

## Chapter 32: Fakhr Al-Razi

### A. Life, Significance Of Thought And Works

The intellectual life of Islam after the attacks of Ash'ari and Ghazālī upon rationalistic philosophy can be largely described as the gradual transition from rationalism of Aristotelian philosophy toward the intuitive and illuminative wisdom of Ishraqis<sup>1</sup> and Sufis. Although Islam began to weaken politically and culturally during the latter part of the 'Abbasid Caliphate, Muslim thought, especially in the Shi'ah world continued the process of divorcing itself from the categories of Peripatetic philosophy. One of the most influential and colourful figures in this movement, who played a major role in the attack against the rationalists, was Fakhr al-Din Razi, who is considered to be the reviver of Islam in the sixth/12th century as Ghazālī was in the fifth/11th century.<sup>2</sup> Razi is, in many ways, a second Ghazālī; in fact, he may, without exaggeration, be considered to be one of the greatest Muslim theologians.

Abu al-Fadl Mohammad ibn 'Umar, known as Fakhr al-Din Razi and also as Imam Fakhr ibn al-Katib, and *Imam al-Mushakkikin* (the Imam of Doubters),<sup>3</sup> was born in Rayy in northern Persia in 543/1149 to a family of scholars who came originally from Talbaristan. His father, Dia' al-Din, was a well known scholar in Rayy and was Imam Fakhr's first teacher. Later, Fakhr al-Din al-Jilli (the latter being also the teacher of Sheikh al-Baghawi and Majd al-Din Suhrawardi) and theology with Kamal al-Din Simnani in Rayy and Maraghah, and soon became a master of all the sciences of his time, including mathematics, medical and natural sciences.<sup>4</sup>

Having completed his formal studies, Imam Fakhr set out for Khwarizm to combat the Mu'tazilites, and from there journeyed to Transoxiana and was warmly accepted at the Courts of Ghur rulers, Ghiyath al-Din and his brother Shihab al-Din. This stay terminated soon due to opposition and jealousy of certain scholars and courtiers. Consequently, Imam Fakhr left Ghur Court for Chaznah, where he taught for a while, and finally, settled in Herat where, under the patronage of Khwarizm Shah 'Ala al-Din, a special school was built for him. There he spent the rest of his life as a teacher and preacher in comfort and honour among a large number of disciples and students who came from all over the Muslim world to study under him. He passed away at the height of fame and glory in 606/1209.<sup>5</sup>

The career of Imam Fakhr is, in many ways, a repetition of that of Ghazālī's. Like his great predecessor, he was of the Shafi'i school, well versed in all the sciences and philosophy and yet opposed to many aspects of the Greek heritage, a critic of the Muslim philosophers, and drawn towards Sufism.<sup>6</sup> In theology, in which he followed the Ash'rite school, he was certainly influenced by Ghazālī and Imam al-Haramain. In philosophy he came under the influence of his compatriot, Mohammad Zakariyya Razi, as well as ibn Sina and in physics his master was, without doubt, Abu al-Barakat al-Baghdadi. Like a series of anti-Aristotelian philosophers before him, Imam Fakhr tried to reconcile religion and rational philosophy by reliance upon ideas derived more from the *Timaeus* of Plato than the Physics of Aristotle.<sup>7</sup>

Imam Fakhr's main role in the intellectual life of Islam was to support the orthodox policy of the Caliphate of his time, to suppress rationalistic philosophy in favour of theology. In the unified view of Islam, politics, religion and intellectual life have never been divorced, so much so, that the political struggle of minorities in the Caliphate, whether they were opposed to Arab domination or, like the Shi'ahs, to the 'Abbasid Caliphate as such, was reflected clearly in the intellectual and religious activities of the period. As the Caliphate supported the Orthodox Sunni theologians against the rationalists, the philosophers sought refuge in the courts of those minor dynasties that were opposed to the central authority of the Caliphs. So we see such figures as ibn Sina and Khuwaja Nassir al-Din Tusi seeking favour of rulers opposed to the authority of Baghdad, and especially of Shi'ah princes.<sup>8</sup>

On the other hand, there appeared a series of great scholars and sages, mostly theologians and Sufis, of whom the most important were Ghazālī, Imam Fakhr, and the Sufi masters, like Shihab al-Din 'Umar Suhrawardi, who lifted their pen in support of the Caliphate and used both theology and Sufism in order to combat rationalistic philosophy.<sup>9</sup> The works of Imam Fakhr were, above all else, dedicated to his cause. Sunni theology reached its height in his works and weakened considerably with the fall of the 'Abbasid Caliphate, which came to an end about 50 years after his death.

The writings of Fakhr al-Din Razi, of which nearly a hundred are known deal almost with every aspect of Muslim intellectual life and include all the sciences of his time.<sup>10</sup> Some of these, like the commentary upon the *al-Isharat w-al-Tanbihat* of ibn Sina and upon his '*Uyun al-Hikmah* and the *Mabahith al-Mashriqiyyah*, are written as criticisms of Muslim philosophers, especially ibn Sina, and on general problems of philosophy.<sup>11</sup> Others deal with the many branches of the intellectual sciences including logic, mathematics, metaphysics and the natural and esoteric sciences.

Still another set of books deals with theology, of which the most famous are the *Kitab al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din*, *Laudami' al-Bayyinah*, and the *Mubassal*, a classic among writings of the *Kalam*. Fakhr al-Din also wrote a large number of works on particular sciences, like the commentary upon the syntax of Zamkhshari, *Kitab al-Sirr al-Maktum* on astrology and astronomy, *Manaqib al-shifi'i* on history, the commentary upon the *Qanun* or *Canon* of ibn Sina, and many other treatises dealing with medicine, geometry, physiognomy, agriculture, theurgy, etc. Besides these writings, Imam Fakhr composed a large number of works on the purely Islamic sciences of exegesis and jurisprudence, of which the most

famous are the *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, the voluminous commentary upon the Qur'an and *al-Ma'alim fi Usul al-Figh* on the principles of jurisprudence.

Throughout these writings, the character of Imam Fakhr as a critic and "doubter" is evident. He criticizes not only the philosophers, but also theologians like Ash'ari and historians like Shahrastani, when he accuses of plagiarizing Baghdadi's *al-Farq bain al Firaq* in his *al-Milal wa-al-Nibal*.<sup>12</sup> Imam Fakhr's particular genius for analysis and criticism is evident in whatever field he turns his attention to, so that in the annals of Muslim thought he has quite justly become famous as one who is a master in posing a problem but not in solving it, in entering into a debate but not in concluding it.

## **B. Theology (Kalam)**

Muslim theology, known as *Kalam*, began as a reaction against the rationalistic school of the Mu'tazilites, and only gradually developed into a complete science. In the earlier centuries the theologians, following the lead of Abu al-Hassan al-Ash'ari, tried to use logic, the instrument of their enemies, in order to defend the truths of revelation. From the fourth/tenth century onward, this defence itself became more subtle and systematic, reaching its height in the works of Imam al-Haramain Abu al-Ma'ali 'Abd al-Malik al-Juwaini, such as the *Irshad* and the *Shamil*.<sup>13</sup> With Ghazali's *Kalam* took a new turn, as opposed to what it was at the beginning to the school of philosophers, it now began to employ the syllogistic method, intellectual ('aqli) evidence and certain theses of the philosophers, thus laying the foundation of the school of philosophical *Kalam* of the later theologians.

Imam Fakhr is the greatest master of this later school of theology, surpassing in many ways even the more illustrious Ghazali. With Imam Fakhr philosophical *Kalam* reaches its zenith of power and perfection; his works became consequently a continuous source of influence over their later theologians, whether they were Sunnis like al-Iji and al-Taftazani or Shi'ahs like Khuwaja Nasr.<sup>14</sup> Properly speaking, Razi must be credited with the foundation of a new school of *Kalam*, and certain writers have even considered him to be the Third Teacher after Aristotle and Farabi.<sup>15</sup> Actually, he composed works characteristic of both the first period of Muslim theology – marked by a revolt against the philosophers and yet by a dependence upon their methods and even some of their ideas – and the second period, after Ghazali, in which theology became a more independent science and lost much of its defensive and apologetic quality. Among the first type of writings one may name *Muhassal* and *al-Arabi fi Usul al-Din* and among the second *Asas al-Taqdis* and *Lawamial-Bayyindt*.

The theology of Imam Razi is marked by the integration of theological themes with other sciences. For example, in his Persian treatise, *Asrar al-Tanzil*, he combines theology with ethics, and in the *Lawami' al-Bayyindt*, theology with Sufism, giving theology a fragrance of spirituality and a beauty detailed and profound discussion concerning *dhikr*, the invocation of one of the interior forms of *dhikr* he writes, "The third kind of *dhikr* is that man of creation should contemplate the creatures of God until each particle of the essence of creation becomes a polished mirror before the unmanifested world so that when he looks

into this mirror with the eye of wisdom the ray of the eye of his should will fall upon the world of Majesty. This is a station without end and a sea with limit.”<sup>16</sup> In this way, Imam Razi raises theology to a height approached only by Ghazālī, far surpassing the usual level of this study.<sup>17</sup>

To understand Razi’s approach to theology, it is enough to analyze the structure of one of his treatises. We take as an example perhaps the most famous of his theological works, the *Muhassal*, which became a classical source book on the *Kalam* almost from the moment of its composition.<sup>18</sup> Here, Imam Razi divides theology into four parts (*arkun*): preliminaries, being and its divisions, rational theology (*ilahiyat*), and traditional questions (*sam’iyyat*). The preliminaries include the principles of logic, the sufficiency of demonstration (*dalil*) to prove the existence of God, and the obligation upon each believer to prove God’s existence.<sup>19</sup> The section on Being and its divisions considers the questions of Being and Non-being, the relation of the One to the many, cause and effect, etc. Rational theology, which is interlaced with passages from the Qur’an, concerns the Necessary Being, His attributes, acts and the divine names. Finally, the traditional questions, which are exclusively scriptural, concern prophethood, eschatology, the Imamate, the faith and other related subjects. As a whole, therefore, Imam Razi’s theology combines the transmitted or traditional elements of revelation (*naqli*) and the intellectual and rational evidence concerning religious and metaphysical questions (*‘aqli*) into a science which takes into account the problem of religion while participating in many of the discussions of philosophy.

In the method and problems of theology, Imam Razi followed the Ash’rites. As he writes in his *Kitab al-Arb’in*, “We (the Ash’rites) believe that God is neither body nor substance, and that He is not in space, yet, we believe that we can see God.” But to show his independence of judgment he goes on to assert, “Our companions (the Ash’rites) have given an intellectual reason for the possibility of seeing God, but we have brought 12 objections against it which cannot be answered. Therefore, we only say that we can see God by appealing to transmitted reasoning, i.e. the Qur’anic text.”<sup>20</sup>

Imam Razi also criticized Ash’ari on the question of atomism which is such an essential aspect of the Ash’rite theology. Razi rejected atomism in his earlier works like the *Mabahith al-Mashriqiyyah* and wrote his *Kitab al-Jauhar al-Fard* to refute it, but later works like the great Qur’anic commentary, the *Majafih al-Ghaib*, he accepted it once again. (Atomism does not play a major role in his theology as it does in the system under other Ash’arites like Baqillani.) This change of position occurs also in the rejection of infinity the void, and the plurality of worlds in the earlier writings and their acceptance in later works like the *Mafahh*.

There are several points in Imam Razi’s theology which are of special interest in so far as his particular point of view is concerned. One relates to the question of faith in which he joins most theologians in regarding faith as the necessary and sufficient requirement for being saved. Hell is not for those who have committed evil acts accidentally, but for the infidels who have no faith. Man is, of course, responsible for his work but ultimately all is determined by the divine will. Imam Razi is very emphatic in his determinism and over-throws even the theory of acquisition (*kasb*) of the Ash’arites. His Qur’anic

commentary is full of arguments for determinism, which he defends more openly and ably than any other theologian. God is the creator of both good and evil, faith and impiety, benefit and injury, all these qualities are decreed by the determination of the divine will (*qada wa qada*). Yet, none of the divine acts can be considered to be inappropriate or blameable since God is the creator and ruler of the world, and whatever He does in His kingdom is His own affair and is as such, appropriate.

According to Imam Razi, “God’s attributes and names must be interpreted symbolically (*ta’wil*) in order to be understood.” He follows the method of Imam al-Haramain in applying *ta’wil* to the Qur’an, especially to those verses in which God is attributed with such anthropomorphic qualities as sight, hearing, etc. This does not mean that Razi tries to overcome the rational difficulties of certain principles of faith by *ta’wil*, as did many of the philosophers. For example, on the question of resurrection, unlike the philosophers who believed only in the resurrection of the soul, Imam Razi asserts that at resurrection God will create for each soul in the same body, made of the same elements as those it possessed in this life.

On the question of knowledge and the process of reasoning, Imam Razi is of the view that reason is neither the cause of which knowledge is the effect nor the source which produces knowledge. There is an intelligible succession between the two; God creates a reasoning which knowledge follows necessarily.<sup>21</sup> He accords a definite value to the rational faculty; his aim in theology is, in fact, to create a science which combines and harmonizes reason and revelation, *‘aql* and *naql*. In his Qur’anic commentary, he calls those who have succeeded in integrating these two elements the Muslim sages (*hukma’ islamiyya*), and praises them greatly. His own importance in Muslim theology lies in his success in establishing the school of philosophical *Kalam*, already begun by Ghazālī, in which both intellectual and revelational evidence played important roles.

## C. Philosophy

The importance of Imam Razi in philosophy lies more in his criticism of the philosophers than in the establishment of a new school. Influenced by the writings of Ghazālī, he studied philosophy to such an extent that he became a definite master of it. Unlike the theologians who rejected Greek philosophy totally or the Peripatetics who followed it strictly, Imam Razi criticized many points of Greek philosophy while accepting certain others.

In the introduction to the *Mughath al-Mashriqiyyah*, the most important of his philosophical works, he writes, “Our associates belong to two groups: one consisting of those who imitate the Greek philosophers, permit no one to discuss their thought and take pride in being able to understand their sayings, and the other comprising those who reject all their ideas with exception. Both of these groups are wrong. We have delved deep into the writings of the previous philosophers and have affirmed the true and rejected the false. We have added certain principles to this philosophy and have put forth some new ideas.”<sup>22</sup>

The new ideas of which Imam Razi speaks are mostly those pertaining to the rejection of certain basic elements of Aristotelianism and in some cases of Platonism. In the *Mabahith* he rejects the Platonic ideas, since in the Ash'arite perspective all infinite modes of Being are absorbed in the Absolute. He also criticizes the Platonic notion of knowledge as reminiscence and the most important and penetrating discussions involves criticism of the principle that from Unity only unity can issue forth, *ex uno non fit nisi unum*, a principle held by nearly all medieval philosophers. Imam Razi puts this view to the test of his severe judgment and criticizes it with his usual genius for analysis. He asserts, on the contrary, that from Unity multiplicity can issue forth, but does not pursue the proof of this assertion very far.

The *Mabahith* deals with many other subjects treated in the well-known texts of Muslim philosophy like those of Ibn Sina. In each case it is the acute criticism of commonly held Peripatetic notions that is of interest. In his commentary upon the *al-Isharut w-al-Tunbihat* of Ibn Sina, which after the *Mabahith* is his most important philosophical work, this type of criticism and doubts about Peripatetic philosophy continue – doubts with his student Nassir al-Din Tusi, tried to answer in his own commentary upon the *Isharut*. Ever since these works were written, nearly every student of Peripatetic philosophy in the Muslim world, especially in Persia, has reached this philosophy through the criticism of Imam Razi, so that the thought of Imam Razi has become a permanent heritage of Muslim philosophers.

His other philosophical works, like the commentary upon the '*Uyun al-Hikmah, Lugab al-Iskarut* and many treatises on logic and metaphysics, are also significant, but his greatest philosophical importance lies in the criticisms and doubts cast upon that school but opened the horizon for the other modes of knowledge like *ishraqi* philosophy and gnosis, which are more intimately bound with the spirit of Islam.

## D. The Sciences

There have been very few Muslim theologians who have had a lot of knowledge of the mathematical and natural sciences as Imam Razi. His pre-occupation with the sciences is itself of great interest, because, usually the Sunni theologians and doctors of law shunned any discipline outside the sphere of the strictly religious sciences. Imam Razi, on the contrary, studied all the *awa'il* sciences, that is, the sciences inherited from the Greeks, and was considered by many of his contemporaries to be the greatest authority of his time on them. There is hardly a science in which he did not compose a treatise, although he never occupied himself with the study of nature in the manner of Ibn al-Haitham or Biruni. His main importance in the sciences was in considering their principles and their relation to theology and to the spirit of Islamic revelation.

A field in which Imam Razi excelled is medicine, a discipline the mastery of which one hardly expects from a theologian. He wrote several treatises on health, pulse, and anatomy, and a medical encyclopedia entitled *al-Jami' al-Kabir* or *al-Tibb al-Kabir*, which he never completed. His most important medical work was his commentary upon the *Qanun* of Ibn Sina, which he often criticized, basing himself on the opinions of Galen and the Muslim physicians, especially Mohammad Zakariyya

Razi. The commentary is sufficient evidence that Imam Razi did not learn medicine by reading one or two manuals but studied it thoroughly and was well versed in it. He was, in fact, famous in Herat for his ability and exactitude in diagnosis.

Imam Razi also wrote several treatises on geometry, astronomy, agriculture, politics, history, and comparative religion.<sup>23</sup> Also of interest are his works on the esoteric sciences (*'ulum gharibah*), to which he devoted much attention. There remains among his writings treatise on theurgy (*talismat*), geomancy (*raml*), physiognomy (*firusah*),<sup>24</sup> astrology, and other similar subjects. It is curious that Imam Razi wrote all these treatises, although he was opposed to certain of these subjects like astrology which he attacked throughout his writings.<sup>25</sup> He was, however, more sympathetic to the study of esoteric sciences than either the theologians or the philosophers, as is illustrated by his defence of alchemy against the charges of ibn Sina.<sup>26</sup>

Of particular interest to the history of Muslim sciences is the scientific encyclopedia of Imam Razi, the *Jami' al-'Ulum*.<sup>27</sup> This work offers a good source for the names, definitions, scope, and major principles of the various Muslim sciences. Imam Fakhr begins with a discussion of traditional religious sciences such as theology, jurisprudence, dialectics, comparative religion, inheritance, will and testament, Qur'anic commentary, and reading of the Qur'an and Hadith, and then passes on to the linguistic sciences dealing with grammar, syntax etymology of words, prosody and poetic metre, and, after that to history.

Having considered the transmitted (*naqli*) sciences, he devotes the rest of the book to the intellectual (*'aqli*) sciences which include natural pharmacology, the science of the occult properties of things, alchemy, theurgy, agriculture, geometry, science of weights, arithmetic, algebra, optics, music, astronomy, astrology, metaphysics, ethics and its various branches, and even chess and other games.

Imam Razi describes the principles, scope and major problems of each science. Despite the fact that his discussion is always general and characteristic of an encyclopaedists and never penetrates too deeply into any single science, the work is perfect evidence of his vast erudition and encyclopedic knowledge. In this respect Imam Razi is similar to the Isma'ili of whom, like Sheikh Baha al-Din Amili, took great interest not only in philosophy but also in all the cosmological and mathematical sciences. Imam Fakhr's importance in the Muslim sciences is, therefore, mostly in bringing closer together the theological and cosmological traditions which, until his time, had been far apart, and in studying nature with a view of discovering God's wisdom in creation, as was done by many other Muslim scientists.<sup>28</sup> In this case, as in so many others, he advanced upon a path already trodden by Ghazali.

## E. Commentaries Upon The Qur'an

Imam Razi's fame in the Muslim world lies as much in his commentaries on the Holy Qur'an as in his theological works. He was greatly devoted to the Qur'an as in his theological works. He was greatly devoted to the Qur'an from childhood and studied Qur'anic commentary with his father. His study of all

the other sciences by no means reduced his love for the Qur'an. As he wrote in old age, "I have experienced all the methods of theology and all the ways of philosophy, but I did not find in them the benefit which could equal the benefit I derived from reading the exalted Qur'an."<sup>29</sup>

Imam Razi's Qur'anic commentaries include the *Tafsir al-Fatihah*, *Tafsir Surat al-Baqarah*, *Asma' Allah al-Husna* and *Risalah fi al-Tanbih 'ala ba'd al-Asrur al-Mau'izah fi al-Qur'an*, which last is a theological commentary combined with Sufi ideas in which metaphysics (*ilahiyyat*) is based on the chapter (*surah*) *al-Ikhlās*, prophecy on the chapter *al-A'la*, resurrection on the chapter *al-Tin* and the recording of human actions on the chapter *al-Asr*. The most important of Imam Razi's commentaries is the voluminous *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, known as the "Great Commentary" (*Tafsir al-Kabir*), which was collected and organized by Ibn al-Khu'i and Suyuti after his death. This work is the most important theological commentary ever written on the Qur'an.

Imam Razi makes this also an occasion to expose his encyclopedic knowledge in that he inter-mingles history, geography, and other branches of knowledge in the commentary of the Qur'anic text wherever possible. He mentions and praises often in this work the Muslim sages who combine intellectual principles with the principles of Islamic revelation.

He also analyzes the stories of the Qur'an and interprets their theological and metaphysical meanings. Despite its volume and the number of topics which do not seem very relevant to the immediate subject-matter, the *Mafatih* is an impressive theological Qur'anic commentary. In its intellectual interpretation and the combining of *'aql* and *naql*, or reason and authority, and in the understanding of the sacred Scripture it remains one of the major commentaries upon the Qur'an.

## **F. Jurisprudence (Fiqh)**

Although primarily occupied with theology, Imam Razi occasionally devoted himself to jurisprudence as well. The few works like *al-Mahsul fi al-Usul al-Fiqh*, *al-Ma'alim*, and *Ihkam al-Ahkum* bear evidence to his mastery of jurisprudence which he interpreted according to the school of exegetes. As already mentioned, he belonged to the Shafi'i school of which he was considered to be one of the '*ulama'*' and authentic interpreters. Imam Razi was particularly well versed in the principles of jurisprudence (*Usul*), which he treated in a manner similar to theology. This subject has in fact never been able to divorce itself from *Kalam*, and is still studied almost as if it were one of its branches. The importance of Imam Razi in Shafi'i jurisprudence lies more in his contribution to the theoretical principles of *Fiqh* than in their actual application embodied in the *fatwas* of the various Shafi'i '*ulama'*'.

## **G. Dialectic, Rhetoric, And Poetry**

Following the example of Ghazali, Imam Razi became a dialectical theologian and, as his works testify, excelled in dialectics. He was famous for his eloquence in persuasion and argumentation, for the quickness of his intelligence and keenness of wit. These gifts were combined with a rhetorical power

which made him the most famous preacher in Herat. Hardly would a scholar dare enter into debate with him; those who took sides against him would soon feel the thrust of his dialectical and rhetorical weapons.

The *Munazarat* bears ample evidence of these traits. In its pages one sees Imam Razi as a tiger that pounces mercilessly upon his helpless adversary and has little regard for softness in discourse. Much of his energy throughout life was spent in attacking bitterly the small sects which arose against the main orthodoxy, such as the Karramlyyah, who probably finally poisoned him.<sup>30</sup> As the *Sheikh al-Islam* of Herat, his main duty was to preach and defend Islam, and he took the opportunity of using his remarkable gifts of rhetoric and dialectic in a manner which made him one of the most famous of Muslim preachers.

Imam Razi also had the gift of poetry, and many verses both in Arabic and Persian are attributed to him. As in the case of many other sages like Khayyam, poetry became for Imam Razi the vehicle for the expression of gnosis and the form of “ignorance” which lies above all formal knowledge. In a quatrain in Persian he writes:

*“My heart was never deprived of science,*

*There are little of the mysteries that I did not understand.*

*For 72 years I thought night and day,*

*Yet I came to know that nothing is to be known.”*

## H. Sufism

There is little doubt that Imam Razi was sympathetic to Sufism, especially in later life, when he wrote most of his poems like the one mentioned above. Moreover, many of his works are, like his Qur’anic commentary, full of Sufistic ideas, and in *Laudmi’ al Bayyinat* he outlines the degree of knowledge in a manner very similar to the Sufi treatise of Suhrawardi, *Safir-i Simurgh*.<sup>31</sup> He is altogether a theologian with sympathies towards Sufism.

What is difficult for us to discover is whether Imam Razi was a practicing Sufi or not. Certainly Sufism is not as evident in his writings as in Ghazālī’s and his life, rich in worldly fame and wealth, had none of the ascetic elements of the life of his great predecessor. There is even an extant letter from the master of gnosis, the Anadalusian Sufi, Sheikh al-Akbar Muhyi al-Din ibn ‘Arabi, advising Imam Razi to leave dialectic and discursive thought and try to reach the stage of gnosis and contemplation, telling him that in heaven medicine and geometry will do him little good.<sup>32</sup>

Moreover, in his writings as in his life, Imam Razi displayed aggressiveness and fighting quality hardly characteristic of the lives and writings of the Sufis.

Yet, despite all this negative evidence, some of his later writings do show the clear influence of Sufism upon him, and it may be that, because of his social position, even after joining the circle of the Sufis, he, to a large extent, has sympathies and affiliations in order to avoid any external opposition. His own poems and his great love for the blind Arab poet Abu 'Ala' al-Ma'arri, the gnostic who often appears like a sceptic to the uncritical eye, on whose *Diwan* he is said to have commented, point to the fact that Imam Razi was not an ordinary theologian, but knew that there is another form of knowledge, gnosis, which lies above all rational sciences like theology. Whether he actually participated in this knowledge in an effective way, is a question too difficult to answer from either historical evidence or internal evidence from his own writings.<sup>33</sup>

There is a poem of Imam Razi which is in itself almost sufficient evidence for his Sufism. In the original Arabic it is so beautiful and effective that hardly any of his biographers has failed to mention it. Written in old age by a man who was the leading scholar and theologian of his day and who enjoyed all the comfort and glory of the life of this world, it is a vivid reminder that beyond the sphere of all human life and knowledge there is another reality which man must seek in order to remain faithful in his own intimate nature. The poem begins with these verses:

*“Our souls fear our bodies as if they want to separate from them.*

*The result of our life in this world has been nothing but pain to others and sin.”*

## I. The Significance And Influence Of Imam Razi

The many sided genius of Imam Razi, to which the previous pages bear partial witness, makes him one of the most colourful figures in Islam. Following the example of Ghazālī, by whom he was profoundly influenced and whose retreat in Tus he visited, Razi spent a life time in combating the rationalistic aspect of Greek philosophy. Although not of equal stature to Ghazālī in Sufism and ethics, he, nevertheless, exercised as much influence, especially in theology, as did his more famous predecessor. Possessed of a special gift for posing problems and for analyzing philosophical questions, he left an indelible mark upon all later Muslim philosophers, especially upon Khuwaja Najr al-Din Tusi, his student, who was the reviver of Muslim philosophy after Imam Razi, and was also the most famous of Shi'ah theologians.

Imam Razi's role in Muslim intellectual life, besides establishing the school of philosophical *Kalam* begun by Ghazālī, was to intensify the attack against Peripatetic philosophy, thereby preparing the way for the propagation of the metaphysical doctrines of the Ishraqis and Sufis who, like Imam Razi, opposed the rationalism inherent in Aristotelianism. With the method of doubt in which was the greatest master in Islam, he analyzed and criticized Peripatetic philosophy in a way hardly ever equalled by anyone except Ghazālī. Yet, he was a theologian also interested in the cosmological, natural and esoteric sciences.<sup>34</sup>

Imam Razi played an important role in bringing theology closer to the sciences and even to Sufism, with which he flavoured this theological works. In the centuries when the Muslim world was turning away from

Peripatetic rationalism toward modes of thought more akin to its own spirit, Imam Razi played a major role in this transformation. He remains as one of the most arresting figures among Muslim theologians, a figure the power of whose thought spread over the whole Muslim world at the very moment when the Mongol onslaught was putting an end to the caliphate, to the survival of which his work was to a large extent dedicated.

## Bibliography

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1. For the definition and description of this term refer to the chapter on "Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi Maqtul."
2. According to a hadith, in each century God sends a great sage and scholar into the world to strengthen Islam. Muslim historians, following the hadith, have searched during each century for the fittest person to receive this honour.
3. He was given this title because he doubted so many of the views of previous philosophers and even of theologians.
4. In the *Wafayat al-A'yan*, ibn Khallikan writes that Imam Razi was the greatest authority on the Greek sciences ('ulum al-awd'il) in his time. The best sources for the biography of Razi are ibn Abi Usaibi'ah, 'Uyan al Anba', ibn al-Qifti, *Tarikh al-Hukama'*, ibn Khallikan, *Kitab Wajaydi al-A'yan*, Shams al-Din Shahrazuri, *Nuzhat al-Arwah wa Raudat al-Afrah*, and ibn Taqi al-Din al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyyat al-Kubra*
5. Al-Subki, *Tabaqat al-Shafi'iyyat al-Kubra*, Matba'at al-Husainiyyah, Cairo, 1324/1906, vol. 5 pp 33 – 40.
6. Although not a great Sufi figure like Ghazali, Imam Razi was, nevertheless, sympathetic towards Sufism, especially in the latter period of his life. Subki, op. cit., p. 35, writes that Razi was himself a Sufi and some of his poems and frequent quotations from the Sufi masters like Hallaj and Abu Sa'id certainly pointed in this direction.
7. For an outline of the ideas of the group of Muslim thinkers who were influenced by Platonic physics, see S. Pines, *Beitrage zur islamischen Atomenlehre*, Berlin, A. Heine Gtubh, Grafenhainichen, 1936.
8. It is far from accidental that the philosophy and the sciences which were connected with the Greek heritage flourished, especially in the fourth/tenth century, when most of the Muslim world was governed by the Shi'ah Buwaibids and Fatimids.
9. The opposition of this group to Greek philosophy was primarily against its rationalistic and syllogistic aspects. The cosmological and certain metaphysical doctrines of the Greeks were not only criticized but were also openly accepted by them. So we see a Ghazali using Hermetic symbolism or a Fakhr Razi writing numerous treatises on the cosmological

sciences.

- [10.](#) For a bibliography of his works, see Subki, op., cit., pp. 33 – 40 and Imam Razi's *I'tiqadat Farq al-Muslimin w-al-Mushrikin*, Maktabat al Nahdat al-Misrtyyah, Cairo, 1356/1937, Introduction by Sheikh 'Abd al-Razzaq, pp. 27ff.
- [11.](#) Imam Razi's student, Khwajah Nasir al-Din Tusi, wrote many works answering his teacher's criticism of ibn Sina and other philosophers.
- [12.](#) See Fakhr al-Din Razi, *Munazarut, Dairatul-Maarif-il-Osmania*, Hyderabad, 1355/1936, where he also criticizes certain parts of Ghazali's *Tahafut al-Falasifah* on the motion of planets. See also P. Kraus, "Les 'controverse' de Fakhr al-Din, Razi," *Bulletin de l'Instiut d'Egypt*, t. 29, 1936-37, pp. 187 – 214.
- [13.](#) For a history of Muslim theology, especially of the Sunni school, see Shibli Nu'mani, *Tarikh 'Ilm-i Kalam*, tr. M. Fakhr Da'i Gilani, Rangin Press, Teheran, 1328/1910, and L. Gardet and M. M. Anawati, *Introduction a la theologie musulmane*, Librarie Philosophique J.Vrin, Paris, 1948.
- [14.](#) The theological masterpiece, the *Tujrid* of Khwajah Nasir al-Din Tusi, who is the greatest of the Shi'ah theologians, is to a large extent, influenced by Imam Razi's *Masa'il al-Khamzun*.
- [15.](#) This title, however, is more commonly given to Mir Damad, the master of theology and philosophy during the Sufawid period.
- [16.](#) Fakhr al-Din Razi, *Lawami' al-Bayyandi*, Library of Imam Rida, Meshed, MS. Cat. No. 233
- [17.](#) Imam Razi, like the Christian theologians, considered Kalam to be the queen of the sciences and sub-ordinated all the other rational sciences like philosophy and the mathematical and natural sciences to it.
- [18.](#) For a more detailed discussion of this work, see L. Gardet and M.M. Anawati, op. cit., pp 162 – 64.
- [19.](#) In all Muslim theology it is considered obligatory upon each Muslim to prove the existence of Good according to his intellectual ability. See F. Schuon, "Nature et arguments de la foi," *Etudes Traditionelles*, vol. 54, Dec. 1953, pp 344 – 63.
- [20.](#) Fakhr al-Din Razi, *Kitab al-Arba'in fi Usul al-Din, Dairatul-Maarif-il-Osmania*, Hayderabad, 1333/1934, p. 190
- [21.](#) Many theologians before Razi considered this relation between reason and knowledge to be custom ('*ddah*), but he explicitly rejects this notion.
- [22.](#) Fakhr al-Din Razi, *al-Mabahith al-Mashriqiyya, Dairatul-Masarif-il-Osmania*, Hyderabad, 1343/1924, vol. 1, p.4
- [23.](#) His historical works include *Kitab Fada'il al-Sahabah* and *Kitab Monaqib al-Imam Shafi'i* and his work on comparative religion, the *I'tiquadat Farq al-Muslimin w-al-Mughrikin*.
- [24.](#) See Y. Mourad, *La physiognomie arabe el le Kitab al-Firasah de Fakhr al-Din al-Razi*, Librarie Orientaliste, Paul Geuthner, Paris, 1939.
- [25.](#) See *Munzarat*, pp. 20 – 24.
- [26.](#) See *Mabahith...*, p. 214.
- [27.](#) This work Imam Fakhr wrote for Khwarizm Shah Abu al-Muzaffar ibn Malik al-Mu'azzam. It has always been a popular scientific encyclopedia and was printed in a lithographed edition in Bombay in 1323/1905.
- [28.](#) Imam Fakhr's writings are full of passages in which he appeals to various natural phenomena as "signs" of the different divine qualities and names. See his *Asrar al-Tanzil*, Teheran, lithographed edition, 1301/1883, pp. 68ff.
- [29.](#) Ibn Abi Usaibi'ah, *Usaibi'ah, 'Uyun al-Anba' fi Tabaqat al-Atibba'*, *Matba'at al Wahabiyyah*, Cairo, vol. 2, p. 27.
- [30.](#) There is a story told of Imam Razi's opposition to the Isma'ilis. He used to attack them bitterly in public, accusing them of having no proofs for their doctrines. One day, one of their agents, posing as a student, found Imam Razi alone in his library, pulled out a knife and pointed it to his chest saying, "This is our proof."

Henceforth, Imam Fakhr never attacked the Isma'ilis in public. One day, the disciples asked him why he no longer spoke against this group – the group which he had opposed so bitterly before. he replied, "Because I have seen their proof." This story appears in nearly all the biographies of Imam Fakhr which we have already mentioned and is characteristic of his wisdom in public life.

[31.](#) See the chapter on "Shihab al-Din Suhrawardi Maqtul."

[32.](#) See Fakhr al-Din Razi, *al-Risalat al-Kamaliyah fi al-Haqa'iq al-Ilahiyyah*, Tehran University Press, 1335 Solar, Introduction by Sayyid Mohammad Baqir Sabziwari, p. (kt)

[33.](#) There is a story told that Imam Razi met the Sufi Najm al-Din Kubra in a gathering and boasted of his religious

knowledge and said that he knew a hundred proofs for the existence of God. Najm al-Din answered, "Is not each proof due to some doubt? God has placed in the heart of the Sufi a light of certainty which dispels all doubt so that he no longer has need of proofs." Imam Razi, upon hearing this answer, surrendered himself to the Sheikh and was initiated into Sufism.

[34](#). It is of great interest that not only in the Muslim world but also in medieval Christianity and in China, many of those who pre-occupied themselves with the science of nature, like the Taoists, Ikhwan al-Safa, and the Franciscans, were opposed to philosophical rationalism and accepted some form of esoteric and metaphysical doctrine based on intellectual intuition and revelation.

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