity becomes clear, it is confirmed that man is not this particular body (Al-Rāzī, n.d.; Al-Rāzī, 1992, p. 93-94).

The above example illustrates Al-Rāzī's holistic approach with detailed and elaborated arguments to support his thesis. He explains that if each part of the body independently possessed life and volition, then a human would not be one rational being but a multiplicity of beings, which is logically absurd. Conversely, if the body were lifeless without the soul, then man must be something beyond the body—namely, the soul itself.

Furthermore, Al-Rāzī prefers the phenomenological method (Attar, 2014) because he stressed the importance of supporting claims through demonstrative evidence or proof. Al-Rāzī always grounded abstract ideas in human experience and real-life examples. For instance, while supporting his thesis that mental pleasure is nobler than sensual pleasure, he described those sensual pleasures, such as eating, drinking, and mating, as imperfect for a man, serving as means to fulfil his needs, and only pleasurable when they remove the pain of hunger. He illustrated the proof with a situation of a hungry man; a hungry man enjoys food more than a less hungry man, but overeating may harm and inflict pain; thus, eating is no longer pleasurable (Al-Rāzī, 1992).

Moreover, he also uses analogies and questions to encourage his readers to ponder. For instance, in the thesis that mental pleasure is superior than sensual pleasure, he described evidence based on the societal norm, a story of a horse, in which the horse is judged (i.e., to be sold at a higher price) not based on eating or drinking, but the quickest, which exercises and makes charges. “If the irrational animal is judged for their merits and excellence, not by eating and drinking... what should you (man), then, think of the rational intelligent animal?” (Al-Rāzī, 1992, p. 175). The question directs readers to ponder that the soul is valued not based on the sensual pleasure, but rather by the merits it holds, particularly due to man's rational faculties.

In summary, Al-Rāzī's epistemological approach is holistic, as exhibited in how he discussed the soul from various angles, including revealed and scientific knowledge. While he anchored his theory of the souls in the Qur'an and Hadith, he reinforced it through logical reasoning, philosophy, medicine, and lived human experience. For that, he was able to harmonise the revealed and acquired knowledge. Furthermore, he also advanced in his time by using the phenomenological method, thus enabling readers to grasp his theory of the soul more clearly. Following the ontological and epistemological approach, the subsequent section will discuss the value that Al-Rāzī upholds in his theory of the soul.

Al-Rāzī's Axiological Approach

Al-Rāzī's approach in understanding the soul is centred on the path to achieving excellence in morality and righteousness, and paradise as the final destination. This is because people with excellent morality are people of the right-hand, who consistently attend to the higher world. They may enjoy pleasure without pain and peace without fear.

According to Al-Rāzī, the soul only entered the corporeal world to acquire knowledge and perform righteous deeds but can get distracted by worldly pleasures and may perform

wrongful deeds. This highlights the importance of a person's action, character, nature, and disposition; *akhlak*. *Akhlak* is the state of the soul that influences human action, in which good characters or good *akhlak* produce good action, while evil characters produce bad action (Rahim, 2013). Therefore, any action performed by the human body is directed by the soul, as both are connected to each other, working in tandem.

Furthermore, Al-Rāzī (1992) added that, although the human soul differs in nature or character (e.g., some are kind and tender while some are despotic and dominating) and never deviates from it, humans can change their manner by caution and training. Thus, for a human to change, knowledge is essential. In *Book on the Soul and the Spirit*, he states that "knowledge that leads to the path of the nearly-placed soul is the science of spiritual exercise and discipline, and knowledge that leads to the path of the right-hand is the science of morals" (Al-Rāzī, 1992, p. 83). In other words, with knowledge (i.e., the science of spiritual and moral), good characters and moral excellence are achievable and attainable (Shihadeh, 2006).

According to Al-Rāzī (1992), human naturally seek perfection and avoid imperfection, whether through power, sensory pleasure, or knowledge. The attainment of power for perfection can be seen from the human desire to dominate the lower world or turn towards the higher world. As humans engage in the lower world, they seek to dominate the corporeal world through pleasure; the perfect pleasures are appetite, coition, and possession, such as authority and wealth. On the other hand, humans also strive to avoid imperfection by avoiding pain such as hunger, loss of power, wealth, or loved ones.

However, Al-Rāzī warns that achieving perfection in the lower world will eventually lead to pain because humans essentially want unlimited power, but the lower world can never satiate their taste for power. This is because man only finds pleasure during a change of state, but not after the new state settles. For that, they will continue to seek more and never feel contented (Shihadeh, 2006). Concurrently, as the lower world is conditioned by the connection between the soul and degenerative body, humans eventually lose their power to achieve perfection, which necessitates pain.

Thus, true perfection lies in detaching from worldly desires and aligning oneself with the Divine through obedience and devotion and turning away from the lower corporeal world except for administering worldly affairs (Al-Rāzī, 1992). The higher world is everlasting, whilst the corporeal world is temporary. Therefore, those who attend the higher world will forever be bathed in the lights of the Divine as they enjoy continuity without annihilation, pleasure without pain, and peace without fear- the ultimate happiness (Al-Rāzī, 1992).

Furthermore, Al-Rāzī asserts that the attribute of knowledge also influences one's action, and this kind of perfection is perfected by theological sciences and spiritual discipline (Shihadeh, 2006). In other words, while humans by nature may behave to achieve perfection and pleasure through attaining power and fulfilment of sensory pleasure in the lower world, one mainly acts to avoid pain and achieve great pleasure in the hereafter. For that, they require knowledge of shariah (i.e., to distinguish the rightness and wrongness of actions and what should be done and avoided) and knowledge to minimise one's desire to overseek pleasures. Moreover, according to Al-Rāzī, animals and humans are judged based on merits and excellence, not by eating or drinking. The best human races possess knowledge, sciences, and

excellent manners; meanwhile, the men who have made no progress in their intellect, customs, and knowledge have grown debased and low. Therefore, intellectual pleasure such as knowledge, sciences, and excellent manners are superior to sensory pleasure like appetite and coition.

Achieving an excellent morality should be the goal for humankind. Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) made it clear that he was sent to perfect the human character. This is stated in a hadith “I was sent to perfect good character” (The Hadith, Adab al-Mufrad, Book 14, Hadith 273). Thus, Al-Rāzī recognised that the perfection of the human soul is best done by perfecting our character through avoiding pain and achieving pleasure in the present world and the hereafter. Al-Rāzī, therefore, discusses achieving excellence in morality based on one’s inclination and action in accordance with the principle of pleasure and pain.

In summary, to Al-Rāzī, what is good is pleasurable, and what is bad is painful. Nevertheless, the analysis of pleasure and pain should not be limited to the surface level, for instance, up to the corporeal worldly pleasure. Instead, what is considered good must avoid pain and bring pleasure in the hereafter. While it is human nature to like pleasure and avoid pain, man should strive for the ultimate pleasure. Those who can enjoy such bliss are righteous, whereas the transgressor will suffer pain, as stated in *Surah Al-Waqiah*, verses 27 and 41 (The Quran, 56;27, 41). Al-Rāzī is also optimistic, stating that one’s character could change through knowledge and persistent training, i.e., abstaining from worldly pleasures. This process indicates the possibility of humans transitioning for the better by achieving excellent morality.

THE DISPOSITION OF THE SOUL ACCORDING TO AL-RĀZĪ

Nature of the Soul

According to Al-Rāzī (1992), the soul is fundamentally different from the body. In terms of essence, while the body is a matter confined to mass and space and composed of many different chemical compositions, the soul exists as its essence, not bound by mass and space. Also, the soul is not related to any genus of the physical body and its parts. As previously mentioned in the ontology approach, Al-Rāzī views the soul as a “living material substance that is diffused through the body, animating it” (Marmura, 1991, as cited in Tiryaki, 2020, p. 24). In other words, the soul administers the body and is responsible for a person being called “alive”. For this reason, a dead body is considered soulless.

Moreover, Al-Rāzī dismisses any material theories of the soul associated with the Greek philosophers such as Galen and his followers, who believe that different aspects of the soul are attached to the human body, namely the liver, heart, and brain (Tiryaki, 2020). From his point of view, the immateriality of the soul and its components are not affected by physical bodily changes. This is illustrated by the stability of self-awareness over time as we grow old. For example, even when our bodies grow taller and bigger as adults, we can still relate and identify ourselves from the previous phase of human development, such as children, to show we are aware of who we are, regardless of the forms we have taken in the physical world (Al-Rāzī, 1992).

Ibn Sina had also previously tried to prove the existence of the soul through the “flying man” experiment and had been scrutinised by Al-Rāzī. Al-Rāzī argues that the sense of awareness and individual experiences in the flying man experiment are the self that is not a body (perception, for instance, is a cognitive process). Therefore, it does not prove that the soul is distinct from the body; instead, it proves that our sense of awareness (or the soul) is not reliant on our perception (Shihadeh, 2006). It is important to note here that Al-Rāzī’s disagreement does not mean he did not believe the soul is distinct from the body; rather, his issue with the thought experiment is the claim that it proves the existence of the soul outside the sensory input (without the human body).

Al-Rāzī also opposes the idea that the soul is divisible into separate forms, as previously believed by other ancient philosophers, such as Aristotle, who posited that the soul has many forms, each responsible for a different function (Al-Rāzī, 1992). Instead, he believes that the soul is one and comprises three main faculties: vegetative, animal, and human, all of which exist within a complete soul (Al-Rāzī, 1992). Each faculty is responsible for many different functions in the human body, and is further explained as follows:

a. **The vegetative faculty.** This faculty is responsible for basic life functions, which provide biological sustenance to the body. Just as plants perform photosynthesis, get nutrients from sunlight, and absorb water in the ground to stay alive, the vegetative soul also plays the same role as it helps the body grow and develop through consumption. There are three subdivisions: assimilation, retention, and driving away. The first two are to assimilate and retain nutrients from the substitute (i.e., food and drinks) materials, while the latter moves the unnecessary particles that do not suit the body. This process resembles digestion. After the three completed their missions (supplying nutrients and making them part of the body), the productive and growth faculties come into play to transform or develop the body.

b. **The animal faculty.** This faculty is responsible for locomotion, perception and emotions. This faculty is how man makes sense of this world, using sensory input to form what he perceives as reality. This faculty is divided into two: motion and perception. The environment influences this faculty as the body responds to the perceived external stimuli. For instance, locomotion or movement is caused by the individual’s determined will and desire, produced by their inclination towards an object, whether agreeable or disagreeable. They were produced by the faculty of appetite and anger, such that appetite attracts agreeableness, while the anger faculty drives away disagreeableness. In this sense, when a man perceives an object as agreeable, he will be inclined towards it, desire to get near it, and move towards it, and vice versa.

The animal faculty also consists of the perceiving faculty, further divided into internal and external faculties. As an external faculty, individuals perceive the environment using the five senses: hearing, sight, taste, smell, and touch. Meanwhile, for the internal faculty, individuals may act based on a judgement formed on information that is sensible (*Sensus Communis*) or can be not sensible but exists, such as a person’s intention (*Phantasy*), as well as govern man’s action in a particular meaning (*Imaginative*).

c. The human faculty. The human faculty maintains and controls the body (host of the soul). The human faculty plays a crucial role as a guiding force that restrains base instinct and regulates ethical behaviour. It is further divided into two: 1) the theoretical faculty provides a scientific description of all psychological phenomena and human-acquired intellect, and 2) the practical faculty focuses on maintaining our well-being. It specifies actions that should be taken to ensure the soul can achieve the highest virtue and moral excellence while avoiding transgression. This faculty is the psychological faculty.

Al-Rāzī (1992) discusses the relationship between the faculties in relation to the soul. To him, human has internal faculties (that help in realising the truth) and speculative faculties (that make man aware of what is useful and harmful for him). The latter faculty is assisted by the senses, as they are the source of understanding the world.

As for appetite, it can contribute to moral diseases or blameworthy character (*akhlak mazmumah*) such as excessive love of wealth, greed and miserliness, as well as excessive love for power and position. Therefore, the human faculty, which consists of theoretical and practical faculties, is necessary to cure these diseases by utilising the appetite in a good manner, resulting in a praiseworthy character (*akhlak mahmudah*).

It can be observed that the three faculties of the soul, as postulated by Al-Rāzī, are almost similar to Aristotle's and Ibn Sina's in terms of their basic functions, but with different ideas of their properties and locations. The following diagram summarises Al-Rāzī's theory of the soul, and the next section explains the application of Al-Rāzī's work.

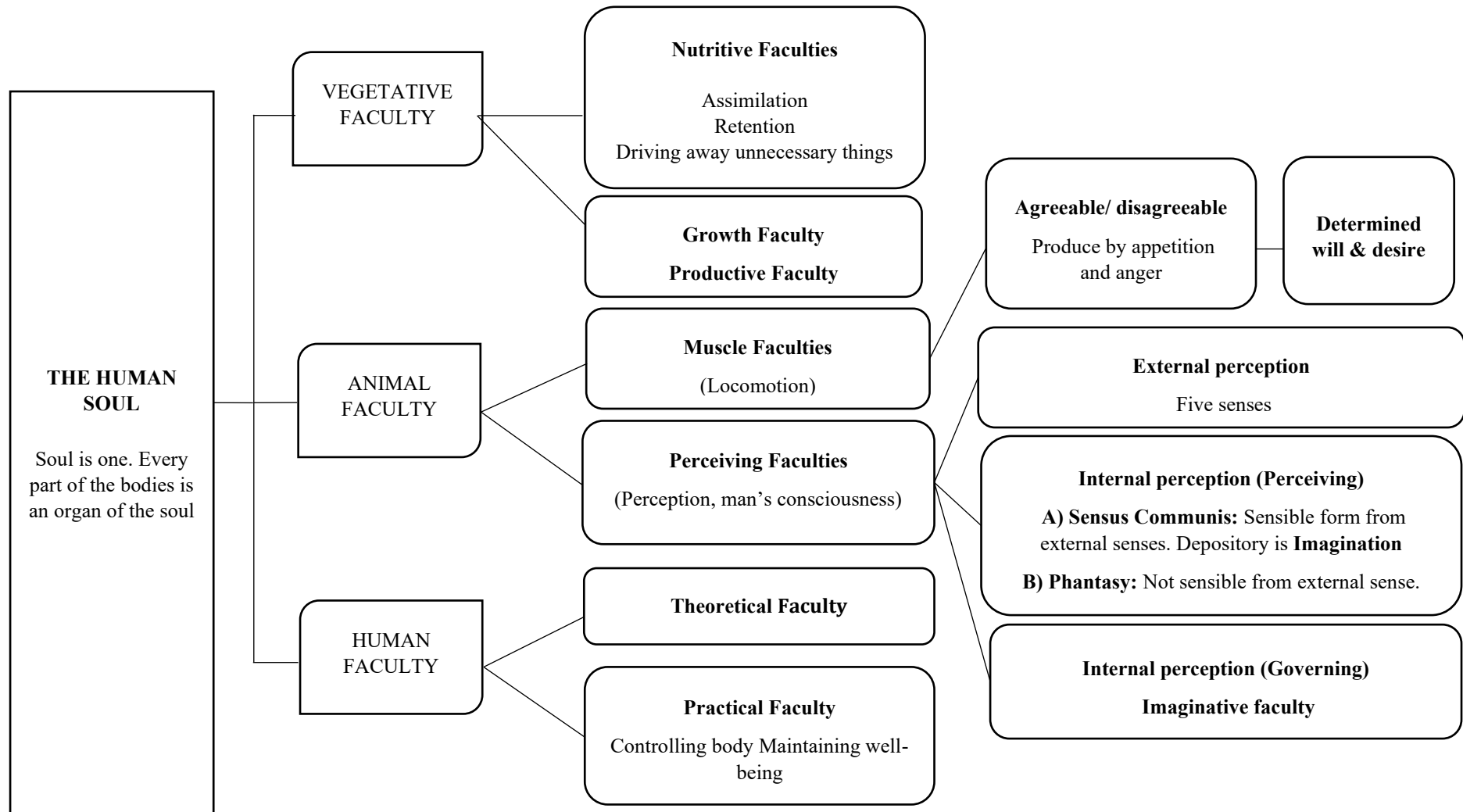


Figure 1. Summary of the faculty of the soul

AL RAZI'S CONCEPTION OF THE SOUL: APPLICATION AND PRACTICE

Soul in Relation to Wealth and Power: Application in Organisation

Al-Rāzī's exposition of the human soul in the Book on the Soul and the Spirit (1992) suggests that the soul exists not merely as a component that constitutes the human being. Rather, the soul serves to complete man as a moral and rational person that is distinguished from animals that are governed solely by appetite. He emphasises that the soul drives behaviours, while the soul enables mankind to have higher reasoning and ethical awareness, humans are also vulnerable to corruption.

Al-Rāzī (1992) recognises human pursuit of wealth and power due to the soul's innate tendency to seek perfection through them. In certain conditions, the pursuit of wealth and power is a necessity and permissible. For example, the attainment of power and wealth is necessary if it helps meet one's basic needs, such as for food, drink, clothing, and a dwelling. This is because fulfilling the basic needs enables a person to perform *ibadah*, and vice versa. Although the pursuit of basic needs is natural and even necessary, unchecked indulgence in material gain can lead to moral decay, resulting in the manifestation of blameworthy character (*mazmumah*) such as greed, miserliness, and pride. To address the moral diseases of excessive love of power and wealth, Al-Rāzī offers ways to recognise the symptoms and suggest ways to cure or control them by understanding the soul. These insights can guide personal development and ethical decision-making in organisations.

For instance, in relation to wealth, employers should consider paying employees a living wage, an amount that enables them to live with dignity and achieve personal growth (Hu & Carr, 2020). This concept of living wage aligned with Al-Rāzī's pursuit of basic needs. A living wage is important as it not only ensures employees can sustain their own lives but also supports their family members and enhances their ability to join and contribute to society, eventually improving their life satisfaction (Hu & Carr, 2020). The benefits will spill over to work in the form of improving employees' job satisfaction, job commitment (Hu & Carr, 2020), improving retention, reduce turnover rate absenteeism, overtime, and training needs which eventually benefits to organisation through reduction of cost based on the benefits and Improvement of brand reputation and morale (Searle & McWhaa-Herman, 2020).

On the other hand, small, inadequate pay can reduce societal worth, diminished self-respect (Searle & McWha-Herman, 2020), prevent employees from breaking the poverty cycle, unable to contribute fully to the organisation (Hu & Carr, 2020). If employees' pay is inadequate, they will strongly rely on government subsidies (Werner & Lim, 2016), and the low pay negatively impacts the family and society due to the inability to cushion against unprecedented events. For example, the COVID-19 pandemic affects the low-income earners and their families' health and well-being by inflicting hunger, malnutrition and mental health issues and makes them more susceptible to COVID-19 infection (Singh et al., 2021). In contrast, ensuring a stable family economy enhances children's engagement in *ibadah*, such as prayer (Chik & Abdullah, 2019). Hence, this highlight the importance of paying employees with adequate wages that meet the person's needs and allow room for growth is crucial as it benefits the individual, organisation, and society.

The decision to pay a living wage requires employers to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and resources. Concurrently, employers should also reflect on their moral characters, such as greed and miserliness, when making the decision. Following Al-Rāzī's suggestion to be aware of such traits prior to curing them, employers must be aware of greed and miserliness, so that they can overcome them by allocating their resources moderately through paying the living wage to employees. Allocating resources for purposes beyond employers' personal wealth can help them avoid being greedy and miserly. Besides, being aware of such traits can also reduce the tendency of personal bias, as employers are able to assess the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities, threats, and resources of the decision to pay a living wage in a more objective manner, without the influence of greed and miserliness. In this sense, Al-Rāzī's view on the influence of appetite, particularly love of wealth and power, supports fairer organisational decision-making.

To summarise, in the case of the pursuit of wealth and power, Al-Rāzī recognises the human need that necessitates such action. He describes the benefits of wealth and power as they can be used to help others in need. The prophetic history had also supported the importance of wealth and power, such as the wife of the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh), Khadijah, and companions like Abu Bakar As-Siddiq, Umar Al-Khattab, Uthman Al-Affan, and Abdul Rahman Auf, who used their wealth and position to help others and catalyse the growth of Islam. However, Al-Rāzī (1992) sternly warns against the harm they bring when one's soul is overly fond of both. The love of wealth and power, if dominating one's soul, can lead to corruption and turn away from the truth and righteousness. Optimistically, one can take action to curb diseases caused by an excessive love of wealth and power by being aware of the traits, spending on good deeds, and comparing oneself to the needy (Al-Rāzī, 1992).

Soul, Happiness, and Moral Development

Happiness is one of the concepts that is brought forward by Al-Rāzī, primarily focuses on ultimate well-being, which, according to him, is the essence of human happiness in the form of spiritual happiness (*al-Saadah al-Ruhaniah*), rather than temporary pleasure, which is known as hedonism (Al-Rāzī, 1904 as cited in Arroisi & Hidayat). The true happiness of men is spiritual happiness as compared to worldly, temporary happiness, which is merely the fulfilment of lust (Arroisi & Hidayat, 2023). Al-Rāzī further argues that spiritual happiness represents the highest form of human contentment, far superior to the worldly happiness limited by desire (*shahwah*) (Al-Rāzī, 1904 as cited in Arroisi & Hidayat). Again, if happiness were merely about satisfying one's desires, for example, like venting anger or fulfilling carnal needs, the animals would be happier than humans. This is because animals often possess stronger instincts and appetites. Therefore, according to Al-Rāzī, true human happiness is not found in physical pleasures like eating and intimacy but in a spiritual state rooted in knowledge of God (*ma'rifatullah*), obedience, and a deep love for Him (Al-Rāzī, 1992).

The spiritual state of happiness is achieved through the perfection of the soul and a deep connection with God (Jaffer, 2015; Shihadeh, 2006). One of the ways to achieve this happiness is through *Takhalluq bi akhlaqillah*, which is the perfection of the soul. The process (*takhalluq*) could not be achieved except by filling oneself with goodness and glory and abandoning what is not good (Arroisi & Hidayat, 2023). The soul's inherent nature (*fitrah*) drives human being to acknowledge the oneness of Allah and to immerse themselves in His divine majesty. Thus,

according to Al-Rāzī, the pursuit of a closer relationship with Allah is the ultimate source of happiness. This state of happiness is achieved when one's actions are performed purely out of a sincere desire that is also pleasing to Allah.

Happiness is what every human being wants. The concept of happiness by Al-Rāzī taught human beings to seek true happiness, as ultimately, they desire eternal happiness. In pursuit of true happiness, a feeling of contentment is necessary, as we need to discern what is good from what is bad. Thus, this happiness comes along with moral development. Knowing what is good and what is bad brings us to true happiness. Recognising what is truly good allows a person to find meaning even in hardship, as life's trials test and strengthen moral and spiritual maturity.

To illustrate this, when a person experiences a significant setback in their life, such as a job loss, divorce, or serious illness, they could see these experiences as part of trials from Allah. The person's true happiness is the ultimate focus on Allah; thus, the worldly calamities can be a blessing for them. They still have and turn to prayer and contemplation to find peace, and at the same time, they work to solve their problems, but with a calm acceptance of God's decree. This adversity builds moral development because it fosters spiritual and emotional resilience, teaching the person to cultivate an inner state of peace, which is a happiness that is independent of external circumstances, such as wealth and power. Also, it helps to cultivate a deep sense of trust and reliance on Allah, hence moving the individual away from their illusion of self-control.

CONCLUSION

This paper examined Al-Rāzī's understanding of the soul. In terms of epistemology, Al-Rāzī's approach to understanding the soul is holistic as he drew his theory from both revealed (*naqli*) and acquired (*aqli*) knowledge, integrating theology, philosophy, medicine, and lived human experience. Nevertheless, his Ash'arite background shapes his prioritisation of the divine sources as the foundation of the theory of the soul.

In terms of ontology, Al-Rāzī (1992) has described that humans act according to their own initiative, and that action is the act of the soul as it governs the body, and thus, behaviour is the manifestation of the soul. Meanwhile, from an axiological perspective, Al-Rāzī presents a positive view of human nature. He posits that while the pursuit of pleasure and avoidance of pain are the primary motives of human action, true and eternal pleasure is attainable only through moral excellence and righteousness (*akhlak mahmudah*). Therefore, individuals are urged to cultivate virtue and strive for self-improvement, consistent with Islamic teaching as stated in *Surah Al-Waqiah*, "the people of the right (righteous), how 'blessed' will they be" (The Quran, 50:8) and for that, humans can change, as in *Surah Al-Ra'ad*, "...Verily, Allah will not change the (good) condition of a people as long as they do not change their state (of goodness) themselves (by committing sins and by being ungrateful and disobedient to Allah)..." (The Quran, 13:11). The two verses highlight the blessed states of the righteous people and affirm man's capability to change and develop their character in striving towards excellent morality.

Secondly, reaching excellent morality and righteousness is possible through knowledge and constant training. Allah mentioned in the *Surah Al-Anbiya*, “And We will surely test you until We make evident those who strive among you [for the cause of Allāh] and the patient, and We will test your affairs” (The Quran, 47:31). This verse serves as a stark reminder that nothing comes easily in this world even for prophets, as Allah tested them with many trials before reaching the highest level of moral perfection to be exemplified by others.

On the final note, it is thus established, based on Al-Rāzī’s work, that humans are created with two components: the soul and the body. The well-being of the soul can ensure the well-being of the body. On that matter, religion gives clear guidelines on how to nourish the souls, i.e., through righteous behaviours (*akhlak mahmudah*). In line with Al-Rāzī’s holistic approach to the understanding of human nature, the psychology field can benefit from his insights. For instance, the study of personality should be extended from describing and identifying traits to building character towards righteous behaviours and a successful man in accordance with the Quran (The Quran, 18:1-11), rather than material success based on a capitalistic view. The verses clearly describe the characteristics of successful people who possess excellent morals. Furthermore, reason is crucial in guiding man to discern right from wrong and to enhance one’s morality. This rational capacity, when aligned with religious guidance, offers a comprehensive framework for understanding human behaviour. Hence, integrating religion aside from the cognitive and behavioural dimensions should be considered when approaching psychological issues, as it enhances spiritual well-being and contributes to the attainment of pleasure here in this world and, ultimately, in the hereafter.

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