

The Dynamics of Human Character Development from the Perspective of Ar-Razi

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ABSTRACT

The experiences humans encounter throughout life shape their character and behavior toward their surroundings. Human development from birth continuously undergoes dynamic changes, both physically and mentally. This issue also concerned Ar-Razi, who sought to explore the dynamics of the human psyche while remaining grounded in Islamic principles and scientific knowledge. He introduced a theory of character development consisting of four phases: (1) the age of growth, (2) adolescence, (3) middle age, and (4) old age. Ar-Razi also classified levels of the soul based on his interpretation of Surah Al-Kawthar into three stages: (1) the highest level, in which the heart and soul are immersed in the light of Allah; (2) the second level, characterized by devotion to Allah through various forms of physical worship; and (3) the third level, the lowest degree, which is oriented toward worldly matters. This article aims to explore Ar-Razi's theory of development holistically.

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1. INTRODUCTION

Humans and the soul are two inseparable elements in the study of psychology. The experiences individuals encounter throughout life shape human character and behavior toward the surrounding environment [1]. Human development from birth continuously undergoes dynamic changes, both physically and mentally [2]. These changes may be either negative or positive. Such changes are essentially the result of human creativity, intellect, and will, which continue to develop and progress over time [3].

Developmental psychology, as a branch of psychology, examines various intra-individual and inter-individual changes that occur within an individual's development. The general public needs to understand the difference between the terms growth and development, which are often used interchangeably [4]. Growth focuses on physical changes

related to body weight, height, and physiological aspects. Development, on the other hand, refers to mental changes in individuals, encompassing emotions, attitudes, and behaviors that unfold throughout the life span and are closely related to psychological processes [5]. Both concepts serve as references for understanding patterns of individual change over time and help parents and teachers determine appropriate parenting and educational approaches for children.

Psychology has developed significantly among contemporary scholars, producing a wide range of psychological theories that address specific aspects of development [6]. Some of the most well-known include Jean Piaget's cognitive theory, Sigmund Freud's psychoanalytic theory, Bronfenbrenner's ecological theory, and Kohlberg's moral development theory [7]. Islam itself also has distinguished scholars who have contributed to the development of psychological knowledge, particularly through the discipline of ethics (akhlaq), which focuses on human attitudes and behavior [8]. One prominent figure is Al-Ghazali, whose theory of spiritual levels is well known. All of these theories share a concern for the stages of human development across various aspects examined by each scholar throughout the human life cycle [9].

The author seeks to explore the potential of other developmental theories that emerged during the golden age of Islamic civilization to illustrate the richness of Islamic intellectual heritage, particularly in the fields of psychology and ethics [10]. Given that scholars of that era were often experts across multiple disciplines, it was challenging to identify a figure who closely aligned with the theme of this study. Among the figures examined, Fakhruddin ar-Razi emerged as a relevant scholar. He introduced a theory of character development consisting of four phases: (1) the age of growth, (2) adolescence, (3) middle age, and (4) old age.

Ar-Razi's theory of character development is particularly interesting to discuss because it is presented in a simple yet clear manner. His book *Kitab al-Firasah* (The Book of Physiognomy) was a popular and influential work in its time. However, this also posed challenges in finding broader references on Ar-Razi's theory of character development, even though his concise explanations are elaborated further in subsequent discussions within *Kitab al-Firasah* and in several of his exegetical works, summarized in *Mafatih al-Ghaib* [11].

Ar-Razi's theory of character development does not revolve solely around periodic stages of life, but also addresses the development of character arising from physiological changes that occur during these periods. Moreover, Ar-Razi employs an Islamic framework of thought, giving his theory a moral orientation toward the ultimate purpose of human life, which is also directed toward the divine. This article is expected to discuss Ar-Razi's theory of character development by expanding on the relationship between individual character development and age, and by examining the nature of the soul as formulated within this theory and its underlying causes. The author also attempts to relate the principles of the soul to human dignity as it emerges in the developmental periods identified by Ar-Razi, linking his theory of the soul to aspects of individual spiritual journeys (*latha'if*) as interpreted from Surah Al-Kawthar.

2. METHOD

The method employed in this study is a qualitative literature review. Data are collected by gathering relevant sources, identifying the required theories (grounded theory), and examining scientific literature and books related to the article's topic. This method is complemented by the author's analytical perspectives, which are grounded in established scientific theories. Based on this approach, two types of data sources are used: primary and secondary sources. The primary source in this study is the book *Kitab al-Firasah*, written by Ar-Razi. The secondary or supporting sources consist of books and scholarly journals directly related to the article's theme and serve to support and enrich the primary source.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Biography of Ar-Razi

In many literature reviews discussing Ar-Razi's theories or thoughts, scholars often present his biography, either in general or in specific terms. This serves as an important instrument for a deep understanding of the body of ideas developed by Ar-Razi, enabling a comprehensive interpretation of his intellectual contributions [12]. The background of a thinker can also provide a foundation for understanding why a particular theory emerged and developed in a distinctive manner, becoming a hallmark of its originator [7].

Ar-Razi was born with the full name Abu Abdullah Muhammad ibn Umar ibn Husain ibn Hasan ibn Ali al-Tamimi, al-Bakhri ath-Thabaristani al-Razi, and was also known as Ibn al-Khatib al-Shafi'i. Scholars believe his lifespan ranged from approximately 554–606 AH (1150–1210 CE) and that he was born in Ray, near present-day Tehran, Iran. He was a descendant of Ali ibn Abi Talib through the line of Hasan, which connected him to the Quraysh tribe. In the Western world, Ar-Razi is often referred to as Rhazes. He is regarded as a pioneer in the field of moral science (*akhlaq*) after al-Ghazali.

His father, Imam Dhiya'uddin Umar, was not only an expert in Shafi'i jurisprudence but also a scholar of *usul al-fiqh* and hadith. He served as the *Khatib* of Ray and was a companion of Imam al-Bughawi. For this reason, Fakhruddin ar-Razi later received the title Ibn Khatib al-Ray, which was attributed to his father. Ar-Razi studied the Qur'an, *usul al-fiqh*, and several other disciplines under his father's direct supervision until his father's death. Afterward, he continued his studies with various scholars in Ray, including Majd al-Din al-Jaili, a renowned scholar of wisdom (*hikmah*), theology (*kalam*), and jurisprudence. Ar-Razi studied under him for a considerable period, eventually surpassing his contemporaries in intellectual mastery.

After completing his education, Ar-Razi mastered nearly all branches of knowledge of his time, including mathematics, medicine, and natural sciences. He later traveled to Khwarizm to disseminate his ideas, then to Transoxiana, where he was warmly received as an advisor to the ruler of Ghur. He subsequently moved to Ghaznah, where he remained until the end of his life as a royal scholar. Among his many influential works, two of the most notable are *Kitab al-Firasah* and *Mafatih al-Ghaib*, which significantly contributed to the fields of moral science and Qur'anic exegesis, his primary areas of expertise.

Some historical accounts mention that Ar-Razi had a brother, whom he deeply cared for, although the affection was not reciprocated. His brother reportedly felt overshadowed

by Ar-Razi's remarkable intellectual achievements, leading to Ar-Razi's imprisonment by the authorities of the time, an event that deeply saddened him, especially after the loss of his respected father. These experiences are believed to have motivated Ar-Razi to develop ideas on psychological healing related to negative human traits such as stinginess and envy [13]. His relocation from Ghur to Ghaznah to avoid jealousy from other scholars and court officials further influenced his interest in studying immoral human behavior and methods to address it. He also expressed deep sorrow over the death of his eldest son in several of his exegetical discussions. The hardships he endured throughout his life appear to have formed an emotional foundation for the theories and hermeneutical approaches he presented in his philosophical works [4].

Few philosophers of his era possessed expertise in mathematics, the natural sciences, and Qur'anic exegesis comparable to that of Ar-Razi. He emphasized understanding the fundamental principles of knowledge by connecting them with the spirit of Islamic revelation, reflecting the framework of his intellectual methodology. His approach combined revelation and reason, Qur'anic concepts, interdisciplinary scholarship, and the doctrines of the *salaf al-salih* alongside rationality [14].

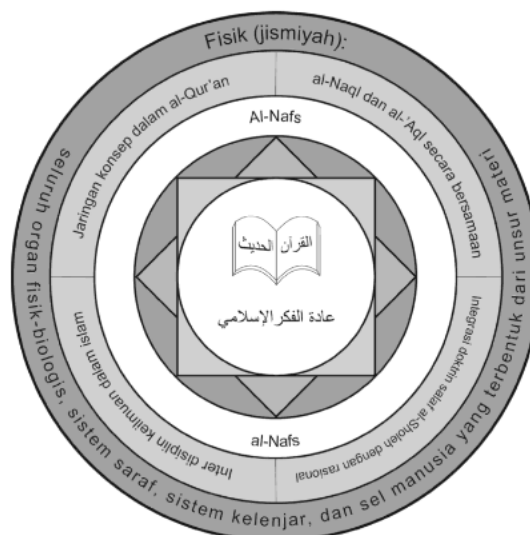


Figure 1. Ar-Razi's Framework Model

The Essence of the Soul

It is undeniable that there are differences in the concept of the soul between contemporary psychology and Islamic psychology [15]. In contemporary psychology, the notion of the soul still includes worldly aspects, as expressed by Freud, who argued that the basic human potential is not much different from that of animals and is oriented toward sexual drives. In contrast, Islamic psychology is grounded in a different definition. It emphasizes the meaning of the soul in relation to the body as a creation of Allah SWT [16].

According to ar-Razi, the soul is a substance distinct from the body and essentially separate from it; the regulation and instruction of bodily organs function merely as instruments and tools of the soul. Development occurs in every phase of life, without

specifying which phase maximizes the soul's potential. This view aligns with al-Ghazali's perspective that the soul (*nafs*) is a subsystem consisting of the spirit (*ruh*), intellect (*'aql*), and heart (*qalb*), all of which are motivating forces that influence bodily actions [17].

Aspects Constituting the Soul

Ar-Razi held views that were relatively controversial among his contemporaries. While the Jabariyah school viewed human actions as the result of human helplessness before God's will, and the Qadariyah emphasized free will and human accountability in the Hereafter, the Ash'ari school proposed the theory of *kasb*, which posits that human actions are carried out by humans through God's will, involving cooperation between God and His creatures in motivating behavior [18].

However, ar-Razi leaned more toward the Jabariyah perspective, emphasizing human submission to divine will. This stance was based on his belief that any actuality without motivation constitutes a denial of God, as potential requires reinforcement (*murajjih*). His philosophical background likely influenced his views. Accordingly, ar-Razi proposed that the purification of the soul is achieved through philosophy:

“To return to God, the soul must first be purified, and what purifies the soul is knowledge and self-restraint from actions not grounded in knowledge.”

In *Ath-Thibb ar-Ruhani*, ar-Razi classified the soul into three types: (1) the Rational Soul, (2) the Emotional Soul, and (3) the Vegetative Soul. This classification resembles the typologies proposed by al-Ghazali and al-Kindi, namely the vegetative, animal, and human faculties. Ar-Razi also associated each category with inherent traits.

a. Rational soul (*an-Nafs an-Nathiqah al-Ilahiyah*)

This is a divine-oriented soul associated with the concept of transcendent unity. Ar-Razi likened it to a horse rider engaged in hunting.

b. Emotional soul (*an-Nafs al-Ghadabiyah wa al-Hayawaniyah*)

This soul possesses animalistic traits and strong emotions. It assists the rational soul in restraining the vegetative soul and preventing indulgence in base desires (Haryanto in Sudarsono, 2023). God grants it two faculties: a motor faculty for direct movement and a perceptive faculty that triggers movement through sensory and emotional stimuli, both outward and inward.

c. Vegetative Soul (*an-Nafs an-Nabatiyah wa an-Namiyah wa as-Shahwaniyah*)

This soul resembles plant-like characteristics, marked by heat and moisture, which may potentially harm the body. Therefore, God provides nutrition and generative power to sustain life and enable reproduction.

Character Development

Ar-Razi categorized character traits through several aspects, one of which is age-based development. He divided human development into four phases, which are more concise than Piaget's cognitive theory or Freud's psychoanalytic stages [19]. Ar-Razi focused particularly on character development as related to physiognomy.

a. Growth Age (0–12 years)

This phase is defined as a transition from weakness and dependence to independence and self-sufficiency, representing a process of completion. Children develop in both physical and spiritual ways. Ar-Razi divided this stage into infancy (first two years), early childhood (ages 3–5), and late childhood (ages 6–12). At this stage, the body contains a balanced excess of heat and moisture, which shape children's behavior. The soul is empty of binding beliefs derived from positive or negative experiences.

Behaviors include natural desires for basic needs such as eating and drinking, rapidly changing desires, egocentrism, a need for appreciation and praise, minimal material interest, high trustfulness, modesty rooted in innate purity, and a tendency toward kindness and gentleness.

b. Adolescence (13–20 years)

This phase represents the attainment of perfection. Excess heat and dryness influence adolescent behavior, leading to a love of pleasure, social interaction, playful conduct, self-confidence bordering on vanity, and susceptibility to anger without fear. Adolescents may incline toward injustice while still retaining empathy for others.

c. Middle age (21–60 years)

Known as *Kuhulah*, this phase reflects balanced inner character between recklessness and cowardice, belief and skepticism. Individuals strive to harmonize usefulness with pleasure, preserve dignity, and display peak intellectual capacity while physical strength remains intact.

d. Old age (60 years and above)

At this stage, personality is dominated by coldness and dryness. Individuals rely heavily on experience, are firm yet hesitant in decision-making, and often express uncertainty about the future. Their orientation shifts toward material concerns rather than validation. Moral decline may manifest as diminished self-respect, fearfulness, heightened emotional sensitivity, indirect wrongdoing, and guarded affection driven by fear of external disturbance. Reduced sexual desire contributes to a peaceful and reserved disposition. Humans at this stage possess a perfect understanding of cause and effect and tend to be quiet and peaceful due to the coldness of old age, which also decreases their sexual desire. Shamelessness and a decreased desire to do good also emerge. Their emotions are easily provoked, though not explosive. Injustice is also not carried out as openly as during the growing years, leading to frequent acts of treason and deception by individuals at this stage. The loving attitude at this stage is driven by a fear of external interference, leading to avoidance of such treatment.

Ar-Razi's theory often links the attitudes displayed in his stages to Hippocrates' theory of human typology, associating them with the dominant concentration of body fluids. Therefore, the terms sanguine (associated with hot characteristics), choleric (dry characteristics), phlegmatic (cold characteristics), and melancholic (moist characteristics) often appear prominent in his theoretical expositions [20]. Ar-Razi more frequently relates these to the body's temperature and climate at each stage.

The Diversity of Levels of the Soul and the Interpretation of the Soul in Surah Al-Kawthar

Ar-Razi classifies the levels of the human soul into three categories based on the orientation of the spirit (*ruh*): (1) the God-oriented soul, (2) the intermediate soul, and (3) the soul that seeks worldly pleasures. The first group represents the highest level, known as *as-sābiqīn*. They are oriented toward the Divine realm and are immersed in divine light and knowledge. This level can be attained through consistent spiritual practice. The intermediate group possesses a moderate and balanced soul; at times, they may reach the highest level through *'ubūdiyyah* (servitude) and obedience, yet they may also descend to the lowest level when dominated by self-regulation and ego-driven actions. At this stage, an understanding of moral science (*'ilm al-akhlāq*) is essential. Meanwhile, souls oriented toward worldly pleasure and material existence become immersed in personal pursuits and tend toward the “left” category, exhibiting unjust behavior [21].

Considering that ar-Razi frequently integrated philosophical thought into his understanding of religious sciences, he also categorized the soul based on the spiritual journey toward perfection (*laṭā'if*) through his interpretation of Surah Al-Kawthar into three levels:

- a. The highest level, namely those whose hearts and spirits are immersed and dissolved in the light (*nūr*) of Allah.
- b. The second level, namely, those who are occupied with the worship of Allah through various forms of physical acts of devotion.
- c. The third level, the lowest rank, consists of souls that are reluctant and preoccupied with bodily matters and transient, worldly desires (Mustapa in Ar-Razi, 1995).

The Relationship Between the Soul and Human Dignity

Ar-Razi emphasizes the close relationship between human moral quality and the purity or impurity of the soul from reprehensible actions. This is closely linked to the strength of *tawḥīd* embedded within individuals, which unites faith and patterns of thought. According to ar-Razi, monotheism must be implemented in concrete practice, and the purification of the soul requires the courage to liberate oneself from ignorance and sin [22]. This aligns with his discussion of the soul's substance, which requires motivation to actualize itself as a form of servitude to Allah SWT [23].

Humans must consciously cultivate positive thinking and ward off negative challenges that may arise at every stage of life, as ar-Razi examined. Good behavior should not be confined to the stigma of being practiced only by the pious or religious leaders, but rather should be grounded in the intention of worshiping Allah SWT, not merely in a sense of humanism. This perspective is consistent with the substance of the soul as proposed by ar-Razi and with the soul-building capacities he emphasized, which ultimately aim to develop awareness of behavior in accordance with the divine purpose of human creation by Allah SWT [24].

Through the concept of the unification of the soul articulated by ar-Razi, prioritizing the relationship with Allah SWT and setting aside his strong inclination toward obedience to his teachers, the theory of the soul he presents demonstrates considerable scholarly

strength from both religious and scientific perspectives [25]. The theory succinctly explains the biological relationship between the body and the character traits formed across developmental periods with reasonable accuracy. However, it is not yet comprehensive in detailing specific aspects such as cognition or morality and remains general in nature [26]. Nevertheless, it reinforces the strong connection between morality and the human soul.

4. CONCLUSION

Ar-Razi was a highly versatile Islamic scholar who was renowned for his intellectual achievements in his time. His contributions to the science of the soul have not yet been explored in depth, even though they offer an interesting and valuable area for further study. Although his discussion of the theory of character development is presented concisely and clearly, it still requires further elaboration, particularly to classify its influences on more specific aspects, such as cognitive and moral dimensions.

Ar-Razi's theory of character development adequately represents each stage of human life and elaborates the influences that arise in accordance with the physiognomic conditions characteristic of each stage. The behaviors associated with these stages are also easy to understand and can be linked to clear and comprehensible key concepts. Moreover, Ar-Razi's background can be studied in depth, enabling a clearer understanding of the intellectual foundations underlying his formulation of the theory.

Overall, Ar-Razi's theory of character development is holistic and interdisciplinary, integrating philosophical thought with Qur'anic exegesis (*tafsir*) and moral science (*akhlāq*). Although this article focuses primarily on the theory of development itself, it may serve as a reference for future researchers to explore further the psychotherapeutic techniques designed by Ar-Razi to anticipate and address reprehensible behaviors at each stage of development. In this way, the dynamics of the soul from Ar-Razi's perspective can be developed more comprehensively, and the potential for more detailed scholarly exploration can be further uncovered.

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