



## Abū Bakr al-Rāzī (9<sup>th</sup> / 10<sup>th</sup>)

### 1. Biographical Notes

- **Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā Al-Rāzī**, known to the Latins as “Rhazes” was born 250/854 in Rayy (near present-day Tehran) where he also died in 313/925 or 323/935. (The date of Rāzī’s death is not certain).
- **Physician, “free-thinking” philosopher and alchemist.** Although he was well trained in various fields of science, he had the greatest success in the field of medicine. His philosophical work was criticized or rejected at all, especially for his polemic view on prophecy and revelation.

### 2. Historical Context

- peak of Mu’tazzilism
- At the end of the 9<sup>th</sup> Century and at the beginning of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century, the relation between Philosophy and Religion changed. Philosophical “free-thinkers” (like e.g. Abu ‘Isā al-Warrāq, Ibn al-Rawāndī and al-Rāzī) claimed more independence.
- crystallization of “falsafa”

### 3. Works and main subjects according to philosophy

#### a. Metaphysics

Al-Rāzī’s creation myth based on five eternal principles: time, space, matter, soul and the creator. In the originally form they were separated from each other, but then a crucial event happened which provoked an ongoing process till nowadays. The soul attempted to unite with the matter. The soul failed but God in His grace intervened, shared his own intelligence with the world that Soul’s hasty desire had formed. Intelligence gave order and stability to the world, but it also gave understanding to the Soul itself, allowing it to recognise its division in this world and seek a return from exile to its original state. (cf. EI<sup>2</sup> VIII (1995), p. 474 c.1)

Al-Rāzī’s understandings of the world on three poles:

- a superior knowledge and merciful god
- a pre-existent, independent constellation of physic conditions (eternity of time, space and material)
- a vital soul, which one is seeking perfection

## b. Epistemology

In opposition to al-Farābī, Avicenna and so forth (“active-“ & “passive intellect”) al-Rāzī claims that every human has the possibility to get intuition and fulfill his life, without guidance from another, because God gives every human being, like a gift, access to the intellect.

This approach implies that he rejected the concept of revelation; asked if a philosopher can follow a prophetically revealed religion, al-Rāzī replied:

“How can anyone think philosophically while committed to those old wives' tales, founded on contradictions, obdurate ignorance, and dogmatism (*muḳim 'alā 'l-ikhtilāfat, muṣirr 'alā 'l-djahl wa 'l-taḳlid*)?” (EI<sup>2</sup> VIII (1995), p. 474 c.1)

Hence he rejected prophecy and the role of the prophets as mediators between God and men. Abu Bakr Al-Rāzī even argued that all Prophets are charlatans, which use miracles to betray the people.

## c. Ethical and moral Philosophy

Al-Rāzī's approach on ethical doctrines could be discovered in two books that fortunately survived – al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī (The Spiritual Physick) and al-Sīra al-falsafiyya (The Philosophical Life). “His entire ethics (in religion as well as in life in general) is focused on the appeal to reason to control passion (al-hawa)” (Goodman 2003: 198-215). Part of the profit of his physiological understanding of pleasure, is that it frees one from the fear of death.

Therefore, the ultimate end for which humans were created does not comprise a physical existence but another world, one without death and pain. For that reason the soul must be educated (for example: learn through experience) and trained till an accurate state of virtue is reached and salvation from suffering pain and unending distress in this world is possible.

## 4. Summary & Influences

- influential medical scientist
- voluminous writings in the entire field of philosophy but only a few have survived
- As a result of his radical “free-thinking” he was rejected as philosopher.
- broadly criticized and called heretical but never faced persecution
- refusal of revealed religions and prophecy
- His polemical view on religious habits at the root of prejudice might have an effect on later philosophers like Maimonides and Averroes.



## 5. Outline of several philosophical books by al-Rāzī (cf. Fakhry 1983: 98)

1. A group of logical treatises dealing with the Categories, Demonstration, Isagoge, and with logic, as expressed in the idiom of Islamic Kalam.
2. A group of treatises on metaphysics in general.
3. Absolute and Particular Matter.
4. Plenum and Vacuum, Time and Space.
5. Physics.
6. That the World Has a Wise Creator.
7. On the Eternity and Noneternity of Bodies.
8. Refutation of Proclus.
9. „Plutarch’s“ Physical Opinions (Placita Philosophorum).
10. A Commentary on the Timaeus.
11. A Commentary on Plutarch’s Commentary on the Timaeus.
12. A Treatise Showing That Bodies Move by Themselves and That Movement Belongs to Them Essentially.
13. The Spiritual Physic.
14. The Philosophical Way.
15. On the Soul.
16. On the Sayings of the Infallible Imam.
17. A Refutation of the Mu’tazilah.
18. Metaphysics according to Plato’s Teaching.

**Al-Rāzī wrote three books where he criticized revealed religions and Prophecy in particular. Unfortunately only fragments survived. (cf. Stroumsa 1999: 93)**

1. “The Prophets’ Fraudulent Tricks” (Mahariq al-anbiya)
2. “The Stratagems of Those Who Claim to Be Prophets” (Hiyal al-mutanabbiyin)
3. “On the Refutation of Revealed Religions” (Fi nakd al-adyan)

## 6. Resources

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