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The Ontology of Growth Mindset: A Cross-Cultural Philosophical Synthesis of Carol S. Dweck's Empirical Psychology and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Theological Epistemology

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ABSTRACT

Since its conceptualisation in modern cognitive psychology, the growth mindset paradigm has profoundly shaped academic discourses on human cognitive malleability and existential self-transformation. However, its prevailing secular framing often lacks ontological depth regarding human agency. This article undertakes a cross-cultural philosophical synthesis of the 'growth mindset' by juxtaposing Carol S. Dweck's contemporary empirical psychology with the classical theological epistemology and Qur'anic hermeneutics of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, particularly through his exegesis in Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb. The research addresses a critical literature gap: while Dweck provides an empirical framework for cognitive malleability grounded in neuroplasticity and secular self-efficacy, al-Rāzī offers a sophisticated metaphysical inquiry into human agency (kasb and qudrah), intellectual disposition (fiṭrah), and cognitive transformation (taghyīr). Employing a stratified comparative-philosophical and hermeneutical framework, this study follows an iterative dialectical procedure.

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It critically assesses Dweck's cognitive schemas against al-Rāzī's ontological exposition of human potential, aiming to construct a synthesis that transcends the limitations of both individual paradigms. The analysis demonstrates that while Dweck's framework offers actionable mechanisms for intellectual persistence, it remains vulnerable to materialist reductionism and instrumentalism. Conversely, al-Rāzī's theology provides a teleological depth that anchors intellectual growth in moral responsibility and divine purposiveness. Ultimately, this study proposes "Ethical Adaptability" as a robust interdisciplinary paradigm—a synthesised mindset that marries unyielding moral accountability with dynamic cognitive resilience to navigate the systemic epistemic and moral crises of late modernity.

Keywords: Growth Mindset; Cognitive Malleability; Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī; Carol S. Dweck; Ethical Adaptability; Comparative Philosophy

1. Introduction

Mindset constitutes a core cognitive construct that profoundly influences an individual's perceptions, decisions, and attitudes toward diverse situations[1]. Its significance lies in the intrinsic interconnection between mindset, self-awareness, character formation[2], and mental disposition[3]. Empirical findings[4] further highlight that mindset plays a pivotal role in shaping not only personal attitudes but also the overall direction of one's future development[5].

One of the foremost scholars to systematically explore the concept of mindset is Carol S. Dweck (1948–present). Dweck argues that mindset is fundamentally tied to the process of self-transformation, shaping individual differences in intelligence, moral orientation, and responses to challenges. She classifies mindset into two primary types: the fixed mindset, which assumes that one's abilities are innate and static, and the growth mindset, which posits that such abilities can be cultivated and progressively enhanced[6]. Moreover, Dweck maintains that mindset is integral to the development of human potential, as it determines how individuals refine their capacities, confront challenges, and strive toward personal advancement[7].

Since its introduction by Dweck, the practical application of the growth mindset concept has encountered significant challenges[8]. These difficulties arise from various factors, notably the reluctance of some individuals to engage in genuine self-transformation[9]. Furthermore, critiques of Dweck's theory point to its disproportionate focus on neurological and environmental determinants[10]. Such criticisms raise a critical question: does the difficulty in cultivating a growth mindset originate from individual resistance to change, or does it instead expose inherent limitations within Dweck's conceptual framework[10]?

The first point is readily observable across numerous contexts. The second, however, demands a more nuanced engagement with Dweck's framework, alongside a cross-cultural philosophical synthesis with alternative conceptual models that account for systemic disparities[11]. In contemplating this latter point, the authors turned their attention to Qur'anic philosophy and asked: how does Qur'anic philosophy conceptualise what might be termed a "growth mindset"[12], and reflect upon how this conceptualisation might realistically serve as an operational framework for individuals seeking to internalise and actualise such a mindset within themselves[13]?

Their reasoning developed along two key trajectories. First, Qur'anic civilisation has historically underpinned the emergence of a distinguished and dynamic civilisation, sustained by individuals who embodied the capacity for transformative and progressive development. Second, the thought of Muḥammad Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (1150–1210) holds profound philosophical relevance. As a philosopher and intellectual endowed with acute psychological insight, al-Rāzī contended that human potential ascends to higher ontological levels when individuals fully actualise their epistemic faculties—namely, hearing, sight, reason, and the heart. This potential, he further argued, is refined through *firāsah* (intuitive discernment) emanating from the heart's illumination, cultivated through *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive presumption) towards the Divine[14,15].

Building upon the preceding discussion, this article examines Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's conceptualisation of the growth mindset as articulated in several of his major philosophical and epistemological works, including *Kitāb al-Firāsah*, *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah*, and his magnum opus, *Tafsīr Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*. Particular emphasis is placed

on the latter, through which al-Rāzī's conception is systematically traced and reconstructed as a coherent philosophical psychology rather than a mere theological commentary. To contextualise and critically evaluate al-Rāzī's insights, this study juxtaposes his thought with Carol S. Dweck's framework of the growth mindset, thereby offering a cross-cultural philosophical synthesis—a comparative and analytical perspective that bridges classical Islamic epistemology with contemporary psychological discourse[16].

Although the Qur'an does not explicitly employ the modern psychological term "growth mindset," it nevertheless contains verses that implicitly construct a profound philosophical ontology of this concept. These verses highlight the notion of self-potential (*quwwat al-nafs*), which positions individuals in a state of existential neutrality, possessing the volition to incline either toward vice or toward intellectual and spiritual actualisation. The Qur'an also underscores the unique endowment granted to humankind in the form of intellect, alongside the provision of epistemic instruments—namely hearing, sight, reason, and the heart—as ontological tools for acquiring and actualising knowledge. Relevant references include Qur'anic passages such as al-Shams, Chapter 91, verses 7–10, al-Aʿrāf, Chapter 7, verse 179, al-Anfāl Chapter 8, verse 53, al-Raʿd Chapter 13, verse 11, and al-Ḥajj, Chapter 22, verse 46. Crucially, al-Rāzī transcends conventional linguistic and jurisprudential interpretations; his engagement with these verses is predominantly philosophical. He examines the nature of human agency and cognitive malleability, yielding fundamental ontological insights that provide an important scholarly contribution to the discourse on human potential[17].

The primary objective of this article is to undertake a cross-cultural philosophical reflection and a comparative analysis of the concept of growth mindset as articulated by al-Rāzī and Dweck. To this end, the study employs a comparative methodological framework that examines the growth mindset from two distinct vantage points: the Qur'anic philosophical perspective, which forms the foundation of al-Rāzī's ontological exposition, and the empirical-psychological perspective, which underpins Dweck's conceptualisation. Through the lens of this cross-cultural philosophical reflection, several dimensions of the growth mindset are analysed, including: (1) the theoretical underpinnings shaped by the epistemological orientations of both scholars; (2) the conceptualisation and operationalisation of mindset categorisations developed by al-Rāzī and Dweck, both of which demonstrate a positive orientation toward self-actualisation; and (3) the axiological implications of the growth mindset within their respective frameworks, highlighting their integrative relevance[18].

With particular reference to al-Rāzī, the discussion extends to his philosophical reflections on Qur'anic verses that implicitly address the growth mindset, notably through the concept of *taghyīr* (existential and cognitive transformation), as articulated in al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53 and al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11. Here, al-Rāzī delineates *taghyīr* not merely as a linguistic signifier, but as a dynamic metaphysical mechanism driving human cognitive evolution. To further enrich the philosophical discourse on mindset in general and the growth mindset in particular, this study also engages with the perspectives of contemporary philosophers of psychology, alongside classical and modern thinkers who approach the Qur'an through an epistemological and ontological lens[19].

In the current body of scholarship, as far as the authors are aware, no study to date has systematically engaged in a comparative philosophical analysis of the growth mindset as conceptualised by al-Rāzī and Dweck. This lacuna can be illustrated through prior works such as Muhammad Taufiq Murtadha's study, which employs a traditional *tafsīr mawḍūʿī* (thematic exegesis) approach[20]. While this research highlights the growth mindset as a developmental orientation that encourages resilience and acknowledges divine involvement, it remains structurally confined to theological exegesis. It fails to extend into a rigorous philosophical framework that interrogates the metaphysical and epistemic nature of human cognitive malleability—an interdisciplinary rigor that is now essential when bridging classical Islamic theology with modern neuroscientific findings on human agency[21].

Similarly, An' im Kafabih and Muhammad Dandy Alif Wildana's study, "Rethinking Human Development Based on Chapter Al-Ra' d Verse 11: How Can Preferences Influence Human Development," provides a valuable empirical contribution using a Linear Probability Model (LPM)[22]. However, its focus is predominantly socio-economic and behavioural—identifying preferences such as altruism and risk-taking—lacking a deeper ontological inquiry into why the human intellect possesses such inherent transformative capacity. Furthermore, the research by Risanaldi Dwi Fa-

jri and U. Saepudin underscores education as the primary catalyst for human transformation based on al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11 [23]. Yet, their analysis remains bounded by normative pedagogical structures and traditional linguistic interpretations, rather than exploring the realistic philosophical mechanisms through which existential and cognitive transformation (*taghyīr*) is actualised—an analytical limitation that highlights the broader need for epistemic diversity and cross-cultural philosophical inquiry in contemporary educational discourse [24].

While previous scholarship has touched upon adjacent themes, the analytical depth remains underdeveloped. For instance, Benlahcene's work in *Afkar* on Malek Bennabi's civilizational psychology provides a framework for understanding social transformation; however, it focuses on collective societal structures rather than the cognitive-metaphysical mechanics of individual 'mindset' transformation [25]. Likewise, the study by Ikhwan et al. on Emotional Spiritual Quotient (ESQ) offers practical applications in human resource development, yet its approach is predominantly utilitarian and lacks the rigorous epistemological critique required to synthesise classical theological ontology with modern cognitive psychology [26].

Furthermore, recent scholarship in the journal *Philosophy and Realistic Reflection* (PRR) has advanced the discourse on cognitive and emotional development through comparative lenses, such as the synthesis of Confucian ethics with Biblical moral psychology [27]. While these studies effectively demonstrate the necessity of cross-cultural reflection in philosophy of education, they often treat emotional intelligence as a distinct psychological category separate from ontological belief systems. Against the backdrop of the aforementioned literature, this study streamlines its parameters by explicitly formulating its core analytical components. The research problem addresses a critical dual inadequacy: the prevailing secular-empirical framework of the 'growth mindset' lacks the teleological and moral ontology necessary to sustain existential depth—a theoretical limitation that reflects the broader need for epistemic and ontological diversity in contemporary educational paradigms [24], whereas classical Islamic theological models of human development often lack the precise cognitive-behavioral mechanics required for modern empirical application [28]. The object of this research is the concept of 'cognitive malleability'—the fundamental human capacity for intellectual and existential transformation. The subject of the study comprises Carol S. Dweck's empirical psychology of mindset and classical Islamic theological epistemology (specifically grounded in Qur'anic ontology). Consequently, the scientific novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary dialectical synthesis: it proposes 'Ethical Adaptability' as a pioneering paradigm that resolves the systemic tension between secular neuro-reductionism and abstract theological fatalism, offering a unified, actionable framework for human resilience in late modernity.

To systematically address these philosophical inquiries, the remainder of this manuscript is structured as follows. Section 2 delineates the methodological framework. Section 3 establishes a conceptual and philosophical review of mindset. Section 4 explores the ontology of the growth mindset in Qur'anic philosophy. Following this, Section 5 undertakes a critical examination of Carol Susan Dweck's empirical psychology of mindset, encompassing a biographical sketch, her specific concept of the growth mindset, and a phenomenological analysis of her empirical framework. Section 6 elucidates al-Rāzī's theological epistemology of the growth mindset, outlining his biography, his concept of human potential, and a hermeneutical inquiry into his conceptualisation. Sections 7 and 8 present the core synthesis of empirical psychology and theological epistemology, culminating in a cross-cultural philosophical synthesis and the proposed paradigm of 'Ethical Adaptability'. Finally, Section 9 provides the conclusion.

2. Methodological Framework

The methodological architecture of this study is grounded in a stratified comparative-philosophical synthesis. It deliberately operates at the intersection of philosophy of mind, virtue epistemology, and philosophical theology [29]. To prevent methodological conflation, this study applies a stratified analytical procedure, ensuring that the integration of diverse disciplines follows a rigorous, logical progression [30].

To operationalise this stratified comparative-philosophical synthesis and prevent methodological conflation, this study establishes strict boundaries, specific functions, and a linear logical sequence for each philosophical method. The operational sequence progresses through three interdependent tiers:

1. The Empirical-Descriptive Boundary (Phenomenology): Positioned as the first sequence, Husserlian phenomenology functions strictly to isolate the cognitive mechanics of Dweck's mindset theory. By employing *epoché* (phenomenological bracketing), it strips away the secular-materialist and neuro-reductionist assumptions of modern psychology, treating the 'growth mindset' purely as a descriptive, lived intentionality of the subject rather than a biological absolute.
2. The Ontological-Normative Boundary (Hermeneutics & Theological Exegesis): Operating as the second sequence, this stage functions to evaluate the phenomenologically stripped mechanics of cognitive malleability against classical Islamic ontology. The boundary here is strictly normative and metaphysical. Through thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) and philosophical hermeneutics, it investigates how human volition and intellectual capacity are grounded in divine teleology, specifically drawing upon al-Rāzī's concepts of *tazkiyyat al-nafs* (purification) and *qalb* (the cognitive-spiritual heart).
3. The Integrative Boundary (Dialectics): Functioning as the culminating sequence, Hegelian dialectics resolves the systematic tension between the first two domains. It does not mix empirical science with theology; rather, it sublates (*Aufheben*) the limitations of both—the secular utilitarianism of psychology and the abstract fatalism of pure theology—to synthesize the final, actionable interdisciplinary paradigm of 'Ethical Adaptability'.

2.1. Data Collection and Material Selection

The material for this study was collected through purposive sampling of seminal psychological monographs and classical philosophical-theological texts. We selected Carol S. Dweck's *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development* (1999) and *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006) as the primary empirical anchors[31,32]. These are complemented by Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* and *al-Mabāḥith al-Mashriqiyyah*, which provide the foundational classical texts for our ontological inquiry into the human intellect and the capacity for *taghyīr* (transformation)[33,34].

2.2. Analytical Procedures and Logical Integration

To execute this integration transparently, the stratified analytical procedure is reorganized into three distinct stages. Each stage is strictly defined by its object, criteria, and stage-conclusion:

Level I: Phenomenological Analysis (the Empirical Domain):

- Object Analysed: Carol S. Dweck's implicit theories of intelligence, specifically the empirical concepts of the 'growth mindset' and neuroplasticity.
- Analytical Criteria: Descriptive phenomenology using Husserlian *epoché* (bracketing)[35]. The criteria require the temporary suspension of secular-materialist and biological-deterministic assumptions[36].
- Stage Conclusion: The extraction of the 'growth mindset' purely as a conscious, lived intentionality and an agentic psychological stance toward adversity, isolated from its secular constraints.

Level II: Hermeneutic-Theological Analysis (the Ontological Domain):

- Object Analysed: Classical Islamic theological epistemology, focusing on al-Rāzī's rationalism and metaphysical mechanics of the heart (*qalb*) and purification (*tazkiyyat al-nafs*).
- Analytical Criteria: Thematic exegesis (*tafsīr mawḍū'ī*) and philosophical hermeneutics applied to classical ontology[37–39].
- Stage Conclusion: The establishment of a profound teleological and moral anchor, proving that cognitive malleability in Islamic philosophy is not merely a utilitarian tool for success, but an existential duty tied to divine accountability.

Level III: Dialectical Synthesis (the Integrative Domain):

- Object Analysed: The systematic epistemological tension between the descriptive empirical findings of Level I and the normative theological frameworks of Level II.
- Analytical Criteria: Hegelian dialectics, specifically the mechanism of *Aufheben* (sublation), which negates the limitations of both domains while preserving their core truths[40].

- Stage Conclusion: The formulation of 'Ethical Adaptability'—a newly synthesized, interdisciplinary paradigm that successfully marries empirical cognitive resilience with unyielding moral ontology.

3. A Conceptual and Philosophical Review of Mindset

Before critically examining the diverse psychosocial dimensions of mindset, it is necessary to establish a strict conceptual taxonomy to prevent terminological blurring across different intellectual traditions. In this manuscript, 'cognitive malleability' serves as the central, overarching philosophical meta-paradigm—defined as the fundamental human capacity for existential and intellectual transformation. Beneath this central meta-paradigm, the terminology is strictly bifurcated into two domain-specific categories.

In the secular-psychological domain, the 'growth mindset' functions as the primary cognitive schema, supported by auxiliary and derivative mechanisms such as 'self-efficacy' (the agentic volition to execute action)[7]. Conversely, in the Islamic ontological domain, '*taghyīr*' represents the central, universal law of change. This ontological law is operationalised internally through the auxiliary process of '*tazkiyyah*' (cognitive-spiritual purification) and is psychologically stabilised by the derivative disposition of '*tawakkul*' (absolute divine reliance). Finally, 'Ethical Adaptability' is positioned not as a preexisting concept, but strictly as the culminating synthesized paradigm—the ultimate theoretical outcome of this study that structurally integrates the empirical schema of the former with the teleological framework of the latter.

To critically examine the nature of 'mindset', one must move beyond mere descriptive definitions and interrogate the underlying epistemic assumptions that govern current psychological constructs. Mindset is not merely a surface-level disposition but a deep-seated cognitive and epistemological orientation that shapes how individuals perceive and engage with their environment[41]. Recent scholarship has underscored the necessity of a critical review, arguing that the prevailing 'growth-fixed' dichotomy is not simply an empirical taxonomy but a construct rooted in specific socio-psychological and philosophical presuppositions[42].

This conceptual review serves as a vital bridge for the subsequent analysis. By identifying the core ontological and epistemological commitments of mindset theory, we establish the conceptual vocabulary required to interrogate the growth mindset within the framework of Qur'anic philosophy. Specifically, examining these psychosocial foundations allows us to trace the parallels and divergences between modern psychological constructs and classical Islamic inquiry into the nature of human potential[43]. Consequently, Sections 3 and 4 are designed as an interconnected dialectical unit; they provide the intellectual foundation for the subsequent critical sketch of Carol S. Dweck's empirical psychology and the hermeneutical inquiry into al-Rāzī's theological epistemology. Through this dual investigation, we clarify how secularized definitions of 'growth' may be enriched by classical metaphysical frameworks of cognitive malleability, setting the stage for the final synthesis of these cross-cultural paradigms.

3.1. Self-Esteem

The conceptualisation of self-esteem as a psychological construct traces its historical roots to the thoughts of William James in his seminal work, *The Principles of Psychology*. James defined self-esteem as the ratio between an individual's actual successes and their aspirations (expectations)[44]. Subsequently, this construct was refined and operationalised by Morris Rosenberg, who designed the Rosenberg Self-Esteem Scale (RSES)—a monumental instrument that remains one of the most widely utilised parameters in psychological research today[45]. In a humanistic and applied context, Nathaniel Branden expanded this discourse by asserting that self-esteem is an indispensable psychological resource required for personal growth, responsibility, and overall well-being[46].

Fundamentally, self-esteem refers to the manner in which an individual perceives and evaluates themselves. This perception and evaluation are sculpted by an amalgamation of internal and external factors, both of which contribute to the fluctuation of an individual's self-worth. Nevertheless, despite these contextual fluctuations, humans generally tend to maintain a relatively stable baseline of self-esteem over time. Internal factors encompass an array of personal experiences and cognitive memories, whereas external influences frequently originate from systemic and environmental interactions. Positive self-perception and evaluation actively

cultivate an individual's capacity to value themselves. This, in turn, solidifies the profound psychological conviction that they are intrinsically deserving of love, happiness, the fulfilment of their needs, and genuine appreciation for the endeavours they have pursued in achieving their goals [47].

Self-esteem is deemed profoundly essential as it serves as a prerequisite for human psychological well-being. Branden outlines two fundamental premises underlying the urgency of self-esteem: humans depend on their capacity to survive and effectively master their environment through the appropriate exertion of consciousness; and every individual bears the absolute responsibility to utilise this consciousness precisely, given that human consciousness does not operate automatically like animal instinct. Branden terms this condition as a trait that is "not wired in" [46].

Interestingly, self-esteem lacks an inherent correlation with Intelligence Quotient (IQ). This distinction arises because self-esteem is a quality that can be cultivated and developed, particularly through the way an individual trains and directs their consciousness. Unlike IQ, which is frequently conceptualised as an innate attribute [46], self-esteem is something that can be deliberately learned and constructed. This process of fostering self-esteem encapsulates three intersecting domains: thoughts, emotions, and behaviour. These three dimensions hold equal significance, although thoughts and behaviour appear to manifest more tangibly [48].

Furthermore, it is imperative to acknowledge that humans are dynamic, continually evolving entities. Humans are endowed with the capacity to choose, make decisions, think critically, evaluate circumstances, respond to various stimuli, and act accordingly. Such a philosophical understanding resonates strongly with the framework of the growth mindset, which postulates that human abilities and dispositions are not rigid, static entities, but rather qualities that can perpetually be nurtured and expanded through effort, reflection, and adaptive learning [46]. Seminal empirical research further substantiates this, demonstrating that adopting a growth mindset actively buffers an individual's self-esteem against external setbacks, proving that core self-worth is highly malleable and cognitively constructed [49].

3.2. Self-Resilience

Self-resilience can be conceptualised as the dynamic human capacity to adapt effectively and maintain psychological equilibrium in response to various situational transformations [50]. While the broader construct of resilience—etymologically rooted in the Latin *resilire* (to bounce back or rebound)—originated within materials science before being adopted into psychology in the mid-20th century, the foundation of research was pioneered by Norman Garmezy [51], Emmy Werner and Smith [52], and Michael Rutter [53], later refined by Ann Masten [54]. The term self-resilience emerged later as a sub-construct positioning resilience within the domain of the individual self, often associated with the theoretical contributions regarding ego-resiliency [55]. Several reviews note that the cognate term ego-resiliency has been prominent since the mid-1980s, frequently associated with the theoretical contributions of Rutter and his contemporaries.

In its initial formulation, self-resilience was introduced through the terminology of ego-resilience, referring to an individual's dynamic capacity to respond to changing circumstances adaptively and flexibly [55]. The development of self-resilience is fundamentally bolstered by seven determining factors rooted in cognitive-behavioural psychology: emotional regulation, impulse control, optimism, causal analysis, empathy, self-efficacy, and the proactive ability to engage with the surrounding environment [56,57].

The maintenance of self-resilience shares a profound connection with the cultivation of a cognitive schema, particularly the growth mindset. This mindset emphasizes cognitive adaptability and interprets systemic challenges as vital spaces for intellectual growth [58]. It is empirically evident that self-resilience and the growth mindset operate within a mutually reinforcing feedback loop, where targeted psychological interventions designed to enhance mindset malleability concurrently elevate an individual's baseline ego-resilience when navigating systemic adversity [59,60].

3.3. Self-Development

The term self-development is customarily equated with personal development. In contemporary psychological discourse, it is fundamentally defined as a set of conscious, self-directed endeavours undertaken by an individual to enhance their psychological flexibility and cognitive capacity, ultimately aimed at achieving a higher quality of existential functioning [61].

Through deliberate self-development, an individual learns to adapt to fluctuating situational demands and over-

come psychological rigidity [62]. Modern behavioral frameworks, particularly Acceptance and Commitment Therapy (ACT), conceptualize this development as a unified model of behavior change [63]. This process bridges the acceptance of adversity with committed, values-based actions, demonstrating that reducing cognitive rigidity is the cornerstone of overcoming distress and achieving profound behavioral transformation [64].

3.4. Cognitive Theory

Cognition encapsulates how an individual perceives, comprehends, and contemplates reality through processes such as sensory perception, empirical observation, memory retention, imagination, and logical reasoning [65]. When correlated with human development, cognition is understood as the progressive, structural stages of change in cognitive abilities—from infancy to maturity—empowering humans to internalise knowledge and formulate strategic plans [66].

Jean Piaget remains a central intellectual figure in this domain, demonstrating that these cognitive processes constitute the foundational architecture upon which moral judgment is built [67]. Piaget's constructivist theory emphasizes the mechanics of how children dynamically adapt to their environment, culminating in a systemic interpretation of that world [68]. Contemporary cognitive science continues to build upon this foundation, revealing that cognitive maturation is profoundly driven by neuroplasticity and the internalised mindset paradigms an individual adopts [42].

To systematically elucidate how the mindset construct permeates human psychological dimensions, the dichotomy between the fixed mindset and the growth mindset can be mapped across four foundational psychosocial theories, as can be seen in the table below (**Table 1**):

Table 1. A Conceptual and Philosophical Description of Mindset.

Psychosocial Theory	Description of the Mindset Concept
Self-Esteem	• General Concept: The mindset functions as an ontological foundation that dictates how individuals evaluate, value, and interpret their inherent capacities and self-worth.
	• Fixed Mindset: Rigidly anchors self-worth to innate talent or immutable intelligence. Failure is perceived as a direct existential threat and an indictment of low self-worth, thereby engendering a highly fragile and volatile self-esteem.
	• Growth Mindset: Tethers self-worth to intellectual dedication, sustained effort, and the learning process. Challenges are not viewed as existential threats, but rather as necessary spaces for self-actualisation, yielding a resilient, secure, and stable self-esteem.
Self-Resilience	• General Concept: The mindset is positioned as the psychological engine that regulates an individual's emotional flexibility, adaptability, and mental fortitude when navigating crises, obstacles, or situational pressure.
	• Fixed Mindset: Cultivates psychological vulnerability. Individuals succumb easily to determinism, believing they lack the inherent, unalterable capacity to transcend the obstacles before them.
	• Growth Mindset: Serves as the primary catalyst for resilience. The meaning of failure is epistemologically reconstructed—not as a terminal dead-end, but as essential feedback that triggers the emergence of adaptive strategies and intellectual persistence.
Self-Development	• General Concept: The mindset constitutes the core philosophical paradigm that steers an individual's trajectory, volition, and courage in actualising the entirety of their potential across personal, social, and spiritual dimensions.
	• Fixed Mindset: Induces existential stagnation. Individuals tend to artificially limit themselves, remaining trapped within their comfort zones due to an overwhelming, paralysing fear that their underlying deficiencies will be exposed.
	• Growth Mindset: Proactively accelerates self-actualisation. Individuals are driven to continuously embrace novel challenges, enrich their cognitive insights, and boldly undertake risks to ascend to higher levels of mastery.
Cognitive Theory	• General Concept: From an epistemological lens, the mindset is a cognitive schema—a core pattern of reasoning and a belief system regarding intelligence—that directly shapes information processing, motivation, and ultimate achievement.
	• Fixed Mindset: Operates on a static mental schema. Intelligence and cognitive abilities are conceptualised as deterministic entities locked at their final limits, entirely incapable of further metaphysical alteration or development.
	• Growth Mindset: Operates on a dynamic cognitive schema. It explicitly acknowledges that human cognitive capacities possess an inherent neuroplasticity that can be perpetually expanded, refined, and reconstructed through experience, stimulation, and adaptive learning.

4. The Ontology of the Growth Mindset in Qur'anic Philosophy

In Qur'anic ontology, the conceptual framework analogous to the contemporary growth mindset is intimately anchored to the Arabic term *taghyīr* (existential transformation). Recent interdisciplinary scholarship validates this connection, demonstrating that *taghyīr* functions not merely as an abstract theological concept, but as a robust operational model for cognitive and behavioral adaptation that directly parallels modern socio-psychological theories [69]. Derived from the active verb *ghayyara–yughayyiru*, it manifests morphologically as an *ism maṣdar* (verbal noun), signifying a dynamic, continuous process of becoming [70]. Within the philosophical discourse of cognitive and existential malleability, this lexeme is most prominently articulated in the Qur'an in al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53 and al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11 [71].

Classical lexicographers frame *taghyīr* not merely as a superficial shift in physical state, but as a profound metaphysical alteration. Al-Rāghib al-Iṣfahānī, in his *Mufradāt Alfāẓ al-Qurʾān*, delineates *taghyīr* across two semantic axes: first, the modification of an entity's form without obliterating its core substance; and second, the radical transformation of an entity through complete existential replacement. He argues that the latter axis aligns more closely with the Qur'anic usage in the aforementioned verses, suggesting that systemic or societal transformation fundamentally requires an internal paradigm shift—such as transitioning from the cognitive stagnation of disbelief to the dynamic conviction of belief [72]. Recent studies in Islamic cognitive psychology further corroborate this mechanism, positing that Qur'anic concepts of internal transformation function as an early philosophical analogue to cognitive reprogramming and neuroplasticity. Through such practices, shifting internal belief systems dynamically reshapes the individual's existential and psychological realities [73].

This linguistic dynamism is corroborated by Elsaid M. Badawi and Muhammad Abdel Haleem, who observe that the root *ghayyara* permeates the Qur'an 154 times [74]. Semantically, this root encompasses a polysemous spectrum (*mushtarak*) denoting 'to alter', 'to modify', and 'to interchange'. While there is occasional morphological intersection with terms implying conflict (such as *aghāra*, meaning 'to raid'), the core ontological essence of *ghayyara* remains rooted in active, deliberate change [74].

The transitive form *yughayyir* ('to actively change or alter') appears centrally in both in al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53 and al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11, emphasising human agency as the primary catalyst for psychological and material transformation. Conversely, the intransitive *yataghayyar* ('to undergo change', Muḥammad, Chapter 47, verse 15) and the active participle *mughayyir* ('the agent who effects change', al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53) further underscore the Qur'an's philosophical preoccupation with mutability [74]. Even the ubiquitous particle of negation, *ghayr* (appearing 147 times), ontologically implies an alternative state of being—a conceptual departure from the static or the normative [74].

To construct a cohesive philosophical ontology of the growth mindset, it is imperative to examine the thematic exegesis of al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53 and al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11, tracing how classical and contemporary exegetes interpret human cognitive volition.

Classical exegetes predominantly framed *taghyīr* within the matrix of divine providence and human epistemic accountability. Ibn Jarīr al-Ṭabarī (224–310 AH) interprets *taghyīr* in al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53 as the deliberate cognitive and behavioural choice of the Quraysh to alter their existential state by rejecting divine blessings (*ghayyārū mā anʿama Allāhu ʿalayhim*)—a rejection that ultimately dismantled their societal security [75,76]. This perspective resonates with Abū al-Ḥasan Muqātil ibn Sulaymān al-Azdī al-Balkhī, who links *taghyīr* to an epistemic failure to recognise and actualise bestowed potential [77]. Similarly, Abū al-Farrāʾ al-Baghawī posits that ungratefulness (denial) is intrinsically a refusal to grow; failing to actualise divine blessings inevitably triggers a regressive psychological transformation [78].

Contemporary exegesis, however, leans more explicitly into the domain of human agency and cognitive malleability. Sayyid Quṭb interprets al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53 as a profound philosophical rebuttal to deterministic fatalism—the debilitating notion that humans are futile, powerless entities trapped in humiliation. For Quṭb, *taghyīr* represents the ontological honour of free will, granting humans the cognitive agency to determine their own existential trajectory, albeit within the overarching framework of the divine law

(*Sharīʿah*) established by God[79].

This anti-deterministic stance perfectly parallels modern psychological frameworks which argue that rejecting fatalism is the prerequisite for cultivating a growth-oriented cognitive schema[80]. Muḥammad Mutawallī al-Shaʿrāwī complements this by framing divine blessings (*niʿmah*) not merely as material gifts, but as an intellectual and spiritual compass (*manhaj*) designed for human flourishing, which remains perpetually intact unless deliberately dismantled by human cognitive stagnation[81].

Crucially, in their analysis of al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11, both al-Baghawī and al-Shaʿrāwī establish a direct causal link between internal cognitive effort and external reality. They affirm that human transformation is strictly contingent upon self-directed striving within the boundaries of universal divine laws (*sunnat Allāh*)[78,81]. Sayyid Quṭb elevates this framework by asserting that internal psychological and cognitive shifts are the ultimate preconditions for any systemic change. While divine omniscience encompasses all future outcomes, the actualisation of divine laws operates responsively: the external universe transforms only in corresponding synchrony with the deliberate, internal cognitive evolution (growth mindset) of the human subject[79].

Building upon the preceding discourse, and as illustrated in the following table (**Table 2**), the matrix systematically maps the metaphysical anatomy of *taghyīr* (transformation)—positing it as the epistemological bedrock for a growth mindset within Qur'anic philosophy. It narratively elucidates both the essential nature of this concept and its existential mechanics across linguistic, scriptural, and hermeneutic strata. Rather than reducing change to a passive deterministic fate, the framework establishes *taghyīr* as an active, ontological reconfiguration; an assertion grounded in classical etymological duality (al-Iṣfahānī) and enshrined in Qur'anic axioms (al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53 and al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11), which collectively dictate that any systemic or external materialisation is strictly contingent upon a preceding, internal cognitive paradigm shift. This profound interplay between human agency and the cosmic order is subsequently validated through realistic historical reflections by classical exegetes—such as al-Ṭabarī, Muqātil, and al-Baghawī—who frame intellectual stagnation and epistemic rejection as the very catalysts for existential regression and the retraction of divine grace. Ultimately, the narrative culminates in the contemporary epistemological syntheses of Sayyid Quṭb and al-Shaʿrāwī, who elevate *taghyīr* to the ontological honour of human free will, thereby philosophically characterising the 'growth mindset' not merely as a secular psychological construct, but as the rigorous, deliberate exercise of self-determination required to align one's cognitive agency with the divine epistemic compass, ensuring enduring existential harmony over systemic misery.

Table 2. The Metaphysics of *Taghyīr*.

Aspect	Philosophical Explication
Etymology (Arabic)	• The root *ghayyara–yughayyiru* denotes the active, existential alteration of a prior state. • Classical lexicons (*Qāmūs al-Muḥīṭ*, *Lisān al-ʿArab*) conceptualise it as dynamic modification. • Al-Iṣfahānī establishes a semantic duality: (1) morphological change (altering form while retaining essence), and (2) ontological replacement (substantive transformation).
The Qur'an	• al-Anfāl, Chapter 8, verse 53: Transformation as an existential consequence. Divine blessings devolve into punishment due to cognitive stagnation (ingratitude), echoing the transformative necessity of the growth mindset. • al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11: The ultimate decree of human agency. External or systemic shifts are strictly contingent upon internal, cognitive paradigm shifts.
Classical Hermeneutics	• al-Ṭabarī: The historical materialisation of *taghyīr*; the Quraysh's existential regression triggered by their epistemic rejection of the prophetic truth. • Muqātil: The metaphysical transmutation of divine stability (sustenance and security) into systemic misery due to human failing. • al-Baghawī: The ontological law of gratitude; intellectual denial inevitably retracts divine grace, initiating regressive transformation.
Contemporary Epistemology	• Sayyid Quṭb: The ontological honour of free will. Humanity is endowed with the cognitive capacity for self-determination; universal transformation is the direct consequence of human action. • al-Shaʿrāwī: The deliberate abandonment of the divine epistemic compass (*manhaj*) inevitably transmutes bestowed existential harmony into misery.

5. Carol Susan Dweck's Empirical Psychology: A Critical and Phenomenological Sketch

To understand the empirical mechanics of the growth mindset before situating it within a cross-cultural philosophical synthesis, it is necessary to first examine the psychological paradigm developed by Carol Susan Dweck. This section undertakes a critical exposition of Dweck's empirical psychology, tracing its origins, defining its core concepts, and subsequently subjecting it to a Husserlian phenomenological analysis. By establishing how Dweck operationalises cognitive malleability in a secular-empirical context, we construct the necessary comparative foundation for the subsequent theological integration with al-Rāzī's epistemology.

5.1. A Brief Biographical Sketch of Carol Susan Dweck

The existing corpus of literature rarely provides a comprehensive biographical account of Carol Susan Dweck. Instead, the preponderance of scholarship is dedicated almost exclusively to her theoretical contributions within the domains of personality, social psychology, and developmental psychology.

Carol Susan Dweck is a distinguished American psychologist, born on 17 October 1946. Prior to being conferred her Doctor of Philosophy (Ph.D.) from Yale University in 1972, Dweck completed her undergraduate education, earning a Bachelor of Arts (B.A.) from Barnard College—an institution affiliated with Columbia University—in 1967 [82].

To comprehend Dweck's intellectual trajectory, one must contextualise her early research within the epistemological paradigm shifts of late twentieth-century psychology. During her doctoral studies at Yale and her subsequent early tenure at Illinois, Dweck's intellectual curiosity was catalysed by contemporary studies on 'learned helplessness'—a concept initially grounded in animal behavioural models. Diverging from deterministic behaviourism, she adopted a profound psychosocial lens to interrogate human motivation, questioning why certain children capitulated in the face of academic failure whilst others exhibited robust resilience. This early empirical inquiry marked the genesis of her lifelong philosophical commitment to uncovering the 'implicit theories'—the internal, unarticulated epistemologies—that individuals construct regarding the malleability of their own intelligence and moral character [83].

Since 2004, Dweck has held the esteemed position of the Lewis and Virginia Eaton Professor of Psychology at Stanford University. Her academic tenure includes equivalent professorial appointments in psychology at Columbia University (1989–2004) and the University of Illinois (1985–1989). Her extensive professional trajectory, which is profoundly anchored in psychological research and pedagogy, encompasses roles as a Professor within the Laboratory of Human Development at Harvard University (1981–1985), an Associate Professor in the Department of Psychology at the University of Illinois (1977–1981), and an Assistant Professor at the same institution (1972–1977) [84].

Concerning the conceptualisation of the 'mindset' framework for which she is internationally renowned, Dweck has authored two seminal monographs that serve as the epistemic anchors of her psychosocial framework. Her first seminal monograph, *Self-Theories: Their Role in Motivation, Personality, and Development* (1999)—which was honoured with the Book of the Year award by the World Education Federation in 2004—operates as a rigorous academic treatise. Philosophically, this work dismantles traditional deterministic models of human personality, arguing instead that individuals construct internal 'meaning systems'—implicit theories about their own nature that directly dictate their psychological resilience and moral trajectories.

Her subsequent and most culturally pervasive monograph, *Mindset: The New Psychology of Success* (2006), translates these dense empirical findings into an accessible psychosocial critique. Within this text, Dweck diagnoses the systemic anxieties of modern achievement culture, illustrating how a fixed mindset precipitates toxic perfectionism and defensive self-justification, whilst a growth mindset cultivates ethical adaptability and continuous existential becoming [32].

Beyond her monographs, Dweck remains highly prolific in publishing peer-reviewed journal articles, particularly empirical research pertaining to mindset theory. Additionally, her scholarly insights have been widely disseminated through various newspaper contributions, thereby bridging rigorous academic discourse with broader public intellectual engagement [85].

From a psychosocial and philosophical vantage point,

Dweck's intellectual biography is not merely a chronicle of prestigious academic appointments, but rather a sustained, rigorous critique of biological and cognitive determinism. Her formulation of the fixed and growth mindsets effectively operationalises the classical philosophical dialectic between immutable human nature (essentialism) and existential becoming (existentialism). By demonstrating empirically that an individual's internal belief system can fundamentally alter their psychological reality, socio-educational outcomes, and neurological development, Dweck has successfully bridged the chasm between abstract epistemology and pragmatic social reform. Her life's work thereby underscores a profound psychosocial axiom: that human flourishing is intrinsically tethered to the phenomenological lens through which individuals perceive their own ontological capacity for continuous transformation [86].

5.2. The Conceptualisation of Mindset in Dweck's Empirical Framework

Dweck's conceptualisation of mindset marks a profound epistemological and methodological departure from earlier determinist research in psychology. The American cognitive psychologist operationalises mindsets into two principal cognitive schemas: the fixed mindset and the growth mindset, each reflecting distinct empirical stances on human capability. A fixed mindset is characterised by the deterministic belief that human abilities are inherited, genetically locked, and therefore immutable. By contrast, a growth mindset rests upon the empirical conviction that cognitive abilities are not static but rather the dynamic outcome of neuroplasticity, practice, and repetition; they can thus be perpetually cultivated and enhanced through sustained effort and cognitive perseverance [31].

Dweck's empirical emphasis on the reciprocal dialectic between genetic predisposition (nature) and environmental context (nurture) in shaping an individual's cognitive schema is further elucidated through Robert J. Sternberg's perspective. Sternberg argues that innate ability, while serving as a baseline, is not the decisive variable in attaining expertise. Instead, sustained effort, cognitive persistence, and the formulation of intentional, purposeful goals constitute the critical determinants of achievement [87]. In this regard, Dweck highlights that the operationalisation of a growth mindset aligns perfectly with Sternberg's assertion: success is less a product of inherent talent than of disciplined cognitive practice and intentional direction [32].

Crucially, the practical operationalisation of a growth mindset necessitates a comprehensive understanding of its fluid conceptual boundaries. According to Dweck's empirical paradigm, no individual embodies a purely growth-oriented schema in its absolute entirety. Rather, human cognition exhibits a dynamic interplay between the two orientations, resulting in a continuum that may be termed a "fixed–growth mindset." Acknowledging this hybridity underscores the necessity of continuous environmental interaction for progressive cognitive development [7,32]. Recent empirical advancements in cognitive psychology strongly corroborate this, demonstrating that mindsets are not binary traits but context-dependent cognitive states that fluctuate in response to systemic environmental stimuli [88].

At the very least, a rigorous grasp of the growth mindset enables its principles to be operationalised more effectively. However, in empirical practice, cultivating a growth mindset is not a spontaneous psychological transformation; it demands profound cognitive restructuring. As Dweck observes: "...it means that change isn' t like surgery. Even when you change, the old beliefs aren' t just removed like a worn-out hip or knee and replaced with better ones. Instead, the new beliefs take their place alongside the old ones, and as they become stronger, they give you a different way to think, feel, and act" [7]. This reflection demonstrates that remnants of a fixed schema remain embedded within the cognitive architecture of each individual. Consequently, specific external stimuli—such as encountering systemic challenges, receiving critical feedback, or experiencing failure—often serve as psychological triggers that reactivate latent fixed mindset tendencies [7].

Dweck's empirical findings also reveal that the translational implementation of the growth mindset is frequently plagued by structural misconceptions, a phenomenon broadly termed the "false growth mindset." First, it is erroneously assumed that positive affective attributes—such as adaptability, open-mindedness, or an optimistic disposition—are the definitive markers of a growth mindset. In reality, human cognition embodies both fixed and growth orientations, with actual development emerging from the rigorous friction of experiences that structurally reinforce one schema over the other. Second, the growth mindset is frequently reduced to

the mere praising of effort, divorced from the efficacy of outcomes. While effort is a necessary operational mechanism, it is insufficient in isolation; empirical emphasis must equally be placed on the cognitive strategies employed, the progress achieved, and the intellectual capacity to derive structural insight from failure. Finally, there is a pervasive tendency to treat the ideological endorsement of the growth mindset as a sufficient proxy for actual cognitive change. Dweck critically cautions against this performative superficiality, noting that rhetorical declarations must be anchored in sustained cognitive-behavioural action [87]. Contemporary psychological literature further validates this critique, showing that educational and organisational interventions failing to operationalise actionable cognitive strategies merely produce lip service rather than genuine cognitive plasticity [89].

Although structurally challenging, cognitive transformation remains empirically attainable. Dweck emphasises the pivotal role of operationalising the internal monologue—the inner dialectic through which individuals interpret and evaluate sensory and systemic information. This discourse functions as a profound cognitive filter, shaping perceptions of adversity, responses to setbacks, and overall motivational resilience. A fixed mindset generates deterministic, judgemental self-talk that assigns rigid, absolute values to experiences, often precipitating clinical anxiety or withdrawal. Conversely, a growth mindset fosters adaptive, developmental self-talk that enables realistic reflection, iterative learning, and constructive action. To cultivate this balanced appraisal, Dweck proposes cognitive-behavioural restructuring as a clinical mechanism to moderate extreme evaluative judgements and promote empirical optimism [7].

To translate these cognitive theories into empirical reality, Dweck operationalises mindset through targeted educational interventions, such as mindset lectures, professional consultations, and structured workshops. In collaboration with cognitive neuroscientists, she developed *Brainology*, an evidence-based, computer-mediated intervention that explicitly demonstrates to students how learning dynamically reshapes the brain's architecture by forming new neural pathways, thereby reinforcing the tangible reality of the growth mindset [90].

In her empirical operationalisation, Dweck highlights the mechanics of neuroplasticity by employing the somatic analogy of muscle hypertrophy. Just as skeletal muscles strengthen and expand in response to progressive physical resistance, the brain physically develops resilience and computational capacity through sustained intellectual friction—such as critical reading, complex problem-solving, and continuous cognitive load. These activities biologically stimulate the formation of new synaptic connections among neurons, generating highly efficient, complex neural networks [91]. Modern neurobiological studies of learning unequivocally support this paradigm, confirming that teaching individuals about the structural reality of their own neuroplasticity acts as the fundamental empirical catalyst for operationalising a growth-oriented cognitive schema [92].

5.3. A Phenomenological Analysis of Dweck's Empirical Psychology

To systematically move beyond the reductionist readings of Dweck's work, we apply the Husserlian method of *epoché* (bracketing) to the core pillars of the growth mindset. By 'bracketing' the secular-materialist presuppositions, we unveil how these concepts function as lived modes of human consciousness.

5.3.1. Bracketing Neuroplasticity: From Biological Fact to Intentional Experience

Ordinarily, neuroplasticity is understood as a biological substrate. Through *epoché*, we bracket this objective fact to reveal its ontological status as a lived intentionality. When a subject adopts a growth mindset, they do not 'experience' neuroplasticity as a change in synaptic density; rather, they experience it as a possibility of being—the consciousness that their limitations are not the horizon of their existence. Neuroplasticity, therefore, is phenomenologically operationalised as the "intentional realization of malleability", transforming the brain from a deterministic constraint into a field of existential potentiality [91,92].

5.3.2. Bracketing Self-Efficacy: From Quantitative Measure to Agentic Volition

Traditional psychology treats self-efficacy as a measurable psychological scale of belief in one's capacity. Via phenomenological bracketing, we move past the quantitative metric to examine the subject's intentionality toward the future. Self-efficacy is here re-framed as the volitional directedness of the self; it is the subject's conscious act of projecting their capacity into an uncertain environment. The

'growth' in growth mindset is not found in the efficacy score, but in the agentic stance—the intentional choice to view the self as an entity that 'becomes' rather than one that 'is' [7,89].

5.3.3. Bracketing Resilience: From Behavioral Output to Existential Persistence

Resilience is frequently reduced to a behavioral output—the ability to 'bounce back' from stress. By suspending this behavioral interpretation, we uncover its essence as existential persistence. Within a fixed mindset, the 'intentionality' of the subject is directed toward the protection of their self-image (defensive mode), which precipitates clinical anxiety. Within the growth mindset, the subject's intentionality is directed toward the object of the challenge itself (adaptive mode). Thus, resilience is revealed not as a mechanical rebound, but as a deliberate, conscious recalibration of the meaning of failure, shifting it from an 'existential threat' to 'epistemic feedback' [7,88].

By operationalising these procedures, it becomes evident that Dweck's operationalisation—through interventions like Brainology—is fundamentally an exercise in cognitive restructuring [90]. By teaching subjects that their intellect is malleable, she invites them to adopt a new phenomenological stance towards the world. This transition from deterministic self-talk to adaptive, developmental monologue demonstrates that the growth mindset is essentially a philosophical act of existential becoming [7,92].

This phenomenological uncovering of Dweck's 'material' concepts serves as the necessary bridge to the next section, where we shall demonstrate how these subjective modes of intentionality find their ontological anchor within the theological framework of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, particularly his conceptualisation of the *qalb* as the mediator of divine epistemic truth.

6. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's Theological Epistemology: A Classical Anchor for Cognitive Malleability

Having delineated the empirical mechanics of cognitive malleability through Carol S. Dweck's psychological framework, this section shifts the dialectical focus to the classical Islamic tradition. While Dweck provides an empirical framework grounded in secular neuroplasticity and socio-cognitive observation, her paradigm inherently lacks a metaphysical teleology that answers *why* humans must strive for cognitive growth beyond mere worldly success. Here, the theological epistemology of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī provides a profound ontological grounding. By reconstructing al-Rāzī's conceptualisation of human potential through a rigorous hermeneutical lens, we lay the groundwork for a cross-cultural synthesis that elevates the secular understanding of psychological resilience into a teleological and eschatological imperative.

6.1. A Biographical Sketch of the Theologian-Philosopher Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī

His full name was Abū ʿAbdullāh Muḥammad ibn ʿUmar ibn Ḥasan ibn Ḥusayn al-Taymī al-Bakrī. He was born in 544/1150 in the city of Rayy (present-day Tehran, Iran) and died in 606/1210 in the city of Herat (within present-day Afghanistan). Al-Rāzī was frequently accorded the sobriquets Ibn Khaṭīb al-Rayy or simply Ibn al-Khaṭīb [38]. Of Arab extraction, he belonged to the Quraysh tribe, possessing a lineage that traced directly back to Abū Bakr al-Ṣiddīq [15].

Al-Rāzī initially acquired his education in the religious sciences—most notably in *kalām* (Islamic theology) and *fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence)—under the tutelage of his own father, Ḍiyāʾ al-Dīn (d. 559/1164), a prominent proponent of Ashʿarī theology and a disciple of the renowned exegete Abū Muḥammad al-Farrāʾ al-Baghawī [93]. However, al-Rāzī's intellectual trajectory rapidly transcended the boundaries of orthodox scholasticism. His extensive travels across Iraq, Iran, and India, characterised by rigorous dialectical encounters with Muʿtazilite and Ḥanbalite scholars, catalysed a profound methodological evolution [94]. Rather than remaining confined within traditional theological strictures, al-Rāzī emerged as a quintessential theologian-philosopher-exegete who interrogated foundational religious premises through a rigorously philosophical-rational lens [95].

He fundamentally reconfigured Ashʿarī theology, transforming it into a highly sophisticated model of rational Islamic philosophy. Al-Rāzī consistently strove to emancipate Islamic thought from *taqlīd* (blind imitation), elevating both theological discourse and Qur'anic exegesis into profound exercises of realistic reflection [95]. For al-Rāzī, theology and *tafsīr* were not mere repositories of dogma; rather, they functioned as dynamic forms of philosophy itself. They were the

intellectual instruments through which he presented religious philosophy in a comprehensively rational and analytically coherent manner. Consequently, he is widely categorised as a seminal philosophical thinker who systematically dismantled the dogmatic and anti-rationalist currents of his era, asserting instead the primacy of the intellect in deciphering divine truths [96,97].

Al-Rāzī was an exceptionally prolific scholar, authoring in excess of 200 treatises that span a remarkably broad thematic spectrum, encompassing *kalām*, *uṣūl al-fiqh* (principles of jurisprudence), philosophy, medicine, *fiqh*, and exegesis. What unites this vast corpus is his underlying philosophical architecture; his theological and exegetical works serve as expansive platforms for metaphysical inquiry into the nature of existence, human agency, and divine will [38].

6.2. The Qur'anic Ontology of Human Potential: Al-Rāzī's Philosophical Psychology

In Qur'anic ontology, the conceptual framework analogous to the contemporary growth mindset is intimately anchored to the philosophical mechanics of human agency and self-actualisation. Within the discourse of cognitive and existential malleability, this paradigm is systematically elaborated in al-Rāzī's magnum opus, *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb*, specifically through his engagement with verses highlighting epistemic transformation and the human intellect's dialectical potential [33,98].

Regarding the divine words in al-Shams, Chapter 91, verses 7–10, al-Rāzī interprets these verses as an ontological reminder to humankind that they are endowed with inherent dialectical potentialities: namely, *fujūr* (immorality/stagnation) and *taqwā* (piety/growth). This reminder aims to awaken human epistemic consciousness to the absolute necessity of exercising moral choice—actively drawing nearer to righteousness while distancing oneself from corruption. He conceptualises this human awareness through the mechanisms of *tazkiyyat al-nafs* (the active intellectual and spiritual effort of self-purification) and *tadsiyyat al-nafs* (the existential entrapment of the soul in stagnation). Situated precisely between these two opposing inclinations is the *qalb* (heart), which functions as the cognitive and spiritual mediator between virtue and vice [33,99].

In al-Aʿrāf, Chapter 7, verse 179, al-Rāzī provides an exposition that resonates profoundly with the modern construct of the growth mindset through his analysis of human volition. Al-Rāzī contends that a truly rational agent (*al-ʿāqil*) would not incline towards disbelief and ignorance, states that inevitably culminate in ruin. Rather, such a person would proactively incline towards faith (*al-īmān*) and profound knowledge (*al-maʿrifah*). In this verse, the term *qulūb* (hearts) is interpreted by al-Rāzī as a holistic nexus encompassing the empirical, rational, and spiritual dimensions of the intellect. He underscores that the neglect of one's rational faculties results in cognitive stagnation, likening such individuals to 'cattle' who fail to employ their divinely endowed capacities [33,100].

To comprehend al-Rāzī's stance on cognitive malleability, one must engage deeply with his nuanced reconfiguration of the classical Ashʿarite doctrine. Traditional Ashʿarism often leaned toward deterministic occasionalism, wherein human actions were seen merely as creations of God 'acquired' (*kasb*) by man. However, al-Rāzī's mature epistemology injects a robust degree of epistemic agency into human volition. He argues philosophically that human intellectual striving operates as the necessary, active precondition for divine facilitation. In this framework, the cognitive effort to grow actively 'acquires' the divine realisation of that growth, effectively carving out a sophisticated space for intellectual accountability [38].

This synthesis is vividly observed in his analysis of al-Raʿd, Chapter 13, verse 11 ("Indeed, God does not change the condition of a people until they change what is within themselves"). Al-Rāzī critically engages with the views of prominent Muʿtazilite thinkers, who argue that this verse unequivocally centres human agency. In a masterful response to this theological dichotomy, al-Rāzī leverages his refined theory of agency. He asserts that the actions of God are actualised in synchronous accordance with the mindset and the internal inclinations manifested in a person's continuous conduct. Actions that have been consciously and persistently pursued—thereby crystallising into deliberate cognitive choices—are the precise loci upon which divine judgement is rendered [33,101,102]. Furthermore, al-Rāzī cites a Prophetic tradition emphasising that community resilience and systemic transformation are collective responsibilities; failure to restrain oppression or stagnation invites collective ruin, linking internal mindset shifts directly to external socio-moral realities [103].

Finally, in interpreting al-Ḥajj, Chapter 22, verse 46, al-Rāzī meticulously identifies the epistemic faculties necessary for the formation of a progressive mindset: *samiʿa* (hearing), *ʿaqala* (reasoning), *abṣār* (sight), *qulūb* (hearts), and *ṣudūr* (conscious cores)[104]. He argues philosophically that sensory data initiated through hearing or sight alone is grossly insufficient for the formation of a sound cognitive schema. Raw sensory perception must be subjected to higher-order cognitive processing, operationalised as the active intellectual acts of deriving lessons (*iʿtibār*) and deep analytical reflection (*tadabbur*)[104]. From a contemporary Islamic psychology perspective, reliance solely on empirical faculties without the critical, mediating role of the heart is deemed epistemologically futile. Hence, the perfection of the mindset lies in the rigorous integration of these faculties, reflecting the highest actualisation of the human constitution[105].

6.3. A Gadamerian Hermeneutical Analysis of al-Rāzī's Theological Epistemology

The conceptual framework of human potential in the thought of Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī achieves its greatest utility for modern comparative philosophy when analysed through the hermeneutical principles of Hans-Georg Gadamer. By applying Gadamer's methodology, we do not approach al-Rāzī's *Mafātīḥ al-Ghayb* merely as a fossilised artifact of twelfth-century Ashʿarite theology, but rather as a living dialogue partner capable of addressing the modern crisis of deterministic cognitive schemas[37].

Gadamer's core concept of *Horizontverschmelzung* (fusion of horizons) posits that genuine understanding occurs when the historical horizon of the text critically engages with the contemporary horizon of the interpreter, generating a newly synthesised meaning. Fusing Dweck's modern psychological lexicon with al-Rāzī's theological epistemology allows us to translate his classical propositions into a sophisticated, highly actionable philosophy of cognitive malleability[37]. Furthermore, Gadamer's notion of *Wirkungsgeschichte* (history of effect) reminds us that our modern secular understanding of "growth" is already historically conditioned; placing it in dialogue with Islamic metaphysics exposes the limitations of secular reductionism and opens the concept to a profound teleological depth.

6.3.1. The Dialectics of Human Potential: Tazkiyyah and Tadsiyyah

In interpreting al-Shams, Chapter 91, verses 7–10, al-Rāzī posits that human existence is an ontological field of dialectical potentiality defined by *fujūr* (stagnation) and *taqwā* (growth). Through a Gadamerian lens, these are not arbitrary divine decrees, but existential orientations that mirror the fixed and growth mindsets. The *qalb* (heart) operates as the cognitive-spiritual mediator where the individual either cultivates *tazkiyyat al-nafs* (active intellectual-spiritual purification) or sinks into *tadsiyyat al-nafs* (existential entrapment)[99]. Al-Rāzī's *qalb* functions phenomenologically as the 'epistemic core' bridging raw biological input and moral-cognitive judgement, prefiguring modern cognitive theories regarding the 'elf' as an active meaning-making entity.

6.3.2. Cognitive Stagnation vs. The Rational Agent (*Al-ʿĀqil*)

In his analysis of al-Aʿrāf, Chapter 7, verse 179, al-Rāzī offers an ontological critique that strikingly parallels the growth mindset. He contends that the *al-ʿāqil* (rational agent) is one who proactively actualises their God-given cognitive faculties. The hermeneutical significance here is that al-Rāzī reconstructs *qulūb* as a holistic nexus of intellect, perception, and spiritual consciousness. From a comparative philosophical standpoint, the 'fixed mindset' is identified not merely as a psychological handicap, but as a form of epistemic negligence. An individual who resists reflection and transformation is ontologically failing to actualise their inherent capacity for *maʿrifah* (knowledge)[100].

6.3.3. Teleological Accountability and the Mechanics of *Taghyīr*

Hermeneutically, al-Rāzī navigates the tension between divine sovereignty and human agency with analytical rigour, asserting that the divine act of *taghyīr* (transformation) is synchronised with the individual's internal cognitive choices. By elevating human intentionality as the locus of divine judgement, al-Rāzī effectively argues that cognitive growth is not a secular-utilitarian pursuit aimed at earthly success, but a moral-divine mandate[103]. His framework of *iʿtibār* (deriving lessons) and *tadabbur* (deep reflective analysis) represents a sophisticated virtue epistemology that demands active cognitive restructuring.

Through this Gadamerian fusion of horizons, it be-

comes unequivocally evident that for al-Rāzī, the growth mindset is an ontological orientation—a perpetual state of becoming (*tazkiyyah*) where the human intellect constantly transcends its previous states [99]. This classical framework provides a profound metaphysical anchor for modern cognitive resilience, demonstrating that intellectual persistence is ultimately rooted in the existential responsibility to actualise one's divinely endowed potential [38].

7. Synthesising Epistemic Paradigms: A Realistic Critique

To prevent methodological anachronism, it is crucial to emphasize that classical Islamic epistemology, including the rigorous rationalism of al-Rāzī, is not a 'ready-made' substitute for modern clinical psychology. Approaching these classical theological texts as empirical psychological manuals oversimplifies both intellectual traditions [28]. While classical theology provides a profound teleological and moral ontology, it inherently lacks the empirical observation, clinical metrics, and neurobiological grounding that modern cognitive science offers. Without the empirical mechanics provided by secular frameworks like Dweck's, traditional theological models are highly vulnerable; they run the risk of remaining strictly abstract or devolving into theological fatalism (*jabr*) in practical, everyday application [21]. Therefore, the dialectical synthesis proposed in this study does not elevate classical theology as intrinsically superior to empirical science. Rather, it proceeds from the premise of mutual insufficiency: Dweck's empirical model requires ontological depth to avoid secular reductionism, just as classical Islamic epistemology requires modern cognitive mechanics to be empirically actionable in late modernity [28].

The synthesis of Carol S. Dweck's empirical psychology and Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's theological epistemology necessitates a critical navigation through their divergent epistemic landscapes. While both paradigms champion the malleability of the human condition, they originate from fundamentally different metaphysical commitments. This section integrates these perspectives to advance a 'Realistic Critique', arguing that a robust interdisciplinary paradigm of 'Ethical Adaptability' requires the reconciliation of Dweck's actionable cognitive mechanisms with al-Rāzī's teleological ethics. By juxtaposing empirical observations of neuroplasticity with classical inquiries into the *qalb* (heart) and *taghyīr* (transformation), this analysis seeks to transcend the materialist reductionism often inherent in modern psychological discourse, proposing an existential 'becoming' rooted in moral and divine accountability.

7.1. Epistemic Symmetries and Divergences

The comparative analysis reveals that while al-Rāzī and Dweck share a rejection of static human nature, their teleological foundations diverge sharply. Dweck frames epistemic motivation within secular, utilitarian, and psychosocial metrics of success, focusing on the individual as an agent of their own cognitive evolution [32]. Conversely, al-Rāzī situates human drive within a profound eschatological framework. For al-Rāzī, the orientation toward the ultimate reality of the afterlife fosters a reflective and ontologically submissive disposition. As Shihadeh [38] demonstrates in his analysis of al-Rāzī's teleological ethics, the pursuit of knowledge is intrinsically tied to the perfection of the soul, anchoring intellectual growth deeply in moral responsibility rather than mere worldly utility. Drawing upon the broader epistemological paradigm of Islamic psychology as cogently outlined by Rassool and Luqman [106], this theological depth exposes how a purely secular teleology remains vulnerable to instrumentalism. Ultimately, an eschatological framework provides the necessary spiritual robustness to sustain resilience against the systemic crises of late modernity

7.2. Bipartite Epistemology: Bridging Self-Efficacy and *Tawakkul*

Dweck's framework relies heavily upon the construct of "trust" operationalised as self-efficacy and secular self-confidence. By contrast, al-Rāzī insists that authentic existential transformation rests upon a bipartite epistemology of trust. The first pillar is self-trust, manifested through the disciplined, empirical cultivation of reason, the senses, and the heart. The second, indispensable pillar is ontological trust in the Divine (*tawakkul*), embodied in submission, righteous action, and the conscious avoidance of vice. As contemporary comparative studies highlight, Islamic psychology inherently seeks to balance Western-centric drives for mere self-actualisation with profound theocentric reliance [107]. Applying this comparative lens to al-Rāzī's framework, it becomes evident that this

bipartite epistemology prevents the 'growth mindset' from collapsing into mere intellectual arrogance by balancing rigorous intellectual striving with ontological submission, thereby creating a more stable psychological equilibrium.

7.3. Beyond Cognitive Solipsism: The Necessity of Transcendent Dialogue

For Dweck, cognitive malleability is largely mediated through the restructuring of the internal monologue. While pragmatically valuable in cognitive-behavioural therapy, such self-referential monologue carries the philosophical risk of inclining toward cognitive solipsism. Al-Rāzī advances a more robust epistemic mechanism: the necessity for both critical self-dialogue (*muḥāsabah*) and transcendent dialogue with the Divine (*murāqabah*). Badri [108] argues that this movement from internal monologue (*khawatir*) to transcendental dialogue is essential; it activates the spiritual cognition of the heart (*qalb*) to perceive realities that secular cognitive restructuring cannot access, thereby anchoring the self within an objective moral-truth framework rather than an isolated subjective loop.

7.4. The Locus of Human Volition: A Critique of Neuro-Reductionism

Finally, the paradigms diverge on the metaphysical locus of the mindset. Dweck's empirical model locates the mindset strictly within the neurobiology of the brain, treating it as a computational faculty. Al-Rāzī offers a critical response to this neuro-reductionism by situating human volition within the *qalb* (the heart) and the *ṣudūr* (the chest)—metaphysical centres where epistemic sensitivity and sincerity reside. As Ermawati et al. [109] point out, contemporary Islamic theological studies have transformed toward an integrative-interdisciplinary approach to bridge classical doctrines with modern challenges. By synthesizing rational (*burhani*) and spiritual (*irfani*) dimensions, they argue that this holistic paradigm provides a constructive response to the value disorientation prevalent in modern epochs. Consequently, al-Rāzī's holistic integration of intellect, spiritual intuition, and moral agency offers a more comprehensive account of the human person than neurocognitive operationalisation alone. By anchoring the 'mindset' in the heart's metaphysical expansiveness, al-Rāzī provides a teleological anchor that modern cognitive science, in its attempt to reduce mind to brain, consistently ignores.

From the comparative outline above, the philosophical similarities and divergences between al-Rāzī's and Dweck's thought reveal both conceptual intersections and profound foundational distinctions. While each scholar acknowledges the dynamic plasticity of the human mindset to develop and transform, their respective frameworks are governed by radically differing epistemological and teleological orientations. Al-Rāzī situates mindset transformation within a theocentric paradigm grounded in Qurʾānic ontology, emphasising spiritual accountability, dual epistemic trust, and an eschatological purpose. Conversely, Dweck articulates a secular-psychological model that confines mindset entirely within human cognition and behavioural adaptation, focusing on secular self-efficacy, neural learning processes, and empirical achievement (see the synthesis of both in **Table 3**).

Table 3. A Cross-Cultural Philosophical Synthesis on al-Rāzī's and Dweck's Thought.

Philosophical Aspect	Al-Rāzī's Qurʾānic Ontology	Dweck's Empirical Psychology
Cognitive Paradigm	Rejects epistemic stagnation (*taqlīd*), viewing the passive acceptance of knowledge as a profound intellectual deficit. Translated into modern paradigms, a "fixed mindset" represents theological denial, whereas a "growth mindset" is the active actualisation of divinely endowed potential—elevating the intellect and soul from mere potentiality to realized actuality [95].	Defines a fixed mindset as genetic determinism and a growth mindset as cognitive enhancement mediated through neuroplasticity and sustained effort [110].
Motivational Teleology	Driven by an eschatological orientation, fostering resilience in temporal worldly affairs through submission to the ultimate reality of the afterlife [38].	Driven by secular and utilitarian goals, emphasising self-actualisation, empirical achievement, and psychological well-being.
Epistemology of Trust	Operates on a bipartite epistemology of trust: balancing rigorous empirical self-agency and intellectual inquiry with absolute metaphysical reliance on God (*tawakkul*) [38,95].	Relies exclusively on human self-efficacy and internal self-confidence, lacking any conceptual framework for transcendent or divine reliance.

Table 3. *Cont.*

Philosophical Aspect	Al-Rāzī's Qurʾānic Ontology	Dweck's Empirical Psychology
Internal Mechanics	Facilitated by a dual dialogue (*muḥāsabah* and *murāqabah*), awakening the "inner eye" (*baṣīrah*) to transcend mere sensory perception [108].	Facilitated purely by internal monologue and cognitive restructuring, which carries the philosophical risk of cognitive solipsism [111].
Metaphysical Locus	Situates human cognition and volition within the *qalb* (heart), offering a holistic metaphysical integration of intellect, emotion, and moral agency [99].	Situates human potential within the framework of secular cognitive psychology and empirical neuroplasticity, focusing exclusively on cognitive adaptability and behavioral outcomes without a metaphysical dimension [6,7].

Despite these stark ontological distinctions, both perspectives converge on the fundamental principle that human capability is neither statically fixed [6,7] nor fatally predetermined [38,95]. Rather, growth is the inevitable product of continuous self-reflection [95], deliberate effort [6,7], and the rigorous cultivation of internal potential [38]. In this regard, extracting the empirical mechanisms of Dweck's cognitive theory and anchoring them within the holistic, ethical, and metaphysical framework of al-Rāzī's exegesis presents a highly robust integrative paradigm, which is deemed profoundly relevant for contemporary applications.

8. Integrative Relevance and Ethical Adaptability: Towards a Foundational Interdisciplinary Paradigm

Bypassing the reiteration of empirical and theological premises already established, the dialectical sublation (*Aufheben*) [40] of these two traditions yields the paradigm of 'Ethical Adaptability'. Economically stated, Ethical Adaptability operates as a bipartite cognitive-spiritual schema: it structurally subordinates the empirical mechanics of cognitive resilience—such as neuroplasticity and sustained effort [91]—to an absolute moral ontology and eschatological accountability [105]. Rather than treating systemic failure merely as an empirical setback to be overcome for utilitarian productivity, this synthesized schema analytically reframes failure as an epistemological catalyst for moral maturation. By securely anchoring secular self-efficacy within a transcendent teleology, this paradigm effectively mitigates the inherent structural vulnerabilities of contemporary positive psychology, specifically its susceptibility to cognitive solipsism and ethical relativism [112].

As the principal theoretical contribution of this manuscript, the paradigm of 'Ethical Adaptability' must be rigorously distinguished to demonstrate exactly how it surpasses existing scholarly frameworks across three specific fields. First, within Islamic psychology, contemporary models frequently integrate mindset concepts but remain structurally confined to normative theological exegesis, often lacking a rigorously defined empirical mechanism [12,13]. 'Ethical Adaptability' surpasses this limitation by operationalising Husserlian phenomenology and Dweck's concept of neuroplasticity as the precise cognitive-behavioral engines required to actualise these abstract theological tenets.

Second, in the philosophy of education, existing cross-cultural frameworks often prioritize collective societal structures or macro-level pedagogical integration [23,25]. Our paradigm transcends this by isolating the micro-cognitive mechanics—arguing that systemic educational reform is structurally impossible without first reconstructing the individual learner's epistemological response to failure and adversity.

Finally, within cross-cultural psychology, religious paradigms are typically reduced to mere cultural coping mechanisms or subjective psychosocial variables. 'Ethical Adaptability' theoretically surpasses this secular reductionism by elevating classical Islamic ontology into a valid, objective psychological anchor. This synthesis proves that moral accountability does not negate cognitive resilience; rather, it provides the ultimate teleological depth necessary to stabilize human self-esteem against the systemic crises of late modernity.

To demonstrate the precise mechanics of the 'bipartite cognitive-spiritual schema' rather than resting on theoretical assertion, we must analyze its operational sequence during empirical failure. Although empirical evidence shows that a growth mindset generally buffers self-esteem against temporary setbacks [49], within a purely secular framework, continuous empirical failure despite sustained effort can

still cause this cognitive schema to collapse into defensive fragility. Without a transcendent anchor, the subject's self-worth remains vulnerable because it is contingently tied to observable, utilitarian outcomes[107]. In contrast, Islamic psychology tethers the subject's baseline identity to an immutable divine endowment, or *fitrah*[107]. Building upon this theological premise, this paper argues that the 'ontological anchor' functions mechanically as a cognitive interrupt. Within this framework, the psychological processing of failure is strictly contained; it is appraised logically as a localized epistemic error rather than an ontological deficit. Because core self-worth is pre-emptively secured, the empirical mechanics of cognitive restructuring—such as neuroplasticity and strategic adaptation—can proceed without the paralyzing interference of clinical anxiety or defensive self-justification.

Furthermore, 'teleological depth' sustains this process by systematically re-routing the motivational axis of effort. If cognitive resilience is pursued strictly for secular productivity or ego-centric well-being, it is easily exhausted by late-modern environments that arbitrarily devalue such effort—a structural vulnerability in secular positive psychology[113]. The paradigm of 'Ethical Adaptability' resolves this vulnerability by substituting the utilitarian endpoint with an eschatological imperative. Within this framework, cognitive growth and the endurance of adversity operate continuously as an existential duty for moral purification (*tazkiyyat al-nafs*)[99,105]. Consequently, the empirical effort itself becomes the primary objective. This sequence demonstrates exactly how classical theological epistemology insulates human agency from external devaluation, stabilizing modern psychological resilience without reverting to theological fatalism.

Finally, 'Ethical Adaptability' is not presented here as a proven empirical conclusion, but as a proposed dialectical framework. Mechanically, it functions as a dual-processing schema: the subject utilizes Dweck's empirical neuroplasticity to process failure as epistemic feedback[91], while simultaneously deploying al-Rāzi>'s moral epistemology to ensure that their subsequent adaptive actions are ethically sound rather than merely functionally effective[38].

From the context of this systemic integration, the following applications highlight its precise relevance to diverse stakeholders.

8.1. Generation Z: Epistemic Resilience against Digital Determinism

Generation Z, navigating existence as subjects of an increasingly algorithm-driven era, are uniquely exposed to both the empowering and existentially destabilising dimensions of the digital sphere. The modern digital architecture is frequently underpinned by 'surveillance capitalism', which inherently relies on behavioural prediction and modification, subtly enforcing a fixed, deterministic loop on human cognition and choice[113]. Against this backdrop of psychological determinism, the Qurʾānic imperative of *tadabbur* serves to anchor their epistemic engagement, demanding rigorous philosophical discernment rather than passive, algorithmic consumption. Dweck's empirical growth mindset complements this by equipping them with the socio-cognitive resilience required to frame digital pressures, hyper-comparisons, and inevitable failures as crucial loci for self-actualisation. Synthesised, these paradigms cultivate a digital literacy that is not merely functionally technical, but profoundly ethical and reflective. This empowers Generation Z to navigate performative environments without relinquishing their moral ontology.

Concretely, this synthesis can be operationalised within educational paradigms by replacing passive 'doomscrolling' or algorithmic echo chambers with structured dialectical exercises[113]. For instance, when confronted with the psychological determinism of 'cancel culture' or the existential dread induced by curated online perfection, a Gen Z individual equipped with this dual framework interprets such phenomena not as definitive judgements on their ontological worth (a fixed mindset vulnerability)[88], but as epistemic anomalies requiring critical reflection (*tadabbur*)[106]. Philosophically, this rescues the youth from digital fatalism; by realistically recognising that their cognitive state is perpetually subject to *taghyīr* (transformation), they reclaim their human agency from the dictates of machine-learning algorithms, transforming digital anxiety into a deliberate exercise of moral self-authorship[113,114].

8.2. Religious Societies: Reconciling Theological Ontology with Cognitive Malleability

For religious institutions and communities, this synthesis underscores the absolute necessity of bridging moral-

spiritual epistemology with psychological adaptability. Al-Rāzī's exegesis offers a robust theological ontology that emphasises human agency and accountability before God [38], whilst Dweck's model operationalises a practical psychology of intellectual persistence [7,88]. Religious societies can institutionalise this integration within their communal pedagogy, theological discourse, and youth mentorship. By doing so, contemporary crises—such as ideological radicalisation, hyper-consumerism, and spiritual apathy—are intellectually reframed not as symptoms of terminal fatalism, but as vital spaces for existential resilience and internal reform. Such pedagogies foster holistic believers who are simultaneously spiritually conscious, morally grounded, and cognitively adaptive.

In specific communal application, this entails a radical restructuring of traditional religious pedagogy: moving away from dogmatic rote memorisation, which inadvertently fosters theological fatalism (*jabr*), towards inquiry-based spiritual curricula [95]. When youth express spiritual doubt or face secular ideological challenges, religious leaders utilising this synthesis would not condemn such doubt as an immutable spiritual failure. Instead, they would reframe it—via Dweck's 'power of yet' [6] and al-Rāzī's emphasis on the intellect's capacity for truth-seeking [95].—as a necessary dialectical friction required for profound theological maturation. Philosophically, this neutralises the perilous dichotomy between blind orthodoxy and secular apostasy. It realistically posits that faith is not a static inheritance but an active, continuous cognitive achievement [7,95], thereby institutionalising *ḥusn al-ẓann* (positive presumption) as an actionable mechanism for community resilience.

8.3. Governments and Policy-Makers: Statecraft as Macro-Epistemology and Systemic *Taghyīr*

In the realm of macro-governance, this integrated paradigm provides a foundational resource for engineering policies centred on educational reform, civic responsibility, and societal resilience [88]. The ontological imperative established in al-Raʿd, chapter 13, verse 11 profoundly resonates with Dweck's empirical emphasis on internal, systemic transformation—a cross-disciplinary convergence increasingly validated in contemporary scholarship bridging Quranic *taghyīr* with Western psychological change models [69,98,100,101]. Governments can operationalise this synthesis by designing structural curricula that inextricably pair critical cognitive reasoning [95] with moral literacy [38], institutionalising lifelong learning as both a civic necessity and a psychospiritual duty [108]. Furthermore, as secular positive psychology often faces philosophical critique for lacking robust moral teleology [112], social policies that foreground cognitive resilience, gratitude, and societal adaptability serve as essential infrastructural counterweights to late-modern phenomena such as systemic disinformation, ideological polarisation, and collective youth disaffection.

In concrete policy terms, this convergence mandates the implementation of 'Digital Citizenship' curricula that do not merely teach software proficiency, but rigorously train students in epistemic ethics—evaluating the truth-value and moral weight of information before assimilation [95,108]. Furthermore, in social welfare and rehabilitation programmes, policy-makers can transition from utilitarian models of passive dependency [112] to capability-building frameworks grounded in the empirical belief in fundamental human malleability [6,88]. From a realistic philosophical standpoint, statecraft thus evolves into an exercise in macro-epistemology. By structurally rejecting the notion that certain socio-economic demographics are cognitively or morally stagnant, the state institutionalises the Qur'anic law of systemic transformation (*taghyīr*) [69,100,101], alongside Dweckian empirical interventions [7], ensuring that public policy treats the citizen not as a fixed variable, but as a dynamic agent of continuous cognitive evolution.

8.4. Civil Society: *Iṣlāḥ* (Reform) and the Ontological Dignity of Collective Action

Civil society organisations can adopt this interdisciplinary framework to systematically empower marginalised communities [88]. By cultivating both cognitive plasticity [7] and ethical responsibility [38,112], civil actors can comprehensively address socio-digital pathologies, including digital alienation, systemic disinformation, and escalating mental health crises [102]. The Qurʾānic mandate for collective, systemic reform (*iṣlāḥ*) intersects seamlessly with Dweck's empirical advocacy for collaborative learning [6,69]. Together, they inspire a form of civic engagement that is both spiritually profound and empirically productive. In practical terms, this synthesis materialises through resilience-based

leadership matrices, ethically grounded mentoring infrastructures, and community dialogues anchored equally in sacred ontology and evidence-based psychological practice [108,112].

Practically, this manifests in the design of community-led interventions—such as grassroots mentorship programmes for disenfranchised groups—that treat socio-economic marginalisation not as an immutable ontological destiny, but as a systemic condition susceptible to collective effort and moral action [69,88]. For instance, NGOs tackling youth alienation can deploy workshops that integrate Dweck's strategies for overcoming the fear of failure [6] with al-Rāzī's theological reassurance of divine support for sincere intellectual effort [95,99–101]. Philosophically, this convergence provides civil society with a realistic antidote to the nihilism often bred by systemic inequality [108]. It establishes a philosophy of collective action where *iṣlāḥ* is driven neither by utopian delusion nor by mere secular activism [112], but by a rigorously grounded epistemic hope [95]; an operational framework wherein marginalised individuals regain their ontological dignity through the deliberate, collaborative exercise of their cognitive and moral faculties [38,98].

8.5. Limitations and Alternative Interpretations

While the paradigm of 'Ethical Adaptability' offers a robust interdisciplinary synthesis, this study acknowledges several methodological and theoretical limitations. First, the proposed framework remains a purely philosophical and hermeneutical construct. It currently lacks longitudinal empirical testing or clinical validation to quantify its efficacy in actual educational, organizational, or therapeutic settings. Future empirical research is absolutely required to translate this philosophical matrix into measurable psychometric scales and observable behavioral interventions.

Second, it is crucial to recognize possible alternative interpretations of this model. The synthesis explicitly relies on al-Rāzī's specific metaphysical dialectic between human volition and divine agency [96,97]. Consequently, adopting an alternative theological framework—such as strict Ash'arite determinism (*jabr*)—would inherently yield a different interpretation. From such a determinist lens, the 'Ethical Adaptability' model might be critically interpreted as over-emphasizing human cognitive agency at the expense of absolute divine predestination [21].

Conversely, from a radically secular-materialist psychological perspective, the integration of an eschatological teleology might be viewed as an unnecessary metaphysical burden that complicates the pragmatic, clinical utility of cognitive-behavioral interventions [112]. By transparently acknowledging these alternative readings, this study presents 'Ethical Adaptability' not as a finalized dogmatic truth, but as an open, generative paradigm inviting further cross-cultural scrutiny and empirical testing.

Finally, to maintain rigorous epistemological humility, we must explicitly narrow any claims regarding the absolute universality of the 'Ethical Adaptability' paradigm. While this study synthesises classical Islamic ontology [38,95] with modern Western cognitive science [6,7,88], the resulting paradigm is not presented here as a definitive, universally binding psychological law. Rather, it operates strictly as a working hypothesis and a culturally situated theoretical proposal. Its immediate theoretical applicability is inherently bound to the specific epistemological parameters of Dweck's empirical framework [6] and al-Rāzī's theological constructs [38,95]. By explicitly framing this model as a working hypothesis, we acknowledge that human cognitive malleability is profoundly mediated by diverse, localized cultural-linguistic contexts. Consequently, this theoretical proposal serves as an open invitation for future scholarship to empirically test, rigorously critique, and iteratively refine its cross-cultural validity

9. Conclusions

Both Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī and Carol S. Dweck have made profound theoretical and practical contributions to the conceptualisation of human cognitive malleability. While operating from vastly different historical and epistemic standpoints, their respective frameworks collectively dismantle deterministic views of human nature. They open critical intellectual spaces, allowing scholars to view human potential not as a static inevitability, but as a dynamic, existential trajectory shaped by volition, reflection, and sustained effort. As contemporary critiques of deterministic psychology emphasise, recognising this conscious, existential trajectory is the foundational step required to move beyond reductive, biological models of human capability.

Through the lens of cross-cultural philosophical reflec-

tion, this article provides a critical synthesis of al-Rāzī's ontological exegesis and Dweck's empirical psychology. While this study unequivocally acknowledges the empirical legitimacy of Dweck's framework in operationalising the growth mindset via cognitive restructuring and neuroplasticity, it simultaneously advances a realistic philosophical critique. By anchoring the discourse in the Qurʾānic metaphysics of *taghyīr* (transformation), it argues that al-Rāzī's paradigm—which integrates the empirical senses, the intellect, and the metaphysical locus of the heart (*qalb*)—offers a fundamentally more holistic ontology. It transcends the purely secular, utilitarian teleology of modern psychology by uniting human cognitive agency with absolute divine reliance (*tawakkul*) and eschatological accountability. By framing human development within this theological expanse, the synthesis answers recent calls in cross-cultural psychology to ground cognitive therapies in culturally and spiritually resonant meaning-systems, preventing psychological resilience from devolving into mere economic instrumentalism.

In this regard, this research advocates for a rigorous integration of modern psychological constructs with classical Qurʾānic epistemology. It elevates the discourse of the growth mindset beyond mere behavioural modification or secular internal monologue, situating it instead within a comprehensive philosophical and theological architecture. This cross-cultural lens facilitates the identification of the deeper epistemological and axiological underpinnings of human development, moving beyond neuro-reductionism to embrace a dual framework of empirical self-trust and theocentric reliance. This dual epistemology directly resolves the philosophical vulnerabilities of purely secular cognitive-behavioural models, which often risk collapsing into ethical relativism or cognitive solipsism when unanchored from an objective, transcendent moral truth.

Accordingly, the profound novelty of this research lies in its interdisciplinary synthesis: bridging classical Islamic intellectual traditions with modern cognitive theory to forge the paradigm of 'Ethical Adaptability'. This integrated framework elegantly combines absolute moral accountability with dynamic cognitive resilience, providing highly relevant practical guidance for contemporary society. Future sociological research and living Qurʾān studies must operationalise this synthesis to address pressing late-modern challenges—such as cultivating reflective digital literacy (*tadabbur*) among Generation Z, equipping religious societies against ideological apathy, guiding governments and policy-makers in designing resilience-based civic curricula, and empowering civil society to enact systemic, collective reform (*iṣlāḥ*). The operationalisation of such a paradigm is increasingly critical, as interdisciplinary scholars note that mitigating contemporary systemic crises requires frameworks that wed adaptive cognitive skills with profound moral purposiveness.

Ultimately, this study contributes to modern scholarship by transcending the traditional disciplinary boundaries that typically isolate Qurʾānic exegesis from empirical psychological frameworks. The findings not only elucidate the profound philosophical convergences and divergences between Islamic theology and secular cognitive psychology, but also establish a foundational interdisciplinary paradigm. Through this synthesis, the conceptual boundaries of the growth mindset are significantly expanded, bearing vital academic and practical implications for the fields of Qurʾānic philosophy, hermeneutics, cognitive psychology, education, and Islamic studies.

Author Contributions

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