

# ABU BAKR AL-RAZI (RHAZES) AND MEDICAL ETHICS

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## Ebu Bekir er-Razi ve Tıp Etiği İlkeleri

**Abstract:** Abu Bakr al-Razi (d. 313 H./925 A.D.), who lived in 10th century, is a Muslim Turkish philosopher. He contributed to the science of physic in several aspects and in this field he wrote many works, most of which were translated to many European languages such as Latin, Greek, English, German and French, and considered as lecture study texts in the European Universities up to the 18th century. He also was regarded as the greatest physician of the Muslim World and called as the ‘Galen of Arabs’ because of his authority on the medicine.

Al-Razi divided the science of physic into two divisions; one as ‘corporeal physic’ which deals with physical and physiological diseases and the other as ‘the spiritual physic’ dealing with the moral diseases, and he set up some strong relations between the body health and the spirit health. According to him, the troubles of the spirit can be understood and explained by the clear evident of the physiological symptoms in body just because of the fact that temperament of the body belongs to both the ethical rules of the spirit and the self. As a result of these strong relations, the physician must be a well-informed doctor of both body and spirit. Therefore, al-Razi has granted the concept; namely al-Tibb al-Ruhani, and the consideration into the Islamic thought to be modeled the periods afterwards.

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One of Abu Bakr al-Razi's most important opinion, which must be examined carefully, is his setting up the relationship between the physic and the ethics. Al-Razi was regarding of the fact that there was an interwoven correlation between the physic and the ethics and especially in order to set out his ideas dealing with the medical ethics, about which he had written a special book named Ahlaq al-Tabeeb. By the help of this book, Razi perhaps became one of the authors who had written the first medical ethics. In the same time, he mentioned about the medical ethics in another book named Mihnat al-Tabeeb. In this book, he cited some rules that both physicians and the patient had to take into consideration. There are very important similarities between his ideas on that and those of Hippocrates and Galen.

In this article, we have tried to put forward the ideas of al-Razi, the great Muslim philosopher and physician, about the medical ethics and to relate them with the ideas of Hippocrates and Galen as well as the contemporary approaches in this field.

**Key Words:** Abu Bakr al-Razi (Rhazes), ahlaq al-tabeeb, medical ethics, medical deontology.



**78 Özet:** Ebû Bekir er-Râzî (ö. 313/925), X. yüzyılda yaşamış Türk asıllı bir İslâm filozofudur. Tıp bilimine çeşitli katkılar sağlamış ve bu alanda birçok eserler yazmış olan Râzî'nin eserlerinin çoğu, başta Latince olmak üzere Grekçe, İngilizce, Almanca, Fransızca gibi çeşitli batı dillerine çevrilerek XVIII. yüzyıla kadar Avrupa'daki üniversitelerde ders kitabı olarak okutulmuştur. Tıp sahasındaki otoritesinden dolayı tartışmasız bir şekilde İslâm dünyasının en büyük hekimlerinden biri kabul edilen filozof, "Arapların Galen'i" diye isimlendirilmiştir.

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Râzî, Platon'dan hareketle tıp bilimini, fizikî ve fizyolojik hastalıkları konu edinen bedenî tıp (et-tıbbu'l-cesedanî) ve ahlâki hastalıkları konu edinen ruhî tıp (et-tıbbu'r-rûhânî) olmak üzere iki kısma ayırmış, beden sağlığı ile ruh sağlığı arasında ilişki kurmuştur. Ona göre bedeninin mizacı, ruh ve nefsin ahlâkına bağlı olduğu için ruhun çektiği elemeler, bedende ortaya çıkacak olan fizyolojik belirtilerle anlaşılıp açıklanabilir. Bu ilişkiden dolayı bir tabibin, hem beden hem de ruh tabibi olması gerekir. Böylece Râzî, İslâm düşüncesine, sonraki dönemde etkili olan, "ubbu'r-rûhânî" kavramını ve bilimini kazandırmıştır.

Ebû Bekir er-Râzî'nin üzerinde durulması gereken en önemli yönlerinden biri, tıp ile ahlâk arasında kurmuş olduğu ilişkidir. Tıp sahasında ahlâkın önemli olduğu ve tıp ile ahlâkın birbirlerinden ayrılmayacakları düşüncesinde olan Râzî, tıp etiği ile ilgili görüşlerini Ahlâku't-tabip (Hekimlik Ahlâkı) isimli eserinde ele almıştır. Râzî, bu eseriyle İslâm dünyasında ilk tıp etiği kitabı yazanlardan biri, belki de ilki olmuştur. Aynı zamanda o, Mihnetü't-tabip (Doktorun İmtihanı) isimli eserinde de tıp etiği ilkelerinden bahsetmektedir. Her iki eserde de hekim ve hastaların uymaları gereken bir birtakım prensiplerden söz etmektedir. Bu noktadaki görüşleri ile Hipokrat

ve Galen'in ortaya koyduğu tıp etiği ilkeleri arasında önemli benzerlikler vardır.

Bu makalede, İslâm dünyasının önemli bir tabip-filozofu olan Ebû Bekir er-Râzî'nin tıp etiği ile ilgili düşünceleri, Hipokrat ile Galen'in görüşlerine ilaveten günümüz yaklaşımlarıyla da ilişkilendirilerek ortaya konulmaya çalışılacaktır.

**Anahtar Kelimeler:** Ebû Bekir er-Râzî, ahlaku't-tabip.



## I. Introduction

Abu Bakr Al-Razi, who lived between 865-925, is an Islamic philosopher of Turkish origin as most of the documented sources indicate.<sup>1</sup> Razi, scholarly educated in language, literature, medicine, philosophy, mathematics, and astronomy as most of his contemporaries did, studied Greek, Hindu, Persian, and Islamic medicine, and became a pioneering figure after Galen (130-200). He worked as the chief surgeon in many hospitals in the cities of Rey and Baghdad, and he became an advisor to caliphs and rulers of the time. He earned the title of "Galen of Arabs" thanks to his authority and leading achievements in medicine.<sup>2</sup> Razi, who kept a position both as a physician and a philosopher, was credited as a physician rather than a philosopher by his contemporaries and the future generation due to his relative achievements in medicine.<sup>3</sup>

Razi distinguished meditation, which involves physical and physiological illnesses, and medication, which studies the weaknesses of morality, from each other. He traced the idea that medication and meditation

<sup>1</sup> Sigrid Hunke, *Avrupa'nın Üzerine Doğan İslâm Güneşi*, çev.: Servet Sezgin, Bedir Yayınevi, İstanbul 1972, s. 163; Hüseyin Karaman, "Bir Biyografi Denemesi: Ebû Bekir er-Râzî", *Hitit Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi*, 2004/2, c. III, sy. 6, s. 104.

<sup>2</sup> İbn Nedim, *el-Fihrist*, Daru'l-maarif, Beyrut 1994, s. 360; İbn Cülcül, *Tabakatu'l-etibba ve'l-hukema*, thk. Fuad Seyyid, Müessesetü'r-risale, Beyrut 1985, s. 77; İbn Ebî Useybia, *Uyunu'l-enba fi Tabakati'l-etibba*, Daru Mektebetü'l-hayat, Beyrut, ts., s. 415; Hunke, *Avrupa'nın Üzerine Doğan İslâm Güneşi*, s. 164; Mehmet Bayraktar, "The Spiritual Medicine of Early Muslims", *The Islamic Quarterly*, vol. 29, 1985, sayı: 1, s. 8.

<sup>3</sup> Edward G. Browne, *Arabian Medicine*, Cambridge 1921; Amir Neccar, *fi Tarihi't-tıp fi't-devleti'l-İslamiyye*, Daru'l-maarif, Kahire 1994, s. 83.

are two different concepts dating back to Plato (427-347 B.C.).<sup>4</sup> Studied the both divisions of medicine, Razi wrote *Kitâbu'l-hâvî*, *Kitâbu'l-mansûrî*, *el-Cuderi ve'l-hasbe* on medication and *et-Tıbbu'r-rûhânî* on meditation. Because, when compared to body, the self has got the upper hand; therefore, it is of crucial focus for the body. To put it differently, in the body-self comparison the self is of greater importance for the body because the nature of the body depends upon the virtue of the self. All the psychological stimuli and the ups and downs in mood appear as the physiognomic indications on the body. Thus, the interdisciplinary growth of meditation and medication flourished the idea that the physician of the body is also the physician of the spirit.<sup>5</sup>

Although this progressive tradition, which dates back to Plato, can be traced to Ebû Yusuf Yakup b. İshak el-Kindî (d. 866), the first Islamic philosopher in Islamic philosophy, Kindî did not use a separate concept for it.<sup>6</sup> Therefore, it is Abu Bakr Al-Razi, who conceptualized this approach. This concept became widespread in subsequent decades and took place in his work *et-Tıbbu'r-rûhânî*, which elaborates on the weaknesses of the self, their causes and treatment. In this sense, enriching the tradition of handling medicine and morality together, he developed a distinctive concept of medicine different from that of Plato. Thus, Razi contributed to the Islamic Moral Philosophy with the ideas he compiled in his work *et-*

<sup>4</sup> Ebû Bekir er-Râzî, "et-Tıbbu'r-rûhânî", *Resailu felsefiyye (Opera Philosophica)* içinde, nşr. Paul Kraus, *Daru'l-afaki'l-cedide*, Beyrut 1982, s. 29. Platon'un bu konudaki görüşü için bk. Platon, *Timaios*, çev.: Erol Güneş ve Lütfi Ay, MEB Yayınları, İstanbul 1997, ss. 86b-88a; amlf., *Kharmides*, çev. N. Şazi Kösemihal, MEB Yayınları, İstanbul 1998, s. 170a-172a; Fahrettin Olguner, *Batı ve İslâm Dünyasında Eflatun'un Timaios'u*, Selçuk Üniversitesi Yayınları, Konya 1990, s. 44.

<sup>5</sup> İbn Ebi Useybia, *Uyunu'l-enba*, s. 420; Tjitze De Boer, *The History of Philosophy in Islam*, Great Britain, London 1961, s. 78.

<sup>6</sup> Krş. Bayraktar, "The Spiritual Medecine of Early Muslims", s. 1. Bazı kaynakların, Kindî'nin "et-Tıbbu'r-rûhânî" isimli bir eserinden bahsetmelerine rağmen, bu eser günümüze kadar gelmemiştir. Bk. Richard Walzer, "Akhlak" md. *The Encyclopedia of Islam* (New Edition), E. J. Brill, Leiden 1960, c. I, s. 328; Mehmet Aydın, "Ahlâk-İslâm Felsefesi", *DİA*, İstanbul 1989, c. II, s. 10.

*Tıbbu'r-rûhânî*.<sup>7</sup> It is the first book on philosophic morality in the History of Islamic Philosophy.

## II. The Principls of Medical Ethics

Medical ethics which are some of the ways to articulate the universal values involve ethical treatment of attitudes, behaviors and applications. In crude terms, it involves a phenomenon embracing all the institutions and staff and problems of values.

*Medical ethics* gives place to the principles of medical ethics in which morality is important in medicine; medicine and morality are indispensable and physician's profession should be defined by physician's ethics as well as his/her professional skills.

Al-Razi, cited some rules that both physicians and the patient had to take into consideration in the *Ahlaq Al-Tabeeb* (Medical Ethics)<sup>8</sup>. Moreover, in the *Mihnat Al-Tabeeb*, too, he mentions both the theoretical and practical applications in medical ethics.<sup>9</sup>

This paper will shed light on the present interpretations of the most prominent physician's ideas on medical ethics along with those of Hippocrates and Galen's.

<sup>7</sup> Bu eser Hüseyin Karaman tarafından *Ruh Sağlığı* (İz Yayıncılık, İstanbul 2004) ismiyle Türkçe'ye tercüme edilmiştir.

<sup>8</sup> Mahmud Necmabâdî, *Şerhu Hallü ve Makâm-ı Muhammed Zekeriya Râzî*, Tahran 1318, s. 239. Bu risaleyi Abdullatif Muhammed el-Abd "Sittu Resail Mine't-turasi'l-Arabî el-İslâmî" isimli kitap içinde neşretmiştir. Bkz. Ebû Bekir er-Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabîp", Risaletü li Ebî Bekir Muhammed İbn Zekeriya er-Râzî ila Ba'zı Telamizetihî" nşr. Abdullatif Muhammed el-Abd, Sittu Resail Mine't-türasi'l-Arabî el-İslâmî (içinde), Mektebetü'n-nahzati'l-Mısıriyye, Kahire 1981, s. 124-149. Risale Mahmut Kaya tarafından "Hekimlik Ahlâkı" ismiyle Türkçe'ye tercüme edilerek bir girişle birlikte yayınlanmıştır. Bkz. Ebû Bekir er-Râzî, "Hekimlik Ahlâkı", çev. Mahmut Kaya, Ünlü Hekim-Filozof Ebû Bekir er-Râzî ve Hekimlik Ahlâkı ile İlgili Risalesi (içinde), Felsefe Arkivi, sy. 26'dan ayrı basım, İÜEF Basımevi, İstanbul 1987, s. 232-246.

<sup>9</sup> Bkz. Ebû Bekir er-Râzî, "Mihnetü't-tabîp", thk. Albert Z. İskender, "er-Râzî ve Mihnetü't-tabîp" (içinde), el-Meşnık, sy. 54/4-5, Beyrut 1960, s. 494-513.

The philosopher's ideas on medical ethics will be enumerated under three items: a physician must recognize responsibility to patients and to self as well as the patients' responsibility to physicians.

### a. Responsibilities of the Physician to Self

According to Razi, the first thing to bear in mind is that a physician should continue studying, advancing scientific knowledge, and maintaining a commitment to medical education. In this respect, a physician should know about philosophy, reasoning, and natural sciences because the one who is obsessively indulging in mundane activities by disregarding all these branches may not be favored.<sup>10</sup>

Abu Bakr Al-Razi mentions a couple of responsibilities physicians should practically shoulder. In this manner, he recommends that physicians be virtuous and refrain from conceit because, according to the philosopher, the most important point in treatment is the dedication of physician's himself to his patients and to love them. Since showing arrogance is considered to be a weakness, not treating the patients is regarded as better than the treatment after which physician's arrogance appears.<sup>11</sup>

Also according to the philosopher, physicians should avoid indulging in pleasure, especially alcohol addiction. Because these kind of addictions may prevent the physician from improving in his field as well as causing irremedial flaws in his profession.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to this, physicians should pay attention to their appearances. His clothes and hair should be neat and clean. Razi, with this view, states that it is not enough for a physician to have only the theoretical knowledge in his field in order to practice the art of medicine humanistically.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>10</sup> Râzî, "Mihnetü't-tabîp", s. 493, 505.

<sup>11</sup> Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabîp", s. 132, 133.

<sup>12</sup> Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabîp", s. 136.

<sup>13</sup> Râzî, "Mihnetü't-tabîp", s. 503.

## b. Responsibilities of the Physician to the Patients

The first of these duties is to treat the patients kindly. According to Abu Bakr Al-Razi, it is what physicians should have first after acquiring professional knowledge. Physicians should not be rude, strict or aggressive but soft spoken, compassionate, and behave modestly. It is because in medicine modesty is treasure and moral beauty.<sup>14</sup>

Razi stresses that the second duty is to keep the secret they have learnt during the treatment process of their patients. Because some people should reveal their secrets, which they have not revealed even to their parents or showed every effort lest nobody has learnt, to physician because of their diseases.<sup>15</sup> This principle, put forward by Razi, takes place in both Hippocratic Oath<sup>16</sup> and in the 9th item of 'The Ethics of Profession of Medicine' defined by Turkish Medical Association<sup>17</sup> and in The Medical Deontology Regulations.<sup>18</sup>

Another duty is to encourage the patient psychologically. He should encourage the patients even who have no hope of recovering from their diseases and instill this hope in them. They must not evince the patients have no hope because the self has dominance over the body and the nature of body is subject to self's essence.<sup>19</sup> To inculcate positive ideas into patients is an important method in modern psychology science. This has been stressed in the 14th item of The Medical Deontology Regulations.<sup>20</sup>

To Abu Bakr Al-Razi, another duty of the physician to his patients is to treat the patient equally regardless of their wealth and he should treat the poor as he does to the rich and the eminent. The aim of the physician should not be the money he will get after treatment but the cure. Physi-

<sup>14</sup> Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabîp", s. 133; amlf., "Mihnetü't-tabîp", s. 503-504.

<sup>15</sup> Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabîp", s. 130; amlf., "Mihnetü't-tabîp", s. 503.

<sup>16</sup> Bkz. Zeki Başar, *Tarihî-Tıp Tarihinde Yemin*, Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, Ankara 1973, s. 80; Esin Kahya, "Hipokrat" md., *DİA*, İstanbul 1989, XVIII, 120.

<sup>17</sup> *Hekimlik Meslek Etiği Kuralları*, TTB Yayınları, Ankara 2002, s. 8.

<sup>18</sup> Aydın, *Tıp Etiğine Giriş*, s. 228.

<sup>19</sup> İbn Ebi Useybia, *Uyunu'l-enba*, s. 420.

<sup>20</sup> Aydın, *Tıp Etiğine Giriş*, s. 231.

cians should be even more eager to cure the poor and homeless than curing the rich.<sup>21</sup> This principle has been indicated in the 7th item of 'The Rules of the Ethics of Profession of Medicine'<sup>22</sup> and 8th item of Medical Deontology Regulations.<sup>23</sup>

Razi also recommends that physicians be more careful while treating women. Physicians should only look at where they have to do because of the diseases. He quotes one of Galen's sentence: '*Physician must adhere to God sincerely; he should only look at where he has to while curing beautiful and attractive women, and strictly avoid from looking at other parts.*'<sup>24</sup> Razi accepts Galen's idea as it is.

### c. Responsibilities of the Patient to the Physician

As the physicians have some ethical duties and responsibilities in physician-patient relationship, the patients also have some responsibilities they have to fulfill. According to Razi, the first thing for a patient to fulfill is to treat the physician kindly and to talk gently. Philosopher, in this point, supports Hippocrates by quoting his words. 'Find your physician and prepare him before you need him'.<sup>25</sup>

Razi also recommends that patients establish a direct dialogue with their physicians. According to the philosopher, secrecy from physician's point of view and explicitness from patient's point of view are vital. The patient should tell everything without leaving any detail out as if he/she was speaking to his/her best friend. Physician and patient should be close enough to talk about every secret and there should be no room for a mediator.<sup>26</sup>

Abu Bakr Al-Razi, specifying this issue further, gives some advices and warnings also to those who have private physicians. He/she, who has

<sup>21</sup> Bkz. Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabip", s. 132.

<sup>22</sup> *Hekimlik Meslek Etiği Kuralları*, s. 8.

<sup>23</sup> Aydın, *Tıp Etiğine Giriş*, s. 229.

<sup>24</sup> Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabip", s. 130.

<sup>25</sup> Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabip", s. 132.

<sup>26</sup> Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabip", s. 135, 137.



private physician, should pay more attention to him than others, put him before everyone because while others are serving for his body, his physician serves for his soul, too. Moreover, the most merciful one among others should be the physician because while others are waiting for his death in order to share his heritage, the physician should try to preserve his health without such expectations.<sup>27</sup>

### III. Conclusion

As a result, Abu Bakr Al-Razi who presented the first example of Islamic medicine ethics, believes that it is not alone enough for a physician to be competent at his occupation and know his field, because the activity of medicine should be determined by medical ethics as well as the art of medicine. A physician should be a "role model" in every respect and should treat his patients according to this. For that reason, Razi was not contented with defining only the behaviours and attitudes of the doctors inside vocational medicine and aimed at forming all their behaviours and attitudes inside the society. So much so that, he even defined the physical appearance of the doctor by saying that his clothes and hair should be proper and clean.

When we examine the opinions Abu Bakr Al-Razi put forward about medical ethics, we can state that he was to a great extent impressed by Hippocrates and Galen on this subject. Moreover, the fact that the philosopher in his works on medical ethics often mentioned the names of these two thinkers and made quotations from their works displays this reality. Besides, that Razi gives Galen's opinion on the subject before putting forward any of his ideas on the subject in his work called "*The Ethics of Medicine*" also indicates this impression.

At this point I have to state that problems of medical ethics has exhibited differences from a nation to another nation with time due to scientific developments, technological progress, growth level of medicine, philosophical thoughts, etc. Related to this today medical ethics includes

<sup>27</sup> Râzî, "Ahlâku't-tabîp", s. 131.

a wide range reaching from ill rights to the fact of abortion, from assisted reproductive techniques to sharing limited sources in medicine, from transplantation to genetics and to ethics of research and press.

Therefore it can be thought that Abu Bakr Al-Razi's principles and applications of medical ethics which we have mentioned here, when considered from the point reached today, do not mean much sense since they will not go beyond repeating what is known. However, I believe that these opinions were stated nearly a thousand and a hundred years ago is quite significant. Also, the philosopher's ideas today still maintain their validities and take place in some certain ethical codes in the field of medicine. In addition to these, Razi's opinions which we have mentioned, together with some certain new thoughts and understandings it brought in Islamic world, carry separate importance in terms of being one of the pioneers of the works made in this field in Islamic thought.

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