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Integrating Classical Qur'anic Exegesis and Modern Physiognomy: A Hermeneutical Analysis of Human Nonverbal Signals in Mafātih al-Ghaib

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Abstract

This research delves into the idea of physiognomy as a means of interpreting human nonverbal cues within the context of the Qur'an and Fakhruddin al-Razi's commentary in Mafātihul Ghaib. Traditionally considered a pseudo-science, physiognomy is reimagined here as a link between the physical and spiritual aspects of human expression. The study addresses a gap in prior research, which often confines nonverbal analysis in the Qur'an to linguistic or semiotic aspects, neglecting psychological and spiritual dimensions. Employing a qualitative library research method, the study investigates nine Qur'anic verses that depict facial expressions, gestures, and bodily signals through al-Razi's hermeneutical perspective. The results indicate that al-Razi consistently views the human body as a communicative entity that expresses internal states – such as faith, arrogance, sorrow, and joy – through nonverbal cues that resonate with divine communication. By integrating al-Razi's interpretations with contemporary nonverbal communication theories, the study highlights an epistemological continuity between classical tafsir and cognitive science. This study aims to analyze how al-Razi interprets nonverbal human signals in the Qur'an and to connect his interpretation with modern cognitive science.

Keywords: *Physiognomic Exegesis; Qur'anic semiotics; Gestures; Mafatihul Ghaib.*

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Introduction

The Qur'an describes various facial expressions, such as radiant faces, gloomy, dark, weeping, or downcast, reflecting emotions of happiness, regret, fear, and humility. Eye movements can also be interpreted, for example, as a gaze full of hope, fear, or shame, which serve as indicators of a person's psychological and spiritual state in interpreting the signs present in their surroundings [1]. The paradigm of nonverbal communication in the Qur'an is not only functional, but also contains transcendental and ethical dimensions, emphasizing the relationship between social and spiritual aspects. Nonverbal communication in the Qur'an serves as a bridge between the physical and metaphysical worlds, creating harmony between actions and spiritual values [2]. Gestures and facial expressions described in the Qur'an often serve as symbols of a person's inner state, reflecting their level of faith or doubt. Verses depicting this nonverbal communication also function as ethical guidelines for interacting with fellow human beings and with Allah SWT.

An individual's confidence in their judgment is often influenced by the strength of the available evidence, even if that evidence may not be entirely accurate or complete. This phenomenon can be explained through the concept of confirmation bias, in which individuals tend to seek out and interpret information that supports their existing beliefs. As a result, individuals may ignore or downplay evidence that contradicts their views [3]. This can give rise to everyday prejudices that associate physical appearance with morality, for example: "their face looks like that of a criminal" [4]. Such prejudices can influence social interactions and judgments about others unfairly. This can lead to discrimination and the exclusion of certain groups within society. The development of negative stereotypes can limit individuals' opportunities and access in various aspects of life, such as education and employment.

Physiognomy is not only an ancient pseudoscience, but also a perspective that connects outward appearance with character and spirituality. Physiognomy is the study of the values and characteristics of individuals that can be interpreted through their physical features. This is done not to judge others, but rather as if reading a phrase from a book [5]. One of the most influential Western perspectives on physiognomy is reflected in the works of Polemon of Laodicea, a rhetorician and politician from the 2nd century AD. For the Greco-Roman society, physiognomy was not merely a theory, but a practical tool used to analyze a person's character through their physical traits [6]. In the Islamic spiritual view, Allah SWT grants profound understanding to His pious servants. They can perceive subtle non-verbal signals, emotional vibrations, or hidden intentions that often go unnoticed by others. This ability is not magic or fortune-telling, but a sensitivity inspired by Allah in the hearts of His pure servants.

However, humans can essentially only surmise what is hidden by observing outward signs [7].

Richard Twine, an English sociologist, also criticized physiognomy on two main grounds: representationalism and the rejection of temporality. According to Twine, representationalism views the human body as a "static text" that can be read directly. This approach overly simplifies human appearance and personality, reducing individuals to a set of fixed traits that can be "read" from their physical features. The rejection of temporality, according to Twine, is evident in the attempt to separate permanent facial features from expressions that can change. This separation also ignores the reality that the human body is always influenced by time, emotions, and experience [4]. Previous studies mainly focus on linguistic or technological aspects of facial expression, without exploring their spiritual and hermeneutical significance. Based on the writings of Adam Kendon, who cites the work of Jean-Claude Schmitt (1990) on movement in the medieval Church, actions such as praying, kneeling, or blessing were considered a "divine language" that helped humans communicate with God. Schmitt argues that the body is not just a physical tool, but also a symbol that signifies belief and connects the ordinary world with the sacred. Ritual movements are viewed as a direct means of participating in the supernatural world [8].

This study begins with three main research questions. First, how does the Qur'an address the concept of physiognomy as outward signs that reflect the inner and spiritual condition of a person? The Qur'an explicitly describes facial expressions and gestures as direct reflections of an individual's psychological and spiritual state. For example, a radiant face (*basymatun*) is portrayed as a manifestation of happiness and faith, whereas a gloomy and darkened face represents rejection, sadness, or the consequences of sinful deeds [9]. Second, how can the concept of physiognomy be connected to the verses on gestures according to Fakhruddin Al-Razi's interpretation? Al-Razi's tafsir, with its distinctive integration of theology, philosophy, and psychology, offers a rich hermeneutic framework for analyzing gestures in the Qur'an [10]. This framework is then placed in dialogue with contemporary perspectives that view gesture not merely as expression, but as a fundamental cognitive and social tool in the construction of meaning [11]. Third, how can we mitigate the potential bias and injustice arising from the use of physiognomy? The practice of physiognomic simplification that links physical traits with inner character carries epistemological dangers, as it can crystallize stereotypes and serve as justification for discriminatory actions [4].

Although research on nonverbal communication in the Qur'an and facial expressions/gestures already exists, most of these studies are linguistic, semiotic, or based on textual interpretation. For example, the article titled A Linguistic

Study of Facial Expressions in Selected Quranic Verses examines the pragmatic and semiotic meanings of facial expressions in certain Quranic verses [12]. Another study, *Types Of Facial Expressions In The Holy Qur'an*, describes various types of facial expressions in the Qur'an, but does not empirically link them to the psychological or spiritual state of the reader or subject [13]. On the other hand, there are studies such as *Facial Expression Recognition of Al-Qur'an Memorization Students Using Convolutional Neural Network* that have measured the actual expressions of participants using technological methods to detect happiness, neutrality, and fatigue during the process of Qur'an memorization [14].

However, the research still has significant gaps. First, there have been no studies linking facial expressions and movements in the Qur'anic text with psychological data. Second, although technologies such as facial expression recognition are easily facilitated by technology, the focus has been more on classifying physical expressions rather than the spiritual or psychological meanings of expressions found in the Qur'anic text. Third, no research has yet combined classical exegesis and modern nonverbal psychology theories in a single design, such as integrating verse analysis with psychological measurement. Fourth, the risks of bias and discrimination stemming from physiognomy are rarely studied. This research aims to fill these gaps by selecting verses about movements in the Qur'an, analyzing Al-Razi's tafsir, classifying individual movements according to symbolism in Al-Razi's tafsir, and analyzing the mitigation of potential physiognomy derived from pseudo-science.

Method

This study utilizes a qualitative approach through the library research method, which is especially suitable for examining Qur'anic verses related to physiognomy and their interpretations in both traditional and modern exegesis. The research depends on primary data sources such as exegesis literature, academic works, and prior studies, rather than conducting field experiments. Library research is particularly fitting for the critical examination of texts and written concepts. Secondary sources include literature in the fields of nonverbal psychology, communication theory, and critical studies on physiognomy, such as the writings of Richard Twine, to provide a contemporary perspective [15].

The researcher will analyze the verses' meanings by considering the context, the definitions of the words, and the interpretations offered by both traditional and modern scholars. Tafsir studies can be further enhanced by incorporating psychological, scientific, and visualization methods to explore the connection between text, the human body, and the soul [16]. Next, the researcher will explore Al-Razi's interpretation of these verses using a hermeneutic

approach to reveal the spiritual, psychological, and ethical dimensions of nonverbal symbols. Al-Razi's interpretative framework will then be critically examined through a dialogue with modern theories of nonverbal psychology and critiques of physiognomy. This synthesis aims to develop a model of understanding that combines classical spiritual insights with contemporary awareness of the risks of bias and stereotypes.

The results of this study are expected to provide a comprehensive foundation for understanding nonverbal symbolism in the Qur'an through the lens of classical exegesis and modern science, while also presenting an ethical framework to mitigate physiognomic simplifications that may be potentially discriminatory. The contribution of this research lies in its effort to bridge Qur'anic and exegetical studies with empirical psychology, as well as in formulating hermeneutical guidelines that are sensitive to both the transcendental meanings and the social implications of interpreting physical signs.

The Concept of Physiognomy in the Qur'an: Outward Signs as a Reflection of the Inner Self

Physiognomy is a study that seeks to understand an individual's character and personality through the observation of external physical features. Its main concept is the assumption of a direct relationship between outward appearance (physical) and a person's inner character. The term originates from Greek, with "physis" meaning nature and "gnomos" meaning knowledge, and historically developed by emphasizing the fixed forms of the face, as popularized by Johann Caspar Lavater [17]. Initially, physiognomy focused on the analysis of static features, such as bone structure and facial proportions, which were believed to reveal a person's permanent character. However, over time, this concept was then distinguished from pathognomy, which focuses more on dynamic and temporary facial expressions, such as those changes caused by emotions. Therefore, the core of physiognomy lies in the effort to "read" internal conditions that are considered stable through fixed physical signs [17].

In the 16th century Ottoman world, physiognomy, also known as 'ilm al-firasat', was considered a legitimate natural science used to assess a person's inner character through their physical appearance. This discipline was not seen as superstition, but rather as a science classified within the Islamic scholarly tradition, as done by Ibn Sina, as part of the applied natural sciences. For the Ottoman administration, physiognomy held significant instrumental value in matters of state. It was believed to assist the Sultan and ruling elite in selecting officials and members of the elite who possessed superior moral character, thus enabling the realization of justice in the state and maintaining the "Circle of

Justice" [18]. This science was divided into two: hikmiyyah physiognomy, which could be learned through experience and study, and shari'iyah physiognomy, which was a divine gift attained through spiritual purification and moral discipline. Mastery of shari'iyah physiognomy was believed to bring enlightenment to the ruler, enabling him to "see with the light of God," so that he was not only just in governing but also a moral exemplar.

In the tradition of classical Islamic intellectualism, physiognomy is considered one of the branches of knowledge rooted in Greek heritage and further developed by Muslim scholars. This science is viewed as a tool for understanding a person's character and internal state through external physical signs, and is often associated with other fields such as medicine, astrology, and dream interpretation. Fakhruddin Al-Razi included physiognomy within the framework of natural sciences and humoral theory, which emphasizes the relationship between a person's physical and psychological conditions [19]. The Islamic perspective on physical features reflecting a person's morality is discussed through the approach of physiognomy, which is rooted in the Islamic intellectual tradition. This concept is supported by references from the Qur'an, as stated in Surah Al-Baqarah: 273, which mentions "you will recognize them by their marks (simāhum)." This verse is interpreted as the foundation for the belief that outward characteristics can reveal inner essence [20].

The Qur'an explicitly describes the body as a form of symbolic nonverbal communication nine times in different verses. These mentions underscore the significance of body language in communication from an Islamic perspective. Some of the examples cited include facial expressions, hand gestures, and other physical characteristics. Understanding this nonverbal communication can facilitate more effective interactions that are in harmony with religious teachings for Muslims and prevent it from becoming justification for discrimination or even racism. Below are references regarding physical signs found in the Qur'an.

1)

يَوْمَ تَبْيَضُّ وُجُوهٌ وَتَسْوَدُّ وُجُوهٌ فَأَمَّا الَّذِينَ اسْوَدَّتْ وُجُوهُهُمْ أَكَفَرْتُمْ بَعْدَ إِيمَانِكُمْ فَذُوقُوا الْعَذَابَ بِمَا كُنْتُمْ تَكْفُرُونَ

(The punishment will occur) on the Day when there will be faces that are bright and radiant, and there will be faces that are dark and gloomy. As for those whose faces are dark and gloomy, (it will be said to them), "Why did you disbelieve after having believed? Therefore, taste the punishment for your disbelief." (QS. Ali Imran: 106)

2)

وَأَمْرَأَتُهُ قَائِمَةٌ فَضَحِكَتْ فَلَبَسَ رُهَا بِإِسْحَاقَ وَمِنْ وَرَاءِ إِسْحَاقَ يَعْقُوبَ

"And his wife (Sarah) was standing, and she smiled (out of joy). So We gave her good news of (the birth of) Isaac, and after Isaac, (the birth of) Jacob." (QS. Hud: 71)

3)

وَتَوَلَّى عَنْهُمْ وَقَالَ يَا سَفَى عَلَى يُونُسَ وَابْيَضَّتْ عَيْنُهُ مِنَ الْحُزْنِ فَهُوَ كَظِيمٌ

And he (Jacob) turned away from them (his sons) and said, "Oh, my sorrow for Joseph," and his eyes became white with grief, and he was one who suppressed his anguish. (QS. Yusuf: 84)

4)

وَلَا تُصَعِّرْ خَدَّكَ لِلنَّاسِ وَلَا تَمْشِ فِي الْأَرْضِ مَرَحًا إِنَّ اللَّهَ لَا يُحِبُّ كُلَّ مُخْتَالٍ فَخُورٍ

"And do not turn your face away from people (out of arrogance) and do not walk upon the earth with pride. Indeed, Allah does not like those who are arrogant and boastful." (QS. Luqman: 18)

5)

وَإِذَا قِيلَ لَهُمْ تَعَالَوْا يَسْتَغْفِرْ لَكُمْ رَسُولُ اللَّهِ لَوَّا رُءُوسَهُمْ وَرَأَيْتَهُمْ يَصُدُّونَ وَهُمْ مُسْتَكْبِرُونَ

"And when it is said to them, 'Come, so that the Messenger of Allah may ask forgiveness for you,' they turn their heads away and you see them turning away in arrogance." (QS. Al-Munafiqun: 5)

6)

سَنَسِمْهُ عَلَى الْخُرْطُومِ

"We will mark his nose." (QS. Al-Qalam: 16)

7)

وَأِنْ يَكَادُ الَّذِينَ كَفَرُوا لَيُزْلِقُونَكَ بِأَبْصَارِهِمْ لَمَّا سَمِعُوا الذِّكْرَ وَيَقُولُونَ إِنَّهُ لَمَجْنُونٌ

And indeed, those who disbelieve almost made you slip with their eyes when they heard the Qur'an, and they said, "He is truly insane." (QS. Al-Qalam: 51)

8)

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاعِمَةٌ . لِّسَعْيِهَا رَاضِيَةٌ

"With their eyes cast down, they are overwhelmed by humiliation. That is the day which was always promised to them." (QS. Al-Ma'arij: 44)

9)

وُجُوهٌ يَوْمَئِذٍ نَّاعِمَةٌ . لِّسَعْيِهَا رَاضِيَةٌ

"On that day many faces will be radiant, satisfied with their efforts." (QS. Al-Ghasiyah: 8-9)

Verses relevant to the physical as a medium of nonverbal communication indicate that the eyes function as a medium for theophanic vision (tajalli), that is, the capacity to witness Divine manifestations. The eyes do not merely observe

physical beauty but also serve as a channel for perceiving the Divine Essence. Moreover, the eyes symbolize spiritual suffering and longing. Tears flowing from the eyes are not merely expressions of worldly sorrow, but also symbols of the great flood of Nūḥ, the parted sea, or heavenly springs such as Zamzam and Kawthar. These tears are often metaphorically described as pearls, oceans, or jewels, representing the spiritual value of suffering and the purification of the soul on the journey toward God. Within the current of this river of tears, there lies an implied journey of purification in which each drop washes away veils of neglect, cleansing the mirror of the heart to reflect the Divine light. Thus, the eyes are not only an organ of vision but also a sacred "text" containing divine secrets, as well as a mirror reflecting the spiritual essence of humanity in its quest for the Creator [20].

The nose is not only understood as a mere anatomical structure, but also as a symbol rich in cultural, historical, and identity-related meaning. The nose is often considered a "synecdoche of the soul," indicating that it represents or reflects a person's character, personality, and even ethnic background. This affirms that the nose is not just a functional or aesthetic organ, but also a complex and significant marker of identity within cultural and historical contexts [21]. From the perspective of the Qur'an, human body parts often have profound symbolic significance, especially in representing spiritual and ethical values. For instance, the face is frequently depicted as a reflection of religious identity and an individual's commitment to the values of piety. The presence of certain indicators in this area can be interpreted as physical symbols that reveal a person's affiliation with the community of believers as well as their consistency in worship practices. Conversely, other parts of the body can also carry opposite symbolic connotations, illustrating negative behaviors such as arrogance or rejection of truth [21].

Fakhruddin Al-Razi's Physiognomy Commentary: Interpreting Gestures in the Qur'an

His full name is Abu Abdullah Muhammad bin Umar bin Husain bin Hasan bin Ali at-Tamimi Al-Bakri At-Tabaristani Al-Razi. He was born on 25th Ramadan 544 AH in the city of Ray, Iran, and passed away on Eid al-Fitr in 606 AH in Herat. He was known as Ibn Al-Khatib Asy-Syafi'i and held the titles of Al-Imam, Fakhruddin, and Syaikhul Islam [22]. Al-Razi wrote more than two hundred books related to medicine, pharmacy, philosophy, music, and various other sciences. He is considered a pioneer in the establishment of experimental science, especially in the fields of medicine and chemistry, due to his deep interest in experimental methodology across the natural sciences. Al-Razi is recognized as "a writer of rare and remarkable productivity, as well as the greatest Islamic physician." In Al-Razi's writings, Fihris Ibn Al-Nadim, the oldest

authoritative record, notes 113 major works and 28 minor works by him. His monumental and most important work is *Kitab Al Hawi Fi Al-Tibb*, also known as *Liber Continens*, a medical encyclopedia consisting of 25 volumes [23].

Al-Razi is known for his profound criticism of Ibn Sina's thought, which sparked a significant shift in Islamic philosophy in the 12th century. Al-Razi continued the tradition of skepticism pioneered by Imam Al-Ghazali, meticulously re-examining Ibn Sina's ideas. This review was carried out through his works, "*Mabāḥis Al-Mashriqiyyah*" and "*Al-Muḥaṣṣal*", which later became the foundation for many subsequent philosophers. Al-Razi's works were used as references to either support or refute Ibn Sina's thought. Al-Razi's influence is clearly evident in the development of illuminationist (Ishraqi) philosophy and later Islamic philosophy. Through his critiques of Ibn Sina, Al-Razi developed his own philosophical system. Al-Razi was not only an opponent but also introduced new ideas, addressing issues concerning reality and knowledge that had previously received little attention [24].

Al-Razi left behind a legacy of knowledge that is exceptionally rich and diverse, making him one of the most renowned scholars in the intellectual history of Islam. His legacy is especially evident in the fields of *ushul fiqh* and *tafsir*. His works, such as *Al-Mahshul fi 'Ilm Al-Ushul* and *Mafātiḥul Ghaib*, remain primary references to this day. As previously mentioned, he mastered *tafsir*, *kalam*, philosophy, and logic; his *tafsir*, *Mafātiḥul Ghaib*, also integrates linguistic analysis (*lughah*), theology (*kalam*), philosophy, and even rational sciences to uncover the meanings of the Qur'an. This approach makes his *tafsir* highly analytical and critical, similar to the methodology he applied in *ushul fiqh* [25]. The main characteristics of this *tafsir* are its critical stance towards *taqlid* (acceptance of tradition without critique), the use of logical arguments, and its attention to profound theological and philosophical issues [26]. The primary style employed is *tafsir bir ra'yi*, which falls under the category of commendable rationality (*mahmud*), wherein Al-Razi examines various issues in great detail and expands his discussions by drawing on multiple disciplines. Although he relied more on reason, he did not entirely disregard tradition or *bil ma'tsur*, as he still utilized evidence from the Qur'an, Sunnah, as well as the views of the Companions and the Tabi'in to support his interpretations [27].

To gain a comprehensive understanding of the context in which a verse was revealed, a careful investigation of *Asbabun Nuzul* is essential. By doing so, the underlying historical context can be understood, allowing the message of the verse to be interpreted more clearly and accurately, and to be applied relevantly as long as similar conditions or causes persist [28]. Therefore, this study strategically examines these verses through two monumental works on *Asbabun Nuzul*, namely the works of Al-Wahidi An-Nisaburi and Imam As-Suyuthi. This

crucial step serves as the foundation before moving on to Al-Razi's interpretation in his tafsir *Mafātihul Ghaib*, with the primary focus on how Al-Razi elaborates that physical characteristics or bodily gestures inherently carry nonverbal communication messages that definitively reflect the personality of the individual possessing those characteristics and gestures.

- 1) (QS. Ali Imran: 106) After further investigation, no Asbabun Nuzul (occasions of revelation) were found for this verse. Based on Al-Razi's interpretation, it can be understood that the face serves as a powerful symbol of nonverbal communication in an eschatological context. Al-Razi explains that the change in the color of the face – becoming radiant white or gloomy black – is a visual expression that communicates a person's spiritual state in the hereafter without the need for words. A white face represents joy, the reception of Allah's mercy, and spiritual success, while a black face communicates sadness, regret, and failure. Al-Razi emphasizes that the face functions as a universal medium of divine communication that can be "read" by the angels and the inhabitants of the hereafter to immediately understand a person's spiritual status. Even in his explanation regarding the use of the metaphors "white face" and "black face" in everyday Arabic language, Al-Razi shows an understanding that the face has become a culturally symbolic system collectively understood to express emotional and spiritual states [29].
- 2) (QS. Hud: 70-71) This verse does not have any Asbabun Nuzul (occasions of revelation). According to Al-Razi's interpretation in the story of Prophet Lot, Lot's perception of his guests' "hands" (angels who had taken human form) can be understood as part of nonverbal communication, even though the specific context of the guests' hand behavior is not described in detail. Implicitly, Al-Razi develops the principle that body parts and physical expressions serve as a medium of divine communication that conveys meanings beyond words. In the story of Lot (which is indirectly referenced through the angels' visit to Abraham), Lot's reaction to the arrival of his guests and his interpretation of their gestures – such as the fear that arises from observing nonverbal behavior – reflect how hands not reaching for food become a symbolic code revealing their true identity (angels) and the divine intent, which was the punishment for the people of Sodom [30].
- 3) (QS. Yusuf: 84) This verse does not have an Asbabun Nuzul (reason for revelation). According to Al-Razi's interpretation of the phrase "his two eyes became white," which was experienced by Prophet Ya'qub, it can be concluded that the physical change in the eyes serves as a very powerful symbol of nonverbal communication. Al-Razi does not interpret "the whitening of his eyes" purely as a medical condition (blindness or an

abnormality), but rather emphasizes it as a visual manifestation of deep and continuous sorrow, something impossible to hide. The face, especially the eye area, becomes a "canvas" that passively and authentically conveys messages of inner suffering without the need for words. This change is a universal nonverbal expression, in which profound and prolonged grief eventually becomes "readable" physically through the fading of the blackness of the eyes, as if the sadness has "drained" the life from his gaze [30].

- 4) (QS. Luqman: 18) This verse does not have an Asbabun Nuzul (specific occasion of revelation). Based on Al-Razi's interpretation, the prohibition of "turning your cheek away from people" can be understood as a rejection of nonverbal forms of communication that signify arrogance. Al-Razi interprets the act of turning one's face or cheek as a manifestation of takabbur (arrogance) directed toward others. From this perspective, the face serves as an exceptionally powerful conduit for nonverbal messages in social interactions. The gesture of turning one's face is not merely a routine physical movement, but rather a symbol that communicates rejection, pride, and indifference toward the presence of others. Al-Razi views it as an expression of an individual's inner conviction that he is greater than his interlocutor, so that his body language reflects disdain and social distance [31].
- 5) (QS. Al-Munafiqun: 5) Ibn Jarir narrated from Qatadah, who said: It was said to Abdullah bin Ubay, "If only you would come to the Prophet, then he would ask forgiveness for you." Abdullah then turned his face away. Then the verse was revealed, "And when it is said to them, 'Come so that the Messenger of Allah may ask forgiveness for you,' they turn their faces away and you see them turning away in arrogance." Ibnul Mundhir narrated from Ikrimah with a similar hadith [32]. Based on Al-Razi's interpretation, the prohibition against "turning away the face/cheek" can be understood as a rejection through nonverbal communication that implies arrogance and refusal. Al-Razi interprets the act of turning away the face as a nonverbal expression of arrogance (istikbar) and reluctance to submit to the truth. When the hypocrites were asked to seek forgiveness through the Messenger of Allah, their turning away was not merely a physical gesture, but a nonverbal symbol that communicated rejection, pride, and defiance. In Al-Razi's analysis, this gesture reflects their inner state, filled with arrogance, where their body language more honestly conveys the rejection in their hearts than any words they might utter [33].
- 6) (QS. Al-Qalam: 16) This verse does not have any specific Asbabun Nuzul (occasions of revelation). Based on Al-Razi's interpretation regarding the marking on the nose (al-kharthum) in this verse, Al-Razi states that the

nose is the most dignified organ on the face due to its prominent position. Therefore, marking the nose is not only understood as a physical injury, but also as a nonverbal symbol that communicates extreme humiliation and degradation of honor. In this context, the mark on the nose serves as a nonverbal message that visually signifies eternal reproach towards negative traits such as lying and slander. This interpretation of the marking – whether in the worldly context, such as the scars from a sword, or in the hereafter as a sign of stigma – emphasizes that the body is also a divine medium that communicates moral values and the consequences of sin through a universal nonverbal language [33].

- 7) (QS. Al-Qalam: 51) This verse does not have an Asbabun Nuzul (specific reason for revelation). According to Al-Razi's interpretation, "their gaze" (li yuziqūnaka bi-abṣārihim) mentioned in the verse can be understood as a form of nonverbal communication that contains destructive psychological and spiritual elements. The gaze of the disbelievers towards the Prophet Muhammad was not merely an ordinary act of seeing, but a nonverbal expression conveying hatred, envy, and rejection through a visual intensity that was almost physical in nature. The interpretation that equates this gaze to "the gaze of a wolf at a sheep" reinforces the idea that the eyes function as a nonverbal channel for transmitting malicious intent and hostility, in which eye contact becomes a medium for delivering hostile messages that can have psychological effects and, according to some interpretations, even physical effects through the concept of al-'ain (the evil eye) [33].
- 8) QS. Al-Ma'arij: 44) This verse does not have an Asbabun Nuzul (specific circumstance of revelation). According to Al-Razi's interpretation, this verse describes people who hasten out of their graves toward the caller with their heads bowed. This verse depicts a physical movement that is not isolated, but rather a direct reflection of an inner state filled with deep humility and profound respect. Their body language – bowed heads and hurried steps – is a nonverbal manifestation of a soul that has reached the pinnacle of surrender. This humility is not a forced attitude, but a natural expression from a heart that has fully acknowledged the greatness of the Caller. And as for the rest, the explanation of this chapter is already known. And He, Glorified and Exalted, is the All-Knowing. I conclude (by praising) the Lord of all the worlds. May blessings and peace be upon Prophet Muhammad, as well as all his family and companions [33].
- 9) (QS. Al-Ghasiyah: 8-9) These verses do not have a specific reason for revelation (Asbabun Nuzul). According to Al-Razi's interpretation, when the innermost heart has reached the peak of contentment – a perfect inner satisfaction from witnessing the fruits of sincere effort – then that

happiness can no longer be hidden. It radiates outward as a calm and profound smile, glimmering at the corner of sparkling eyes, illuminating the entire face until it appears radiant. This is not just an ordinary light, but the glow of inner peace that has reached its ultimate goal, that feels complete and no longer yearns for anything more. The face then shines, soft and serene, like the light of pleasure radiating from within, while a relaxed demeanor and clear eyes stand as visible proof that every burden and doubt has disappeared, replaced by conviction and gratitude. This is the embodiment of harmony between a satisfied soul and a radiant body, where the fullness of the heart transforms into a light that greets the world [34].

Integration of Classical Tafsir with Modern Physiognomy

Gestures have several important and interconnected cognitive functions, primarily by reducing cognitive load and thereby enhancing the efficiency of mental processes. Spontaneous gestures also serve as predictors of readiness, where mismatches between gesture and speech (gesture-speech mismatch) often reveal implicit knowledge or transitions that have not yet been articulated. Gestures actively facilitate memory and learning, both through the production and observation of gestures, which have been shown to improve information retention and knowledge transfer in contexts such as problem-solving. Overall, according to the Gesture for Conceptualization Hypothesis, gestures play a role in supporting conceptualization processes by helping to explore and manipulate spatial-motor information, thereby enriching the process of thinking and speaking [35]. From an interpretive perspective, gestures are viewed as symbolic representations and tools for interpreting meaning, both concrete and abstract [36]. Meanwhile, physiognomy highlights aspects of bodily expression, where gestures become reflections of emotion, identity, and neurological conditions [37].

Al-Razi's involvement in the history of physiognomy is manifested through his contributions to scientific works in the field of medicine. It is noted that Book II of his medical treatise titled *Liber ad Almansorem* (also known as *Kitab al-Mansuri*), written in the tenth century, was based on the fundamental theory of physiognomy. This medical work was later translated into Latin in the 1180s, enabling the dissemination of his knowledge of physiognomy to the Western world. Al-Razi's treatise made a significant contribution by integrating the tradition of physiognomy with Galenic medical thought. Al-Razi's role did not lie in the creation of a new science of physiognomy, but rather in the synthesis and application of that knowledge within a systematic medical framework, which in turn influenced the development of this field in the Latin world [38]. Al-

Razi's rationality, which integrated health with spirituality, was also applied in his reasoning in interpreting the verses of the Qur'an. Al-Razi's approach to interpreting the Qur'an involved intellectual exegesis, in which he used reason and analysis to understand the sacred text. This method was part of a broader trend in Islamic scholarship that sought to harmonize revealed knowledge with rational inquiry [39].

Based on Al-Razi's interpretation of nine verses from the Qur'an, there is a consistent understanding that the human body, particularly the face, functions as a complex, multidisciplinary, and multidimensional system of nonverbal communication. In QS. Ali Imran: 106, Al-Razi interprets the change in facial color as a visual language that directly communicates spiritual status, where a white face represents joy and the acceptance of mercy, while a black face signifies sorrow and regret. The same principle is reflected in his interpretation of QS. Yusuf: 84, where the "whitening of the eyes" of Prophet Ya'qub is not seen merely as a medical condition, but as a passive canvas that reveals the deepest inner sorrow. Furthermore, in interpreting QS. Luqman: 18 and QS. Al-Munafiqun: 5, Al-Razi asserts that turning one's face away is a nonverbal expression of arrogance that communicates rejection and indifference. Meanwhile, the interpretation of QS. Al-Qalam: 16 regarding the marking on the nose reveals the concept of the body as a "text" that records moral stigma, wherein the most honorable part of the body becomes the very medium to convey the deepest humiliation.

Al-Razi's analysis of these various verses collectively forms a sophisticated theoretical framework on nonverbal communication from an Islamic perspective. In QS. Hud: 70-71, Al-Razi develops the principle that body movements – such as hands not touching food – can serve as symbolic codes that reveal true identity and divine intent. His interpretation of QS. Al-Qalam: 51 regarding destructive gazes reflects an understanding of the power of transmitting intent through visual contact, which can even have physical effects, as seen in the concept of al-'ain. On the other hand, his interpretation of QS. Al-Ma'arij: 44 regarding bowed heads and QS. Al-Ghashiyah: 8-9 regarding radiant faces demonstrates how body language can be a visual manifestation of positive spiritual states – humility and inner satisfaction. Overall, Al-Razi not only affirms that nonverbal communication in the Qur'an is universal and transcendent, but also that the human body is a divine medium revealing the deepest inner truths, in which every movement, expression, and physical change contains spiritual meaning that can be "read" within the framework of communication between humans and the Creator.

This study adopts the integrative-interconnective paradigm proposed by M. Amin Abdullah (2014) as its main theoretical framework. This means bringing together various scientific disciplines so that they complement each other. In the

context of tafsir (Qur'anic interpretation), the integrative-interconnective approach combines Islamic sciences with general sciences and seeks common ground between the two. The goal is to achieve a more comprehensive understanding of revelation that is relevant to human reality. This theory moves beyond the paradigms of conflict and independence, aiming for a kind of integration that is semi-permeable [40]. In this model, the boundaries between the disciplines of Qur'anic interpretation and physiognomy are no longer viewed as rigid barriers, but rather as semi-permeable membranes that facilitate dialogue, exchange of concepts, and mutual enrichment. The fundamental concept of this paradigm, namely intersubjective testability, requires researchers to test and enrich their understanding of religious texts (objectivity of the text) by integrating perspectives and findings from other disciplines, thus producing a more contextual and relevant understanding.

In the context of this study, the theory of integration is operationalized by synergizing Imam Al-Razi's classical interpretation of "physiognomic signals" in the Qur'an with the framework of contemporary nonverbal communication studies. For example, Al-Razi's interpretation of QS. Ali Imran: 106, which views changes in facial color as a visual expression of spiritual states, and his interpretation of QS. Luqman: 18, which understands turning one's face away as a symbol of arrogance, are used as the foundation for "textual objectivity." These interpretations are then creatively and imaginatively integrated with concepts in nonverbal communication, such as universal facial expressions (Ekman), kinesics (body language), and oculusics (eye language). This integration not only validates the psychological depth found in classical exegesis but also transforms it into a structured and communicable understanding within the discourse of modern communication studies, thereby demonstrating how religion and science can complement and affirm each other [40].

This study then demonstrates that, although they originate from different epistemological traditions, modern physiognomy—which examines the relationship between facial expressions and psychological states—can be productively integrated with Al-Razi's classical interpretation. Al-Razi's interpretation, rich in psychological and spiritual descriptions of bodily expressions, such as the profound sorrow that "whitened" the eyes of Prophet Ya'qub or the inner happiness that "illuminates" the face, finds its resonance in modern scientific findings regarding the close connection between emotions and physiological expressions. The convergence point lies in a shared recognition that the body is not a mute entity, but rather a nonverbal "text" actively communicating the deepest inner states. Thus, this integration does not crudely equate the two disciplines, but instead creates a creative dialectic in which the hermeneutic richness of classical interpretation provides depth of meaning,

while the modern scientific framework offers tools to map and analyze the divine “body language” contained in the Qur’an.

Mitigating Bias and Potential Discrimination in the Practice of Physiognomy

Confirmation bias is a cognitive tendency that affects the way a person processes information. Individuals experiencing this bias tend to seek, interpret, and remember information that aligns with their pre-existing beliefs or hypotheses. This phenomenon is not limited to verbal or written information but also extends to the interpretation of physical and nonverbal cues [41]. Stereotypes are a form of excessive generalization applied to certain groups, often based on easily identifiable characteristics such as gender, race, or age. The impact of these stereotypes can be extremely harmful, as they may reinforce existing prejudices and contribute to systemic social injustice. Stereotypes not only affect how people perceive others, but can also influence how individuals see themselves, potentially limiting their aspirations and opportunities in various aspects of life.

Physiognomy, as a practice that seeks to link physical features with a person's character or personality, has faced harsh criticism from the scientific community. This approach, which claims to be able to read a person's inner nature through external appearance, is considered to lack a strong scientific basis. Richard Twine identifies two fundamental weaknesses in physiognomy: representationalism and the rejection of temporality. Representationalism refers to the assumption that physical signs directly reflect a person's internal qualities, a concept considered overly simplistic and unfounded. Meanwhile, the rejection of temporality refers to physiognomy's failure to recognize the dynamic nature of human identity and meaning [4]. As a result, physiognomy is regarded as an overly deterministic approach that is unable to capture the nuance and variability in human nature and behavior.

Therefore, critical thinking skills play a crucial role in objectively evaluating information, thus preventing confirmation bias and stereotypes. However, studies show that the level of critical thinking skills in Indonesia is still categorized as low to moderate, which has the potential to increase the tendency towards biased judgments [42]. Experiential learning activities that focus on race and ethnicity play a crucial role in fostering a deeper understanding of complex social dynamics. This approach enables the identification and analysis of how racism and ethnic prejudice operate in everyday contexts. Through engagement in simulations or case studies that reflect social realities, individuals can understand that racism is not merely an issue of personal attitudes, but is also embedded within institutions and policies. This encourages the development of critical thinking that is essential for challenging the status quo and striving for

solutions that are more just and inclusive. Ultimately, experiential learning about race and ethnicity not only enhances knowledge but also motivates action for positive social change [43].

Islamic ethics in evaluating others are explained through the principles of religious moderation, which emphasize justice, responsibility, and honesty. The principle of *i'tidal* (objectivity and fairness) serves as the main foundation, requiring every judgment to be based on facts and truth, while avoiding subjectivity or prejudice. In addition, the approach of *tasamuh* (tolerance) teaches respect for differences, while *syura* (consultation) highlights mutual respect for opinions, polite speech, and a willingness to listen to others without negative tendencies. More broadly, the principle of *al-la'un* (non-violence) rejects every form of unjust or harmful judgment, encouraging mutual trust, cooperation, and empathy. The implementation of these values in daily life ensures that judgments of others are not only fair and honest, but also grounded in responsibility for maintaining social harmony [44].

Conclusion

This study concludes that from the perspective of the Qur'an, as interpreted by Fakhruddin al-Razi in his exegesis *Mafatihul Ghaib*, physiognomy is a symbolic and communicative system in which physical signs reflect the spiritual and psychological realities of humans. The findings show that the Qur'an clearly presents facial expressions, body movements, and physical characteristics as outward manifestations of inner states such as faith, disbelief, humility, or arrogance. These nonverbal signs serve as ethical and theological symbols that connect human emotions with divine meanings.

The implication of Al-Razi's interpretation is that understanding the Qur'an requires a multidisciplinary approach that combines theology, psychology, and philosophy. This indicates that interpreting the sacred text is not limited merely to linguistic or legal aspects, but also involves deeper metaphysical and spiritual dimensions. Al-Razi's hermeneutic approach opens new opportunities in Qur'anic studies by emphasizing the importance of body language as an expression of human moral and spiritual states, which can enrich our comprehension of the Qur'an's messages in a more comprehensive manner.

Although physiognomy has the potential for bias and stereotyping, al-Razi's interpretation offers a corrective perspective rooted in the ethics of moderation, objectivity, and justice. This study shows that integrating classical interpretation with modern nonverbal communication theory produces a productive dialogue between faith and science, revealing the human body as a dynamic "text" containing messages of divine communication.

This research focuses solely on textual analysis, leaving room for future studies to empirically investigate nonverbal communication among Qur'an interpreters. Future researchers are encouraged to examine how gestures, facial expressions, and body language enhance verbal explanations during Qur'an interpretation sessions. Furthermore, comparing nonverbal communication styles among Qur'an scholars from various regions could uncover intriguing patterns and differences in interpretive practices.

Author Contributions

Abdullah Ghafur Hakim: Conceptualization, Methodology, Writing – review & editing, Supervision, Project administration. **Abu Bakar:** Methodology & Investigation. **Nouval Fawzy Ameen:** Writing – review & editing

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Conflict of Interest

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