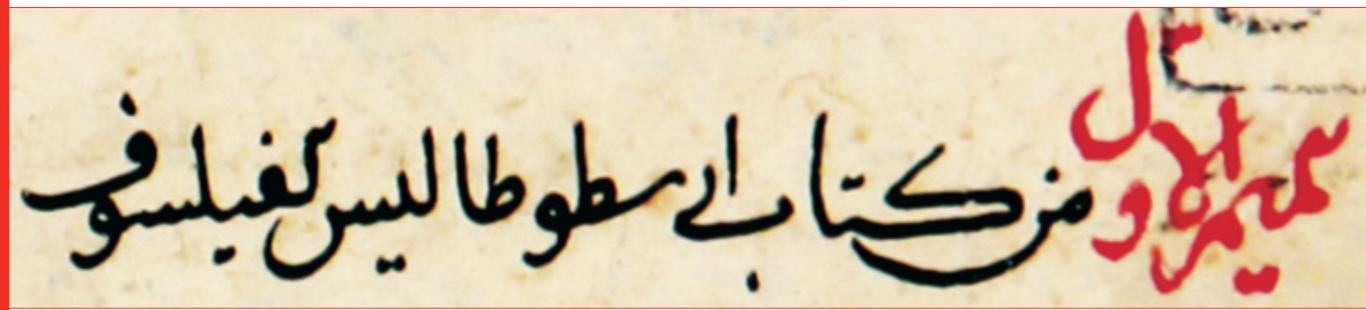
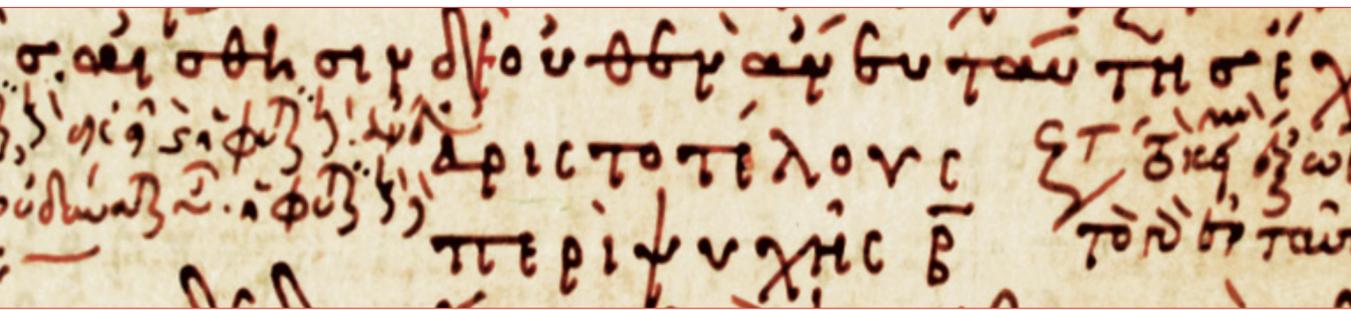


# Studia graeco-arabica



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# Studia graeco-arabica

The Journal of the Project

*Greek into Arabic*

*Philosophical Concepts and Linguistic Bridges*

European Research Council Advanced Grant 249431

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2015



Published by  
ERC Greek into Arabic  
*Philosophical Concepts and Linguistic Bridges*  
European Research Council Advanced Grant 249431

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Service Provider: Università di Pisa, Area Serra - Servizi di Rete Ateneo

ISSN 2239-012X (Online)

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Registration at the law court of Pisa, 18/12, November 23, 2012.

Editor in chief Cristina D'Ancona.

#### Cover

Mašhad, Kitābhāna-i Āsitān-i Quds-i Raḍawī 300, f. 1v  
Paris, Bibliothèque Nationale de France, grec 1853, f. 186v

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# Studia graeco-arabica

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2015

# *How Epicurean was Rāzī?*

Lenn E. Goodman\*

## *Abstract*

Muḥammad b. Zakariyā' al-Rāzī, a major contributor to the Galenic tradition in medicine, pursued philosophy as well, as Galen had urged physicians to do. Rāzī believes in critical thinking and intellectual progress. He rejects the authority of prophets: They are, at best, impostors, and the exclusivity of claims to revelation breeds bloodshed rather than salvation. God enlightens us, Rāzī argues, through the gift of reason, not the visions of a few: All of us are capable, if we put our minds to it, of thinking for ourselves, well enough in fact for the soul to make her way back to her true home. Creation, Rāzī argues, resulted from the over-ebullience of a soul too eager for embodiment, too spontaneous to control herself without the gift of reason, and too innocent to foresee that her sufferings would inevitably outweigh the peaceful pleasures she would seek in the world her vivacity sets in motion. Rāzī's world did begin. But matter, time, space, and soul, as well as God, are eternal. Space and time, pace Aristotle, are absolute. Atoms are uncreated and indestructible. Rāzī hoped for immortality but had no truck with the tales of physical resurrection. He grounds his ethics chiefly on prudential counsels: The appetites are self-enlarging; the passions, self-aggravating and inevitably frustrate. Pleasures, rightly understood, result from the relief of pain or other dislocation. Their optimum is found not in ever more intense sensation but in the respite that awaits us when we rein in desire. The present paper explores the roots of Rāzī's ethics and cosmology, seeking to understand his affinities with Epicurus and other predecessors including Plato – with Galen frequently the mediator. Rāzī learns from Galen much of what he knows of philosophy. But independence of mind is his most striking philosophical attribute.

Few Muslim thinkers were more outspoken in criticizing the received religion than Muḥammad b. Zakariyā' al-Rāzī (d. ca. 925), physician nonpareil and classic freethinker.<sup>1</sup> This maverick philosopher's views are attested in his surviving writings and in the testimony of typically hostile witnesses. Maimonides, for one, sternly condemns Rāzī's view that evils outweigh goods in this life. Rāzī's nemesis, Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī,<sup>2</sup> pillories his thesis that five things are eternal – God, Soul,

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\* My warm thanks to Y. Tzvi Langermann and to Cristina D'Ancona for their very thoughtful reading of this essay and their most helpful suggestions.

<sup>1</sup> Ibn al-Rāwandī (9<sup>th</sup> to early 10<sup>th</sup> century) rivals Rāzī in his distaste for the emerging Islamic orthodoxy. He turned savagely on his sometime Mu'tazilite confreres (who made prophecy an obligation of divine justice) and enters the annals of Islam as the archetypal *zindiq* or heretic. His *K. al-Intiṣār*, translated by A.N. Nader, as *Le Livre du Triomphe*, *Lettres orientales*, Beirut 1957, began as a retort to al-Ġāḥiẓ's encomium on the Mu'tazila but segues into a defense of Shi'ism, which Rāzī himself scored. Claiming reason as his standard, Ibn al-Rāwandī condemns prophecy in general and Muḥammad and the Qur'ān in particular but cloaks his fulminations in the guise of criticisms fathered on the "Brahmans". His work thus becomes a key source of the commonplace among classical Islamic thinkers that the "Brahmans" reject special prophecy. See S. Stroumsa, *Freethinkers of Medieval Islam: Ibn al-Rāwandī and Abū Bakr al-Rāzī*, Brill, Leiden 1999 (Islamic Philosophy, Theology, and Science: Texts and Studies, 35).

<sup>2</sup> Abū Ḥātim al-Rāzī (d. ca. 933) was lieutenant to the Ismā'īlī chief *dā'ī* (missionary) of Rayy, whose successor he ousted in his own favor. Aḥmad b. 'Alī (Amīr at Rayy 916-24) was among his converts, but when the Sāmānids took

time, space, and matter. Horrified at Rāzī's ascribing the world's origins to the over-exuberance of the world Soul, moderated only by God's gift of reason,<sup>3</sup> Abū Ḥātim scarcely disguises his glee in reporting Rāzī's charge that all prophets are impostors. Divine inspiration, Rāzī holds, is universal. It comes in the form of human reason, obviating recourse to prophets. Where Epicureans branded religion as impious for misrepresenting divine detachment, and immoral for promoting hideous atrocities, Rāzī denounces prophets for their sectarian appeals, which foment bloodshed and are better thought of as demonic if not fraudulent.<sup>4</sup>

Rāzī's independence of mind, his striking claim that progress and personal salvation depend on independent thinking, his atomism and its corollary, the reality of the void, his insistence that all human beings are capable of thinking for themselves, even his doctrine of spontaneous motions, stunned or outraged contemporaries and later readers. Rāzī wrote against the Mu'tazila,<sup>5</sup> assailed the Ismā'īlī dogma of the infallible Imām,<sup>6</sup> and rebutted Iamblichus' apology for pagan piety in the Neoplatonist's *Response to Porphyry's Letter to Anebo*.<sup>7</sup> Of a piece with Rāzī's iconoclasm was his *Doubts about Galen*, a critique of the teachings of the great philosophical physician of the 2<sup>nd</sup>

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Rayy Abū Ḥātim fled to the Šī'ites in Daylam; when Mardāwīg, the strongman of Daylam, turned on the Ismā'īlīs, he sought protection from Muflīh, a Šī'ite sympathizer and eventual Amīr of Afghanistan: see S. Stern in the *EP*<sup>2</sup>, s.v. "Abū Ḥātim".

<sup>3</sup> Rāzī could hardly fail to be inspired by Galen's comment: "Just as man's body is bare of weapons, is his soul destitute of skills. So, to compensate for the nakedness of his body he received hands, and for his soul's lack of skill, reason", Galen, *On the Usefulness of the parts of the Body*, Περὶ χρειαζ μωρίων - *De Usu partium*, trans. from the Greek with an Introduction and Commentary by M.T. May, I-II, Cornell U.P., Ithaca 1968, p. 71. The work was translated into Arabic as *K. fi Manāfi' al-ā' dā'* by Ḥubayš b. Ishāq from a Syriac rendering by his uncle Hunayn b. Ishāq (d. 873 or 877), who then revised the translation. The work was widely known and used from Iran to al-Andalus.

<sup>4</sup> See *Abi Bakr Mohammadi Filii Zachariae Raghensis (Rāzīs) Opera Philosophica Fragmentaque quae supersunt* ed. P. Kraus, Universitatis Fouad I Literarum Facultatis Publicationum, Fasciculum XXII, Cairo 1939, *Pars prior* (all that was published); repr. in F. Sezgin (ed.), *Islamic Philosophy. Vol. 19, Mohammadi filii Zachariae Raghensis (Razis). Opera philosophica fragmentaque quae supersunt, Pars prior*, Johann Wolfgang Goethe University - Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science, Frankfurt a.M. 1999 (Publications of the Institute for the History of Arabic-Islamic Science), Farsi, p. 177; Arabic, p. 178. Al-Bīrūnī lists two works of Rāzī's that he calls *kufriyyāt*, "infidelities": *Fi l-Nubuwwāt*, *On Prophecy*, or perhaps better, *On Claims to Prophecy*, and *Fi Hiyal al-Mutanabbiyyīn*, *On the Ruses of Prophetic Impostors*, or *Pretenders*. See Abū Rayḥān al-Bīrūnī, *Risālah fī Fibrīst kutub Muḥammad b Zakariyyā al-Rāzī* tr. P. Kraus as *Épître de Beruni contenant le repertoire des œuvres de Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā ar-Razi*, Maisonneuve, Paris 1936. *Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, our source for Rāzī's holding prophets to be demonically inspired, compares that claim to the Harranian pagan belief that the ghosts of evil men haunt the deserts and urge those whom they influence to harm their fellow men. Rāzī's thought that such promptings may be real rather than fanciful resonates with the Epicurean realism about the gods. For to Epicurus what is perceived must be real.

<sup>5</sup> For Rāzī's critique of the Mu'tazila see Ibn al-Nadīm's *Fibrīst*, tr. B. Dodge, Columbia U.P., New York 1970, p. 705. Rāzī's theological work "became the object of discussion and refutation" in his lifetime. The Mu'tazilite leader al-Balḥī "refuted the second discourse of this book, which caused Rāzī to write a refutation of this refutation": M. Mohaghegh, "Rāzī's *Kitāb al-'Ilm al-Ilāhī* and the *Five Eternals*", *Abr-Nahrain* 13 (1972/3), pp. 16-23, p. 17. We can see Mu'tazilite affinities in Rāzī's concern for animal suffering. But he plainly has no patience with the Mu'tazilite premise of God's obligation to create the Qur'ān. As he makes clear in his debates with Abū Ḥātim, God's obligation to enlighten his creatures is fully met by His imparting reason.

<sup>6</sup> See Šahrastānī, *Nihāyatū l-Aqdām fī 'ilm al-kalām*, ed. by A. Guillaume, *The Summa philosophiae of al-Shahrastānī. Kitāb Nihāyatū l-Aqdām fī 'ilm al-kalām*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1931, p. 426.

<sup>7</sup> See Y.T. Langermann, "Transcriptions of Arabic Treatises into the Hebrew Alphabet: An Underappreciated Mode of Transmission", in the *A.I. Sabra Festschrift*: F.J. Ragep - S.P. Ragep (eds.), *Tradition, Transmission, Transformation. Proceedings of Two Conferences on Pre-modern Science held at the University of Oklahoma*, Brill, Leiden 1996 (Collection de travaux de l'Académie internationale d'histoire des sciences, 37), pp. 246-60, p. 258.

century, whose works, translated into Arabic, were the mainstay of medical teaching and practice for medieval physicians who could read Arabic.<sup>8</sup>

But Rāzī was no mere debunker.<sup>9</sup> He was neither cynical nor irreverent where he thought reverence due. Some, he wrote, might judge him harshly for finding weaknesses in so great a physician as Galen; he marked the chinks he saw in Galen's armor not out of disrespect but from a wholesome desire to correct the record and promote the progress of medical knowledge. God knows, Rāzī writes, that he took no pleasure and sought no profit in mounting his critique. He saw it as a duty. It pains him to be censured for faulting a master's teachings, but medicine belongs to philosophy and demands truth, not dogma.<sup>10</sup> Galen himself, he adds, would have welcomed corrections that advance the art, as is clear from his scorn for blind partisanship and from his own critique, in *De Usu partium*, of Hippocrates, Plato, and Aristotle.<sup>11</sup> Rāzī's respect for Galen, in fact, ran deep. Even as he opens his account of Galen's shortcomings with a critique of the now lost *De Demonstratione*, he flags it as "the most sublime and useful book" he knows, "outside of holy scripture". But scripture itself, for Rāzī, was not above reproach, as his words about prophecy reveal.

Few of Rāzī's writings survive beyond the medical works, which, in time, would stand alongside the Galenic canon.<sup>12</sup> Two philosophical works survive intact, the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, *Medicine for the Soul*, an ethical work, translated by A.J. Arberry under the rather quaint title *The Spiritual Physick*;<sup>13</sup> and a brief memoir, also translated by Arberry, as *Rhazes on the Philosophic Life*,<sup>14</sup> an apologia, in which

<sup>8</sup> See Rāzī, *K. al-Šukūk 'alā Ġālīnūs*, ed. M. Muḥaqqiq (Mehdi Mohaghegh), Mu'assasa-i Muṭāla'āt Islāmī, Dānišgāh-i Tihṙān, Tehran 1993; S. Pines, "Rāzī critique de Galien", in F.S. Bodenheimer (ed.), *Actes du Septième Congrès International d'Histoire des Sciences, Jérusalem, 4-12 août 1953*, Académie internationale d'histoire des sciences, Paris 1954, pp. 480-7 (repr. in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, II. Studies in Arabic Versions of Greek Texts and in Medieval Science*, The Magnes Press, Jerusalem - Leiden 1986, pp. 256-63). Pines calls the work "œuvre capitale". Kraus meant to include it in his second Rāzī volume. *Šukūk* here means not quite 'doubts', but misgivings. As in Pines' paraphrase, the title promises a critique. As Mohaghegh notes, Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a gives the work's full title as *Doubts and Inconsistencies in the Works of Galen* – in 'Uyūn al-Anbā' fi ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā', ed. N. Riḍā, Dār al-Maktaba al-Ḥayāt, Beirut 1963-65, p. 422.

<sup>9</sup> Despite rejecting special prophecy, Rāzī remains religiously committed, in his own way. He wrote a work on prayer and opens the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* with more than perfunctory prayers of his own. The *Fibrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm lists a work of his against Šahīd al-Balḥī's polemic and another defending the afterlife; tr. Dodge, p. 706. Epicurus too was committed to religious practices; and Lucretius, famously, opens *De Rerum Natura* with a prayer for peace, longing for Venus to lull her consort Mars and hailing her as "mother of the race of Aeneas". He sees her as the generative principle in nature and moving source of creativity.

<sup>10</sup> Cf. Miskawayh, *Al-Fawz al-aṣḡar* (Beirut 1319 a.h.), p. 68, cited in Mohaghegh, "Notes on the *Spiritual Physic* of al-Rāzī", *Studia Islamica* 26 (1967), pp. 5-22, p. 6 n. 4 (= *Al-Fawz al-aṣḡar li-Miskawayh*, ḥaqqāqahū wa-qaddama laḥū Ṣ. 'Uḍayma, Maison Arabe du Livre, Tunis 1987, p. 95.7-8).

<sup>11</sup> Rāzī seems to intend *De Usu partium* I 8, trans. May, pp. 75-8.

<sup>12</sup> Chaucer writes of the Physician in the *Prologue* to the *Canterbury Tales*: "Well he knew the olde Aesculapius,/ And Dioscorides, and eke Rufus;/ Old Hippocras, Hali, and Gallien,/ Serapion, Rhazes, and Avicenn,/ Averroes, Damascene, and Constantine, Bernard, and Gatisden, and Gilbertene". As Mohaghegh remarks, al-Bīrūnī's listing of Rāzī's works catalogues some eighty on philosophy.

<sup>13</sup> *The Spiritual Physick of Rhazes*, Murray, London 1950; the work is also translated into French by R. Brague as *La Médecine Spirituelle*, Flammarion, Paris 2003. As Mohaghegh points out, "Notes on the *Spiritual Physic* of al-Rāzī", p. 7, Rāzī was not the first physician to write a "Spiritual Physic". A work under that title is also ascribed to al-Kindī; see R.J. McCarthy, *al-Tasānīf al-mansūba ilā Faylasūf al-'Arab al-Kindī*, Maṭba'a al-'Ānī, Baghdad 1962, p. 43. Ibn al-Ġawzī wrote an apparent response to Rāzī's work under the same title and using much the same sequence of topics. The idea of a therapy of the soul, of course, harks back to Plato. See *Sophist* 227 C - 228 A, *Philebus* 46 C, *Timaeus* 86 B.

<sup>14</sup> Arberry's translation appeared in "Rhazes on the Philosophic Life", *Asiatic Review* 45 (1949), pp. 703-13; in Ch. Butterworth, "The Book of the Philosophic Life", *Interpretation* 20 (1993) pp. 227-36; in J. McGinnis and D.C. Reisman (eds.),

Rāzī answers charges that he has not faithfully enough hewed to the asceticism ascribed to Socrates, his “imām”. Lost works like Rāzī’s *Theology* were perhaps a bit too heretical to inspire copying. Even so, the learned labors of Paul Kraus did recover sufficient fragments to let us piece together the elements of Rāzī’s philosophy – and verify the claims of his detractors.<sup>15</sup> Among the fragments Kraus published the *Munāẓarāt bayna al-Rāzīyayn, Debates of the two Rāzīs*, Abū Ḥātim’s account of how he bested and bearded “the heretic” at the court of the amīr. Tendentious though they are, the *Munāẓarāt* is a precious document. It’s as though we had before us Socrates’s thoughts, as retold by Callicles.

Years ago, starting in the early 1970s, I published a series of articles noting an Epicurean streak in Rāzī’s thinking. More recently Peter Adamson has argued that Rāzī’s anatomy of pleasure is not Epicurean at all but Platonizing, that Rāzī had no real access to Epicurean ideas, and that the ethics of the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* is inconsistent with Epicureanism.<sup>16</sup> The Platonic roots of Rāzī’s views on pleasure were urged on me by Shlomo Pines even as I was first framing my thoughts on the subject. Pines was right, of course, up to a point.<sup>17</sup> But the story is a bit more complicated. Plato’s account of pleasure stands at the base of his larger project of locating the true object of desire and highest goal of eros beyond the sensory world. Rāzī adopts a similar view, comparable, in fact, to al-Kindī’s intellectualist vision of salvation.<sup>18</sup> Yet what Rāzī seeks in the hereafter is surcease as well as a spiritual homecoming, and his ethical counsels in the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* are strikingly prudential.

What did Rāzī know of Epicurus? Adamson wrote, “it is unclear how al-Rāzī could have been influenced by, or could even have known anything about Epicureanism”.<sup>19</sup> I did mention Galen’s *On the Passions and Errors of the Soul*, as Adamson notes.<sup>20</sup> But Adamson did not find there the rich

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*Classical Arabic Philosophy: An Anthology of Sources*, Hackett, Indianapolis 2007, pp. 36-44; and along with the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* in E. Tornero, *La Conducta virtuosa del Filósofo*, Trotta, Madrid 2004, pp. 93-104.

<sup>15</sup> See n. 4 above. Only Part I was published. Dorothee Metlizki, Paul Kraus’ widow, told me that she deposited his ms for the intended second volume in the Cairo library, distraught in the aftermath of his suicide, but failed in her later efforts to recover it.

<sup>16</sup> P. Adamson, “Platonic Pleasures in Epicurus and Rāzī”, in P. Adamson (ed.), *In the Age of al-Farabi: Arabic Philosophy in the Fourth/Tenth Century*, London and Turin: The Warburg Institute - Nino Arago Editore, London - Turin 2008, pp. 71-94. The surviving fragments of Rāzī’s lost book about pleasure were collected and edited by P. Kraus in *Opera Philosophica* (cited above, n. 4), pp. 139-64. A sampling is translated in F. Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam*, translated from the German by E. and J. Marmorstein, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London 1975, pp. 103-6.

<sup>17</sup> Plato denies that all pleasures, even the most sensuous, presuppose a prior pain. His first counterexample are “the pleasures connected with smell. For these, with no antecedent pain suddenly attain an indescribable intensity, and their cessation leaves no pain after them (...). Let us not believe, then, that the riddance of pain is pure pleasure or that of pleasure pain” (*Republic* IX, 584 B 5 - C 1). By specifying suddenly Plato aims to forestall the riposte that all pleasures presume at least a gradual, thus insensible, loss or lack. Plato seems to see a continuum from the sensuous to the spiritual and intellectual, its progress marked by the ladder of love. Hence his reliance on music to attune the soul. In the end, of course, for Plato, it is the soul that must tune the body (*Republic* III, 398 C - 403 D). But in education or the therapy and improvement of the soul, the process would run in both directions.

<sup>18</sup> See al-Kindī’s *Essay on How to Banish Sorrow*, edited by H. Ritter and R. Walzer as “Studi su al-Kindī II. Uno scritto morale inedito di al-Kindī (‘Temistio Περὶ ἀλυπτίας?’)” in “Studi su al-Kindī”, *Memorie della Reale Accademia Nazionale dei Lincei, Classe di Scienze Morali, Storiche e Filologiche*, Serie VI, vol. 8, fasc. 1 (1938), pp. 5-63. The *risālah* is translated by McGinnis and Reisman in *Classical Arabic Philosophy*, pp. 23-35, as “On the Means of Dispelling Sorrows”; and by P. Adamson and P. Pormann in *The Philosophical Works of al-Kindī*, Oxford U. P., Oxford 2012, pp. 249-66, as “Letter on How to Dispel Sorrows”.

<sup>19</sup> Adamson, “Platonic Pleasures”, p. 71.

<sup>20</sup> The reference, crediting a suggestion made by Mehdi Mohaghegh of Tehran in his *Filusuf-i Rayy*, Society for the Protection of National Monuments, Tehran 1970, p. 22, is in my chapter on Rāzī in S.H. Nasr - O. Leaman (eds.), *History of Islamic Philosophy*, Routledge, London 1996, p. 214 n. 44, where I saw Epicurean resonances in Galen’s rejection of the

account of pleasure that would meet Rāzī's needs. *Quellenforschung*,<sup>21</sup> I must confess, was the furthest enterprise from my mind when I first noted Rāzī's affinities to Epicurus – although I could hardly overlook the spontaneity of the worldsoul's motion in Rāzī's myth of her fall. Nor was my project one of *Rezeptionsgeschichte*. What engaged me philosophically then and engages me still was the work of comparative philosophy. I saw kindred spirits and was (and remain) less concerned with where Rāzī drew his ideas, or how they were received. After all, so far as reception goes, both Rāzī and Epicurus are marginal survivors textually. Most of their philosophical writings in both cases are lost, and what remains chiefly are fragments and scraps – although Epicurus will be rediscovered by Gassendi and others, and although Rāzī does have a subtle, somewhat suppressed impact on Maimonides (despite Maimonides' loathing for other thoughts of his), as will be duly noted in the commentary to the *Guide to the Perplexed* that will accompany the new translation that my colleague Philip Lieberman and I have in hand. All the same, the kinship that I found so interesting might show up more clearly if a link could be shown between Rāzī and his Epicurean predecessors. Peter Groff nicely sums up some of the affinities – the critique of religion, the atomism (that seems to cut clear of any reliance on substantial forms), the physicalist account of sensation, the “therapeutic arguments against the fear of death based on the absence of sensation” once the body no longer functions as it did during life. These thoughts, as Groff puts it, seem “underdetermined” in purely Platonic terms.<sup>22</sup>

Rāzī does call his cosmology more Platonic than Aristotelian. Yet his physiology and the attendant theory of pleasure rest on his atomism, framing the complex that entrains his outspoken claim, so offensive to Maimonides, that evils outweigh goods in this life. And the moral weaknesses targeted in the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, deficiencies hinted in the medical slant of its title, reflect the Epicurean premise that pleasure finds its optimum not at some imagined peak but in *ἀταραξία*, peace of mind. Rāzī's diatribe against eros is frankly Epicurean, as is his focus on the fear of death among the moral weaknesses that draw his concern. So I still see Epicurean thinking in Rāzī's ethics, an outlook fostered by what Rāzī learned of atomism from Galen's works, if not by sifting and filtering Plato's ethical thoughts to bring them closer to earth, where Rāzī's medical authority had more purchase than in the upper reaches of Plato's vision.

Rāzī's atomism and vigorous defense of the void, the very un-Aristotelian absoluteness of time and space for him, his posit of uncaused motions, and his egalitarian views about insight and education also ring more Epicurean than Platonic.<sup>23</sup> So I should say something here about Rāzī's cosmology and

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quest for rank. “The rejection of a political life and the argument that the quest for rank finds no natural or inherent limit”, I argued “are both Epicurean”. For Galen's view, see Galen's *On the Passions and Errors of the Soul*, tr. P.W. Harkins, Ohio State U.P., Columbus 1964.

<sup>21</sup> That work, I'm glad to say, has now been admirably done by two Israeli scholars: M. Bar-Asher, “Quelques aspects de l'éthique d'Abū-Bakr al-Rāzī et ses origines dans l'œuvre de Galien”, *Studia Islamica* 69/70 (1989), pp. 5-38, 119-48; and Y.T. Langermann, “Islamic Atomism and the Galenic Tradition”, *History of Science* 47 (2009), pp. 277-95.

<sup>22</sup> See P. Groff, “Leaving the Garden: Al-Rāzī and Nietzsche as Wayward Epicureans”, *Philosophy East and West: A Quarterly of Comparative Philosophy* 64 (2014), pp. 983-1017, p. 1004 n. 29.

<sup>23</sup> Plato thought reason a rare gift that needs special cultivation to bring it to full flower. But Rāzī, like the Epicureans, thought of reason not in terms of the arduous disciplines of dialectic and mathematics (he wrote against the penchant of some philosophers to invest excessive energies in mathematics). Reason, on his view, stands closer to common sense and is accessible to all who turn their mind to it. One of Rāzī's lost works was on gauging intelligence. I doubt that he assumed literally all human beings to be equal intellectually, but it is pretty clear that he held all who are of normal mind able to think well enough for themselves to need no dogmatic instruction (*tā līm*) by an Ismā'īlī *dā'ī*, guidance by a Platonic elite, or even formal training in logic. Like Epicurus Rāzī seemed to prefer the seat-of-the-pants logic of street debate. Man's spiritual goal, he held, is accessible with even a modicum of independent thinking. If ordinary folk have not advanced on that

the fall of the soul, then about pleasure and pain and the problem of evil, then about Rāzī's ethics and his handling of immortality.

Notice at the outset, though, that Rāzī's ethics is hardly sybaritic, just as that of Epicurus was studiously non-Cyrenaic. Epicurus rejects the illusion of "peak experiences". Pleasures, on the analysis that Rāzī forwards and that Epicurus develops from his early exposure to Plato's teachings, cannot be amassed and are only foolishly thought to be enhanced at sensory extremes. Rāzī agrees with Plato and Epicurus that pleasurable sensations result from processes of repletion – filling a somatic void, as he sees it. Pleasure finds its optimum in pain's cessation.<sup>24</sup> Plato, Epicurus and Rāzī all agree that enlarged desire means enlarged need – and neediness. Wisdom counsels that we maximize our pleasure when we minimize desire. That is a hedonic counsel, although hardly consonant with any vulgar hedonism.

### *Rāzī's Cosmology*

Rāzī held five things to be eternal: God, soul, time, space, and matter. Matter was eternal since atoms are uncompounded and indestructible. Time and space are absolute, not relative to bodies and motion, as Aristotle held.<sup>25</sup> The void, permits – even invites – atomic motion. Absolute space, as Aristotle stressed, seems critical to atomists if absolutely solid atoms are to move.<sup>26</sup> Just as absolute space allows but does not require the presence of a body, absolute time permits but does not imply the occurrence of motion. Eternal time, for Rāzī, is the medium in which measured time elapses, the relative time marked by Aristotle's celestial timekeepers, the stars and planets.<sup>27</sup>

Rāzī's atoms are a far cry from the instantly evanescent, dimensionless atoms of the occasionalist kalām. Rāzī perhaps targets the continuous creationism of the kalām when he argues theologically for the eternity of the atoms: If God could create from nothing, He would surely use that simple and direct method consistently. Why, Rāzī asks, would God leave things to develop if He might have made man, say, mature from the start.<sup>28</sup>

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path, it is not for lack of insight but for lack of interest. *Munāẓarāt*, pp. 298-9 Kraus. Indeed, despite Plato's presumption that individuals vary in their access to the fruits of reason, Rāzī credits him with holding that even the most limited human intelligence suffices to bring the soul home to its eternal abode. *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, p. 30 Kraus = p. 32 Arberry.

<sup>24</sup> For the Galenic roots of Rāzī's account, see Bar-Asher, "De l'éthique d'Abū-Bakr al-Rāzī et ses origines dans l'œuvre de Galien", pp. 133-5.

<sup>25</sup> Ibn Ḥazm takes Rāzī to task for not using the terms *zamān* and *makān* in their familiar senses, where time is an interval and place is a location. Rāzī, seeing that those Aristotelian usages beg the question by preloading time and space relativism into the definitions of the terms, uses the Arabic *al-faḍā'* for space, rather than "place", and *al-ḥalā'* (standing in for the Greek κενόν or χώρον) for the void. He uses *al-dabr* (or *al-muddah*) to refer to absolute time (the αἰών of the Greeks). Rāzī, *Opera Philosophica* (cited above, n. 4), pp. 171, 241-6 Kraus; cf. pp. 189, 198, 213.

<sup>26</sup> Arist., *Phys.* IV 6, 213 b 4-6; Aristotle follows up at 7, 214 a 17-19 by finding the notion of the void incoherent.

<sup>27</sup> Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, p. 304 Kraus; tr. Goodman, in "Rāzī vs Rāzī – Philosophy in the Majlis", in H. Lazarus-Yafeh - M.R. Cohen - S. Somekh - S. Griffith (eds.), *The Majlis: Interreligious Encounters in Medieval Islam*, Harrassowitz, Wiesbaden 1999, pp. 84-107, p. 92. Rāzī here applies to absolute time Plato's famous description of time as "the moving image of eternity", *Timaeus* 37 D 6-7, where Plato specifies that the Demiurge made time everlasting. Rāzī echoes Galen's paraphrase of *Timaeus* 38-39, in responding to Abū Ḥātim, stipulating that, "Measured time is relative to the motions of the spheres and the courses of the sun and the stars", See *Galen Compendium Timaei Platonis aliorumque dialogorum synopsis quae extant fragmenta*, ed. P. Kraus - R. Walzer, Warburg Institute, London 1951 (Plato Arabus, 1), Arabic, pp. 8, 11, Latin, pp. 47, 52. Galen's conspectus of the *Timaeus* was translated by Ḥunayn b. Ishāq (d. 877). The *Timaeus* itself was translated by Yahyā b. Biṭrīq (d. ca. 830); see R. Arnzen, "Plato's *Timaeus* in the Arabic Tradition. Legend - Testimonies - Fragments", in F. Celia - A. Ulacco (eds.), *Il Timeo. Esegesi greche, arabe, latine*, Pisa U.P., Pisa 2012 (Greco, Arabo, Latino. Le vie del sapere. Studi, 2), pp. 181-267.

<sup>28</sup> See Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *K. Zād al-Musāfirin*, ed. B. al-Ramān, Kawiani, Berlin 1923, pp. 75 ff., 92, 103, quoted in S. Pines, *Studies in Islamic Atomism*, tr. M. Schwarz and edited by Y.T. Langermann, The Magnes Press, Jerusalem 1997, pp. 48-49.

Matter, for Rāzī, is inert, but not without character, causal impact, or stability. Soul gives it motion. In the beginning, Rāzī reasons, were time, space, God, soul, and matter. Soul passionately desired embodiment.<sup>29</sup> Matter would be her plaything and playground. Soul, as yet unaided by mind, learns only from experience. So she could hardly know that the body she so longed for would be her prison and medium of torment. Nor could she conceive that all bodily pleasures are preconditioned by pain or lack<sup>30</sup> – or that loss and dissolution is their final outcome. Once embodied, soul set matter in motion – but chaotically, until God imparted reason, giving order to matter’s motion. Reason allowed soul to see that this world is not her true home and gave her the intellectual means to regain her rightful place.<sup>31</sup> Only soul’s innocence could explain the world’s origin. So creation, for Rāzī, was no Neoplatonic allegory of nature’s timeless dependence on divinity but a story of temporal origins, a drama beginning in silence and ending in peace, but tumultuous and fraught with trouble in its second act.

Epicurus, of course, had no cosmic soul to set matter spinning out of control, nor would his gods have deigned to intervene to set any soul aright. But Rāzī’s atomism does bring him closer to Epicurus than to Aristotle or the *kalām*. And his thesis that evils outweigh goods in this life seems to reflect Epicurean assumptions. The peace of mind that is the ultimate aim of all rational desire for Rāzī cannot last in this world. Pain and suffering inevitably overbalance it, giving the Epicurean dilemma its bite. Soul, for Rāzī, is no Epicurean swarm of superfine atoms but a self-subsistent life principle, as it was for Plato. Soul’s plunge into matter, as Rāzī has it, was neither natural nor forced but spontaneous.<sup>32</sup> It was not motivated by an Epicurean clinamen. For Rāzī’s soul is not physical. But its spontaneous movement on Rāzī’s account is clearly an exception to Aristotle’s general rule that motions are either natural or constrained.<sup>33</sup>

The atomism of Democritus and Epicurus was known in Arabic – scantily, it long seemed, mainly through references “meagre (and mostly inauthentic)” from gnomological traditions, as Dimitri Gutas wrote.<sup>34</sup> Pines looked to India for the roots of atomism; van Ess suggested Iran. If Rāzī’s atomism does have ancient precedents, they’re clearly not in the geometric solids from which Plato built the world in the *Timaeus*. Those figures were not really atomic, and they face Aristotle’s formidable objection that one can hardly make a world of solids from figures with no mass that are solid only notionally.<sup>35</sup> Aristotle had a parallel objection to the Forms: How could changeless entities serve as causes in a world of change? There’s not much room to squeeze an atom through the doorway flanked by two such sentinels. Plato’s concern was to draw a world from ideas – bodies from figures, figures from numbers, a brilliant piece of prestidigitation, but of little help to Rāzī, for whom atomic matter was eternal.

<sup>29</sup> Rāzī, *Opera Philosophica* (cited above, n. 4), pp. 204-5 Kraus.

<sup>30</sup> Rāzī, *Opera Philosophica* (cited above, n. 4), pp. 208-9 Kraus; cf. Plato, *Gorgias* 495 E - 497 B.

<sup>31</sup> Rāzī, *Opera Philosophica* (cited above, n. 4), pp. 203-6 Kraus.

<sup>32</sup> Rāzī, *Munāzarāt*, p. 311 Kraus = p. 99 Goodman.

<sup>33</sup> Arist., *Phys.* V 6, 230 a 18. *De Cael.* III 2, 300 a 23, *De An.* I 3, 406 a 4-5.

<sup>34</sup> D. Gutas, “Pre-Plotinian Philosophy in Arabic (other than Platonism and Aristotelianism): a Review of the Sources”, in W. Haase - H. Temporini (eds.), *Aufstieg und Niedergang der Römischen Welt. Geschichte und Kultur Roms im Spiegel der neueren Forschung*, De Gruyter, Berlin - New York 1994, II.37, p. 4974-92 (repr. in Id., *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition*, Ashgate, Aldershot 2000, same pagination), p. 4958, n. 59; C. Baffioni, *Atomismo e antiatomismo nel pensiero islamico*, Istituto Universitario Orientale, Napoli 1982, pp. 25-46.

<sup>35</sup> Galen’s epitome of the *Timaeus* survives in Arabic, but, as Langermann observes, it makes no mention of atomism. What interested readers of Arabic was the way in which the work motivated (and even repaired with fresh premises from the lumber yard of Plato’s other works) Plato’s argument for the world’s creation. See Kraus - Walzer (eds.), *Galenii Compendium Timaei Platonis* (cited above, note 27).

No work of Epicurus is known to have been translated into Arabic. And the anecdotal evidence, where it does sprout up, reveals little, unless read with prior knowledge of the facts and the fancies of its authors. One anecdote, for instance, pictures Aristotle, before joining Plato's Academy, as a lad of 17, defending against Epicurus the philosophical value of studying rhetoric and grammar.<sup>36</sup> Setting aside the anachronism and read not as history but as midrash, the tale makes some sense. Aristotle did write the *Rhetoric*, which the Arabic canon included in the *Organon*; and the *Categories* does lean on grammar. Aristotle's earliest job in the Academy, reflected in the *Topics* and *De Sophisticis Elenchis*, was to teach the ins and outs of practical logic, as Plato's counterforce to the Sophists – work that led on to Aristotle's founding work in logic. So there is poetic truth in picturing Aristotle as a lad defending rhetoric and grammar against Epicurus' outspoken contempt for dialectic, as if logic were an epistemic rival of the senses.<sup>37</sup>

But regarding atomism, the evidence on the ground is not quite so sparse as Gutas makes out. "The Galenic tradition", as Langermann notes, "contains substantive discussions of atomism, including specific references to Epicurus in particular"<sup>38</sup> – although, in the modern secondary literature, "one hardly ever comes across the name of Galen. Pines limits himself to a few references to Galen's epitome of the *Timaeus*".<sup>39</sup> Langermann focuses on Galen's *On the Elements according to Hippocrates*, a text, as he notes, that did not escape the eagle eye of Harry Wolfson, which often surveyed a vast field without missing much detail.<sup>40</sup>

Wolfson pursued the parallels of Galen's thoughts about "elements" to the *Book of the Elements* of Isaac Israeli, the early tenth century centennarian bachelor physician/philosopher of Qairawan, best known and longest remembered for his book on the diagnostic uses of urine.<sup>41</sup> The longest of

<sup>36</sup> D. Gutas, "The Spurious and the Authentic in the Arabic Lives of Aristotle", in J. Kraye - W.F. Ryan - C.B. Schmitt (eds.), *Pseudo-Aristotle in the Middle Ages. The 'Theology' and Other Texts*, Warburg Institute, London 1986, pp. 15-36 (repr. in *Greek Philosophers in the Arabic Tradition*), pp. 20-21, citing Siġistānī's *Šiwān al-ḥikmah* etc.

<sup>37</sup> Diogenes, X 31; cf. Seneca, *Epistles*, 89.

<sup>38</sup> Langermann, "Islamic Atomism" (cited above, n. 21), p. 277. Among Rāzī's successors, Maimonides, who depends on Arabic sources for any detailed knowledge of Greek philosophy and science, knows of the atomism of Epicurus and his rejection of providence. He identifies Epicurus as an atheist, largely because Alexander of Aphrodisias reports that Epicurus recognized no deity who governs the world but relied on the chance collocations of atoms. See *Guide*, I 73, II 32, III 17.

<sup>39</sup> Langermann, "Islamic Atomism", p. 278. Adamson quotes two passages from Rāzī's critique of Galen, "Abū Bakr al-Rāzī on Animals", *Archiv für Geschichte der Philosophie* 94 (2012) pp. 249-73. Adamson thanks Fritz Zimmermann for calling them to his attention.

<sup>40</sup> Langermann, "Islamic Atomism" (cited above, n. 21), p. 278. In "An Epitome of Galen's *On the Elements* ascribed to Ḥunayn ibn Iṣḥāq", *Arabic Sciences and Philosophy* 25 (2015) pp. 33-78, G. Bos and Y.T. Langermann have now published the Arabic text and an English summary of a version of Galen's work that seems to have been carefully studied by writers in Arabic who were interested in atomism and rival theories of the ultimate composition of physical things. Regrettably, the text of its seventh chapter, dealing with questions of the inertness or sentience, etc. of the elements of things "seems to be hopelessly corrupt", largely as a result of confusion over the presence or absence of negative particles. Regrettably, all that survives of Epicurus or Democritus in the epitome is a curt dismissal of the notion that coming to be and passing away can be accounted for by combination and arrangement (*ta'lif* and *nizām*) rather than mixture and alteration/transformation (*imtizāġ* and *istihāla*). See Bos and Langermann's text, p. 73, English, p. 57.

<sup>41</sup> Israeli's *Book of the Elements* survives in Gerard of Cremona's Latin translation and in the Hebrew of Abraham b. Ḥasday: *Sefer ha-Yesodot. Das Buch über die Elemente. Ein Beitrag zur jüdischen Religionsphilosophie des Mittelalters nach dem aus Arabischen ins Hebräische übersetzten Texte von Abraham b. Samuel Halevi Ibn Chasdai* (...) hrsg. von Dr. S. Fried, A.H. Župnik, Drohobycz 1900; Kaufmann, Frankfurt 1900. The Arabic original is lost. Langermann finds the Hebrew translation "obtuse and in some places simply impenetrable". A. Altmann - S. Stern, *Isaac Israeli: A Neoplatonic Philosopher of the Early Tenth Century*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1958, pp. 133-45, translates an excursus on philosophy, prophecy and "the Upward Path" (cf. Plato's "second voyage"). In another treatise of similar title, *The Book of Substances* (*Ġawābir*) Israeli adopts the objection

Israeli's surviving writings on philosophy, the *Book of the Elements*, treats of the simple components of bodies and rejects the precedence to the elements of the four qualities (hot and cold, wet and dry). It aims to harmonize Galen's view of the elements with those of Aristotle and Hippocrates and argues at length against Democritean atomism. Wolfson focused on a passage that seemed to link that atomism with the unextended atoms of the *kalām*. For Israeli attributes to Democritus the view that a line is composed of points.<sup>42</sup> If so, it might seem that all atoms are dimensionless and thus vulnerable to Aristotle's argument that no body can be made of parts without size.<sup>43</sup>

Rāzī's contemporary, the young Saadia Gaon, reached out to Israeli in distant Qairawan about his philosophical and scientific work, and Rāzī too might have known the work of his learned medical contemporary. But it's far more likely that he saw the same Galenic work that Israeli used. *On the Elements*, "was the first of the sixteen Galenic works that formed the 'core curriculum' for medical students in late Antiquity", as Langermann writes. So a version of it with "significant additions and alterations was included in the so-called 'Alexandrian summaries' or *ḡawāmi'*" – the handbooks from which medical knowledge might be mastered.<sup>44</sup> There were full commentaries too; and 'Alī b. Riḏwān explains his choosing Galen's *On the Elements* as the first in the Galenic corpus that he would explicate, calling it the logical starting point for anyone seeking perfection in the art of medicine, since it treats the make up of living beings and thus lays the foundation for understanding health and illness.<sup>45</sup>

Despite Galen's hostility to atomism, or perhaps because of it, given Galen's thoroughness, *On the Elements* is "replete with information" on atomistic theories. It "opens with a sustained critique of atomism",<sup>46</sup> targeting Epicurus and Democritus, among others. Galen later names his *bête noire* Asclepiades (1<sup>st</sup> century B.C.E.) among those who chime in supporting atomism – for Galen, less a harmony than a cat's chorus. The atoms of Leucippus, Galen writes, have no parts. Those of Epicurus have parts but cannot be divided, being simply too hard. Those of Asclepiades cannot adhere or be conjoined. All three think the atoms infinite in number.<sup>47</sup>

Where Galen speaks of atoms Ḥunayn supplies *aḡzā' allatī lā tataḡzazzā'a*, indivisible particles, the rather periphrastic name for atoms in the later literature. In his alchemical *Sirr al-Asrār*, the *Secretum Secretorum*, Rāzī, like his fellow alchemist Ḡābir, calls the atom *habā' lā ḡuz' labu*.<sup>48</sup> "Fortunately", Langermann writes, "we have an exact definition of *habā'*". They are motes of dust that float in the air, visible when the light strikes them.<sup>49</sup> So atoms are indivisible motes. One recalls Lucretius' brilliant description of the motes of dust dancing in the still air, their movement revealed

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and reply format of the *kalām*. From the fragments translated in Altmann-Stern, the work seems to have dealt with essences and logic *vis-à-vis* divine and natural action, a natural topic for a philosopher facing the challenge of *kalām* metaphysics.

<sup>42</sup> H.-A. Wolfson, *The Philosophy of the Kalam*, Harvard U.P., Cambridge 1976, pp. 484-5; and his *Repercussions of the Kalam in Jewish Philosophy*, Harvard U.P., Cambridge 1979, pp. 162-5.

<sup>43</sup> Arist., *Phys.*, VI 1, 231 b 2-5; cf. *De Gen. et corr.* I 2, 316 a 30-34.

<sup>44</sup> Langermann, "Islamic Atomism" (cited above, n. 21), pp. 278; 284-9.

<sup>45</sup> Ibn Riḏwān's endorsement is quoted in Langermann, "Islamic Atomism", p. 282, from the Hebrew ms preserved at Munich in the Bayerische Staatsbibliothek, *heb.* 228 f. 60.

<sup>46</sup> Langermann, "Islamic Atomism" (cited above, n. 21), p. 278.

<sup>47</sup> Langermann, "Islamic Atomism" (cited above, n. 21), p. 285.

<sup>48</sup> "According to Ruska, the influence of Rāzī is most apparent in methodological classification, for Rāzī divested alchemy of its superstitions and gave it a strict scientific form". D. Metlitzki, *The Matter of Araby in Medieval England*, Yale U.P., New Haven 1977, p. 90, citing J. Ruska, *Al-Rāzī's Buch Geheimmis der Geheimmisse*, Springer, Berlin 1937, p. 13.

<sup>49</sup> See Pines, *Islamic Atomism* (cited above, n. 28), p. 157; P. Kraus, *Jābir ibn Ḥayyān. Contribution à l'histoire des idées scientifiques dans l'Islam. II. Jābir et la science grecque*, Institut Français d'Archéologie Orientale, Cairo 1942-1943; repr. Les Belles Lettres, Paris 1986 (Sciences et philosophie arabes. Études et reprises), p. 154 n. 6.

by the scintillation in the light<sup>50</sup> – the Tyndall effect, as we now call it. It was Einstein who showed in 1905 that the impact of atoms suffices to spin such particles suspended in a fluid like air, the so-called Brownian movement – although, as Lucretius stresses, the dancing motes are far larger than atoms. In translating *On Medical Experience*, Ḥubayš calls an atom of Asclepiades *hubayba*, “granule”, explaining, “these being indivisible particles”.

Galen, as Langermann observes, touches on atomism further in *De Placitis*, where he aims to harmonize the views of Plato and Hippocrates. In *On Medical Experience*, his dialogue on medical epistemology,<sup>51</sup> he opens with a brief for theory (λόγος) placed in the mouth of Asclepiades, to be answered from the more empirical standpoint of physicians like Menodotus, Serapion, or Theodosius.<sup>52</sup> As Galen’s paradigm or parody of the medical theorist, Asclepiades compares the elements of things to the letters of the alphabet and scoffs at the inability of brute empiricism to marshal the infinite variety of nature – or disease.<sup>53</sup>

In another work from the great body of Galen’s work that was translated into Arabic, *On the Natural Faculties*, we have a rare glimpse of a smoking gun. For, as Langermann observes, Rāzī “chooses to expound his own atomic theory in the course of a critique of that Galenic writing”.<sup>54</sup> We can hardly have clearer evidence of where Rāzī learned of atomism. We can see him parting company with Galen as to the underlying character of physical reality. Atoms would appeal to Rāzī since they allowed him to sidestep Plato’s problem, of deriving the physical from an utterly non-physical first Cause.

In *On the Natural Faculties* Galen inveighs against the mechanism of the school of Asclepiades: They neglect qualitative changes and thus fail to credit the specific powers (δυνάμεις) of diverse living organs and tissues. Following Aristotle, Galen classes changes as varieties of motion (alteration, growth/diminution, translocation, and generation/destruction).<sup>55</sup> Alteration is qualitative change, slighted by the mechanists. But Galen acknowledges an apparent hybrid case. Relying on Aristotle and Chrysippus, he calls it “total alteration”. When, say, bread is transformed into living tissue like blood more than accidents are altered.<sup>56</sup> Yet it hardly seemed proper to call such a change destruction.

Atomists, Galen argues, cannot describe such processes since they treat all changes quantitatively, reducing all causation, in effect, to the aggregation or disaggregation of indivisible parts: “the sophists”, he writes, “when foodstuffs change to blood, although granting that the change is evident to sight, taste, and touch, will not allow that the change is real. Some deem the effect a mere error of the senses shifting over time and variously affected, the substance itself remaining unaltered”. Other theorists, Galen adds, have it that blood, say, was already present in the bread. Its seeming change to flesh only

<sup>50</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura* II 113-41.

<sup>51</sup> *De Experientia Medica*, known in Greek from a few quoted passages before its discovery (in Arabic translation) by Ritter in the library at Istanbul, was edited and translated by R. Walzer, *Galen On Medical Experience*, First Edition of the Arabic version with English Trans. and Notes, Oxford U.P., London 1944. The Arabic translation by Ḥubayš was based on Ḥunayn b. Ishāq’s Syriac rendering of the Greek. Michael Frede reprinted Walzer’s English translation in Galen, *Three Treatises on the Nature of Science*, Hackett, Indianapolis 1985, pp. 49-106. Frede Englished the passages surviving from the original that Walzer kept in Greek.

<sup>52</sup> Galen, *Three Treatises*, p. 51.

<sup>53</sup> Galen, *Three Treatises*, pp. 52-53.

<sup>54</sup> See Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, ed. and tr. A.J. Brock, Harvard U.P., Cambridge MA - London 1979 (Loeb Classical Library). The work is extant in Ḥunayn b. Ishāq’s Arabic translation, Ms Leiden Or. 433. Langermann calls attention to Galen’s treatment of atomistic theories in this work, “Islamic Atomism”, p. 282. Pines was not yet aware of *Doubts about Galen* when he published his book on atomism. His 1953 paper, “Rāzī Critique de Galien”, (note 7 above) fills that lacuna.

<sup>55</sup> Cf. Galen, *Meth. Med.*, 1.6.46 Kühn.

<sup>56</sup> Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, I 2.5-6, pp. 9-11 Brock.

teased out what was already present. That thought harks back to the ancient speculations of Anaxagoras (and forward too, to theories of transubstantiation!). The atomism of Asclepiades seems to harbor a presocratic discomfort with change, as if fearing some illogic in a thing's becoming what it was not.

The anti-atomist Mu'tazilite al-Nazzām adopted a tactic similar to the doctrine of latency that Galen condemns. His doctrine of *kumūn* may reflect some lingering sense of the Megarian unease with change.<sup>57</sup> Just as the Stoics, partly in the interest of their monism, turned to the idea of  $\chi\rho\tilde{\alpha}\sigma\iota\varsigma$ , intermixture, al-Nazzām relied on interpenetration, *mudāḥala*, to explain altered appearances without positing qualitative change: Any traits ever to appear in things were already present. Aristotelians, of course, need no such notion. Substances like foodstuffs are potentially what they are not at present. Their matter does not conceal what they will become. Living organisms have capacities to effectuate the transformations life demands. A prisoner fed only bread, Galen observes, still has blood in his veins.<sup>58</sup>

The atomism of Asclepiades is not the atomism of the kalām (although Avicenna does brand kalām atomists latter day followers of Epicurus). Kalām occasionalism is no mechanistic naturalism like that of Epicurus. It denies horizontal (or natural) causality in deference to God's exclusive power. But Galen has more than pique on his side when he calls the atomism of Asclepiades sophistical. For it dismisses the evidence of the senses.<sup>59</sup> Like the Epicureans, these atomists eliminate essential forms. That approach could not but appeal to Rāzī, who has God inject reason into the world but does not rely on emanation – or substantial forms.

Democritean atomism was motivated by problems about change. That was its critical point of contact with the atomism of the kalām: Reductionism allowed Democritus to explain changes in the (subjective) qualities of things without countenancing any change beyond locomotion. The atomism of the occasionalist kalām eliminated any shift or blur in the character of beings (atoms), in favor of their replacement by ever new cohorts of invisible, indivisible, and unchanging particles. Without substantial forms the Muslim occasionalists could render "beings" changeless, ensuring that all agency belonged to God. In a world of atoms and their accidents, where there were no essences, the character of all things would be clearly contingent on God's will. Such anti-naturalism was of little interest to Rāzī. But the elimination of natural forms did have the advantage of freeing science from Plato's quest for the essences of things, leaving a seemingly more commonsensical pursuit of building blocks and their arrangements.

Galen, although no atomist, did view time as absolute. Alexander of Aphrodisias took him to task for it. The *Fihrist* of Ibn al-Nadīm reports that Alexander called Galen "mule head" and credits Alexander with a work against Galen *On Time and Space*.<sup>60</sup> Although lost in Greek, the work survives in part in Arabic and Latin, under the title *On Time*.<sup>61</sup> One thesis singled out for rebuttal is an

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<sup>57</sup> For the doctrine of *kumūn*, see Pines, *Islamic Atomism* (cited above, n. 28), p. 165. For the afterlife of the doctrine see H. Eichner, "Ibn Rušd's Middle Commentary and Alexander's Commentary in their relationship to the Arab Commentary Tradition on the *De Generatione et Corruptione*", in C. D'Ancona - G. Serra (eds.), *Aristotele e Alessandro di Afrodisia nella tradizione araba*, Il Poligrafo, Padova 2002 (Subsidia mediaevalia patavina, 3), pp. 281-97, p. 283.

<sup>58</sup> Galen, *On the Natural Faculties*, I 2.6, p. 11 Brock.

<sup>59</sup> *Kalām* occasionalists quantize time and space and rely on God to create new atoms and accidents at every instant rather than allow any atom to move through space or alter its character over time, lest power be vested elsewhere than in God. So Maimonides echoes Galen's charge in addressing the kalām. *Guide*, I 73.

<sup>60</sup> The *Fihrist of al-Nadīm*, tr. Dodge, vol. 2, pp. 608-9.

<sup>61</sup> For the Arabic text, see 'A. Badawī, *Commentaires sur Aristote perdu en grec et autres épîtres, publiés et annotés*, El Machreq Editeurs, Beyrouth 1971. R.W. Sharples discusses and translates the Latin (with notes by F. Zimmermann on

anti-Aristotelian view that Rāzī shares: Time would continue even if all motion ceased.<sup>62</sup> From Themistius' commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* we learn that Galen, in *On Demonstration*, branded Aristotle's definition of time circular, for describing time as the measure of motion "in respect to before and after" – and specifying that "before and after" is meant temporally. Aristotle, Galen charged, had defined time, as Themistius put it, "in terms of itself".<sup>63</sup> Rāzī was not wrong, then, to see in Galen an opening for his own view that time should not be defined in terms of motion but must be absolute, lest its definition collapse in circularity. Evidently, Rāzī's rejection of time relativism was not unsupported by argument – and precedent.

By calling time inseparable from motion, Galen charged, Aristotle had rendered time subjective, misled by the fact that we observers are changing even when we view some static body.<sup>64</sup> Alexander countercharged that Galen had made time a substance<sup>65</sup> – echoing the Aristotelian accusation that exponents of the void had made a being of non-being. Alexander's charge was not unmotivated in Aristotle's terms. For Galenic time had a reality dependent on nothing else. Rāzī did not call time a substance, but time, as he conceived it was real in its own right, and that clearly did sound as if it met a key Aristotelian test for substantiality.<sup>66</sup>

### *The Fall of the Soul*

Matter, Rāzī held, is itself inert. Only soul can set it in motion.<sup>67</sup> But why would it do that? Soul, as we've seen, longed to be incarnate, knowing nothing of the suffering embodiment would bring.<sup>68</sup> God knew, of course, but did not restrain her. Like a wise father whose son yearns to enter a lovely garden with no sense of the thorns and stinging vermin it contains, God allowed the soul's impetuous descent, not powerless to stop her but understanding that souls learn only by experience.<sup>69</sup>

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the Arabic version) in "Alexander of Aphrodisias on Time", *Phronesis* 27 (1982) pp. 58-81. These texts do not name Galen. But Adamson sees "powerful reasons for thinking Galen is the target".

<sup>62</sup> Rāzī, *Opera Philosophica* (cited above, n. 4), pp. 195-6 Kraus; Arist., *Phys.*, IV 11, 218 b 21.

<sup>63</sup> The Aristotelian response, as Adamson points out, would be that time is an epistemic primitive. That would explain but not erase the circularity.

<sup>64</sup> Them., *In Phys.*, p. 144.23-25 Schenkl (CAG V.2, Berlin 1900), tr. R.B. Todd, *Themistius on Aristotle's Physics 4*, p. 144.23, Duckworth, London 2003, p. 56. We find Galen's charge echoed by Ibn Bāḡḡah in his commentary on Aristotle's *Physics* and by Ibn Rušd, *Aristotelis Opera cum Averrois Commentariis*, Venice 1562, repr. Frankfurt 1962, 4.177 M. See P. Lettinck, *Aristotle's Physics and its Reception in the Arabic World. With an Edition of the Unpublished Parts of Ibn Bājjā's Commentary on the Physics*, Brill, Leiden 1994, p. 382 (Aristoteles Semitico-Latinus, 7); P. Adamson, "Galen and Rāzī on Time", in R. Hansberger - M. Afifi al-Akiti - Ch. Burnett (eds.), *Medieval Arabic Thought: Essays in Honor of Fritz Zimmermann*, Warburg Institute, London 2012, pp. 1-14 (Warburg Institute Studies and Texts, 4). And see Goodman, "Time in Islam", *Asian Philosophy* 2 (1992), pp. 3-19.

<sup>65</sup> See Ibn Abī Sa'īd al-Mawṣilī's letter to Yahyā b. 'Adī in S. Khalifat, *Yahyā Ibn 'Adī, The Philosophical Treatises*, Jordan University, Amman 1988, pp. 318-19.

<sup>66</sup> Rāzī knew the Aristotelian criterion of substantiality and cited it in his *Theology*, as is noted by the Christian thinker Ilyā Nasibainī (d. 1049). See Mohaghegh, "Rāzī's *Kitāb al-'Ilm al-Ilāhī* and the *Five Eternals*" (cited above, n. 5), p. 17.

<sup>67</sup> The *Fihrist* (tr. Dodge, p. 706) credits Rāzī with a work arguing that matter's motion is innate. To be consistent, Rāzī would then have to hold that soul has animated matter since the world began – unless, perhaps the work that al-Nadīm lists reflects a Galenic view that Rāzī modified in developing his famous notion of five eternals.

<sup>68</sup> Cf. Rāzī, *Opera Philosophica* (cited above, n. 4), p. 216 Kraus.

<sup>69</sup> Rāzī, *Munāzarāt*, pp. 309-11 Kraus = pp. 97-98 Goodman. Here is the relevant passage from the Arabic Plotinus: "We say that, although the noble lordly soul has left her high world and descended to this low world, she did so by an aspect of her high ability and power, in order to give form to and to administer the essence that is after her. If she slips away from this world after giving form to it and administering it, and quickly enters her own world, her descent to the evil world hurts

Only through suffering in this world can a soul come to realize that this world is not where she belongs, and only with reason's guidance can she learn her way to her true home.

Soul's fall set matter whirling chaotically, until God imparted reason, giving order to the cosmic dance and insight to the soul. Reason, for Rāzī, was not a sixth eternal. It was of God Himself.<sup>70</sup> That affinity tells us something about Rāzī's God and helps explain why reason is the only ladder by which soul can learn to retrace her steps. Plato is the source for Rāzī's story:

This is, in the truest sense, the origin of creation and the world, as we should do well to believe on the testimony of wise men. God desired that all things should be good and nothing bad, so far as was attainable. Wherefore also, finding the whole visible sphere not at rest but moving in an irregular and disorderly fashion, out of disorder he brought order... [and finding] that no unreasoning creature could ever be fairer overall than the intelligent, and that intelligence could not be present in anything devoid of soul (...) he put intelligence in soul and soul in body (*Timaeus*, 29 E 3 - 30 B 5).

Plato's Demiurge imparts soul as well as intellect. In Galen's version motion is innate in matter since soul is inherent in it, but both soul and matter were "confused and disordered" until given form by the creator.<sup>71</sup> But for Rāzī reason comes from God, and soul existed on her own, as an eternal being.

Rāzī calls his cosmogonic story the only viable alternative to eternalism and the only workable proof (*ḥu ṣ ḡ a*) of creation.<sup>72</sup> There is an Epicurean lick in the story as Rāzī tells it, but also a bit of theodicy embedded there: The spontaneous motion of the soul, being neither natural nor forced but spontaneous, is no product of plan or agency and so cannot be laid to God's account. Pain and suffering, then, are not God's fault, even on a cosmic plane. That exempts God of responsibility for both natural and humanly wrought evil.

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her not at all: indeed she benefits by it, for she derives from this world the knowledge of evil, and learns what its nature is, after expending her powers on it and manifesting her noble deeds and acts, the quiescent, that were within her when she was in the world of mind. Had she not displayed her activities and expended her powers and made them fall under vision, those powers and activities would have been idle in her and the soul would have forgotten the sound and perfect virtues and deeds, if they were hidden and not apparent" (tr. after Lewis, p. 243). Armstrong translates the corresponding passage (*Enn.* IV 8[6], 5.25-34) as follows: "So then the soul, though it is divine and comes from above, enters into the body and, though it is a god of the lowest rank, comes to this world by a spontaneous inclination, its own power and the setting in order of what comes after it being the cause of its descent. If it escapes quickly it takes no harm by acquiring a knowledge of evil and coming to know the nature of wickedness, and manifesting its powers, making apparent works and activities which if they had remained quiescent in the spiritual world would have been of no use because they would never have come into actuality". A bit later in the same treatise (IV 8[6], 7.2-15), Plotinus says, "it is better for the soul to be in the intelligible, but all the same (...) having a common boundary with the perceptible nature, gives something to it of what it has in itself and receives something from it in return (...) especially as it is possible for it to emerge again having acquired the whole story of what is like to be there, and by the comparison of things which are, in a way, opposite, learning, in a way more clearly, better things". In the Arabic this becomes: "We say that although the soul has penetrated into the body she is capable of emerging from it, leaving it behind, and returning to her own upper world of mind and comparing the two worlds, and when she compares the two worlds and their virtues she knows the superiority of that world by experience, so as to have recognized accurately the high and noble virtues and the superiority of that world over this world, for if the knower is weak of nature and has experience of evil and knows it by experience (...) this is better than that he should know evil by knowledge only, not by experience" (tr. after Lewis, p. 247).

<sup>70</sup> Rāzī, *Opera Philosophica* (cited above, n. 4), pp. 197, 204 Kraus.

<sup>71</sup> Cf. Plat., *Epinomis* 982 A 6 - C 2.

<sup>72</sup> Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, p. 308 ll. 5 ff. Kraus = p. 96 Goodman.

Abū Ḥātim presses Rāzī about spontaneity:

“All philosophers agree”, I said, “that motion is of two kinds: natural and constrained. There is no third”.

“True”, he said, “that is what the ancients said. But I have developed an improved and rather subtle theory, from which I derive completely unprecedented consequences. I say that there are three kinds of motion: natural, constrained, and spontaneous”.

“We are not familiar with this third”, I said. “Tell us how it comes about”.

“I’ll give you an analogy that will help you picture it”, he said, “and at the same time give you the right idea about it”.

Now, these debates between us took place in the home of one of our princes, who was seated in our view arguing some point with the chief justice of the town. Also present at this gathering was the physician known as Abū Bakr Ḥusayn al-Tammār. To illustrate the “spontaneous” motion he had invented, the heretic said: “Do you see the Judge sitting with the Commandant?”

“Yes,” I said.

“Suppose”, he went on, “that he ate gassy foods, and the gasses churned and built up in his gut. He holds on and controls himself, not letting them out, lest they issue with an audible report. But then they get the better of him and spontaneously escape. This motion is neither necessary nor constrained, but spontaneous”.<sup>73</sup>

We can’t be sure if Abū Ḥātim accurately reports Rāzī’s illustration<sup>74</sup> – or his choice among those present to single out. So it’s hard to say if Abū Ḥātim’s counterargument, appealing to natural causes, effectively erases Rāzī’s notion of spontaneous motions. Plotinus has a similar thought about the impetuous motion of the soul:

The souls go forth neither under compulsion nor of free will; or, at least, freedom, here, is not to be seen as a deliberate choice but more like such a natural, spontaneous leap, or the passionate natural desire of sexual union,<sup>75</sup> or as some men are moved, unreasoning, to noble deeds.<sup>76</sup>

Plotinus goes on to meditate on soul’s inevitable descent, decreed by Nous, since the universal “broods close over the particular” (*Enn.* IV 3[27], 13.24-25). Returning to the motives of noble actions, today sometimes called instinctual or automatic, he sees an affinity between the impetuous and the heroic – rushing into a burning building, say, to save a child. The act is unthinking but not irrational. It may spring from habit, practice, even training. Virtue has become implicit. It is not calculated or agonized over but is, just as Galen, in the opening lines of Περὶ ἐθῶν, says an ethical disposition would be. Plotinus can make cosmological use of human spontaneity, because Nous, as he puts it, does brood over the particular: The universal is immanent, over and above the particular it governs, but also within it. The declension of being, accordingly, for Plotinus, if not for the Gnostics

<sup>73</sup> Rāzī, *Munāẓarāt*, pp. 311-12 Kraus; tr. Goodman, in “Rāzī vs Rāzī” (cited above, n. 27), pp. 99-100.

<sup>74</sup> Plotinus spoke of a birthpang, if not a spontaneous act of courtship, or heroism, rather than the unseemly counterpart Abū Ḥātim supplies to Rāzī in the *Munāẓarāt*.

<sup>75</sup> Here Plotinus begs to differ with Aristotle (*Politics*, I 2, 1252 a 27) for situating the (pro)creative urge perhaps too closely in the lap of nature.

<sup>76</sup> *Enn.* IV 3[27], 13.18-21. I have fused MacKenna’s poetic rendering here with Armstrong’s, which touches some of the nuances less prominent in MacKenna, despite MacKenna’s splendid diction.

or Rāzī, is a generous act. So the sparking over of providence that gives life and lights up human reason can also reignite in acts of courage or generosity: “the law is given in those on whom it falls. They bear it with them. Let the moment but come, and what it decrees will be brought to act (...)”.<sup>77</sup>

Plotinus, clearly, saw spontaneity as an alternative to the dichotomy of forced and free. For Aristotle, fire’s upward motion and earth’s downward motion would be classed as natural. The motion of a projectile was “forced”. But both sorts of motion would be natural in our terms, by contrast with the Aristotelian alternative of the voluntary. Spontaneous motions are quite distinct from any of these, and that’s where Aristotle might be expected to dig his heels in. He dismissed the notion of uncaused events. Chance was no true cause but just a catchall name for congeries of causes generally incidental to each other and to their observed effects. Spontaneity, similarly, for Aristotle is just a way of speaking of the outcome of no regular or intended cause. Epicurus begged to differ. His ethical agenda demanded freeing the will from the straitjacket in which atomism seemed to bind it. Hence the posit of the clinamen. Mechanistic determinism was not the issue dogging the flanks of Plotinus, but he did confront astrological determinism just as vehemently as Epicurus had spurned what he saw as its Democritean counterpart. For both philosophers, defeating determinism meant opening an avenue to felicity, as each, distinctively, conceived it.

Epicurus, as Armstrong showed, took his point of departure in Plato’s “tripartite division of happenings: into those caused by necessity, those caused by chance, and those within our control”. But “what Epicurus has done, and he seems to have been original in doing it, is to split the traditional conception of Chance-Necessity (...)”. Chance had been aligned with necessity (as it often has been, from Democritus to Monod). But Epicurus made room for “an erratic, capricious principle in the world” – freeing spontaneity from its bondage to causality and making chance (τύχη) “a separate force”, as Bailey put it.<sup>78</sup> Irrational, perhaps, or even labeled an “element of feminine caprice in the world” (as Rāzī too suggests by using the feminine gender when he speaks of the soul’s passionate desire for embodiment), the clinamen allows Epicurus to speak of creativity as well as freedom in the language of spontaneity.<sup>79</sup>

Spontaneity finds a home in Rāzī’s thinking, alongside atomism – partly, as I’ve suggested, for reasons of theodicy: Had soul chosen her moment it would belong to the annals of rationality. Had she acted under compulsion there would be a cause. But both causes and reasons would lead back to God, making Him responsible for the deficit Rāzī finds in the world’s balance of (hedonic) accounts. For Rāzī has no access to a demiurge, a lesser god, at whose feet to lay the world’s deficiencies, as Plato does in the *Timaeus*. It was Rāzī’s appeal to spontaneity that led my mind back to Epicurus. For until the rise of quantum physics the universe of Epicurus stands out for being driven by tandem forces of law and chance, at the root of order and creativity.

Rāzī’s myth and the tale he tells to motivate it weave together many threads: Gnostic visions – of the soul’s fall, creation as a catastrophe, the world as a crypt – with a Neoplatonic softening of τόλμα, the soul’s impetuosity, and reason as our sole means of escape. Epicureans and Platonists take a dim view of the quality of human life in this world. But Plato’s dismissal of worldly worth,

<sup>77</sup> *Enn.* IV 3[27], 13.26-30, tr. after MacKenna.

<sup>78</sup> A.H. Armstrong, “The Gods in Plato, Plotinus, Epicurus”, *Classical Quarterly* 32 (1938), pp. 190-6, pp. 191-2, citing *Enn.* II 3, Epic., *Letter to Menoecus*, 133-34, Plat., *Leg.* X, 888 E - 89 A, to establish the originality of Epicurus, and C. Bailey, *Epicurus: The Extant Remains*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1926, p. 341 and F.M. Cornford, *Plato’s Cosmology*, Kegan Paul, Oxford 1937, pp. 165-77.

<sup>79</sup> See Lucretius, *De Rerum Natura*, II 216-93; Diogenes of Oenoanda, Fr. 33: Cic., *De Finibus*, 1.6.19; C. Bailey, *The Greek Atomists and Epicurus*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1928, pp. 122, 316-27, 433-7.

“For good things with us are far fewer than evil”<sup>80</sup> takes on a naturalist’s authority when coupled with atomism. Rāzī agrees that this world is not the proper home for souls. But his sense that souls, once given reason, wisely yearn for a better place is seconded by a more worldly objection to the world: Sufferings here outweigh any respite the world can give – on Epicurean grounds: Whatever is composed of atoms will inevitably collapse.

### *Pleasure, Pain, and the Problem of Evil*

Rāzī’s account of pleasure, as he repeatedly reminds his reader, is the linchpin of his ethics. It does have its roots in Plato, most tellingly in Plato’s image of those who live for pleasure trying to carry water in a sieve.<sup>81</sup> Rāzī offers a bit more clinical diagnosis, leaning on the atomism underlying his physiology. But the idea that appetites grow when indulged is a Platonic theme from which both Rāzī and Epicurus profited. For Rāzī, Galen, who clearly had no amateur interest in pain, is a key intermediary here. But as Langermann notes, Galen uses pain in an argument against atomism: If Epicurus or Leucippus were right about atoms, Galen argues, one would never feel pain. For pain presupposes both change and sensation, and atoms have neither. Galen makes his case pointedly, as it were, by turning, characteristically, to an experiment (albeit not a very good one): If we prick the skin with a needle and it touches just a single atom, one would feel no pain, for an atom is without sensation. Likewise if the needle touched multiple atoms (!). But we do feel pain when pricked by a needle. So the body is not composed of atoms.<sup>82</sup> The argument is a prize case of the fallacy of division, presuming that anything present in a whole must pertain to each of its parts.

Galen, of course, was worlds away from conceiving the actual size of atoms. But even if we think of cells rather than atoms, his example is misplaced. For, while it’s true that the sensitive tissues of the lips or fingers will hardly miss a needle’s prick, in one’s back, where nerve endings are more widely spaced, a needle prick is readily missed. The Mutakallimūn often fell afoul of the fallacies of composition and division, so it’s good to find a Mu‘tazilite, ‘Abd al-Ġabbār, rightly noting that pain, on an atomist account, would result from disruption of the atomic array and need not affect each atom individually. Rāzī’s response is similar, treating pain as a displacement, and relying on the void to support his account of desire.

The idea of pleasure as repletion, as Adamson notes, is clearly present in Plato’s *Gorgias* (493-497) and in the *Republic* (IX, 585 A 1 - B 10), where *κένωσις* and *πλήρωσις* are key terms, and hunger and thirst are models. In both dialogues “impure pleasures” are preconditioned by pain: The pleasure of recovery from illness is really a lessening of pain. But sensory pleasures, for Plato, are shadow images of real pleasure, which is intellectual. For Plato distinguishes the pleasures of the appetitive, spirited, and rational souls (IX, 580 D 7 - 581 B 10). He does call some sensuous pleasures real, but the highest

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<sup>80</sup> Plato couples that remark, *Resp.* II, 379 C 4-5, put into the mouth of Socrates, with the affirmation that only the good should be ascribed to God.

<sup>81</sup> Plat., *Resp.* II, 363 D 7 - E 1. At *Phaed.* 84 A 2-6, playing on thoughts of repletion and depletion, Plato has Socrates compare the pursuit of pleasure to an endless task like Penelope’s, unweaving by night what she weaves by day.

<sup>82</sup> Galen, *On the Elements according to Hippocrates*, ed. Ph. De Lacy, *Galenī De Elementis ex Hippocratis sententia*, Akademie Verlag, Berlin 1996 (CMG VI 1,2). J.S. Wilkie and G.E.R. Lloyd compare the Arabic and Greek texts in “The Arabic Version of Galen’s *De Elementis secundum Hippocratem*”, *Journal of Hellenic Studies* 102 (1982), pp. 232-3. The *Epitome of Galen’s On the Elements* preserved in Arabic presses the point about sentience in its fourth chapter, pp. 68-69 of Bos and Langermann’s Arabic text; pp. 53-54 of their English translation. The author of that *Epitome* returns to the issue at the close of his textually vexed Chapter 7 (Arabic, p. 72, English, p. 56) to remark that elements need not be sentient. For minerals are not, and neither for that matter, are the fingernails.

pleasures, he suggests, lie beyond sensation. Pure pleasures, in the *Republic*, would be those unmixed with pain. In the *Gorgias*, once a deficiency is remedied sensations of pleasure and pain cease.<sup>83</sup> That would be the thought that matters most to Epicurus, and to Rāzī in his quasi-medical counsel about worldly pleasures.

Rāzī knows the *Timaeus*, where Plato holds that pleasurable or painful sensations are transmitted to the awareness from what the body undergoes (πᾶθος), pleasure being a return to the natural state (64 A 1 - 65 B 3). The repletion idea is prominent in the *Timaeus*, given the work's focus on the body, as Adamson suggests. That physical focus makes the work most relevant to Rāzī, given his medical outlook – and Plato's interest in diseases in the *Timaeus* (82-88). A key passage, quoted by Adamson from Galen's summary, explains that sudden departures from the body's natural state are painful; pleasures are felt when the return to normalcy is swift, but changes can be too gradual to be perceived. Slight or easy changes, the Arabic explains, are neither pleasurable nor painful – nodding one's head, say, or blinking an eye.<sup>84</sup>

“For al-Rāzī”, as Adamson puts it, “the perception of sudden improvement is genuine pleasure. It is just that the genuine pleasure can be had only by first being harmed, even if this harm was not perceived”.<sup>85</sup> The distinction of harm from painful sensation, as Adamson remarks, puts Rāzī in a good position to point out how easy it is to be mistaken about what is helpful or harmful.<sup>86</sup> In thinking of pleasure as something to be amassed, or heightened by ever more extreme sensations, the unaware or inattentive are prone to overlook what the physiology of pleasure reveals: that every pleasure is preceded by an equal and opposite departure from the natural state. Pleasures bring no real gain or profit.

Epicurus, once a student of the Platonist Pamphilus (D.L., X 14), was well aware of Plato's critique of hedonism and tellingly adopted his distinction of necessary from unnecessary desires.<sup>87</sup> Given his belief that “no pleasure in itself is bad” (*KD* 8, *VF* 50), Epicurus, as Adamson notes, did not follow Plato so far as to brand certain pleasures unnecessary. But desires were fair game. Those that are vain or empty (κενάλ), Adamson reasons, would seem to be dismissed by Epicurus as yielding no real pleasure.<sup>88</sup> A hedonist ready to endorse Callicles' cormorant pursuit of pleasure might dismiss that argument as invoking what Charles Stevenson called a persuasive definition. But Epicurus can readily rebut, that real pleasures should bring peace of mind (ἄταραξία). Indeed, Epicurus called it “the first step toward salvation” to free oneself from “maddening desires” (*VF* 80). Rāzī follows:

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<sup>83</sup> See Adamson, “Platonic Pleasures” (cited above, n. 16), pp. 76-7. In the *Philebus* Plato addresses pleasures unconnected with pain – pointing to the life of knowledge and virtue, but awarding the prize to the life of mind and pleasure (21 D 9 - E 2). That Solomonic verdict harks back to the *Protagoras* (357 B 4), where the “art of measurement” is invoked to determine which pleasures are worth choosing. It also points forward to Aristotle's treatment of εὐδαιμονία in inclusive rather than exclusive terms. But for Aristotle it is the moral virtues and the active life that complement the otherwise self-sufficient joys of knowing, making the *summum bonum* a summit rather than an isolate. In the *Philebus* (51 B - E) the pleasures of sight and sound are added to those of smell. But the unchanging objects of *Resp.* IX, 585 C remain topmost in Plato's axiology, as they are in his ontology.

<sup>84</sup> Galen, *Compendium Timaei*, p. 19 Walzer; for Galen's corresponding account of pain, *Methodus Medendi*, 12.8 and *De Locis Affectis*. Aetius defines pain as a sensation produced by a sudden change in temperament, e.g. from heat to cold, V 100; see Paul of Aegina, *The Seven Books*, edited by F. Adams, The Sydenham Society, London 1847, 1, pp. 296-7; cf. Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūhānī*, pp. 36-7; Adamson, “Platonic Pleasures” (quoted above, n. 16), p. 83.

<sup>85</sup> Adamson, “Platonic Pleasures”, p. 85.

<sup>86</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>87</sup> Epicurus, *Letter to Menoecus*, 127, echoing Plat., *Resp.* VIII, 558 D - 559 D.

<sup>88</sup> Adamson, “Platonic Pleasures”, p. 78.

Reason's moral task is to remember what pleasure really is and consistently rely on the critical distinction between mere sensations of repletion and the lasting pleasure of genuine repose.

Epicurus reduced Plato's "art of measurement" (*Prot.*, 357 B 3) from qualitative to quantitative terms (much as Democritus had reduced qualitative to quantitative changes): "If every pleasure could be extended both in time and in effect over the whole of our nature, or its ruling parts, there would be no difference between one pleasure and another" (*KD* 9; cf. *VF* 33). Bentham took the same reductive path, much to Mill's distress. Anatomical and temporal differences will distinguish Epicurean pleasures from one another. That leaves room for the (more lasting) pleasures of "the ruling part" but still allows Epicurus to dismiss intangible goals like glory or sanctity – immortality, of course, or even humane goods, of service or self-sacrifice. Such transcendental goals are illusory (cf. *VF* 32). But Epicurus does maintain that "It is impossible to live pleasurably without living justly, nobly, and wisely" (*KD* 5). The grounds he offers are prudential: The thief or cheat (and perhaps even the free rider) is never free of the fear of detection.<sup>89</sup> Here Epicurus packs conventional ideas of justice, nobility, and wisdom into his carefully sculpted account of pleasure, doubtless with an eye cocked to respectability, a motive, as I argued long ago, not discordant with Rāzī's aims – or those of any hedonist more interested in a mainstream following than in aping Callicles' shock tactics.

Epicurus greatly simplified Plato's nuanced account of pleasure: "The elimination of all that causes pain is the highest peak of pleasure" (*KD* 3). So the pleasure of repose is real. For Rāzī pleasure is always a sensation of change, and he finds no such sensation in the natural state as such. But does that mean that repose is no hedonic optimum for Rāzī? Granted Rāzī has no term for Epicurean katastemic pleasures. He makes quite a case for (Plato's) thesis that the natural state has no sensation of its own. Was I wrong, then, to speak of our "enjoyment" of that state?<sup>90</sup> I can't quite banish my grandmother's fine English diction when she spoke of someone's enjoying good health. For health, as Adamson rightly stresses, is Rāzī's base of operations, and health continues when the body remains in its natural state – always a dynamic rather than a static equilibrium in a living being.

We might get some help here from Torquatus, cast by Cicero as the Epicurean in *De Finibus*. For Cicero had sound philosophical intuitions and access to Greek texts no longer extant. Torquatus portrays Epicurean philosophy as a source of courage, since it "makes light of death" (I 49). He also hopes to free his interlocutors of any naive notions they may harbor about the Epicurean brand of hedonism and show them "how serious, temperate, and austere the school is that (too often) is taken to be sensual, lax, and luxurious".<sup>91</sup> He explains:

The pleasure we pursue is not just the kind that directly affects our nature agreeably and is thus perceived as welcome by the senses. Rather, pleasure, according to us, reaches its maximum in the removal of all pain. When freed of pain we enjoy that freedom itself and the absence of any harm (*ipsa liberatione et vacuitate omnis molestiae gaudemus*). But whatever we enjoy is pleasurable, just as whatever assails us is painful. So any removal of pain is rightly called a pleasure (...) the removal of pain brings pleasure in its stead. Thus Epicurus saw no middle between pleasure and pain. He held what some consider the neutral state, of complete absence of pain, to be a pleasure, indeed, the peak pleasure.<sup>92</sup>

<sup>89</sup> Besides *KD* 5, cf. 17, 37; *VF* 12, 13, 56-57, 70.

<sup>90</sup> Adamson, "Platonic Pleasures", p. 86.

<sup>91</sup> Cic., *De Finibus*, I 37, tr. after H. Rackham, *Cicero. De Finibus bonorum et malorum*, with an English trans. by H. Rackham, Heinemann - Macmillian, London - New York 1914, p. 41 (Loeb Classical Library).

<sup>92</sup> Cic., *De Finibus*, I 37-38 (cf. trans. Rackham, pp. 41-43).

The displacement preceding every pleasurable sensation on Rāzī's account need hardly cause injury. But some dislocation is inevitable. No pleasure comes without price. In this sense Rāzī has good reason, even without a word for *katastemic*, to treat the natural state as an optimum, not of sensation but of wellbeing. Pain, for Epicurus, functions as a tocsin, warning of actual or potential harm. Both pleasures and pains in Epicurean theory serve as signals, pointing the way to normalcy. It's hard to say, in these terms, that Rāzī does not regard the natural state as the hedonic optimum. For, as Epicurus said, "it is not apparent health but real health we need" (*VF* 54). The mistake Rāzī constantly blames for moral error is the pursuit of ever added, ever greater sensations, when the real optimum is relief from sensation and release from desire. As Epicurus taught: "The flesh would have it that pleasure is unbounded and demands boundless time. But thought, having reasoned out the purpose and limits of the flesh and dispelled fear of the future, gives us life in full; we no longer need boundless time. Reason does not shun pleasure. But when the time comes to take leave of life it does not depart as though anything of the best life were wanting" (*KD* 20; cf. 19, 21).

For Rāzī, as Adamson notes, any pain we suffer that we did not bring upon ourselves results from nature and necessity. The point is Galenic:

Consider well the material of which a thing is made, and cherish no idle hope that you could put together from the catamenia and semen an animal that would be deathless, exempt from pain, endowed with never-ending motion, and as radiantly beautiful as the sun.<sup>93</sup>

Galen follows Plato here.<sup>94</sup> Rāzī paraphrases Galen: "One should not disparage man and his makeup, looking to the sun, moon, and stars. For the same wisdom and providential care are shown here on earth. But one must consider the element of which each thing is made and not wish that an animal formed of menstrual blood and semen could be free of pain, death, or illness, like the sun".<sup>95</sup>

On the heels of his paraphrase from *De Usu partium* Rāzī rejects a reading of Galen that he sees as ultimately hedonistic, the claim that the pleasures enjoyed in life can outweigh or even equilibrate the pains one suffers. That view Rāzī takes to be tantamount to hedonism, perhaps because it would seem to undercut the recognition that this world is not the soul's true home and thus to negate the incentive for breaking free of the body. Hedonism, Rāzī argues, is inconsistent with Galen's position in *Περὶ ἐθῶν* (*Fi Ahlāq*).<sup>96</sup> Plato, he insists, and all the better philosophers reject the notion that pleasures alone are worthy of pursuit for their own sake. Indeed, if pleasure were life's paramount good, the best living beings would be those most suited to it: Beasts would be superior to humans and

<sup>93</sup> Galen, *De Usu partium*, III, tr. May, 1, p. 189.

<sup>94</sup> See *Statesman*, 273 B. The same passage in Plato pictures the transformation of the world from chaos to cosmos in terms that resonate with Rāzī's narrative.

<sup>95</sup> Rāzī, *K. al-Šukūk 'alā Ġālīmūs*, ed. Muḥaqqiq (cited above, note 7), p. 17.

<sup>96</sup> As noted by Samuel Stern, the Greek original of Galen's *Περὶ ἐθῶν* is lost, as is Ḥunayn's full Arabic translation, although some fragments are quoted by various authors. But a summary survives, *Muḥtaṣar min K. al-Ahlāq li-Ġālīmūs*, discovered by Paul Kraus, who published his edition in the *Bulletin of the Faculty of Arts of the University of Egypt* 5 (1937), pp. 1-51 (Arabic section). J.N. Mattock translated the text in the Walzer Festschrift edited by S. Stern - A. Hourani - V. Brown, *Islamic Philosophy and the Classic Tradition*, University of South Carolina Press, Columbia 1972, pp. 235-60. Kraus addressed the reception of the work and its fragments in the Arabic introduction to his text, and Stern supplemented that information in "Some Fragments of Galen's *On Dispositions (Peri Ethon)* in Arabic", *The Classical Quarterly* 6 (1956), pp. 91-101. Walzer had discussed it in "New Light on Galen's Moral Philosophy (from a recently discovered Arabic source)", *Classical Quarterly* 1 (1949), pp. 82-96 (repr. in Id., *Greek into Arabic. Essays on Islamic Philosophy*, Cassirer, Oxford 1962, pp. 142-63).

indeed to the stars and God. Most tellingly, making pleasures the sole ends worthy of choice in their own right would mean giving up the rule of reason, forswearing the soul's escape from the body, and leaving it inextricably entangled in physicality.

Confident that the soul is a primary reality, not reducible to matter, Rāzī battles to keep open a Platonic, intellectualist egress. He accepts Plato's thought that souls which cleave to sensory things will not achieve escape velocity. Reason holds the key to that escape, which begins, even before attachment to any higher truths, with the recognition that pains are an inevitable consequence of our embodiment and will inevitably outweigh pleasures: The Giver of Forms (*al-muṣawwir*) could create only in matter suited to the forms to be imparted. Immunity from pain was not in the cards. But rather than forgo creation altogether, the Formgiver gave us respite, a return to the natural state, as Plato "and other naturalists" taught. Yet pleasures, being only a release from pain, can never overbalance it. The body will inevitably suffer the decay against which pains caution us.

Despite Rāzī's disavowals of hedonism, Maimonides sees an Epicurean cast in his handling of the problem of evil and berates him for holding that evils outweigh goods in this life:

Common people often imagine that evils outnumber goods in the world, so much so that much of the rhetoric and poetry of all nations contains this bias. The wonder is, they say, that time brings any good at all, whereas evils are said to be many and constant. Not just the masses commit this error. So do those who claim to know something. Rāzī wrote a famous book that he called *Theology*,<sup>97</sup> filled with his ravings and prodigious feats of ignorance, including the claim that evils outstrip the good in the world: If you set a man's repose and the duration of his peaceful pleasures alongside the pains and sufferings, hardships, strokes and chronic diseases, misfortunes, sorrows, and afflictions that beset him, you'd find our existence, human life, an immense evil, a chastisement inflicted on us. He undertakes to vindicate this claim by piling up these woes against all that monotheists affirm as to God's manifest bounty and beneficence, His being pure goodness, and the pure goodness of all that issues from Him.<sup>98</sup>

Maimonides traces the error he condemns to a mix of hedonism and egoism: Vulgar minds, he charges, often seem to assume that all the world exists for their pleasure alone. When they suffer the disabilities inherent in our embodiment, they rush to blame God or fate for not granting them all that their crass hearts desire.<sup>99</sup> Rhetoric, song, and story play up such feelings. Maimonides does not negate Rāzī's humane sensibilities.<sup>100</sup> Indeed he follows Rāzī (and Galen) in tracing human sufferings to our embodiment and acknowledging that we bring many of our sufferings on ourselves – although many are the work of others. He does not pretend that human sufferings are not real evils or are, somehow, always deserved.<sup>101</sup> But he has little patience for those who fail to look to the larger scheme of nature, or for those who leverage human suffering rhetorically so as to impugn God's knowledge, grace, or sovereignty.

In a way Maimonides turns the tables on Rāzī by rejecting the claim that sufferings outweigh life's broader goods. That is the view, on his account, that leans on hedonism since it weighs in hedonic coin the goods and ills of living in the world. To know God, Maimonides holds, is the highest

<sup>97</sup> This would be the *ʿIlm al-ilāhī* mentioned in the *Fihrist*, tr. Dodge, p. 706.

<sup>98</sup> Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, III, 12, ed. Munk, 3, p. 18a.

<sup>99</sup> Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, III, 12, ed. Munk, 3, pp. 18b-22a.

<sup>100</sup> As a physician Rāzī was known for providing comprehensively for his patients including those in need, seeing to their diet, and even providing them with stipends. See al-Nadim, *Fihrist*, p. 702 (tr. Dodge).

<sup>101</sup> Maimonides, *Guide to the Perplexed*, III, 22-23, ed. Munk, 3, pp. 44b-51b.

human good, and the chance to reach for that goal warrants the vulnerabilities attendant on our embodiment. Rāzī too, of course, had urged the soul's return to her true abode, although he did not quite call the avenue or its goal knowledge of God. Nor is it as clear as might be, despite his disavowal, that he has fully purged the hedonic axiology that Maimonides detects as the mainspring of the Epicurean dilemma, which Rāzī deployed in behalf of his counsels of escape: the thesis Maimonides singles out as the claim that evils outweigh goods in this life.

### *A Prudential Ethics*

Fakhry, Druart, and Adamson have stressed the Platonic roots of Rāzī's ethics. I have seen him marching to a different drummer. Fakhry rightly saw in Rāzī's treatment of the dialectic of pleasure "adumbrated in *Philebus* 31 D and 42 C and *Timaeus* 64 D", an approach "reported by Galen in his compendium of the *Timaeus*, extant only in Arabic".<sup>102</sup> Citing Rāzī's repudiation of hedonism, he calls him "the outstanding Platonist of Islam" – chiefly in recognition of his preference of Plato's views over Aristotle's.<sup>103</sup> But Rāzī declares that his rejection of subservience to one's appetites and passions is shared not only with Plato but also with "the physical philosophers", who "did not believe the soul exists on its own".<sup>104</sup>

Rāzī's hedonic strategy, like that of Epicurus, is not to maximize pleasure by increasing its intensity or duration, nor even by enhancing its quality, but by allowing reason to guide one to a better understanding of the physiology of pleasure. If pleasure is repletion, it finds its optimum not when the senses are reporting processes of resolution but in the resting state, when desire is at a minimum. So we optimize pleasure when we minimize desire and trim it to nature's needs. The reasoning is indeed Platonic at root, as I wrote years ago. It is Plato's case that a life spent in pursuit of pleasure is like trying fill a leaky jar with liquids hard come by and painfully lost.<sup>105</sup>

"Passion and instinct", Rāzī writes, are always inciting, urging, and pressing us to pursue present pleasures and to choose them without reflection or deliberation on the possible outcome, even though it may involve later pain and prevent us from attaining a pleasure many times greater".<sup>106</sup> Passion and our animal nature, Rāzī explains, see only the present. That was Plato's reasoning in introducing "the art of measurement" in the *Protagoras*, taken up by Epicurus, without regard to Plato's larger thesis, that reason, ultimately, must measure goods and ills beyond those of pleasure and pain. Rāzī hews to the simpler case: A child with ophthalmia needs to know better than to rub his eyes, eat dates, and play in the sun.<sup>107</sup> As Fakhry explains, "It is because of their ignorance of the genuine nature of pleasure that the incontinent yearn for never-ending enjoyment" – little suspecting, the link of pleasures with prior pain.<sup>108</sup>

It was the prudential thrust of Rāzī's moral arguments that led me to relate his ethics to an Epicurean outlook. We can see that thrust quite clearly when Rāzī surveys the vices he aims to

<sup>102</sup> M. Fakhry, *Ethical Theories in Islam*, Brill, Leiden 1994, pp. 72-3, citing Galen, *Compendium*, p. 19 Kraus-Walzer; cf. al-ʿĀmirī, *K. al-Sāʿādah wa-l-ʾisʿād fi l-sīra al-insāniyya*, ed. M. Minovi, Steiner, Wiesbaden 1957-58, p. 49.

<sup>103</sup> Ibn al-Qifṭī reports that it was a weak line of thinking on Rāzī's part that provoked his sharp divergence from Aristotle. Ibn al-Qifṭī, *Tārīḥ al-ḥukamāʾ*, auf Grund der Vorarbeiten A. Müllers hrsg. von J. Lippert, Dieterich'sche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Leipzig 1903, p. 171.

<sup>104</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, p. 24 Kraus = p. 26 Arberry.

<sup>105</sup> See L.E. Goodman, *Jewish and Islamic Philosophy: Crosspollinations in the Classic Age*, Edinburgh U.P., Edinburgh 1999, p. 46.

<sup>106</sup> See *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 2.

<sup>107</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, p. 22 Kraus = pp. 23-4 Arberry.

<sup>108</sup> Fakhry, *Ethical Theories*, p. 73.

diagnose and treat in the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*. But before reviewing those discussions I should remark that Rāzī's focus on individual moral choice preserves the personalism of the Hellenistic age. Plato, we'll recall, declined to divorce moral from social questions. In his anatomy of the virtues, which became all but canonical for Islamic ethical philosophers,<sup>109</sup> he parses our moral task in terms of an internal politics, reconciling competing interests under reason's guidance. Correspondingly, he regards the work of public policy in moral terms. The pursuit of justice, for Plato, whether in the individual or in the state, is a matter of integrating rival penchants that we know first hand from our experience of the inner conflicts of the soul but, famously, writ large (for purposes of objectifying rival interests) as if they were the overriding demands of diverse classes in a model state. The task of statecraft is to integrate these interests. So public justice is won by the same means an individual must use to attain internal peace. Plato's political focus is visible again when al-Fārābī couches his key thoughts about metaphysics in a book of social theory – its full title: *The Book of the Principles underlying the Beliefs of the People of the Virtuous State*.<sup>110</sup> In the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, as in Epicurus, there is no overt politics.<sup>111</sup> Rāzī shares the Epicurean (and Galenic) counsel that public offices and honors are best avoided (unless one grows up with natural access to them, he suggests, in effect deferring to an emir like the one for whom he writes). Here's what Rāzī says about “The Quest for Worldly Rank and Station”, as Arberry translates the heading of his chapter on the subject:

One who desires to ornament and elevate himself with such eminence, seeking respite and relief from bondage and imprisonment by the cares and grief that batter and blast him toward a passion whose goal is just the opposite of what he seeks<sup>112</sup> should recall and hold firmly in mind: first, what we've gone over as to the superiority of reason and rationality in action, and then what I've said about bridling and curbing desire and its subtle traps and snares.<sup>113</sup>

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<sup>109</sup> See my discussion of Miskawayh and al-Ġazālī's virtue ethics in *Islamic Humanism*, Oxford U.P., New York 2003, pp. 101-21. Miskawayh, who pioneered virtue ethics in Islamic philosophy was indebted to the Christian philosopher theologian Yaḥyā b. 'Adī, the teacher of his teacher, Ibn al-Ḥammār.

<sup>110</sup> The work, *Kitāb Mabādī 'Arā' Ahl al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*, was edited and translated by my teacher Richard Walzer as *Al-Fārābī on the Perfect State*, Oxford U.P., Oxford 1985). As Walzer liked to stress, al-Fārābī was somehow heir and continuator of a tradition of Greek political Platonism lost to many in the Academy – although not, of course, to the profoundly spiritual Plotinus, who still dreamed of founding a Platonopolis.

<sup>111</sup> There is an implicit political message in Epicureanism, the message of *laissez faire*: One gains ἀταραξία not by engaging in public concerns (as the Stoic ethos of responsibility might counsel), but by avoiding them. A byproduct of that policy, Epicureans might argue, will be discarding meddlesomeness. That, in turn, might be pled to be maximally beneficial even socially. But the claim, *il faut cultiver notre jardin*, is weighed down by legitimate concerns about the ill effects of benign neglect of others' needs, and with serious worries about who or what will maintain social peace and order when those receptive to such advice retire with their friends to their garden.

<sup>112</sup> The translation of the passage is mine. The present phrase is not, as Arberry renders it, “diametrically opposed to the purpose of this chapter”. The *bāb* here is not a chapter (a chapter in Rāzī's book is called *fāṣl*). Rāzī's sense here is, “just the opposite of his purpose on this head”. The purpose in question, as Rāzī stipulated at the outset was respite or repose. The ambitious office seeker traps himself into a course whose outcome is quite contrary to what he sought. He has only entangled himself more deeply in the toils of the sort bondage he was hoping to escape. Cf. Epicurus, *VF* 67: “great wealth can scarcely be attained without slavery to crowds or politicians (...)”, cf. *VF* 81. Socrates ascribes his own avoidance of public office to the cautions of his δαίμωνιον, *Apology*, 31 D 1 - 5.

<sup>113</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, p. 85 Kraus. Paul Walker surveyed the remnants of Rāzī's writings in search of a political doctrine; his findings were mainly negative. See his “The Political Implications of al-Rāzī's Philosophy,” in Ch. Butterworth (ed.), *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy*, Harvard U.P., Cambridge 1992, pp. 61-94.

Lucretius too traces the quest for office to greed and wishful thinking, a sense of confinement, aggravated by another passion that Rāzī too condemns, the fear of death:

Avarice and blind lust for office  
 Lead men on to breach the bounds of law,  
 To join or aid in crime, by night or in broad day,  
 Vying for wealth or power, wounding life itself,  
 And feeding those wounds, in no small part,  
 By fear of death.  
 When harsh need or abject station  
 Seem distant from a sweet, calm life,  
 And more death's waiting room,  
 False fears harry men,  
 Who rush for some far, far escape –  
 By setting the state on fire, grasping greedily for riches,  
 Piling corpse upon corpse.  
 Savagely they savor a brother's death,  
 Fearing and loathing a kinsman's table,  
 Consumed by envy at another's power or fame,  
 Seeming, so they whine,  
 To lie shrouded in the shadows,  
 Or engulfed in mire.  
 Some die to win a statue, or a name.  
 Some grow so disheartened,  
 And hate life and light so deeply,  
 As to kill themselves,  
 Forgetting that the fear of death  
 Was the root of their cares. (*DRN*, III, 59-86)

Reminding his reader of the true character of pleasure, Rāzī explains that we soon take for granted any status we achieve (cf. *KD* 25). His argument against pursuit of office, rank, and circumstance recalls the boundlessness of desire for things unnecessary but hinges on a cost benefit analysis. It is not distaste for crime that makes the case here (lest real princes seem to be indicted or impugned), but the sheer imbalance of long term pains and pleasures.

The quest is onerous, dangerous, unlikely of success, and sure of disappointment even in that rare event:

Barring some rare and surprising accident, one can exchange one's familiar and accustomed station for something grander only by taking on a great burden of effort and exertion (...). One who has grown up unaccustomed to command and the company of escorts fore and aft but strains and strives to reach that state has turned away from reason and toward passion. He will not attain such rank without toil and arduous effort and loading his soul with alarms and dire risks, most leading to destruction. Nor will he win his object without bringing on himself pains many times the pleasure won in reaching it. He has simply been deceived, gulled by the image of his goal and failure to conceive the road to it. (...) And when he finally reaches it and gains what he had hoped for, his joy and satisfaction are soon lost. His status now is just another facet of the usual and familiar, less and less a source of pleasure, and ever

harder and harsher to maintain and defend – although passion will not let him give it up or seek escape. (...) He has lost much and gained nothing.<sup>114</sup>

Rāzī praises Plato alongside reason, and like Plato he sees in reason our highest hope of return to a world free of the injuries and deceptions toward which our animal passions lure us. Summarizing Plato's view, linked to that of "the divine recluse Socrates", he writes: The soul will attain immortality insofar as it breaks free of the body and does not remain sunk in the material world, where all things disperse and dissolve, but with the help of the ideas proper to it, regains its own world.<sup>115</sup> But even a worldly ethics, he continues, offers sound moral advice:

This sums up Plato's view and that of Socrates, the divine recluse who preceded him. But to proceed: No worldly view whatever fails to demand curbing the passions and appetites somewhat, rather than give them free rein. Controlling the passions is an obligation recognized by every rational person and every religion. So an intelligent person should set his mind's eye on that thought and bear it diligently in mind. Even if he does not reach the highest rung described in this book in that regard, he'll at least gain the more modest one of those who counsel reining in the passions enough to avoid doing worldly, temporal harm to himself. And if at first he must swallow some bitterness and discomfort by reining them in, that will be followed soon enough by a sweetness and pleasure he can enjoy (...).<sup>116</sup>

Habit, Rāzī promises, will render easier one's battle with the passions as one gradually learns self-control and makes discipline part of one's character. That psychological point, about balancing the stabilizing habits of discipline against the destabilizing habits of desire, gives Rāzī his transition from the Platonic heights, toward which he has pointed, to his more worldly strategy, where self control is not the highroad to immortality but a practical safeguard against the tainted fruits sought blindly by ungoverned appetites and passions. It is this lower road, a prudential track, that Rāzī follows in most of his concrete moral advice in the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*.

Self-love, he argues, impedes self-governance. So if one is fortunate enough to have a candid friend and brave enough to encourage him to overcome a natural reticence, one can see one's failings in another's eyes. One can even profit by seeing one's faults in the eyes of a less friendly critic.<sup>117</sup> By following Galen's advice about what Bobbie Burns will call the gift to see ourselves as others see us, Rāzī finds a pathway to moral perspective more in keeping with his independent spirit than, say, the guidance on offer from an infallible Ismā'īlī imām. For him the question is not "What would (even) Jesus do?" but "What would you do, if you had the sense to objectify your self-image by seeing

<sup>114</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, pp. 86-7 Kraus = pp. 95-6 Arberry; cf. Chapter 2, where Rāzī argues that in time all pleasures pall.

<sup>115</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, pp. 27-30 Kraus = pp. 29-33 Arberry. Rāzī seems to follow the *Phaedo* here. But one must also note the concern he voices about excessive intellectual ambition, the counterpart of the worldly ambitions whose extreme he finds in Alexander the Great – and his claim that even the thickest of men is capable of rising to the spiritual world, if he puts his mind to it. For the Arabic *Phaedo*, see D.N. Hasse, "Plato arabico-latinus: Philosophy - Wisdom Literature - Occult Sciences", in S. Gersh - M.J.F.M. Hoenen (eds.), *The Platonic Tradition in the Middle Ages*, De Gruyter, Berlin 2002, pp. 31-65.

<sup>116</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, pp. 31-32 Kraus = p. 33 Arberry.

<sup>117</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 4, citing *Fī Tā'arruf al-rağul 'uyūb nafsihi* (*How a Man may Recognize his own Faults*) and *Fī anna l-aḥyār yantaḥi ūna bi-ā dā'ihim* (*That the Best Profit from their Enemies*). For the Galenic background and Galen's use of a fable of Aesop to motivate these counsels, see Bar-Asher, "Quelques aspects de l'éthique d'Abū-Bakr al-Rāzī" (cited above, n. 20), pp. 137-8.

yourself in another's eyes". There's an echo here of Plato's thought, in the *Alcibiades*, that we best see ourselves and the divine within us in the pupil of another's eye. But Galen's version, taken up by Rāzī affords not an epiphany but an instrument for self-examination meant for everyday use.

Rāzī's prescription against conceit, as Arberry aptly translates '*aḡab* here, follows up on Galen's advice. The remedy is to recognize the harm done by overweening self-love. For conceit feeds on self-deception and fosters complacency and a failure to find and fix one's weaknesses. The result is diminished success, which Rāzī freely describes in worldly terms: one loses ground vis-à-vis one's peers and rivals.<sup>118</sup>

Still, it's one thing to desire success and quite another to wish to see others to fail. Envy, as Rāzī diagnoses it, is a product of stinginess and greed – one wants more and balks at sharing, and so resents another's gain, as though life were a zero-sum game. Seeing that envy is akin to malice is the start of a cure, given the contrast with God's generosity. Straightforward reasoning can help: One might ask oneself why one doesn't envy those one's never met – people in China or India, say – but only those near at hand. The question aims to expose the unreason of envy. One has no special right to another's success, Rāzī argues. Besides, there's little if any pleasure in envy; but the anxiety it breeds and the risk of counter-measures are palpable. So the argument turns from an ideal of *imitatio Dei* to earthier considerations. We long for what we lack but soon take for granted what we have, Rāzī reminds his reader. Pleasures eagerly anticipated soon pall, displaced, as al-Kindī had argued, by the fear of loss. Rāzī's brief has turned prudential.<sup>119</sup>

We can see Galen's fingerprints on Rāzī's account of anger when he retells Galen's story of his mother's growing so frustrated by a lock that she bit it. Uncontrolled anger, Rāzī finds, is often more hurtful to the angered than to the object or butt of his anger. Ungoverned fury can even lead to death, as Rāzī can testify from his own observation. Given the harm anger can do to one's health and other interests, anger is a prime witness in support of Rāzī's rather clinical case for the need to keep reason in charge of one's emotions.<sup>120</sup>

Mendacity, too, is rejected on prudential grounds: The liar is sure to be found out ultimately: "When a person loves being big and taking charge everywhere, in every way, he loves to be the one who teaches and informs since that sets him above those who are taught (...)"<sup>121</sup> Yet lying inevitably backfires. Glitches and contradictions expose the liar, and he forfeits the esteem and dominance he sought. Any pleasure lying may bring, Rāzī cautions, is sure to be outweighed by fear of discovery.<sup>122</sup> In the same way any Epicurean can argue that the thief and philanderer never know peace of mind.

Rāzī's case against gluttony is again prudential. Unbridled appetites know no limits – and are thus, inevitably, frustrate, as Plato explained and Rāzī's own observations confirm. Epicurus drove home the point: "It is not the stomach that is insatiable, as people say, but the false belief in the stomach's infinite capacity" (*VF* 59). Gluttony, Rāzī argues, harvests only contempt. Reputation and anxiety are hardly irrelevant to the medical posture he adopts in framing his counsels to those he often speaks of as though they were his patients. For this clinic is *rūḥānī*, that is psychic, and even for an individualist the opinions of others matter, materially if not more deeply. An Aristotelian

<sup>118</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 6.

<sup>119</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 7.

<sup>120</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 8; and see Bar-Asher, "Quelques aspects de l'éthique d'Abū-Bakr al-Rāzī", pp. 138–40.

<sup>121</sup> There's a taste here of Rāzī's principled resistance, in the name of human equality, of the claim that his adversary Abū Ḥatīm harped on in their encounters, the idea that humanity is inevitably divided into the teachers and the taught – the former class, presumptively, composed of prophets and Ismā'īlī imāms.

<sup>122</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 9.

would explain this by the fact that we humans are social animals. But Rāzī, who is hardly an egoist, independent minded though he is, does care what others think of him, viewing his reputation, like his work, as an extension of his identity.

Pointing out that overeating brings illness and indigestion, Rāzī notes, can be a more effective remedy than philosophical appeals to the primacy of reason. He quotes a philosopher on the difference between eating to live and living to eat. But not everyone will take the point. One who finds neither religious nor intellectual grounds for self-restraint can still be held back if reminded that overeating brings more pain and suffering than self-control: Where one is held back neither by doctrine (*madhabibi*) nor outlook (*ra'yibi*) a prudential tack often proves more effective.<sup>123</sup> That thought makes explicit Rāzī's dialectical reason, in most of his discussions in the *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, for appealing to the balance of pleasures.

Alcoholism is readily seen to be ruinous. In classing it as a disease, Rāzī does not aim, as today's medicalizers often do, to exempt it from moral judgment. He catalogues the clinical impact but adds disgrace, immodesty, indiscretion, and loss of control, among the more immediate deficits of drunkenness. Appetites and passions intensify, and reason is enslaved by drink. Rāzī mentions no doctrinal grounds for abstention but permits the occasional drink if taken not for pleasure but, as needed, say, to allay anxiety. Alcohol proves a prime witness in support of Rāzī's Platonizing claim that indulgence breeds ever further indulgence.<sup>124</sup>

Miserliness can stem from prudence, he allows. But when it springs from a passion for keeping and having, it must be fought. Sometimes reason can quell it simply by noting its excess. But the red line between reason and passion, where possession is concerned, is need. Rāzī traces that line in individual and secular terms, not those of charity or saintly asceticism.<sup>125</sup>

Virtue itself (*al-faḍl*) can be harmful, he argues, if one worries too much or thinks too hard. Scrupulosity was the medieval moralist's term for the moral (and ritual) part of the weakness Rāzī pinions here in reason itself. He cautions against an excessive love of learning, which can lead to melancholia (he transliterates the Greek word, the physician's classic name for what is now called depression).<sup>126</sup> Other symptoms are insomnia, wasting away, and delusions (Arberry's apt rendering in this context of the Arabic *waswās*). Most of these disabilities are bodily. But the delusions (one might have said dementia) afflict reason itself and are typical of the irony Rāzī finds at the heart of the weaknesses his "physick" aims to combat: the self-defeating dialectic of passion. An avidity for wisdom, in this case, taken to excess, yields just the opposite of the goal pursued.<sup>127</sup>

Grief, Rāzī holds, must be overcome insofar as it partakes of passion and subverts reason's rule, harming both body and soul. Rāzī draws a bright line once again between reason and passion: Reason urges only a course that will yield profit. Grief, insofar as it remains a passion, can make no such promise. One can forestall it, he advises, by not giving hostages to fortune. Facing the claim that self-isolation only advances the loss it meant to avert, Rāzī answers that loneliness is far less painful than loss: Losing a child hurts much worse than having none. It's highly debatable, of course, whether it's better never to have loved than to have loved and lost. Rāzī defends his judgment by pointing to the

<sup>123</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 13.

<sup>124</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 14.

<sup>125</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 10.

<sup>126</sup> For the symptoms of melancholia, see the passage from Rufus of Ephesus, translated from the Arabic fragments in Rosenthal, *The Classical Heritage in Islam* (cited above, n. 16), pp. 198-201.

<sup>127</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 11.

natural joy of attachment, pressing his paradigm case, love of one's children. But he undercuts his plea by demeaning the joys whose natural strength he has just stressed.

The argument remains prudential, in keeping with Rāzī's announced intent to make his ethical case in worldly terms. In the manner typical of *consolatio* literature and well preceded in al-Kindī's essay *On How to Banish Sorrow*, he adds the advice that one should remind oneself that his losses are not unique and that no attachment can last forever: Constantly think of your loved ones as already lost – or, failing of that, spread your potential losses by acquiring multiple objects of love, and reminding yourself that any of them is soon replaced. There's not much room here for love as a window on transcendence, as Plato paints it in the *Symposium*, nor for notions of mutuality (caring for the other for that person's sake, as in Aristotle's ideal of friendship), nor for individuality in what one cares for in one's loved ones – considerations that might raise earthly love above purely selfish self-regard.<sup>128</sup>

Rāzī drives home his rejection of pleasure as the be-all and end-all of life with a dismissive treatment of *'iṣq*, "carnal love", as Arberry renders the term. Where Plato (and many a Sufi in his wake<sup>129</sup>) presented eros as the gateway to more supernal planes of the soul's realization, Rāzī, like Lucretius, sees it as dehumanizing:

The pleasure imagined by lovers, and others infatuated or obsessed by something (power or possessions, or anything that so dominates and overwhelms the soul of some that they crave nothing else and suppose life empty without it) is pictured by them as grand beyond measure – but only because they fancy attaining the object of their desire, getting whatever was so hugely precious to them, with no thought of the costs, the road to be traveled before reaching their goal. If they reflected and considered how rough and rocky that road is, how hard and dangerous, how steep and full of pitfalls, even fatal, the sweetness would turn bitter in their mouths. What seemed small would loom large, given the stress and the hardships required (...).

Lovers are worse than beasts in failing to control their unbridled passion. Not content to sate it sexually where they may – although it is the vilest passion, the foulest to the rational soul that is the real man – they want just one particular object; so they heap passion upon passion, compounding lust with lust, led captive, increasingly abject, ever more slaves to their own concupiscence. A beast does not go so far. It gratifies the urge in the measure nature asks, to ease the oppressive pain of excitation, but no further; then it rests from all such exertions. Yet they, not content with a beast's subservience to nature, call reason to passion's aid. Reason, the gift of God that sets us above the beasts by showing us the ills of passions and teaching us to master and control them! They use it to mount to ever subtler and rarer desires, ever more exquisite and perverse, yet remain, inevitably, agitated and unsated. And it serves them right. Tormented by their many unrequited urges, ruing all that they've missed, never satisfied and happy with what they have, always in pursuit of something more – and that, without limit.<sup>130</sup>

Rāzī's passionate rejection of passion is more redolent of Lucretius than of Plato<sup>131</sup> – even to the point of offering indiscriminate erotic access as a salve in lieu of obsessive attachment:

<sup>128</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 12.

<sup>129</sup> See Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (cited above, n. 109), pp. 60-4.

<sup>130</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, pp. 38-39 Kraus = pp. 40-41 Arberry; cf. Epicurus, *VF* 63.

<sup>131</sup> One can't help thinking of Lucretius' mockery of the fondness that turns figure faults and other defects into pet-names and endearments (IV, 1153-70), or recalling how he calls love's goal a mirage within a dream (IV, 1097-1100) and mocks lovers' fruitlessly seeming to desire to possess or be possessed by one another, as if the fire scorching them might be slaked by what ignites it (IV, 1080-96).

If your love is away, yet her image is near,  
 Her sweet name is still heard.  
 Best flee those visions –  
 Drive them off!  
 They only feed your ardor.  
 Turn your thoughts elsewhere,  
 Cast your seed where you may.  
 Don't save it all for one.  
 All you'll surely save  
 Is pain and heartache.  
 For wounds will only fester when they're fed.  
 You'll grow madder by the day,  
 Weighed down by agony.  
 Old wounds are eased by new ones  
 That heal while still fresh.  
 Slake your wanton passion anywhere.  
 There's safety in numbers, as they say.<sup>132</sup>

To continue in prose: You needn't miss all that Venus offers if you abandon passionate love and a single beloved. That will free you from the pain of loss. There are plenty more where she came from. Didn't you do fine before you met her? She's no different from the rest in anything she does – be they ever so homely (IV, 1073-74). Lucretius adds that last with an unkindness of the sort that may have prompted Jerome to see the bitterness of personal disappointment in the diatribe.

Rāzī doubtless read no Latin. So the claim is not that Lucretius influenced him. But he knew his Galen well and saw ample detail in his clinical practice. His diagnosis of erotic obsession paints no prurient picture, no glimpses through the keyhole that would only feed the fires he urges one to damper. His object is not “literary” in that sense. He skirts moralism too, with only a glancing charge that coition is vile in reason's eyes. Like the Iḥwān al-ṣafā', he compares human sexuality with animal mating – to the disadvantage of the sybarite, and the romantic.<sup>133</sup> But, like an Epicurean, he rests his case on the inevitable frustration of those who ignore reason's counsels: that pleasure has a natural

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<sup>132</sup> Lucretius, *De Rerum natura*, IV, 1061-72. The translation is my own, but I've stolen the thought of that last line from R. Humphries, *Lucretius, The Way Things Are*, Indiana U.P., Bloomington 1968, p. 150. Like Lucretius, Rāzī aims his critique not just at eros itself but at the literary celebration of the erotic. In the Islamic case that tradition was promoted by Ḥanbalites, perhaps, as I've suggested, as a counterforce to often overheated Sufi tendencies to map mystic ecstasies and their *hulūlī* excesses onto erotic experience, and indeed, with sometimes antinomian exuberance, to confuse the two sorts of ecstasy. See L.A. Giffen, *The Theory of Profane Love among the Arabs: The Development of the Genre*, New York U.P., New York 1971; J.N. Bell, *Love Theory in Later Ḥanbalite Islam*, SUNY Press, Albany 1979; Goodman, *Islamic Humanism* (cited above, n. 109), pp. 60-66. Jalal Abd Alghani of the University of Haifa has identified the targets of Rāzī's critique as Ibn Dawūd al-Zāhirī (d. 909), the founder of the Arabic courtly love tradition and al-Waššā' (d. 937), an *afficionado* of *adab* and refinement (*ẓarf*). See his “Medieval Arabic Love Theory between Dissonance and Consonance: Abū Bakr Muḥammad ibn Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī and his Argument against 'Ishq", *Acta Orientalia Academiae Scientiarum Hungaricae* 67 (2014), pp. 273-87.

<sup>133</sup> Contrasting human sexuality with its animal counterpart, a bird remarks in *The Case of the Animals vs Man before the King of the Jinn*, the fable of the Iḥwān al-ṣafā': “All this is foreign to us. We are roused to mount but once a year, and not with overmastering passion or at pleasure's call but for the survival of our race”, tr. L.E. Goodman - R. McGregor, Oxford U.P., Oxford 2009, p. 257.

downside and natural limits, a fact neglected by lovers and other obsessives, to their cost. Rāzī, like Epicurus, treats sexual desire as an itch to be scratched.<sup>134</sup> It is no portal to immortality, but just a sore that grows and worsens when rubbed and fretted, like those other passions, lust for power or possessions. For they too are obsessions, self-aggravating, and self-frustrating.

Addressing coitus, as distinguished from passionate love, Rāzī's case is clinical, and again prudential: Sexual congress "weakens one's vision, ruins and wastes the body, hastens senility, decrepitude, dessication and debility. It harms the brain and nerves, saps one's strength, and promotes diseases too numerous to mention".<sup>135</sup> Like other appetites, sexual desire is self-enlarging – only more so, given our recall of its intense pleasures – and the effects of indulgence on the genitals.

Like Plato in the *Timaeus* (86 D-E) Rāzī traces sexual incontinence to an excess of semen; and, like Plato, he finds control of desire to be in our interest, for the body's sake as well as the soul's. Again like the *Timaeus*, he inclines to medicalize the condition rather than focus on its moral dimensions. Restraint reduces the demand and can restore or preserve youthful vigor and impede the advance of aging. Nothing is said here of the ethical impact of promiscuity (or abstinence!) on one's partner(s), nor of the moral burden of favoring sensuality above more spiritual or intellectual use of one's energies, but only that excessive recourse to concubines (*sarārīyī*) seeks to fill an ever-enlarging, inevitably frustrate, demand, and that sexual activity, unlike eating or drinking, is not a necessity of life but a shameful, mindless, animal-like indulgence, rightly reviled by most human beings.<sup>136</sup>

Epicurus inclines more than Plato to invoke social stigma, perhaps because Plato is chastened by thoughts of the vilification of Socrates. But in freely making repute a concern, Epicurus tacks away from the deontological and toward the prudential. "Let nothing be done in your life," he says, "that you would fear to be known by your neighbor" (*VF* 70). The neighbor here, rather than any deity, becomes the "ideal observer" who tests our moral failings – as Galen hoped a candid friend would do. Rāzī, like many a homilist, hews to the prudential. The permission he offers ("if you must...") is grudging but hardly puritanical. The appeal to reason is not Plato's invitation to broader and loftier prospects but to the basic claim that sensuous indulgence is vile, disgraceful, ultimately self-defeating. The axiology remains hedonic, although repose rather than intensity is seen as pleasure's highest, stablest goal.

Rāzī devotes a separate chapter to three weaknesses, *wala'*, *'abat*, and *madhab*, that Arberry translates as "Excessive fondness, Trifling, and Ritual". The first term seems to mean what we call infatuation. Rāzī does not deal with it at length. He covered it well enough under *'iṣq* and will soon be generalizing, when he likens lust for rank and office to other passions like avarice. As for *'abat*, this fraught term bears connotations more of triviality than of "trifling". As Arberry explains in a note and as Rāzī himself makes clear by his examples, he means habits like fidgeting or playing with one's beard. One might mention pacing and perhaps some more troubling habits like nail biting.

"Ritual", however, seems a weak rendering of what Rāzī means by *madhab*. His examples – excessive hand washing and inordinate concern, with, say, purity in one's food – suggest what we would call obsessive-compulsive behavior and thus verge toward properly psychiatric concerns. Allowing for the

<sup>134</sup> Plato himself modeled the satisfaction of desire on the scratching an itch, to underscore the inseparability of at least certain pleasures from pain; see *Philebus* 46 A-B.

<sup>135</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, p. 75 Kraus.

<sup>136</sup> Rāzī, *Tibb al-Rūḥānī*, pp. 76-7 Kraus = pp. 82-5 Arberry. Cf. Epicurus: "Of bodily desires, those that are avidly pursued although they cause no pain if unfulfilled are those that arise from a vacuous belief. It is not because of their own nature that they are not dispelled but because of human delusions", *KD* 30; cf. 26. "Nothing is enough for one to whom enough is too little", *VF* 68; cf. *VF* 69.

non-existence of germ theory in Rāzī's day, one might guess that some of what he observed had more warrant than he presumes. But insofar as the excess that draws his interest is indeed compulsive, it's not clear that merely labeling it irrational or embarrassing will be quite as effective as he hopes. Obsessives and compulsives (kleptomaniacs, say) are rarely as open to the sort of reasoning Rāzī recommends, or as readily shamed out of behaviors they cannot control. That's one difference between their situation and that of someone who thoughtlessly cracks his knuckles or toys with a pencil or a button.

Turning to getting and spending, Rāzī's case is again prudential.<sup>137</sup> He does not use the Epicurean thesis that pursuit of wealth is a disguised expression of a fear of death. But neither does he dismiss worldly endeavors as chasing illusory goods. The grasping workaholic and the prodigal wastrel alike, failing to limit their desires or rein in their passions, rob themselves of the peace of mind reason recommends. The mean in terms of worldly goods lies at what Arberry nicely terms a "modest sufficiency", "modest adequacy", or "modest competence".<sup>138</sup> The thought resonates with Epicurus' words: "The wealth nature requires is finite and readily gotten. That demanded by vain notions knows no bound".<sup>139</sup> In al-Kindī's manner, Rāzī adds a word about the risks of losing material goods, contrasting the permanence of intellectual possessions. But even here, in keeping with the economic focus of his chapter, he cites intellectual goods not for their intrinsic worth, nor as passports to immortality, as he, like al-Kindī, hoped they would prove, but as marketable commodities, less perishable than a merchant's stock in trade.<sup>140</sup>

Like Galen, Rāzī values work. He urges finding a useful and honorable profession. Working too hard is the personal fault he regrets in the *Sīrah*. But leisure is hardly his ideal. Reason, he argues, allows humans, unlike other animals, to improve our circumstances by dividing our labors and specializing in our skills: "Since human life is bettered and brought to its fullest only through cooperation and collaboration, each of us must engage in this way and contribute as best he can, careful to avoid the extremes of excess and deficiency. For the one extreme, deficiency, is vile and base since it reduces one to a pauper, dependent on others, whereas the other brings only toil without respite and unmitigated slavery".<sup>141</sup> The ultimate goal remains repose. But Rāzī is confident that one will reach that end soon enough.

Rāzī closes his clinical survey of vices with a topic dear to both Plato and Epicurus, the fear of death. Lucretius eloquently exposes the disguises and denials of that fear:

So when you see someone angrily proclaim  
That after death he'll rot,  
Or be consumed by flames or beasts,  
You know his words do not ring true.  
Some secret pang still lodges in his heart,  
How ever much he may deny  
Supposing that in death he'll feel sensations.  
No. He does not, I think,

<sup>137</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapters 17-18.

<sup>138</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, pp. 88, 90 Kraus = pp. 96, 99 Arberry.

<sup>139</sup> KD 15; cf. 20, 21, 25; *VF* 35. "A free life", Epicurus adds, "cannot contain much wealth. For it is not readily gotten without servility to monarchs or mobs (...)", *VF* 67.

<sup>140</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, Chapter 17.

<sup>141</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, pp. 80-2 Kraus.

Quite credit what he claims,  
 Or recognize its grounds –  
 That he'll be utterly turned out of life.  
 Thoughtlessly he thinks  
 That even then he will live on,  
 Mourning himself as beasts and birds gnaw the carcass  
 He still pictures as his own,  
 While he stands by, mingling his grief  
 With its imagined pain. (*DRN* III, 870-87)

Unlike an Epicurean, Rāzī is clearly interested in immortality. Just as Plato pictures Socrates calling philosophy a preparation for death, which frees the soul from the body and its demands, Rāzī harbors Platonizing hopes that intellectual engagement will free the soul from the distress embodiment has brought. As Socrates urges in the *Phaedo*:

There is one way in which a man can be free of all anxiety about the fate of his soul – if in life he has abandoned bodily pleasures and adornments as foreign to his purpose and likely to do more harm than good, and has devoted himself to the pleasures of acquiring knowledge, and so by decking his soul not with a borrowed beauty but with its own – with self-control, and goodness, and courage, and liberality, and truth – has fitted himself to await his journey... (114 D 8 - 115 A 1).

Rāzī has not forsaken that ideal; and, like al-Kindī, he sees the path to immortality in Platonic terms: The soul's return home will be won only by thinking. The goal is still a repose, release from the turmoil attendant on embodiment. In the apologetic context of the *Sīrah* Rāzī confidently affirms, in terms at once Platonic and Mu'tazilite, that one's state after death will be "admirable or reprehensible" (as Arberry renders the Arabic, *ḥamīdah aw ḍamīmah*) "in keeping with our course of life while our souls were with our bodies". Rāzī freely acknowledges God's justice toward his servants,<sup>142</sup> a Mu'tazilite article of faith. But he does not seem loath to treat such language as a trope: One's future state will reflect the life he's lived, as Plato held, since souls will gravitate toward matter or ideas, depending on their prior attachments.

The hopes for immortality Rāzī voices are generic, and he mounts no full dress argument in their behalf. He plainly has no interest in physical resurrection, nor any taste for traditionalist dogmas like the torment of the tomb,<sup>143</sup> holding fast to the view that after death there is no sensation. The hopes for immortality advanced in his debates with Abū Ḥātim are Platonic and intellectualist; like al-Kindī's, they pin themselves on thinking. For Rāzī that means independent thinking. He is not a philosopher to nail his every thought to a text, and those who wish to understand his reasoning would do well to learn from him in that regard.

Yet, although Rāzī's highest hopes are Platonic, his moral counsels do not rest on those hopes alone. He knows that not every reader, or patient, will share an expectation of spiritual immortality with the confidence urged in the Qur'ān for expectations of bodily resurrection, judgment, and

<sup>142</sup> Rāzī, *Sīrah*, p. 108.4-9 Kraus.

<sup>143</sup> For the interrogation and torment in the tomb, see Qur'ān 6:93, 47:29, 8:52, 9:102, 23:21, 52:47; *Fiqh Akbar* I (mid-eighth century) § 10; *Waṣīyyat Abī Ḥanīfah* (ditto) §§ 18-19; *Fiqh Akbar* II (mid-ninth century) § 23. See A.J. Wensinck, *The Muslim Creed: Its Genesis and Historical Development*, Cambridge U.P., Cambridge 1932 (repr. Cass, London 1965).

retribution. Rāzī himself may stand uncertain of his more sublimated hopes. So it is not the *Phaedo* that he echoes at the close of the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* but another concluding passage from Plato, Socrates' disjunction at the end of the *Apology*: "Death is one of two things. Either it is annihilation, and the dead have no consciousness of anything or, as we are told, it is really a change – a migration of the soul from this place to another" (40 C 5-9) – and then, challenging those who voted for his execution, Socrates presses the disjunction: "Now it is the time that we were going, I to die and you to live, but which of us has the happier prospect is unknown to anyone but to God" (42 A 1-5). Rāzī reflects on the Socratic disjunction in the final chapter of the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, calling the fear of death, "an affection that cannot be wholly dispelled from the soul unless she is content that after death she will pass to a better state" –

That is a topic demanding a very extended argument, if proof rather than report is sought.<sup>144</sup> And there is no basis at all for such a discussion – least of all in this book. It would be too broad, too long, and too elevated for this book's scope, as I've mentioned already. It would demand investigation of every religion and school of thought that maintains or implies an afterlife for man, and then a judgment as to which are true and which false. It is not hard to see how elevated, and how dangerous, that would be, and what extended talk it would require about things unknown. So I'll let that go and try to satisfy those who hold to the belief and conviction that the soul perishes with the body. For as long as one remains in fear of death he will incline away from reason and toward the passions.<sup>145</sup>

Pursuing the second alternative, Rāzī argues that death is not to be feared since only the living feel pain. In death there is no desire or yearning, no sense of loss or regret over pleasures foregone. Since pain is pleasure's precondition, no pleasure comes without prior cost and ultimate loss. So reason can conclude that "Death is better than life"<sup>146</sup> – if not because death takes us to a better world then on the alternative Socratic grounds, that death is a dreamless sleep.

For Rāzī, as the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* shows, prudential considerations clearly seemed an adequate guide to life for worldlings – and more than adequate compared to the notions of those who "sit in mosques all day".<sup>147</sup> He does not ground his moral counsels in the Qur'ān or the *ḥadīth*. He has little regard for the authority of prophets, or any who claim privileged knowledge about the good for man. Prudence is the rule of reason, the best ruler of the soul. Reason, he insists, never knowingly urges a disadvantageous course. It reins in the appetites and passions, confining them to their proper ends, in the limits set by nature, recruiting passion itself to its aid in restraining the demands of unruly appetite and recognizing the need to limit even its own ambitions lest excess render them destructive.

Relying on Rāzī's moral realism and the philosopher's confidence in God's justice, Adamson writes, "we know by reason and not by revelation that God would not inflict harm on us needlessly". From this Adamson infers that "there is no tension between an ethics of rationality and an ethics of godlikeness. Rather, these two ideals turn out to be identical".<sup>148</sup> Identity seems a bit strong here. A reasoned confidence that God is inseparable from His justice does not warrant the belief that reason is a sufficient guide to life – let alone our sole safe guide and carriage to the hereafter. Rāzī anticipates

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<sup>144</sup> Note the echo of Socrates' "as we are told". Rāzī here places *ḥadīth* and philosophical tradition side by side, treating both as hearsay. Neither is to be accepted without argument.

<sup>145</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, pp. 92-93 Kraus = p. 103 Arberry.

<sup>146</sup> Rāzī, *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, p. 93 Kraus = p. 103 Arberry.

<sup>147</sup> Rāzī, *Sīrah*, p. 106 Kraus = p. 708 Arberry.

<sup>148</sup> Adamson, "Abū Bakr al-Rāzī on Animals", p. 272.

the Enlightenment in his faith that reason suffices in both roles. It diminishes his radical independence to equate his confidence in God's justice with the practical and soteriological sufficiency of reason. It was for making just so bold an inference that Descartes was accused of Pelagianism. Contrast Ḡazālī's claim that only by God's grace will one find the strait path commended in the opening Surah of the Qur'ān (1:6).<sup>149</sup> Reason, for Rāzī, is the vehicle of that grace. Neither the Mu'tazilites nor the Mu'tazilite influenced Shī'ites with whom Rāzī interacted shared such confidence in reason. Even a philosopher like al-Kindī, who more than leaned in that direction, would hardly have made that claim quite so outspokenly.

In the *Sīrah* Rāzī identified as the goals of human life the pursuit of knowledge and practice of justice.<sup>150</sup> He boldly finds in that practice and pursuit the end that Plato prescribed: to become as like to God as humanly possible. He presses the point by urging that we emulate God's justice and mercy in our treatment of animals<sup>151</sup> and adds an excursion excoriating the hunt, perhaps a barb directed at the courtier class, for whom the chase was a secular pleasure par excellence. We see Mu'tazilite affinities here in the claim that God cares about the suffering of animals, but also an Epicurean tenor, in grounding an ethical concern not solely in the fate of the immortal human soul but in the broader issue of the suffering of sentient beings, the cynosure of any hedonically grounded ethics, as Bentham clearly recognized, and Peter Singer among our own contemporaries.<sup>152</sup>

Following up on a suggestion of his teacher, Shlomo Pines, Meir Bar-Asher notes a change of tone and thrust in the *Sīrah* from the counsels of the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* and ascribes it to a change in outlook. He recognizes the apologetic motive in the writing of the *Sīrah*. For Rāzī is quite clear that the little work was written in response to pointed criticisms of his way of life: his failure to emulate the presumed asceticism of Socrates, his "imām". Like Galen, Bar-Asher reasons, Rāzī was a skeptical Platonist when he wrote his ethical handbook; but he has grown more spiritual in the *Sīrah* and is now a convinced Socratic, committed to immortality and *imitatio Dei*.<sup>153</sup>

Balancing this view, Bar-Asher notes, as I did years ago, that the hedonic counsels of the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī* lean in an ascetic direction, whereas the lifestyle commended in the *Sīrah* endorses moderate enjoyment of reasonable pleasures, tempered only by the discipline needed to toughen oneself against future times of stress or crisis. Rāzī still refers readers to the detailed prescriptions of the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*. So he, at least, does not seem to see a sharp discontinuity in his views. The *Sīrah*, as Bar-Asher notes, firmly rejects the cloistered life of monks and what Rāzī brands as the corresponding

<sup>149</sup> See my discussion in *Islamic Humanism* (cited above, n. 109), p. 114.

<sup>150</sup> Rāzī, *Sīrah*, p. 101 Kraus = p. 705 Arberry.

<sup>151</sup> Rāzī, *Sīrah*, pp. 103-5, 108 Kraus = pp. 707-8, 710 Arberry, quoting Plato, *Theaet.* 176 B 1. Bar-Asher traces Rāzī's use of Plato's words to his Galenic source; see "Quelques aspects de l'éthique d'Abū-Bakr al-Rāzī", pp. 126-8.

<sup>152</sup> Compare *The Case of the Animals vs Man*, esp. ad fin., Arabic pp. 275-80, English pp. 311-16.

<sup>153</sup> Thérèse Druart explains the differences Bar-Asher observes rather differently in her piece, "The Ethics of al-Rāzī", *Medieval Philosophy and Theology* 6 (1997), pp. 47-71: "Since *The Spiritual Medicine* is intended for beginners, its tone is pedagogical, introducing themes gradually (...)", p. 59. "(...)The Philosophic Life provides the ultimate justification for the basic principles of *The Spiritual Medicine* (...)", p. 53. "Since character reformation, or at least a fair amount of it, must precede philosophical training, al-Rāzī is at pains to provide for his argument a fairly neutral or minimalist philosophical framework which does not take a stance on difficult issues such as the nature of the soul and its immortality or God's attributes and causation. Some arguments in fact rest simply on fairly obvious self-interest and on the superiority of human beings over animals; they do not seem philosophical at all. Other somewhat more sophisticated arguments use the philosophical position that 'pleasure is simply return to nature and a respite from pain', a view attributed to the 'natural' philosophers. Most of the arguments derive in some way from a conception of the soul 'provisionally' accepted and deemed to be Platonic. Though al-Rāzī calls Plato the leading philosopher, he refuses to discuss the validity of his conception of the soul (...)", p. 50.

extremes of Muslim ascetics, which Rāzī calculatedly links to Christian celibacy by using the term ‘monkish’, so as to echo the celebrated *ḥadīth*: “no monkery (*rahbaniyyah*) in Islam” (cf. Qur’ān 57:27).<sup>154</sup> Rāzī’s repugnance for “religion”, as Bar-Asher puts it, persists. The need to defend his lifestyle has not softened his hostility to what he finds lacking or misleading in religion as he knows it.

I find it revealing that when Rāzī begs off from offering a full dress discussion of the hereafter in the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, he pleads not just that such an inquiry would demand far too extended a survey of the world’s religions and schools of thought but also that he judges such a survey to be too dangerous. The fate of Ibn Kammūna suggests that Rāzī is hardly overcautious on that score.<sup>155</sup> Coming from as outspoken an Islamic heretic as he, the admission, could only gratify Pines’ collaborator Leo Strauss. The *Sīrah* plainly strives to accommodate religious views, at least insofar as Rāzī’s good conscience and commitment to truth permit. But it does not move on from spiritual immortality to physical resurrection – a detriment no less serious in the eyes of the orthodox than is the eternalism that Rāzī eschews.

Allowing for the apologetic framing of the *Sīrah*, I do not see a sharp departure from the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*. It’s true the handbook does advance more worldly guidelines than the ambitiously spiritual polestar of the *Sīrah*. But I don’t see a change of mind about the matter or the means of ethics: In both works Rāzī acknowledges a higher, Platonic, road alongside what he is not ashamed to commend in more worldly terms. He does not hate the body and is not averse to meeting its needs and serving its appetites and desires, so long as they do not turn destructive or addictive. The duality here is not that of two different phases of the author’s life but the plainer difference between the claims and needs of body and soul. Rāzī’s prescription for accommodating that duality is the classic Greek one of moderation. For asceticism in its excess can breed vices just as well as pleasure does, as Rāzī notes in the *Sīrah*, and as his Jewish contemporary Saadia Gaon spelled out more fully.<sup>156</sup>

Reason, as Rāzī understands it, will curb puritanical or ascetic extremes just as it rules out dogmas of the sort that his Aš‘arite contemporaries were pressing even as he wrote. Prudence of the worldly sort, on which he rests his case in the *Ṭibb al-Rūḥānī*, does not dismiss the higher claims of Platonic intellectualism. Indeed, it endorses them since they point the way to a fuller respite and higher peace than souls will find in this embodied life. And reason does more than point. For thinking, as Rāzī understands it, is more than a guide in practical decision making. It is also the link by which souls can lift themselves above the world’s turbidity and return to their true home. Recourse to a Platonic immortality offers Rāzī a more welcoming if less assured haven for his hopes than worldliness can – let alone the worldly sort of piety that too often passes for devotion. It offers a requital of his pursuit of truth and intellectual excellence, and a respite from the fear of death far more in character for him than any that Epicurus or Muḥammad had to offer.

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<sup>154</sup> Rāzī, *Sīrah*, pp. 105-6 Kraus = p. 708 Arberry.

<sup>155</sup> See Ibn Kammūna, *Tanqīḥ al-abḥāṭ li-l-mīlāl al-ṭalāt*, ed. M. Perlman, *Sa’d b. Manṣūr ibn Kammūna’s Examination of the Inquiries into the Three Faiths. A Thirteenth-century Essay in Comparative Religion*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1967 (Near Eastern Studies, 6), and Perlman’s translation, as Ibn Kammūna’s *Examination of the Three Faiths. A Thirteenth-century Essay in the Comparative Study of Religion*, University of California Press, Berkeley 1971; cf. my review in *Philosophy East and West* 22 (1972), pp. 487-8.

<sup>156</sup> See my discussion of Saadia’s stance in *God of Abraham*, Oxford U.P., New York 1996, pp. 143-4.