

Al-Razi's Conception of the Soul: Psychological Background to his Ethics

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Abu Bakr Muhammad ibn Zakariyya ibn Yahya al-Razi (865–925 or 932?)—I am listing all his names to distinguish him clearly from several other famous writers with the name al-Razi—the Latin Rhazes referred to in the prologue of the *Canterbury Tales*, was one of the greatest medieval physicians.¹ On the one hand, most of his medical works were translated into Latin, and his medical fame is universally acknowledged. His philosophical standing, on the other hand, is rather controversial.² His own apology, *The Philosophic Life*, which he wrote rather late in life, already indicates that some contemporaries were disputing his right to call himself a philosopher.³ Like Galen, another philosopher-physician and one of his main sources, he was considered by many an excellent physician but a poor philosopher.

Many medieval Muslim intellectuals objected strongly to his views on religion and prophecy—so much so that they dubbed him “the heretic.” Their religious concerns may have colored their evaluation of his philo-

I cannot thank enough my colleague Richard M. Frank, who had the patience to comment on this text, not only checking the Arabic, but also taking care of my worst crimes against English. He made many useful and challenging suggestions.

1. On al-Razi's life, see Paul E. Walker, “The Political Implications of al-Razi's Philosophy,” in *The Political Aspects of Islamic Philosophy. Essays in Honor of Muhsin Mahdi*, ed. Charles E. Butterworth, *Harvard Middle Eastern Monographs*, 27 (Cambridge, Mass.: Center for Middle Eastern Studies of Harvard University, 1992), pp. 61–65. On his life and works, see Abdurrahman Badawi, “Muhammad ibn Zakariyya al-Razi,” in *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, vol. I, ed. M. M. Sharif (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), pp. 434–39; and Lenn E. Goodman, “Muhammad ibn Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī,” in *History of Islamic Philosophy*, part I, ed. Seyyed Hossein Nasr and Oliver Leaman, *Routledge History of World Philosophies*, I (London and New York: Routledge, 1996), pp. 198–215. Paul Kraus edited most of al-Razi's philosophical works: al-Razi, *Opera philosophica* (Cairo: Imprimerie Paul Barbey, 1939). References are to this edition.

2. See Walker, “Political Implication,” pp. 65–74.

3. Kraus edition, referred to in note 1, pp. 99–111. Previous editions of *The Philosophic Life* with an introduction and excellent French translation, also by Paul Kraus: “Raziana I. La Conduite du Philosophe. Traité d'éthique d'Abu Muhammad b. Zakariyya al-Razi,” *Orientalia* N.S. 4 (1935): 300–34. English translation by Charles E. Butterworth, “*The Book of the Philosophic Life*,” *Interpretation* 20 (1993): 227–36. I refer to this translation and its numbered sections.

sophical achievements. As for the philosophers themselves, the *falasifa*, they, too, expressed contempt for his philosophy. Al-Razi was very critical of Aristotle and, therefore, a danger to their own orthodoxy.⁴ While Aristotelian philosophers were at great pains to harmonize Aristotle's and Plato's views to strengthen their contention that philosophy had reached the truth, al-Razi enjoyed refuting previous philosophers, be they Aristotle,⁵ Proclus,⁶ or even Galen,⁷ who influenced him so much. In fact, he delighted in showing contradictions not only between religions (and even within Islam) but also among philosophical schools. This earned him a general enmity.

Scholars, too, give rather mixed reviews of his abilities as a thinker. Gaudefroy-Demombynes speaks of "gaps in his system" and describes *The Spiritual Medicine* as "rather pedestrian."⁸ Abdurrahman Badawi, however, raves about him: "Al-Razi had no organized system of philosophy, but compared to his time he must be reckoned as the most vigorous and liberal thinker in Islam and perhaps in the whole history of human thought."⁹

In fact an appraisal of al-Razi's philosophy is rather difficult since his metaphysical works are lost and what we know about his views on these matters comes from adverse reports. Yet there is no doubt that his philosophical and religious views were important since several authors, such as Abu Hatim al-Razi (a tenth-century Ismaili missionary), spent much time refuting them at some length.¹⁰

4. Al-Razi's philosophical heroes are Socrates and Plato; in *The Philosophic Life* he even calls Socrates his "Imam," the prayer leader (p. 99, l. 5; Butterworth, n. 1, p. 227).

5. For instance, the first part of his *Metaphysics* is a virulent attack against Aristotle's concept of nature. See Arabic text, pp. 116–24; Italian translation and detailed commentary by Giulio A. Lucchetta, *La natura e la sfera. La scienza antica e le sue metafore nella critica di Razi* (Bari: Milella, 1987). Lucchetta accepts the authenticity of the attribution of this text to al-Razi (pace Badawi, "Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi," p. 439) and reviews previous discussion on this issue (p. 24).

6. Al-Razi wrote a refutation of Proclus, now lost.

7. Al-Razi penned *Doubts against Galen*, which has been recently edited by Mehdi Mohaghegh, *Kitāb Al-Shukūk 'Alā Jalīnūs* (Tehran: Institute of Islamic Studies; Kuala Lumpur: International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilization, 1993). One can glean some sense of its content in the English introduction to this edition—which was originally published in *Islamic Studies Presented to Charles J. Adams*, ed. W. B. Hallaq and D. P. Little (Leiden: Brill, 1991), pp. 107–16—and in Shlomo Pines, "Razi critique de Galien," in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, vol. II: Studies in Arabic Versions of Greek Texts and in Mediaeval Science* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1986), pp. 256–63—which was originally published in *Actes du VIIIe Congrès International d'Histoire des Sciences* (Paris: 1953), pp. 480–87. On Galen's influence on al-Razi's ethics, see Meir M. Bar-Asher, "A propos de l'influence de Galien sur l'éthique d'Al-Razi," *Studia Islamica* 70 (1989): 130–47.

8. "Er-Razi philosophe d'après des ouvrages récents," *Revue de l'Histoire des Religions* 62 (1941): 169, 189.

9. See Badawi, "Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi," p. 448.

10. Kraus published part of this controversy in *Opera philosophica*, pp. 291–316. It comes from Abu Hatim al-Razi's 'A'lām al-nubuwwah.' Fabienne Brion has translated some of the relevant sections of Abu Hatim's book in "Philosophie et révélation: Traduction annotée de six extraits du Kitāb A'lām al-nubuwwa d'Abū

Fortunately for our own purposes the edited texts, and in particular *The Spiritual Medicine*¹¹ and *The Philosophic Life*, provide much information on al-Razi's ethics, which is underpinned by a very unusual conception of the soul. As Richard Sorabji has recently shown, late ancient philosophers were debating animal psychology, as well as the treatment of animals. This led some of them to reject the Aristotelian conception of the soul.¹² Al-Razi is much influenced by this debate and takes a position decidedly in opposition to Aristotle. He therefore defends a conception of the rational (*al-nātiqa*) soul, which up to now has not been properly understood. It allows al-Razi to set a hierarchy of sentient beings, while arguing for their kinship, since he defends transmigration. This conception differs markedly from the well-known views of famous Islamic philosophers, such as al-Farabi, Avicenna, Avempace, and Averroes, and thus, is very interesting. Al-Razi demonstrates originality and thoughtfulness.

Being "rational" for al-Razi is not simply a status. Rather it involves a dynamism since each "rational" soul must somehow tend to imitate the cosmic soul's return to its original better state. This is why the "rational" soul is in need of spiritual medicine and why al-Razi wrote *The Spiritual Medicine*. I therefore first present al-Razi's conception of the individual "rational" soul and then his understanding of the fall of the cosmic soul and its rescue by God. To do so, I do not limit myself to his popular works, that is, *The Spiritual Medicine* and *The Philosophic Life*. Other works and sources of information will allow me to reach a better grasp of al-Razi's philosophy and to show that he is a consistent and original thinker.

I. THE INDIVIDUAL "RATIONAL" SOUL

Al-Razi holds that the rational soul (*al-nātiqa*), "located" in the brain, survives death and that this soul, which is self-subsisting, may go through a series of transmigrations before reaching its complete liberation from the

Hâtim al-Râzî," *Bulletin de Philosophie médiévale* 28 (1986): 134–62, and in "Le temps, l'espace et la genèse du monde selon Abû Bakr al-Râzî. Présentation et traduction des chapitres I, 3–4 du "Kitâb a'lâm al-nubuwwa" d'Abû Hâtim al-Râzî," *Revue philosophique de Louvain* 87 (1989): 139–64. Alessandro Bausani offers a more partial translation in *Un Filosofo "Laico" del Medioevo Musulmano. Abu Bakr Muhammad Ben Zakariyya Razi* (Rome: Istituto di Studi Islamici, 1981), pp. 47–59.

11. Arabic text, pp. 15–96. Dimitri Gutas provided some corrections for this edition in "Notes and Texts from Cairo Mss. I: Addenda to P. Kraus's Edition of Abu Bakr al-Razi's *Al-Tibb al-Ruhani*," *Arabica* 24 (1977): 91–93. English translation by Arthur J. Arberry, *The Spiritual Physick of Rhazes* (London: John Murray, 1950). As the Arabic edition and the English translation follow the same division into brief chapters, I simply indicate the chapter and the page of the Arabic edition.

12. *Animal Minds & Human Morals. The Origins of the Western Debate* (Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1993).

body and its return to its own world, the world of the cosmic soul. An Aristotelian conception of the soul, even if construed in a way that entails the self-subsistence of the intellect and, therefore, its survival after death, does not easily fit into a theory of transmigration. Al-Razi, who is no admirer of Aristotle, either did not know much about Aristotle's conception of the soul or simply put it aside to adopt one more satisfactory for his own purpose. The basic scheme, including the location of the three souls,¹³ has its source in Plato's *Timaeus* and the Galenic tradition,¹⁴ but al-Razi introduces twists that we need to examine on their own terms. So first, we consider his conception of the survival of the soul after death and its self-subsistence. Second, we determine what exactly he means by "rational" soul. Third, we see how his rather unusual understanding of "rational" allows him to grant animals various degrees of incipient rationality. Finally, we indicate how the hierarchy of sentient beings, and particularly their usefulness to other sentient beings, determines the way in which they should be treated.

A. The Survival of the Rational Soul after Death and Its Self-subsistence

In the second chapter of *The Spiritual Medicine*, al-Razi, who adopts Plato's conception of the soul, attributes to Plato both these views—that is, the survival and self-subsistence of the soul—and provisionally accepts them. All human beings have three souls: (1) the vegetative, incremental, and sensually desiring soul, located in the liver; (2) the irascible or animal soul, located in the heart; and (3) the rational (*al-nātiqa*) or divine soul (*al-'ilā-hīya*), located in the brain.¹⁵

At once al-Razi's Plato contrasts the rational soul with the two lower souls. Only the rational soul subsists after death because it alone has its own particular substance, whereas the other two souls are merely the sum of the humors of the heart and liver. In fact the whole body, including the brain, is simply the instrument and implement of the rational soul. In spelling out the powers of the rational soul, al-Razi's Plato is careful to make this clear: "Sensation, voluntary motion, imagination, cogitation, and memory arise from the brain but not because this belongs to its material nature and

13. Al-Razi often speaks of three souls rather than of three faculties of the soul.

14. On al-Razi's Platonism, see Schlomo Pines, appendix IV, *Novelles études sur Ahwad al-Zaman Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi. Mémoires de la Société des Etudes Juives*, I (Paris: Société des Etudes Juives, 1955), pp. 56–58. This text has been included in *The Collected Works of Shlomo Pines, vol. I: Studies in Abu'l-Barakat al-Baghdadi. Physics and Metaphysics* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1979). It seems to come mainly from the *Timaeus* through Galen's *Summary*—Arabic edition with an introduction and Latin translation by Paul Kraus and Richard Walzer, *Plato Arabus, vol. I: Galeni Compendium Timaei Platoni* (London: Warburg Institute, 1951)—and Plutarch's *Commentary*.

15. Arabic text, pp. 27, ll. 14–29, at l. 1.

humors, but rather because of the substance that resides in it and uses it as an instrument and implement. Nevertheless, the brain is the nearest instrument and implement of this agent."¹⁶ All activities, even sensation, that involve some form of awareness are the realm of the self-subsisting rational soul, which merely inhabits the brain. The cosmic soul, too, is self-subsistent, as we shall see, and even existed purely in its own realm before it foolishly desired to involve itself with matter. Later on, God in His compassion rescued it by granting it intellect.¹⁷

Since in his *Doubts against Galen* al-Razi criticizes Galen for not accepting the self-subsistence and immateriality of the soul, we do know that he agrees with Plato on this issue. Al-Razi even says that observations that show that cerebral wounds impede the normal functioning of the rational soul are not real objections to its self-subsistence.¹⁸

Despite its self-subsistence the rational soul is entangled with the body on this earth, but al-Razi's Plato is sure that if the rational soul would make perfect and complete use of its rationality it would liberate itself from the body in which it is enmeshed.¹⁹ The myth of the soul makes it clear that the perfect use of rationality is to be equated with, and only with, philosophy.²⁰ Al-Razi's Plato shares this view, though he couches it in more indirect terms since he teaches that the rational soul should marvel and wonder about the world (physics) and desire to know all about it and about the body. Of special concern should be its own condition and its fate after death, that is, psychology.²¹ As psychology is connected to the myth of the soul, which involves God and His attributes, it will probably lead to metaphysics and so to the whole of philosophy.

According to al-Razi, Plato thinks that such knowledge of the soul combined with a desire to escape the body, will ensure that when the sentient soul (*al-hassāsa*; notice the shift in terminology from rational to

16. Arabic text, p. 28, l. 11–p. 29, l. 1. The close connection between the brain and the rational soul explains why what affects the cerebral humors can be an obstacle to the intellect's activity.

17. On this see Lenn E. Goodman, "Razi's Myth of the Fall of the Soul: Its Function in His Philosophy," in *Essays in Islamic Philosophy and Science*, ed. George F. Hourani (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1975), pp. 25–40; and Fritz Meier, "Der "Urknall" eine Idee des Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī," *Oriens* 33 (1992): 1–21.

18. Arabic text, and Pines, "Razi critique de Galien," p. 484.

19. Arabic text, p. 28, ll. 5–6.

20. See *Spiritual Medicine*, chap. XX "On the Fear of Death," at the end of which al-Razi explores the possibility that there may be some state to which the soul comes after death. He then states that anyone "who has performed the duties of the true *sharī'a* should not fear death since this *sharī'a* promised him victory, rest, and attainment of eternal felicity. If anyone has some doubts about the *sharī'a* or does not know it or is not certain of its validity, he must search and examine to the utmost of his effort and capacity" (pp. 95, ll. 16–96, at l. 3). The true *sharī'a* seems to be philosophy since (1) al-Razi criticizes every revealed religion he knows of, and (2) he states that there is neither revelation nor prophecy nor salvation, except through philosophy.

21. Arabic text, p. 29, ll. 14–17.

simply sentient) leaves the body, it will join its own world and no longer have any desire to mingle with anything bodily. The soul will then remain by itself, alive, rational, immortal, immune from pain, and content with its condition and place.²² Any rational soul that does not reach this level will again hanker for a body and will get one. *The Philosophic Life*, which expresses al-Razi's own views, also asserts that the acquisition of science and the practice of justice (i.e., both theoretical and practical philosophy) will deliver us from this world to another one that is free from pain and death.²³

So the rational soul's self-subsistence grounds its survival after death and the possibility of its final liberation from the body through the study and practice of philosophy. Yet the careful reader may be puzzled. What exactly does al-Razi mean by "rational soul"? If he equates it with the purely human soul, how can he adopt transmigration? If not, why does he refer to the irascible soul as the "animal" soul and state that it is mortal? Moreover, sensation and voluntary motion were listed among the various activities of the rational soul, and the rational soul is also called the sentient soul. It is time to determine what al-Razi means by "rational soul" and "animal soul" and whether he follows Plato's views in including sensation and voluntary motion among the powers of the rational soul.

B. Al-Razi's Conception of the Rational Soul

In presenting Plato's three souls, al-Razi refers to the irascible soul as the animal soul; he locates it in the heart, equates it with the sum of the heart's humors, and therefore declares it to be corruptible since the humors are corruptible. The animal soul's only role is to provide natural heat and pulse motion, that is, unconscious and reflex motions that are linked to breathing and the cardiovascular system. Voluntary motion and all other conscious activities pertain to the rational soul.²⁴

One of al-Razi's own medical works, *The Introduction to the Art of Medicine*, confirms this understanding of the "animal soul" and the "rational soul."²⁵ Chapter X treats the organs. The heart is the origin of life and

22. Arabic text, p. 30, ll. 10–15.

23. Arabic text, p. 101, ll. 14–17; Butterworth, n. 9.

24. Arabic text, chap. II, p. 28, l. 10–p. 29, l. 1. On al-Razi's conception of the soul, see Lenn Evan Goodman, "Razi's Psychology," *The Philosophical Forum* 4 (Fall 1972): 26–48.

25. *Libro de la introducción al arte de la medicina o "Isagoge"* (*Kitâb al-madkhal ilâ sinâ'at al-tibb wahwa Isâghûji de Abû Bakr Muhammad b. Zakariyyâ al-Râzi*, ed. with Spanish translation, introduction, and indices by María de la Concepción Vasquez de Benito, *Acta Salmanticensia, Filosofía y letras*, 110 (Salamanca: Instituto Hispano-Arabe de Cultura, 1979). Spanish references are to this edition. Arabic text in this case refers to the Arabic text in this Vasquez edition and Spanish refers to the Spanish translation. Notice the parallel between philosophy and medicine since the treatise is also called an *Isagoge*, as is the first book in the traditional order of the organon.

causes natural heat, breathing, and cardiovascular motions. Al-Razi adds that bloodless and heartless animals have some other equivalent of the heart. The brain is the origin of nerves and the spring of sensation, motion, and the reasoning psychic actions referred to as ruling. The latter are divided into: (1) imagination (*al-wahm*), that is, the imaginative power located in the front of the brain, which receives what the five senses convey to it; (2) the cogitative power (*al-fikrīya*), located in the middle of the brain, by means of which it knows the truth of things; and (3) the power of memory (*al-hifz*), located at the back of the brain, which retains and remembers.²⁶

Chapter XI, dealing with the powers, offers more information. There are three kinds of powers: (1) the psychic, residing in the brain; (2) the animal, operating from the heart; and (3) the natural, acting from the liver. The active animal power causes the heart's and arteries' contractions and dilations. The passive animal power concerns itself with nerves that go out of balance. Interestingly, in detailing how various emotions and passions are symptoms of excessive humors connected to the heart, al-Razi spells out what this unbalance means.²⁷ This explains his concern that philosophy includes study of the body and medicine. Bodily medicine helps to regulate passion and the effect of humoral disorders in the brain, which is the instrument so closely connected to the rational faculty. Such excess, for instance, can give rise to melancholy, the tragic downfall of the overenthusiastic philosopher.²⁸ There are three kinds of psychic powers: (1) the ruling ones, which again are listed as imagination, cogitation, and memory; (2) voluntary motion; and (3) sensation. The latter two use other organs in addition to the brain, whereas any ruling activity operates by itself.²⁹

From this it is clear that al-Razi fully endorses Plato's conception of the animal and the rational souls. Even the technical terms used for the various powers are the same.³⁰ Yet the medical text adds an important point. The powers of imagination, cogitation, and memory, located in the brain, form a subgroup because they exercise the active role of regulation and ordering and do not require instruments in addition to the brain. Therefore, sensation and voluntary motion are presumably subject to these powers. We and some animals determine in which direction we will go and to what kind of sensory objects we will pay attention.

It is now clear that by actions of the "animal" soul, al-Razi means the unconscious, reflexive life activities shared by both animals and human beings. The term "rational" covers all conscious activities, including sensa-

26. Arabic text, Vasquez, p. 65, and Vasquez Spanish translation, p. 77.

27. Arabic text, Vasquez pp. 73–74, n. 6; Spanish, p. 84.

28. Arabic text, Vasquez pp. 80–85, particularly n. 4; Spanish, pp. 91–95.

29. Arabic text, Vasquez, p. 72, n. 5 (read *bi-nafsīhi*, instead of *yanfasahu*); Spanish, pp. 83–84.

30. It is rather curious that neither Plato's scheme nor the medical text uses the term "intellect." Is intellect identical with cogitation (*al-fikr*) or is it its highest manifestation?

tion and voluntary motion, which again are common to animals and human beings. So for al-Razi, the “rational” soul is far more encompassing than an Aristotelian would assume and can integrate animals, which are all endowed with sensation and, therefore, presumably can feel pain. This will have enormous ethical implications. There is continuity between animals and human beings since animals share at least some level of rationality as it is broadly understood. This view allows for the possibility of transmigration since even the souls of animals survive after death. What is not clear is whether animals have incomplete rational souls and are missing some powers or whether their bodily constitution does not allow them access to all the powers of the “rational” soul they do have. If the latter, animals and human beings have exactly the same soul but do not have the same access to all its powers. In any case, there is no doubt that al-Razi’s conception of the rational soul is rather inclusive, and we need to examine the texts to determine whether at least some animals enjoy some high level of the ruling powers.

C. Animals and the Exercise of “Ruling Rational” Powers

In *The Spiritual Medicine*, al-Razi often contrasts the behavior of animals with the purposive, deliberate action of human beings, whose intellect, with the help of imagination, can survey options and their long-term outcomes before selecting the most advantageous. Clearly some animals, too, have imagination and memory, but does any animal have some share of rationality in the strict sense even if intellect as such seems denied to them?

The Spiritual Medicine asserts that people who do not wonder about the soul’s fate after death—the most philosophically pregnant issue in that text—have as much rationality as beasts (cattle) or, even worse, as bats, vipers, and other worthless things, which do not cogitate or remember at all.³¹ The implication is that some animals (such as bats) have no share in cogitation and memory, whereas others (such as cattle) do, and that cogitation is the highest power. It also assumes that human beings who do not raise the central philosophical issue are not fully human. But as the context is very rhetorical and the passage is intended to needle people into becoming philosophers, readers could accuse me of taking too literally a piece of rhetorical exaggeration. A passage in chapter XVII, however, supports my contention that there is more here than a simple figure of speech. Though this chapter on earning, acquiring, and so on gives rather short shrift to animal social life—it does not benefit the individual because animals lack complete mutual help and intellectual cooperation—it nevertheless acknowledges that many “irrational animals” (understood by al-Razi as not fully rational) acquire objects and store them away. Such animals, therefore,

31. Arabic text, chap. II, p. 29, ll. 16–17.

must enjoy a better ability to picture to themselves cogitatively than animals that do not acquire, “for the cause of acquiring and what elicits it is the picturing of a situation in which the object to be acquired is missing, though the need for it remains.”³² In other words such animals can picture to themselves a complex future situation and adopt a course of action appropriate to its eventuality. Such an ability is also characteristic of the intellect.

In his so-called *Metaphysics*, al-Razi in fact asserts that some animals have low levels or prelevels of higher powers. In that text he rejects Aristotle's conception of nature, particularly its teleology, as being too anthropomorphic and as attributing to nature, which for al-Razi is purely passive and inert, what in fact comes from God. In favor of nature's teleology, he tells us, some cite the example of swallows, which build nests, and hornets, which build houses—that is, precisely those animals that have a certain social life, acquire, possess, and store. The defenders of nature's teleology naturally attribute such purposive animal behavior to nature. Al-Razi counterattacks by arguing that animals—in contradistinction to natural objects such as fire, which have only one single constant action—do not act “by nature” because “they have various actions such as flying when they need to but remaining still after exertions when there is no need for flying, and their choice (*ikhtiyār*) of feeding on some things and not on others and their choosing high hidden places for their nests. Animals . . . have a certain choice and discernment even if they do not have full discernment and do not yet reach the level of those that are endowed with intellect.”³³

This shows that although intellect proper is specific to human beings, some animals are not far from that level since they enjoy some choice and cogitation. So for al-Razi there is a hierarchy among animal species; some are very close to the human level. This explains why, though “irrational” in the strict sense, animals have some share in rationality, construed more broadly as any form of consciousness and purposive behavior. These levels of rationality allow for a kind of continuum between the various animal species and human beings and, therefore, transmigration. The animals' share of rationality and the immortality of their “rational” soul entitle them to proper treatment but also to eventual deserved punishment since they are endowed with choice.

D. The Treatment of Animals and Human Beings and Transmigration

Though *The Spiritual Medicine* stresses the gap between animals and human beings, it shows at the very beginning an interest in treating them well. In

32. Arabic text, p. 83, ll. 6–7.

33. Arabic text, p. 121, l. 20–p. 122, l. 6; Italian translation in Lucchetta's *La Natura e la Sfera*, p. 365.

the praise of intellect in chapter I, the intellect's first advantage is that it leads to a preference of us over the "irrational" animals so that we rule over them and dispose of them in ways that yield benefits to both us and to them.³⁴ In chapter II, while summarizing the views of philosophers who assert the soul's self-subsistence and survival after death, al-Razi indicates that such philosophers think that those who have inflicted pain on animals to satisfy their own pleasures "will come to see that they suffer woeful consequences after the soul leaves the body; its pain, regret, and distress shall be many and long enduring."³⁵ However, since *The Spiritual Medicine* focuses on character reformation and barely touches on social ethics, not much else is said on this issue.

The treatment of human beings is addressed in passing in various chapters, for example, the chapter on envy. Envy is closely related to malice. The malicious resent the good luck of those who never offended or injured them and take pleasure in their injuries. They deserve the hatred of God, because God desires the good of all men, and of men, because they are hateful and unjust to them.³⁶ Chapter IX, on lying, allows lying if this confers an advantage to the person lied to, particularly if it saves his life. The chapter on earning speaks only of cooperation through one's work.³⁷ Obviously all human beings should be treated well and justly. Justice, however, may require punishment for wrongdoing, and the chapter on anger discusses how to mete out punishment in proportion to the crime.³⁸ None of these passing remarks leads to detailed justifications or an elaboration of the principles from which they may derive.

Chapter XIX, which sums up the virtuous life, describes it as the one followed by all great philosophers. It consists in treating all human beings justly and, beyond that, in showing compassion and benevolence to all and trying to secure the advantage of all human beings, except evildoers.³⁹ This call to universal justice and benevolence has a nice ring to it but sounds a bit superficial since no justification is given for this prescription and terms as complex as "justice" are not defined. Furthermore, the incentive to follow such a way of life is sheer self-interest: justice will ensure our own safety from our neighbors and compassion will ensure their love for us.⁴⁰ The only interesting point is that many people are constrained by evil *shar'as*, or laws to perform evil actions. Examples of such bad laws refer to people who allow deceitful treatment of opponents; the Manicheans' refusal to give water, food, and medical treatment to those who do not share their views; those who abstain from killing dangerous, useless animals such as scorpions; and those who do not wash. Such people do not practice universal justice and benevo-

34. Arabic text, p. 18, ll. 1–2.

35. Arabic text, p. 24, ll. 8–11.

36. Arabic text, chap. VII, p. 48.

37. Arabic text, chap. XVII, pp. 80–82.

38. Arabic text, chap. VIII, p. 56.

39. Arabic text, p. 91, ll. 7–11.

40. Arabic text, p. 92, ll. 7–9.

lence nor work at diminishing potential evils for themselves or others. The last chapter on the fear of death asserts that if there is an afterlife, those who have performed all the duties of the "true *sharī'a*," that is, philosophy, should not fear death since everlasting happiness is promised to them. Obviously al-Razi has definite views on the way in which one should treat others and oneself but does not justify them, and his incentive to the reader for adopting them is simply that they lead to a better afterlife.

The Philosophic Life, which determines not only how we should treat ourselves but also how we should treat other living beings and maintain the world, exhibits much interest in the treatment of animals. It spends much more time on this question than on the treatment of other human beings. As the text is al-Razi's own apology, we should not be surprised that he would deal at greater length with more controversial issues. Treating one's fellow human beings well is common to most religions, among them Islam, and to most philosophers. Belief in transmigration is less common; moreover, al-Razi does not even share with some of its adept the view that all sentient life should be equally respected. Also, whether one can eat meat or sacrifice animals had been disputed among such philosophers as Plutarch and Porphyry.⁴¹ Even philosophers who upheld transmigration were divided between those who took it as a one-way street—that is, accepting transmigration from animals to human beings but not vice versa—and those who saw it as a two-way street.⁴² It comes as no surprise that al-Razi states no fewer than three times that his champion, Socrates, even though he recanted his previous asceticism, never ate meat.⁴³

The imitation of God's mercy requires us, and apparently animals as well, "not to cause any pain to a sentient being if this being has not deserved to be pained or if the pain inflicted will not prevent a greater pain."⁴⁴ As for God's justice, it requires the punishment of those who deserve it.⁴⁵ The first criterion for the treatment of animals is how they act toward human beings and other animals. Since al-Razi attributes some level of choice to at least some animals, we are not surprised that such animals can be rightly said to deserve punishment if they treat other sentient beings badly. The second criterion is the hierarchy of living beings since, as we have seen, human beings rule animals. Moreover, the final liberation of the rational soul from the body can come only from a human body, not an animal body,⁴⁶ wherefore an animal's death can be a step toward the final liberation of its soul.

41. See Kraus, "La conduite du philosophe," p. 308, and Sorabji, *Animal Minds & Human Morals*.

42. See Kraus, "La Conduite du Philosophe," p. 328, n. 1.

43. Arabic text, p. 99, l. 7, l. 18, and p. 105, l. 14.

44. Arabic text, p. 103, ll. 17–18.

45. See *The Spiritual Medicine*, chap. VIII, on anger, p. 56, ll. 4–9; and principles 1 and 4 in *The Philosophic Life*, which speak of the rewards and punishments granted by God in the afterlife, p. 101, ll. 13–14 and p. 101, l. 19–p. 102, l. 1; Butterworth, n. 9.

46. Arabic text, p. 105, ll. 1–4, 12–13; Butterworth, nn. 18, 20.

The concrete examples al-Razi gives help us to understand how he applies these criteria. Imitation of God's mercy is first in the order of presentation. Since one should not cause useless pain to an innocent sentient being, kings should not take pleasure in hunting and people should not impose excessive labor on domestic animals. Yet, as animals are inferior to human beings, animals can be domesticated, and in cases of necessity, whenever justice and intellect require, one can cause serious hardship and even death to an animal if it can save a human life, as when a rider is pursued by an enemy. Al-Razi comments that this is true especially when the particular human being is learned and good or if his safety would be of greater use for humankind since "the usefulness of this man and his remaining in this life would be more fitting for people than preservation of this horse."⁴⁷ Curiously, the only reference specific to the treatment of human beings is presented as a follow-up. If two men are in the desert and one of them has only enough water for the survival of one person, the water should be given to the one who is most useful to humankind.⁴⁸ The question of who owns the water is apparently irrelevant.

Imitation of God's justice follows. On the one hand, carnivorous animals such as wolves, lions, and tigers must be exterminated as far as is possible because they would themselves exterminate many other animals and because their death may hasten their final liberation—there is hope they will move to more salutary bodies.⁴⁹ As for vipers, scorpions, hornets, and the like, which are less destructive than carnivores but may cause pain to other animals and cannot be domesticated, they may be, but need not be, exterminated.⁵⁰

On the other hand, domestic animals—does this include useful carnivores, such as cats and dogs?—and herbivores should not be destroyed but rather should be treated with gentleness and used as little as possible for

47. Arabic text, p. 104, ll. 1–11, particularly, ll. 9–11; Butterworth, nn. 15–16. As al-Razi stresses the criterion of usefulness to other people over the possible intrinsic value of human life, it is not altogether clear whether a poor specimen of a human being, such as a cruel, old criminal, should take priority over a young, gentle, and useful horse—particularly since the classic case of whose life should be saved is presented as an afterthought or a development of this case of choice between an animal and a human life.

48. Arabic text, p. 104, ll. 11–13; Butterworth, n. 16.

49. Arabic text, p. 105, ll. 4–6; Butterworth, n. 18. This statement makes one wonder whether al-Razi thinks that the specific bodily makeup of various animal species determines their mental and moral level and the specificity of their soul or if all animals, including human beings, have the same soul but various species of bodies determine the number and level of powers they can use. In other words, do human beings and animals have exactly the same soul but only human bodies allow full use of them?

50. Arabic text, p. 105, ll. 7–9; Butterworth, n. 18. In the *Metaphysics*, al-Razi endowed hornets with some choice. In *The Spiritual Medicine*, chap. XIX, p. 91, l. 13–p. 92, l. 1, al-Razi criticizes Manicheans who abstain from killing snakes and scorpions.

food. Moreover, to prevent such a result, they should not be bred in such great numbers that their slaughter would be necessary.⁵¹ Al-Razi adds that if it were not that final liberation from the body occurs only from human bodies, then slaughter of lower animals would never be allowed.⁵²

E. Implications of Transmigration and the Progressive Return to the Realm of Soul

The insistence that a soul's final liberation can take place only from a human body has an ethical implication we have already seen. The killing of useful animals may be allowed in case of necessity because it gives them a chance to move to a better body, that is, a human one. From this it would follow that the killing of innocent human beings is never allowed since their souls cannot move to a better kind of body. Al-Razi states that serious injustice—and killing an innocent human being is such an injustice—prevents the perpetrator's soul from reaching lasting happiness, at least after this particular life. As he puts it, even acquiring domination over the whole earth for the span of one's life at the price of committing crimes against human beings would not be worthwhile since it would deprive that individual of lasting bliss.⁵³

If the souls of animals can move to better bodies, there is a need, at least until some time in the future, for a fresh supply of human bodies. Though *The Spiritual Medicine* certainly does not encourage procreation (since one of the ways to prevent mourning is not to procreate⁵⁴) and declares copulation evil in itself,⁵⁵ *The Philosophic Life*, in contrast, encourages procreation at least moderately. Highlighting that Socrates came to procreate in the better phase of his life, al-Razi states, at least a couple of times, that true philosophy encourages the propagation of the human species⁵⁶ and rejects solitary life.

Because of his conception of the "rational" soul as involving a broad and a narrow meaning of rationality, al-Razi is able to reduce the distance between human beings and animals. He has, therefore, psychological underpinnings for both transmigration and his moral views concerning the treatment of animals. He is also fully aware that his new conception of the soul must lead to the abandonment of Aristotle's teleological conception of nature. In fact, al-Razi also rejects Aristotle's cosmology and metaphysics, as we see now in the discussion of the cosmic soul.

51. Arabic text, p. 105, ll. 9–11; Butterworth, n. 20.

52. Arabic text, p. 105, ll. 12–13; Butterworth, n. 20.

53. Arabic text, p. 103, ll. 3–6; Butterworth, n. 13. See also p. 106, l. 18–p. 107, l. 2; Butterworth, n. 25.

54. Both in the English translated by Asberry and in the Arabic edition by Kraus, chap. XII, on grief.

55. Ch. XV.

56. Arabic text, p. 99, ll. 7, 10–12; Butterworth nn. 1–2; Arabic text, p. 100, ll. 19–20 and p. 101, ll. 1–2; Butterworth, nn. 7–8.

II. THE COSMIC SOUL

Al-Razi's insistence on the necessity of spiritual medicine or character reformation implies that each "rational" soul needs some kind of restoration and return to an original, better state. This view becomes clear when we look at his famous myth of the soul. Before analyzing this myth we should recall that al-Razi's cosmology and metaphysics are rather un-Aristotelian and known only indirectly through quotations and adverse reports, particularly those of Abu Hatim al-Razi.⁵⁷

Al-Razi holds that there are five eternal principles: (1) the creator, or perhaps more exactly, the demiurge, though he is usually referred to as *al-bāri*, a Koranic term; (2) soul; (3) matter, or *hyle*; (4) space; and (5) time. Al-Razi is fully aware that this conception is rather uncommon among Greek philosophers in general and far from Aristotle's in particular. Of course, soul, which is one of the five eternal, as they are called, is a cosmic soul and, like the other eternal, seems to be uncreated. The relation between this cosmic soul and the particular souls of animals and human beings is none too clear, but the life story of each individual soul appears to be an exemplification of the adventure of the cosmic soul.⁵⁸

The five eternal constitute the background for the myth of the soul as told by Abu Bakr al-Razi, according to Abu Hatim's account in the *Signs of Prophecy*.⁵⁹

I say that the five [principles] are eternal whereas the world came to be. The reason for the world's coming into being is the following: soul desired to get enmeshed into this world⁶⁰ and sensual desire [*al-shah-wa*] moved it to do so without soul knowing what evil consequences would affect it [soul] once it would get enmeshed into the world and

57. For Abu Hatim's text, see Kraus's Arabic text, pp. 295–313. For al-Razi's metaphysics and cosmology, see Salomon Pines, *Beiträge zur islamischen Atomlehre* (Berlin, 1936), pp. 34–93. Badawi, "Muhammad ibn Zakariya al-Razi," pp. 440–46; Majid Fakhry, "A Tenth Century Arabic Interpretation of Plato's Cosmology," *Journal of the History of Philosophy* 6 (1968): 15–22; and Fritz Meier, "Der 'Urknall' eine Idee des Abū Bakr ar-Rāzī," *Oriens* 33 (1992): 1–21.

58. Fakhry already mentioned this parallel in "Tenth Century Arabic Interpretation," p. 18.

59. It seems that al-Razi considers this myth to be an argument against the materialists who defend the eternity of the world. Goodman attempts to explain this claim in "Razi's Myth of the Fall of the Soul." Fritz Meier does the same in "Urknall." Abu Hatim, who reports this claim, thinks the myth is such a poor argument that he accuses al-Razi of having let "his passion overcome" his intellect (Arabic text, p. 308, l. 19). This must be a particularly galling comment for the author of *The Spiritual Medicine*.

60. The exact meaning of the verb *tajabbala* (Arabic text, p. 308, ll. 9–10) is rather obscure. Brion in "Le temps, l'espace," translates as "l'âme a désiré informer ce monde" (p. 156). Alessandro Bausani, in *Filosofo "Laico,"* adopts "L'anima bramo impastarsi col mono" (p. 55). Meier in "'Urknall,'" wavers and finally selects "Die Seele (Urseele) hatte Lust in diese Welt einzugehen" (pp. 16–17, n. 45).

into turmoil over the world's coming to be. Soul then moved matter with tumultuous, wayward and disorganized motions being unable to achieve that which it willed. The creator had mercy on soul and helped it to bring this world into being. He brought soul to organization and balance because he had mercy on it and knew that once soul had tasted the evil consequences of what it had done, it would return to its own world. There its turmoil would quiet down and its sensual desire cease and vanish. Thus this world came into being through the help the creator gave to soul. If it were not for this help soul would not have been able to bring the world into being and if it were not for this reason this world would not have come into being.⁶¹

Some elements in this story are very important:

1. Soul did not know the consequences of its intended action.
2. Because of this ignorance, soul was misled by sensual desire (*shahwa*, a species of passion, *hawan*).
3. Soul's action was disorganized and unsuccessful and soul did not accomplish what it willed *'arāda*; this by implication seems to be the origin of evil and pain.
4. God was merciful and knew that His intervention would have a beneficial outcome.
5. Because of His mercy and knowledge, God came to the rescue of soul and so got both soul and the world organized.
6. Once it has realized what it has done, soul will return to its own world free from turmoil and sensual desire.

One point in this version is never explained, however. What exactly is the kind of help the creator brought to soul? I would like to suggest that this help is none other than the gift of intellect, which brings about philosophy. If we accept this interpretation, which has its source in Nasir-i-Khusraw's version of the myth, we discover that the important elements of the tale are also present in *The Spiritual Medicine*, which is designed to help individual rational souls to return to their previous better state.⁶²

What really misled the cosmic soul into following sensual desire—and after all *The Spiritual Medicine* is an attempt to reform this sad behavior—is not knowing the consequences of its intended course of action. By contrast, what leads to God's successful rescue operation was His knowledge of the outcome of His intervention. The very first chapter of *The Spiritual Medicine* sums up all the advantages that arise from intellect in the following way:

61. Arabic text, p. 308, ll. 8–15. French translation and context in Brion's "Le temps, l'espace," pp. 139–64, particularly p. 156.

62. This version can be found in the original Persian, as well as in Arabic translation, in Kraus's Arabic text, pp. 284–86; German translation in Meier, pp. 10–11. All the elements found in Abu Hatim's version are also present in Nasir-i-Khusraw's.

“Without intellect our state would be the state of beasts, children, and lunatics”; with it “we picture to ourselves our intelligible actions before they become manifest to the senses and so we see them as if we had sensed them. We then copy their forms in our sensible actions and they become manifest, conforming to what we imitated and imagined of them.”⁶³

In other words, intellect allows us to use mental representations of future actions to test their outcome so that we are able to realize what we have imagined as we have imagined it. It is true that the passage I have just translated does not even allude to a survey of consequences for possible courses of action or to a subsequent selection of the most advantageous. Nevertheless, many other passages that contrast human beings with animals, children, or lunatics show clearly that what is at the core of intellect’s usefulness is its ability to evaluate alternatives through their long-term consequences and to select the most profitable.

Chapter II, for instance, considers people superior to animals because people have the faculty of will and the capacity to postpone action so that it follows deliberation. Because animals do not deliberate, they cannot restrain their natural inclination for the sake of intellectual values, and so they do not have choice.⁶⁴ A page later, al-Razi develops the contrast between natural inclination and intellect. “Passion and natural inclination always call us to follow immediate pleasures and to prefer them without cogitating and deliberating about their outcome.” They even hurry us to what will yield pain since they, like a child, see no further than the present instant. In contrast, anyone who follows his intellect will carefully consider the outcome, picture it to himself, and weigh the options. They only will be able to choose the most advantageous.⁶⁵ In the same way, chapter VIII, on anger, asserts that there is little difference between a lunatic and anyone whose anger has left him bereft of the ability to cogitate and deliberate.⁶⁶ Chapter XVIII links the human capacity to use imagination for reviewing options and their outcomes to the possibility of avoiding what is harmful and heading straight for what is useful.⁶⁷ The many other references to the same point highlight its importance.⁶⁸ Notice that in this popular work

63. Arabic text, p. 18, ll. 9–12.

64. Arabic text, p. 20, ll. 10–15, even if, as we saw earlier, in other texts al-Razi attributes choice to some animals

65. Arabic text, p. 21, l. 13–p. 22, l. 6. Some readers will be reassured to know that al-Razi thinks that education accustoms children to rein in their natural impulse. See, chap. II, p. 21.

66. Arabic text, p. 55, ll. 14–15.

67. On the quest for ranks, Arabic text, p. 85, l. 16–p. 86, l. 2.

68. For instance, Arabic text, chap. II: animals are so engrossed in the immediate pleasure that they keep eating peacefully up to their being slaughtered (p. 24, l. 16–p. 25, l. 1). Chapter VIII: animals unleash action without deliberating (p. 56, l. 4). Chapter XIV: drunks, too, stop thinking and deliberating and so rush into action, thereby giving up their rationality and joining sheer animality (p. 73, l. 10). Chapter XV: sex addicts emulate billy goats and bulls, which lack deliberation and thought of consequences (p. 76, ll. 16–17). Yet in chap. XVII, on earning, al-Razi

al-Razi highlights differences between animals and human beings to convince the latter to make full use of their rationality and of the gift of intellect, whereas, as we saw earlier, in more technical works he does not hesitate to express his conception of the "rational" soul—which encompasses both animals and human beings.

The ability to chart and to evaluate mentally various courses of action and their outcomes in order to select and realize the most useful is what distinguishes adult human beings from lunatics, children, and animals. It saves us from being misled by passion since it makes us understand that following passion or sensual desire is to our own disadvantage. Because of this same capacity, God rescued the cosmic soul from the bad consequences of its desire.

On the one hand, the adoption of a poor course of action does not allow soul to realize that which it willed. On the other hand, if we are led by intellect, which selects and carefully plans the most useful course of action, we reach the object of our will.⁶⁹ Then our action is organized and successful since it allows us to rule animals in ways that are profitable not only to us but also to them and to reach our goals by means of navigation, medicine, and various techniques granted by intellect.⁷⁰ The fact that al-Razi insists that these crafts arise from intellect highlights his distance from many Muslims, who claim that human beings learned them through revelation. Such skills will ensure the instauration of the world, and the duty to maintain the world is a theme that *The Philosophic Life* uses to tone down Socrates's early asceticism. It also allows al-Razi to defend the necessity to exercise a profession even if one is a philosopher. As for the poor "mindless" cosmic soul, left to itself it did not succeed in organizing the world and was simply jerking it in every direction without accomplishing anything.⁷¹ Finally, intellect leads to our own ultimate well-being parallel to soul's return, freed from desire, to its own realm.⁷²

It is rather striking that with one exception all the important elements in the myth of the cosmic soul find a parallel in the first chapter of *The Spiritual Medicine*, which retraces the way individual souls can escape from the snare of passion and sensual desire. This liberation is a slow process that

concedes that animals who store provisions have a greater share of cogitative imagination (p. 83, ll. 5–6).

69. Arabic text, p. 18, ll. 3–4.

70. *The Spiritual Medicine*, p. 18, ll. 1–6; *The Philosophic Life*, p. 102, ll. 3–4; Butterworth, n. 9.

71. Since only God could organize this world, one can understand that al-Razi objected strenuously to attributing to nature itself the organization God granted to it. See his criticisms of Aristotle's notion of nature in *Metaphysics*, Kraus's Arabic text, pp. 116–24.

72. *The Spiritual Medicine*, chap. I, p. 19, ll. 1–2. In chap. II, al-Razi's Plato claims that "if [the rational soul] would use its rationality fully, this would be its liberation from the body with which it is entangled" (p. 28, ll. 5–7) and, therefore, presumably its return to its own realm in which there is no pain (p. 30, ll. 14–15).

requires an increase in knowledge, particularly in philosophy. It is, therefore, no surprise that al-Razi thinks that, with time, knowledge progresses in accuracy and scope, and he is thus ready to criticize openly his predecessors in medicine and philosophy. This contrasts with the views of Aristotelian philosophers, such as al-Farabi and Averroes, who claim that philosophy reached its peak with Aristotle. Rather, al-Razi made himself the champion of personal examination and critical thinking (*ijtihād*) in contrast to those who advocated the uncritical following of tradition (*taqlīd*), be it in medical, religious, or philosophical matters.⁷³

The one element in the myth of the soul that, while prominent in *The Philosophic Life*, is downplayed in *The Spiritual Medicine* is the role of God, particularly His motivation in rescuing soul and organizing the world. God's motivation for His rescue was His mercy, that is, an altruistic motivation. So al-Razi's normative ethics, which calls for the human being to imitate God as far as possible, requires helping other living beings to reach their goal and the preservation of the world.⁷⁴ For al-Razi, imitating God means reenacting God's compassionate treatment of the cosmic soul and His help in realizing its project of the constitution of the world.

Human beings, therefore, do not simply need to take care of their own souls for their greater advantage, as *The Spiritual Medicine*, an introductory work for eventual would-be philosophers, preaches. After all, that text recommends even proper social behavior not on the grounds of altruistic motivations but on mere self-interest: being just ensures our safety from our neighbors and showing mercy ensures their love for us.⁷⁵ Rather, human beings ought also to imitate God's compassion and mercy in helping other living beings for their own sake and to maintain the world. *The Spiritual Medicine*, which lays great emphasis on the intellect, highlights the contrast between animals and human beings. As reading this text precedes the study of philosophy, which will include the examination of the soul and the determination of God's attributes, it limits itself to self-interest and ends on an appeal to begin research into the soul's fate. In contrast, *The Philosophic Life*, which assumes acceptance of the myth of the soul and knowledge of God's main attributes, spells out our duties to all sentient beings, and animals in particular, since it posits transmigration. Therefore, to under-

73. See, for instance, his introduction to his *Doubts against Galen*, Arabic text, pp. 1–18; and Pines, "Razi critique de Galien," pp. 480–83, particularly his dispute with Abu Hatim al-Razi, p. 300, l. 21–p. 303, l. 18, in which al-Razi contrasts the personal reflection proper to philosophers with the uncritical acceptance (*taqlīd*) of other people. On this issue of *taqlīd* and its complexity, see Richard M. Frank, "Al-Ghazali on Taqlīd, Scholars, Theologians, and Philosophers," *Zeitschrift für Geschichte der arabisch-islamischen Wissenschaften* 7 (1991–92): 207–52.

74. On al-Razi's ethics, see Thérèse-Anne Druart, "Al-Razi (Rhazes) and Normative Ethics," in *Tradition and Renewal*, vol. 2, ed. David A. Boileau and John A. Dick, *Louvain Philosophical Studies*, 6 (Louvain: Leuven University Press, 1993), pp. 167–81.

75. Arabic text, chap. XIX, on the virtuous life, p. 92, ll. 7–9.

stand al-Razi's social ethics—broadly construed as covering his treatment of both animals and human beings—we need to have grasped how much his own conception of the individual “rational” soul differs from the predominant Aristotelian one and how it relates to his understanding of the cosmic soul's history of the fall and return to its own realm because of God's gift of intellect. Once this is done, one can agree with al-Razi that he is truly a philosopher.

