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**THE SPIRITUAL PHYSICK OF ABU BAKR MUHAMMAD IBN ZAKARIYA AL-RAZI**

The *Spiritual Physick* appears therefore as the produ*c*t of a curiously perfect blend of two civilizations, expressed in the language of a third; an admirable synthesis of science and metaphysics, shaped in the mind of a master physician and given verbal form by a master of language. It is scarcely an exaggeration to say that the book is unique in Arabic **l**iterature. The author hardly betrays himself as a Muslim, though his name Muhammad proves him so to have been; otherwise he would have done as all other Ara*b*s did who wrote on ethics, elaborating Iris discourse with quotations from the Koran and the sayings of the Prophet, and only introducing the views of Greek thinkers where they appeared to ac*c*ord with sound Islamic teaching*.* Avicenna was much more orthodox; he even wrote commentaries on parts of the Koran. Rhazes’ God is a very rational and reasonable God, a God, we might almost say, with a sense of humour, an eminently Persian God. Reading of Rhazes’ books supports the feeling of presence of a man who knew no vain fear because he had analyzed fear out of his mind; a man who knew no vain hope because he knew that the laws of nature were as beneficent as they were immutable; a man indifferent to fame and wealth because he was intellectually persuaded of their worthlessness; a man whose counselis a sure guide through the baffling perplexities that are the inevitable accompaniment of human life, a sage and reasonable comfort under the dark shadows of extreme affliction and death. Certain men of a speculative turn*,* discriminating and of undoubted attainments*,* having observed that we consort with our fellows and engage in various manners of earning a livelihood, reproach us on this account*,* finding it to be detrimental in us and asserting that we are swerving aside from the philosophic life*.*

The criticism is particularly levelled at his alleged failure to live up to the ideals of Socrates, his confessed master, who is pictured as living a life of utmost rigour; at the same time Socrates himself is criticized according to this legend for conduct contrary to the laws of nature and liable to lead to the extinction of the human race and the desolation of the world. Rhaze agrees with the objection that is raised to Socrates’ “earlier life”, but makes it clear that he differs from his master “only quantitively, not qualitatively”; he is in full agreement with the view that life should be lived in a disciplined manner, but cannot accept the doctrine of extreme self-abnegation. He argues the proposition that pleasure is not to be indulged when it is irrational in its appeal**,** much along the same lines as in the *Spiritual Physick.* Then he analyzes the problem of pain.

Since we have laid it down as the foundation of our case that our Lord and Ruler is kindly and compassionate towards us and regards us with loving care, it follows from this that He hates that any pain should be fall us; it also follows that whatever happens to us not of our own earning and choosing but due to some necessity of nature*,* is to be regarded as inevitable. It therefore behoves us not to pain any sentient creature whatsoever, unless it deserves to be pained*,* or unless it be to avert from it still greater pain. Rhaze follows up the implications of this conclusion by condemning blood sports except when practiced against carnivorous beasts such as lions, tigers and wolves; at the same time he urges the annihilation of snakes, scorpions and other noisome creatures that have no discoverable beneficial use or property. From the animal kingdom he turns back to man. The practice of austerity is obviously easier for those not accustomed to luxury from birth than for the children of rich parents; the latter cannot be required to compete with the former in this respect on a basis of equality.