

A Critical Examination of Fakhr al-Razi's View on the Conditions of Moral Action Emanating from Humans

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Abstract

Fakhr al-Razi holds two distinct views regarding how moral action emanates from humans. First, he points to the interaction of the soul and body, and the role of faculties and physical structure in the issuance of moral action. In his second theory (the theory of the ranks of souls), he divides humans into three categories: "the Muqarrabun" (those drawn near), "the Ashab al-Yamin" (the companions of the right), and "the Ashab al-Shimal" (the companions of the left), each possessing different capacities and moral standings. The Muqarrabun are immersed in divine knowledge and connected to the science of spiritual discipline; the Ashab al-Yamin have the potential for movement toward perfection and knowledge of ethics; and the Ashab al-Shimal lack any capacity for ethical transformation. By emphasizing the intrinsic and unchangeable nature of souls, Fakhr al-Razi deems moral change impossible for some individuals—a view that also relates to contemporary concepts of weakness of will (akrasia) and moral indifference, albeit with greater stringency regarding the possibility of ethical transformation. In proving the essential difference among souls, he attributes ethical differences in children to innate differences in their souls, rejecting the influence of the body and environment. This stance has been criticized, however, for neglecting genetic and prenatal factors, making incorrect generalizations from behavioral differences to essential differences, and underestimating environmental influences. This article, while noting the rational and Quranic origins of Fakhr al-Razi's view, addresses the main criticisms leveled against his theory of the ranks of souls.

Keywords

Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, levels of the human soul, Ashāb al-Yamīn, akrasia, weakness of will.

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