

## Desire and Pleasure in Islamic Thought: A Critical Study

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Received: 18 October 2024 /Revised: 28 February 2025/Accepted: 3 March 2025/

Publish: 3 June 2025

### ABSTRACT

*In Islamic thought, the concepts of desire, goodness, evil and pleasure are pivotal for understanding human moral and spiritual development. This study examined the philosophical aspects of happiness, focusing on the interplay between intellectual virtues and bodily pleasures. It posits that true happiness primarily arises from the exercise of reason while also recognising the significant role of physical enjoyment in this pursuit. The conditions conducive to happiness are categorised into three key domains: actions related to the body, emotional states, and cognitive discernment. Furthermore, the fear of death is identified as a significant barrier to happiness, often rooted in a lack of knowledge about the afterlife. This ignorance can lead to anxiety, ultimately diminishing overall well-being. The paper suggests that both religious and philosophical education are essential for providing insights into the nature of death, thus alleviating fear and fostering a deeper understanding of happiness. The study analysed primary Islamic texts and contemporary scholarly interpretations to explore how these teachings can develop intellectual capacities. This development enables individuals to address challenges to their well-being and prepare for a meaningful existence in both this life and the next. This study highlights the importance of a balanced approach to happiness that incorporates both intellectual and physical dimensions, thereby contributing to a comprehensive understanding of well-being.*

*Keywords: Pleasure; happiness; Islamic thought; education; well-being*

### INTRODUCTION

This paper will critically examine how Islamic philosophy addresses desire, goodness, evil, and pleasure, and how these elements contribute to the pursuit of true happiness. By connecting classical insights to contemporary mental health challenges, we aim to provide a holistic understanding that is both timeless and timely.

Mental health is a crucial aspect of human existence, influencing our ability to cope with life's challenges, engage in social interactions, and pursue meaningful goals. This chapter explores the concept of mental health, drawing from philosophical and psychological perspectives, particularly within the context of Islamic philosophy. It highlights the characteristics of a mentally healthy individual, such as emotional awareness, resilience, and social competence, while emphasizing the importance of understanding as a unique human endeavor. Through this exploration, we aim to establish a framework for understanding mental health that integrates both philosophical insights and practical applications.

The question “Why?” is somewhat beyond us. However, the question “How should we live?” is up to us. We already know and experience our ability to choose the good, the right, and the beautiful. We can overcome physical pains, such as a toothache, through the healing process. But how will we deal with the pains that disturb our soul, such as anguish, ambition, fear, jealousy, and insatiability? One common aspect of philosophy and religion is to take care of the human being in the face of the weariness caused by emotions and passions, through the calmness and competence of reason. Many definitions of philosophy can be made. Defining philosophy as “the care and competence of our soul” expresses the essence of this article. A person is as much a being of fear, hope, habits, and preferences as they are a being of possibilities. We are always candidates for good or bad news or events. Just as joy visits us, so do sorrows. While living may seem ordinary, it should not be forgotten that living is an art. How well do we know ourselves, and what tools do we have to understand ourselves? Desire is an intrinsic tendency within individuals, generally

reflecting the pursuit of an aspiration or goal. In Islamic thought, desire can be evaluated from two perspectives: positive (goodness) and negative (evil). Positive desires propel individuals toward virtuous and righteous actions, whereas negative desires can lead to harmful and wrongful paths. The effective management of desire is contingent upon a person's will and moral values. Goodness encompasses all that is beneficial and virtuous in Islam. It holds significance not only at an individual level but also within a societal context. Benevolent desires and actions align closely with the concept of goodness, and Islam encourages individuals to perform good deeds for the betterment of society, leading to spiritual fulfillment.

In exploring the concepts of desire and pleasure in Islamic thought, it is essential to acknowledge the foundational influence of Greek philosophy, particularly the ideas of Plato, Aristotle, the Stoics, and the Hedonists. Plato, in his dialogues such as the *Republic* and *Phaedrus*, presents desire (*epithymia*) as a lower faculty of the soul, often in conflict with reason (*logos*) and spirit (*thymos*), advocating for its regulation through wisdom and self-discipline (Plato 1997). Aristotle, on the other hand, provides a more nuanced view in his *Nicomachean Ethics*, where he distinguishes between rational and irrational desires, linking pleasure (*hedone*) to the fulfillment of natural functions and the pursuit of the highest good (*eudaimonia*) (Aristotle ). The Stoics, such as Epictetus and Seneca, took a more ascetic stance, viewing desire as a source of disturbance and advocating for its control through reason and virtue (Inwood 1985). In contrast, the Hedonists, particularly the followers of Epicurus, argued that pleasure is the highest good, though they emphasized intellectual and moderate pleasures over transient physical indulgences (Epicurus 1994). These perspectives significantly influenced Islamic philosophers such as al-Fārābī, Avicenna, and al-Ghazālī, who integrated Greek notions of desire and pleasure into their own ethical and metaphysical frameworks while adapting them to Islamic theological principles.

In Islamic thought, the concepts of desire, goodness, evil, and pleasure are intricately linked to the understanding of happiness. This chapter aims to critically examine how these elements are addressed in classical Islamic sources, exploring their roles in the pursuit of true happiness. By analyzing key texts and philosophies, we will uncover the moral and ethical frameworks that define happiness in Islam,

illustrating the balance between worldly desires. Desire, or *hawa*, is often viewed with caution in Islamic philosophy. While it can lead to positive outcomes when aligned with virtuous intentions, uncontrolled desires can result in moral decay and strife. Classical scholars like Al-Ghazali(d.111) and Ibn Sina(d.1037) emphasize the importance of moderating desires through reason and spiritual discipline. The concept of *tazkiyah* (purification of the soul) highlights the need to refine desires to align them with ethical principles, thereby fostering a sense of inner peace. Islamic teachings suggest that desires serve as tests of character and faith. Overcoming negative desires can lead to personal growth and a deeper connection with God. (Ghazali 1937; Ibn Sīnā 1960; Abdurrazıq 1966).

Goodness (*khayr*) and evil (*sharr*) are central to the Islamic understanding of morality and ethics. The pursuit of goodness is seen as essential for attaining happiness, while evil acts are believed to lead to spiritual and psychological suffering. Evil, on the other hand, refers to all that is detrimental and harmful. In Islamic thought, evil transcends mere physical harm; it also entails spiritual degradation. This concept serves as a reminder for individuals to avoid negative desires, wrongful intentions, and harmful actions. Islam proposes various moral and social guidelines aimed at preventing evil and promoting goodness (Goodman 2003).

Classical Islamic philosophers, such as Al-Farabi(d.950) and Ibn Rushd,(d.1198) provide frameworks for understanding good and evil through rational discourse and divine revelation. Happiness is associated with the pursuit of virtuous actions that benefit both the individual and society. Engaging in evil deeds not only distances individuals from happiness but also disrupts societal harmony. Islamic teachings stress accountability and the consequences of one's actions, reinforcing the idea that true happiness is achieved through ethical living. Pleasure (*ladhdha*) is often viewed as a transient experience, distinct from true happiness (*sa'adah*). In Islamic philosophy, while pleasure can enhance the quality of life, it is not the ultimate goal. Pleasure is commonly understood as joy or satisfaction, but in Islamic thought, it is examined within a moral framework. True pleasure is associated with spiritual and inner fulfillment. From this perspective, worldly pleasures may be transient and deceptive, while spiritual pleasures offer lasting and profound happiness. Consequently, it is essential for individuals to guide their When we experience

the world through our power of knowledge, anger, and desire, we truly exist only when reason governs over anger and desire. A state of anger and desire without the sovereignty of reason connects us with scarcity rather than existence. Living with uncontrolled anger and endless desires leads to a very different and exhausting life. desires and make morally sound choices in their pursuit of pleasure (Dar 1963).

Classical thinkers like Al-Ghazali argue that reliance on sensory pleasures can lead to dissatisfaction and emptiness. True happiness is rooted in spiritual fulfillment and connection to the divine. Islam encourages a balanced approach to pleasure, advocating for enjoyment within the boundaries of ethical conduct. This balance promotes a fulfilling life that integrates both spiritual and worldly experiences. Humans produce science through their knowledge, gaining understanding. When we balance the power of anger, we become brave and successful. When we effectively use our desires, we act with dignity, character, and moderation, leading to beautiful behaviors. At times, individuals attempt to use their anger and desires without the control of reason, yielding to the cravings of the ego. When the power of anger escapes the grip of reason, it can transform into a force that leads to mistakes and harms others. A happy and healthy life is about liberating ourselves from being slaves to our emotions and living according to the principles of reason, managing our feelings. Humans exist through reason. Only through reason can we achieve a realistic level of consciousness, surrounded by fear, hope, habits, and preferences (Garden 2014; Weinman 2007).

The pleasures we experience may make us happy for a time, but just as flavors are quickly tasted, they are also quickly left behind. In this world, we are busy consuming emotions we haven't lived. Just as cold turns to warm and warm to cold, we are travelers between the station of fear and hope in the realm of emotions. We cling to life with our hopes upon waking, only to be struck by fear from news or events that unfold during the day. Perhaps by evening, we reconnect with hope again. Our journey from the city of fear to the city of hope never ends. By our very nature, we are compelled to satisfy our five senses. However, after a certain point, this leads to insatiability and exhaustion. In this state, a person may define themselves as unhappy. Happiness is not merely the fulfillment of every desire. The presence of needs and deficiencies is the most natural state.

Thus, we do not feel depleted and insatiable. Of course, we will meet our needs, but in doing so, we must not consume ourselves. A person aware of their needs fulfills them, while one who is unaware consumes themselves. Can we truly feel secure by merely satisfying our biological needs? Certainly not. We approach death; it's impossible to keep our bodies perpetually healthy and young. Mortal foods lead us towards death. In contrast, our spiritual and psychological needs enrich and develop us, providing true security (Tûsî 1964).

An individual with sound mental health is:

1. At peace with their identity and recognizes their emotions.
2. Equipped with foresight to plan for the future.
3. Resilient in coping with spiritual challenges and problems.
4. Aware of their personal needs and the resources to meet them.
5. Skilled and diligent in socializing.

Competent in love, work, approval, forgiveness, and problem-solving.

Mental health is fundamentally described and articulated in current studies. These principles can also be seen as a classification of the ultimate goals of philosophy. We will encounter examples of this in the works of Islamic philosophers in the following pages. In a sense, the broad elaboration of these principles can be seen in the theories of virtue in Islamic philosophy. Mental health is maturity. This state of maturity involves accepting ourselves as we are and having the virtue to engage with others' needs, sharing both joys and sorrows. Mental health also characterizes emotional and social intelligence. The best expression of this is Aristotle's quote: "Anyone can become angry—that is easy. But to be angry with the right person, to the right degree, at the right time, for the right purpose, and in the right way—that is not easy." Mental health is a subjective state of well-being. According to this, what matters most is how we, as individuals, feel, rather than the direction and criteria of the masses. Our strength lies within our inner universe. Mental health is resilience. It involves gaining strength through defense mechanisms to cope with problems.

In fact, as long as the needs for security, love, respect, and self-actualization identified in Abraham Maslow's hierarchy of needs find their natural course, we can maintain a balanced and healthy life. Maslow's often-referenced hierarchy of needs is essentially a modern expression of the characteristics of our vegetative, animalistic, and human selves, as

elaborated in Islamic philosophy.(Maslow. 1943). From the perspective of Islamic Ethics Philosophy, humans have five fundamental efforts regarding their vegetative, animalistic, and human aspects. We can define these as: nourishing, reproducing, growing, sheltering, and understanding. While the efforts to nourish, reproduce, grow, and shelter are shared with other living beings, the effort to understand is unique to humans. A life without the effort to understand signifies a vegetative or animal level of existence. The path to understanding is through knowledge, and the path to action is through understanding. Without meaning, there is no life. Finding meaning is a reconciliation with life. The search for meaning is the quest for freedom. Humans are on a journey to discover meaning and value through their communication with others, each of whom holds a unique significance ( Al-Kindī 1952 Fakhr al-Dīn Razi 1968).

## RESEARCH BACKGROUND

Mental health is a crucial aspect of human existence, influencing our ability to cope with life's challenges, engage in social interactions, and pursue meaningful goals. This paper explores the concept of mental health, drawing from both philosophical and psychological perspectives, particularly within the context of Islamic philosophy. It highlights the characteristics of a mentally healthy individual, such as emotional awareness, resilience, and social competence, while emphasizing understanding as a unique human endeavor. Through this exploration, we aim to establish a framework for understanding mental health that integrates philosophical insights with practical applications.

In today's fast-paced, digitally connected world, individuals face unprecedented levels of stress, anxiety, and depression. Social media, while fostering connectivity, often exacerbates feelings of inadequacy and loneliness, leading to a deterioration in mental well-being. The rise of consumerism and instant gratification further complicates our pursuit of lasting happiness, making it crucial to revisit classical philosophies that emphasize balance and moderation.

In the context of Islamic philosophy, particularly as articulated by the Neo-Platonism of Al-Fārābī (d.950) and the Brethren of Purity (Ikhwān al-Safā'), happiness is understood as the soul's liberation from the body and its orientation towards the intellect. This philosophical framework emphasizes the soul's

connection with the intellect and its ultimate union with it. The highest being, Allah, is regarded as the source of all existence and virtues. The sustenance of the soul is derived from the intellect, which Allah has endowed with perfection and virtues. Consequently, the maturity and virtues of the soul are contingent upon its relationship with the intellect. Matter, dependent on the soul, plays a subordinate role, as the soul mediates between the intellect and matter in terms of perfection and virtues (Farabi 1962; Attas 1995; Moustafa 1966; Boer 1933). Unlike the intellect and the soul, matter remains indifferent to the beings of the celestial realm. It is the soul that imparts value and significance to matter, functioning as the source of knowledge. The virtues and the yearning for perfection, endowed by the Absolute Creator above the soul and intellect, form the fundamental purpose of happiness. This state of happiness is characterized by the soul's perfection in existence, wherein it transcends the need for material possessions, ascending to a sublime level purified from corporeal concerns.

Examining the nature of this attainment reveals that the path to happiness encompasses both intellectual knowledge (theoretical) and certain voluntary efforts related to the body (practical). Wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage arise from the interplay of these three faculties of the soul. A person who engages in critical thinking, reasoning, and establishing connections between cause and effect realizes virtue within the realm of intellect. Just as reason is essential for the cultivation of virtue, healthy thinking is crucial for the theoretical aspect of reason. Healthy thinking is vital for achieving the ultimate good, which is the virtuous goal of happiness. Happiness itself is defined as a state of perfection wherein the unity of knowledge and action is realized. The four fundamental virtues—wisdom, justice, temperance, and courage—are considered good not merely for their inherent nature, but because they serve as pathways to happiness (Mahdi 1969; Turgut 2022).

Aristotle and Plato, who have served as important sources for Islamic ethical philosophy, both view happiness as fundamentally rooted in knowledge and wisdom. According to Plato, true happiness can only be attained through genuine knowledge (wisdom). Once wisdom is achieved, the path to happiness becomes more accessible. Individuals who distance themselves from transient values such as wealth, honor, leadership, friendship, family, and fame—choosing instead to pursue wisdom—will



ultimately attain true happiness. These transient values, being ephemeral, cannot provide lasting fulfillment (Rorty 1974; Weinman 2007).

## METHODS

This study employs both inductive and deductive approaches to explore the concept of pleasure within the context of Islamic thought. The research methodology is designed to uncover deeper insights into the concepts of desire, goodness, evil, and pleasure through a combination of deconstructive analysis and systematic categorization of existing literature.

The texts selected for analysis are grounded in classical Islamic sources and include key works from Kalam (Islamic theology), Islamic philosophy, and contemporary interpretations of Islamic ethics. Classical texts were chosen based on their influence on the development of Islamic moral philosophy, focusing on the writings of prominent philosophers such as Ghazali, Ibn Sina, Al-Farabi, and Ibn Rushd. Additionally, selected psychological studies and contemporary research offer modern insights that complement the classical discourse, allowing for an interdisciplinary approach to understanding pleasure. The criteria for selection emphasize texts that directly address the moral and ethical dimensions of pleasure and its relationship to happiness, desires, and human flourishing.

A qualitative approach is particularly suitable for this study, as it allows for an in-depth exploration of the nuanced and complex relationships between ethical concepts. By engaging with both primary philosophical texts and contemporary literature, the qualitative methodology facilitates a detailed examination of the meanings and interpretations of key concepts like pleasure, goodness, and evil. This approach is inherently flexible, allowing for the synthesis of diverse philosophical and psychological perspectives while emphasizing contextual meaning and theoretical development over statistical generalization.

The deconstructive analysis employed in this study focuses on critically examining the underlying assumptions and structures present within the texts. This involves identifying contradictions, implicit biases, and hidden frameworks that shape the understanding of pleasure and its ethical implications. In conducting the deconstructive analysis, the study traces the evolution of these concepts across different Islamic intellectual traditions, uncovering

how meanings and definitions shift over time. Special attention is given to how these texts relate to contemporary moral and psychological frameworks, identifying both continuities and departures from classical thought.

The deconstruction is validated by comparing multiple interpretations of pleasure across different sources, noting variances in their conceptualization, and identifying their relevance to current ethical debates. Additionally, peer review and scholarly feedback from experts in both Islamic philosophy and contemporary psychology ensure the validity of the analysis, confirming that the interpretations drawn are well-supported and contextually relevant.

The study also examines how theoretical insights on pleasure and desire inform practical moral philosophy in Islamic thought. By reviewing Islamic ethical frameworks—such as the concept of *tazkiyah* (purification of the soul) and the role of reason in regulating desires—this research aims to show how theoretical teachings translate into moral behavior in both individual and societal contexts. This process of categorization and analysis provides a clear structure for understanding how Islamic philosophers reconcile the theoretical with the practical in their discussions of pleasure, goodness, and evil.

The literature review will be comprehensive, encompassing primary and secondary sources. Primary sources will include classical philosophical texts in translation, religious scriptures, and foundational works in Kalam. Secondary sources will include contemporary psychological studies and philosophical critiques that address the role of pleasure in modern ethical discourse. This combination of classical and contemporary literature allows for a holistic understanding of the concepts and their applications across time.

By employing this methodology, the study aims to provide a robust understanding of the role of pleasure in Islamic thought and its relationship to ethical living, contributing to both philosophical and psychological debates on well-being.

## RESULT AND DISCUSSION

In his work *Mīzān al-ʿAmal* Ghazālī (d.1111) examines the measure and balance of actions and behaviors, addressing the joy derived from achieving a state of freedom from base desires. He contrasts the knowledge gained about the transcendent realm with that of the sensory world. Al-Ghazālī defines

happiness as a psychological state that emerges from a metaphysical dimension. The source of this psychological state lies in the enlightenment of the soul, which, as a result of this illumination, transforms knowledge into action, guiding the individual toward moral perfection (Ghazali 1964; Abul Quasem 1975; Donaldson 1953)

The role of the active intellect is pivotal in our acquisition of knowledge about the transcendent realm. The active intellect is in a constant state of motion and action; it not only provides forms but also serves as a source of illumination for the human intellect. This illumination elevates the intellect to a level where it can conceive of beings independent of matter, thereby facilitating the realization of happiness (Cum'a 1927).

Opinions regarding happiness vary widely. As Aristotle noted, some individuals equate happiness with pleasure, wealth, or honor. Those who are ill may believe that health is synonymous with happiness; those who are poor may think wealth is the key to happiness; and the ignorant may consider wisdom to be the ultimate form of happiness. In this context, the deprivation of a particular desire is often perceived as the absence of happiness. In Islamic ethical philosophy, happiness is regarded as an absolute value. By "absolute value," it is meant that happiness is chosen solely for itself and not for any other purpose. This distinguishes happiness from means or intermediary goals, which are pursued for the sake of achieving something else. Happiness stands as the highest and most perfect of all goals and goods. So, what is the good that is identified with happiness? According to Aristotle, the good refers to "the ultimate purpose and end of everyone." This ultimate goal itself is a good, and the means employed to attain it are also considered good (Aristotle 1961, 1095 a (22-28), 1095 b (22-28), 329; Weinman. 2007).

Happiness represents perfection and completeness. The ultimate goal achieved is, from one perspective, the good itself. In the pursuit of happiness, understood as a form of perfection, the means employed are also considered good. Knowledge, serving as a guiding and educational element, functions as a means to attain happiness. Because it is desired as an ultimate goal in the context of perfection, knowledge possesses the quality of being an absolute value. Regarding virtues, they are not inherently good but are deemed good in their capacity to lead to happiness. If knowledge and action do not converge on the path

to happiness, one risks distancing themselves from the attainment of this goal. For example, consider the virtue of wisdom. Is the pursuit of wisdom's knowledge intended solely for its own sake, or is it valued because it contributes to the happiness of the individual who possesses it? The same can be said for the virtues of justice, temperance, and courage. In Islamic ethical philosophy, these virtues are good insofar as they guide individuals toward the ultimate goal of happiness. (Hacımuftüoğlu 2015).

From this perspective, the four fundamental virtues that shape the understanding of happiness in Islamic ethical philosophy serve both as "the goals and purposes of everyone," signifying the good, and as steps leading to happiness, which is regarded as the ultimate good of all goods. This underscores that knowledge permeates every aspect of Islamic thought, encompassing sources, values, benefits, beginnings, and ends, as well as the states before and after action. One of the key figures who shaped and systematized Islamic ethical philosophy, Ibn Miskawayh, views good as an objective value that all people collectively strive for, while also contemplating the moral goals and consequences that arise from good actions. (Abd al Rahim 2013).

Good serves as the ultimate goal towards which everything aspires; for humans, happiness is synonymous with a virtuous life. Virtues that are based on and derived from knowledge function as a means to achieve happiness, reflecting a harmony born from the unity of knowledge and action within the soul. In Islamic ethical philosophy, the concept of good encompasses the good itself, knowledge, happiness, the rational, the beautiful, the true, and the harmonious. Our ability to make judgments about good and its counterpart, evil—manifested in forms such as ignorance, error, discord, and disorder—is intrinsically linked to knowledge. Without knowledge, we are unable to accurately identify good or distinguish it from evil. Every entity possesses two aspects: the external and the internal. We often label something as bad due to our inability to fully comprehend the goodness that may be hidden within it (Aristotle 1961, 1095 a (22-28), 1095 b (22-28), 329).

In Islamic ethics, it is essential to recognize that happiness also signifies a state free from deviations caused by excess and deficiency, particularly the lack of knowledge. Happiness encompasses an intense experience of desire and enjoyment. As the highest point of good, happiness evokes a universal inclination toward it. Similarly, good

itself represents a state and quality in which all entities inherently find pleasure and fulfill their existence. However, in Islamic ethical philosophy, happiness is not solely a worldly condition; it also holds significance in the hereafter, paralleling its relevance in this visible, perceived, and lived world. From an ethical standpoint, the good aligns with our desires. Nonetheless, it is not accurate to assert that everything we desire is inherently good. What should be ethically desired is determined by examining the interrelationships of all our goals and the foreseeable consequences of our actions.

The Brethren of Purity articulate a foundational view of Islamic ethical philosophy by asserting that everything that exists in the universe is good. They perceive the creation of the universe as a manifestation of God's grace. According to this perspective, what appears to be evil is not created with the intention of causing harm; rather, their concept of evil is relative and incidental. They categorize good and evil into two dimensions: one related to actions and acquisitions, and the other concerning the rewards and punishments that arise from those actions. Their analysis of good and evil spans five areas: knowledge, ethics, character, speech, actions, and movements. The two primary sources that provide us with knowledge of good and evil are rational insight and divine laws (Ikhwān al-Safā', Rasail, III, 185-186).

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Ibn Sina, reflecting the Islamic philosophical tradition, connects the concepts of "good and evil" with happiness. Like the Brethren of Purity, he begins by establishing the metaphysical foundations of good. The foundations of happiness are closely tied to "the supreme good." The first reality that emerges from existence itself is absolute good, and everything is fundamentally good because of this absolute standard. In this view, good is intrinsic to existence, while evil is considered incidental. Ibn Sina seeks to substantiate the idea that the fundamental nature of all things is good. He approaches knowledge through the lens of goodness, building upon and developing the ideas inherited from Al-Fārābī and the broader Islamic philosophical discourse. Although evil exists in the material world and the sublunary realm, it was not intended at the inception of existence. For example, in the order of existence, water serves as a cooling agent, while fire acts as a heating agent. While the statements "water cools" and "fire heats" denote positive conditions, how can we describe the experiences of someone drowning in water or someone burning in fire? Starting from the premise that goodness is the essence of everything, Ibn Sina asserts that drowning or burning are not intended evils; rather, they are "Musadafat," or incidental evils that arise accidentally (Ibn Sina 1968; 1960; 1899; 2007; İdris 2012; İnati 1995; Lala 2023).

As a representative of mystical thought, Rumi speaks of absolute and relative values. According to him, there is no absolute evil, and God does not create evil. These views are prominently expressed in his work "Masnavi." Rumi asserts, "It follows that there is no absolute evil in the world; know that bad and evil are relative. There is no poison or sugar that does not serve as a hindrance to one and a benefit to another. The snake's venom is life to the snake and death to humans. For aquatic creatures, the sea

is like a garden; for land creatures, it is death and devastation.” This emphasizes that goodness and evil arise from the perspective directed toward them. Furthermore, Rumi notes that evil is not a permanent attribute. He illustrates this with the example of water: its sourness transforms into sweetness when it becomes grapes, then into alcohol in a jug, making it forbidden, and finally into vinegar, which is useful. As beings existing within time, humans hold varying opinions about good and evil. Grounding his views in the Qur’an, Rumi cites the verse, “If We abrogate a verse or cause it to be forgotten, We bring forth a better one or similar to it,” asserting that certain value judgments have been replaced by better ones by God to help societies improve.

“This century is a brand new century; the Moon is still the Moon, but the water is not the same water. Justice is that justice; superior knowledge is that superior knowledge,” he states, indicating that justice and superior knowledge possess an unchanging quality valid across all times and conditions. He expresses that changing values pertain to the material realm, while unchanging values belong to the realm of the soul.

“Those that change are traits of the body; the place of change is the body; the immortal, on the other hand, is the clear Sun. It does not change at all; it is not in the East, so it does not take another form; nor is it in the West” (Rûmî 2008, v IV, c 65-73; v IV, b. 3788-3789).

Just as Ibn Sina composed a separate treatise on ethics, he also contemplated happiness, producing a work titled “Risāle fi’s-Saade.” In this treatise, he aligns himself with the philosophers who preceded him in focusing on this subject, asserting that happiness is desired for its own sake and represents a state of eternal peace and joy in proximity to the Creator. Ibn Sina emphasizes the essential conjunction of knowledge and action in the pursuit of happiness, noting that the soul’s powers of “knowing” and “doing” are pivotal in cultivating virtues. He advocates for a philosophical education that fosters the harmony of knowledge and action, ensuring the mind remains free from extremes and deficiencies. Furthermore, he highlights that humans desire both happiness and the pathways leading to it, clarifying that the mere satisfaction of lust and the pursuit of material power do not contribute to true happiness (İbn Sinâ 1933; Inati :12-23)

One of Ibn Sina’s foundational works is titled “Al-Shifa” (The Healing). This comprehensive text delves into metaphysics, natural philosophy,

theology, and psychology, aiming to enlighten humanity through both theoretical and practical knowledge, ultimately leading individuals to human and intellectual pleasures. Ibn Sina defines pleasure as the absence of pain and sorrow; from one perspective, it represents the experience of perfection. Pleasures are influenced by the contemplative soul, which directs them toward positive channels. The thinking soul, through moral virtue, guides observable pleasures and emotions toward goodness and perfection via rational knowledge.

In Islamic moral philosophy, good and happiness are understood quite differently from lust and pleasure. Islamic moral philosophers have categorized pleasure in various ways. Under the guidance of the Ikhwan al-Safa, contemplation, reflection, and the pursuit of knowledge are viewed as forms of pleasure. Knowledge itself becomes a source of joy, ultimately contributing to happiness. In this framework, spiritual and angelic pleasures elevate happiness to a metaphysical dimension, suggesting the fulfillment the soul experiences after the physical body. (Fakhry 1991; Saruhan 2024).

Ghazali, aiming to revive religious knowledge and sciences, authored “Ihya Ulumi’d-Din” (The Revival of Religious Sciences), where he provides both theoretical and practical insights into moral issues. In doing so, he seeks to revive ethics as well. He posits that when a person fulfills a moral command, it should be grounded in the nature of the command itself: the command ought to be directed toward a goal. An act devoid of purpose would be absurd for its doer; thus, this goal should ideally align with religious and moral principles. From this viewpoint, the pleasure derived from anything can be understood as reaching a perfection that harmonizes with its inherent nature. Ghazali asserts that the essence of intellectual pleasure is knowledge, fundamentally referred to as “Marifatullah” (Knowledge of God). Knowledge enables us to comprehend the nature of things and values, illuminating our understanding and revealing the knowledge of good and evil, as well as the source of happiness. Furthermore, knowledge is significant because it leads us to an awareness of knowledge itself. As we purify and mature ourselves, we can attain the highest form of knowledge, which is divine knowledge. From Ghazali’s perspective, due to the limitations of our understanding, he argues that “Marifatullah” will only be incompletely grasped in this world. This incomplete knowledge



cannot yield complete pleasure, indicating that true and complete pleasure will be comprehended in the hereafter (Ghazālī 1937; 1998; 1964; Garden 2014).

Another important aspect of Islamic moral philosophy is that happiness encompasses both the visible world and the unseen, otherworldly realm. It is often noted that the most enduring happiness will be experienced in the hereafter, where there is no coming into being or annihilation. The Ikhwan al-Safa presents a division of happiness: earthly happiness, characterized by the advancement of all creatures toward optimal conditions and perfect goals, and otherworldly happiness, which reflects each soul's elevation toward its most complete goals in the best possible state and opportunities.

A striking point made by the Ikhwan al-Safa is the equation of good morals with happiness, while bad morals are associated with misfortune and unhappiness. In contrast, Al-Ghazali examines otherworldly happiness through the lenses of knowledge, action, and purpose. He establishes that people pursue wealth, health, status, bodily and spiritual pleasures, knowledge, power, and virtue, expecting some benefit from all these pursuits. However, regardless of whether actions are motivated by the concept of benefit, the ultimate aim of all our actions is the highest benefit: the happiness of the hereafter.

For virtues to be deemed beneficial, they must serve as means to this ultimate goal. Ghazali identifies benefit, pleasure, and beauty as the three essential conditions of happiness, drawing inspiration from Aristotle. Indeed, Aristotle, who laid the foundations of philosophy and its ethical branch, associates happiness with that which is the best, the most beautiful, and the most pleasant.

In Islamic moral philosophy, the pleasure derived from knowledge and wisdom is considered superior to all other forms of pleasure. As Al-Ghazali states, this is an intellectual pleasure grounded in knowledge and virtue. Other pleasures and delights do not express an intrinsic reality; they are not independent states experienced in isolation but are rather negative pleasures that arise from the alleviation or removal of pain.

Pleasure, therefore, is understood more as a result of the absence of pain than as a positive state in itself. It is not merely an inherent quality arising from its own nature. Al-Ghazali defines pleasure as a negative experience that emerges from the alleviation of suffering, emphasizing that this view is based on his belief that moral values and actions do not possess immutable qualities.

To elaborate on this perspective, he introduces the concept of *Kizb* (falsehood), defined as a vice stemming from ignorance, which may involve neglecting knowledge or failing to regard it as binding. According to Ghazali, if lying were inherently bad, its negative quality would not change based on circumstances. The fact that lying can occur under certain necessities suggests that it is not intrinsically evil; in some contexts, lying may even be viewed as a morally acceptable behavior for the sake of worldly happiness.

In Islamic moral philosophy, it is acknowledged that lying is not inherently bad, especially when it serves individual or societal interests, such as family happiness, personal health, or the defense and protection of the homeland.

Ghazali questions the absoluteness of our understanding of moral values, suggesting that some individuals possess a self-centered view of knowledge, believing they alone have access to the true understanding of good and evil. This belief can lead to a state of delusion. He also points out that many people are influenced by suggestions or preconceived notions, which he considers significant in shaping our moral values. In his work "El Munqiz," he emphasizes the struggle to break free from these influences and to establish a personal moral framework (Saruhan 2024:19).

Ghazali notes that moral knowledge often arises from common understandings or widely accepted beliefs. Unlike many Western philosophers, he approaches moral values and actions through the lens of purpose and intent, rejecting worldly goals as a foundation for morality. He argues that the diversity of individuals' worldly aims undermines the stability of moral principles based solely on such goals.

*Ibn Miskawayh*, further categorizes pleasures into two stages: *fi'li* (active) and *infiali* (passive). Passive pleasures stem from bodily desires and tendencies towards revenge, which are shared with lower forms of life and do not lead to sustained happiness, as they lack the integration of virtue and rational faculties. In contrast, active pleasures arise from reflection, contemplation, and introspection, directly relating to the human self, making them stable and intellectual in nature. Ibn Miskeveyh equates the active, *fi'li*, and rational aspects with true happiness, while placing passive, *infiali*, and sensory pleasures outside the realm of genuine fulfillment (*Ibn Miskawayh* 1329: Saruhan 2022:25-65; Adamson 2015: 199–223).

Additionally, the fear of death is addressed as a significant barrier to happiness, often viewed as a manifestation of “knowledge deficiency.” Scholars like Abu Bakr al-Razi, Ibn Miskeveyh, and Ibn Sina explore how anxiety about death impedes human happiness and mental well-being. Ibn Sina specifically links the fear of death to ignorance, explaining that individuals fear death due to a lack of understanding about the afterlife. This uncertainty regarding how the soul will be treated after death intensifies their anxiety. Such fear, arising from ignorance, contributes to unhappiness. In contrast, religious knowledge provides insights into death and the afterlife, helping to alleviate this fear. Humans possess innate intellectual abilities, akin to seeds that can be cultivated through education. Religious knowledge aims to illuminate the unknown aspects of death, offering comforting insights. By fostering a clearer understanding of death through education, individuals can remove barriers to their happiness, progressing toward fulfillment in this life while also preparing for eternal happiness in the hereafter.

## CONCLUSION

This study contributes to the ongoing discourse on happiness by providing a nuanced understanding of its multifaceted nature, particularly highlighting the dynamic relationship between intellectual virtues and bodily pleasures. The research reveals that while rational thought serves as the foundation for achieving true happiness, physical enjoyment also plays an integral role. The classification of happiness-inducing conditions—spanning bodily actions, emotional states, and cognitive discernment—establishes a comprehensive framework that enhances our understanding of this complex phenomenon.

Additionally, the study addresses the fear of death, which is identified as a significant barrier to happiness, primarily stemming from ignorance about the afterlife. The findings suggest that by addressing this fear through philosophical and religious education, individuals can cultivate a deeper understanding of their existence, paving the way for greater spiritual fulfillment and lasting happiness.

Furthermore, the research underscores the importance of intellectual growth and the dispelling of existential fears as essential steps toward achieving a balanced and meaningful life. The integration of

philosophical insights with psychological principles highlights the crucial role of self-awareness, resilience, and social competence in mental well-being. This holistic approach to happiness, rooted in spiritual fulfillment, ethical living, and alignment with higher moral principles, provides a roadmap for individuals to navigate life’s challenges and attain personal growth.

The exploration of Islamic philosophy on happiness, with a focus on classical thinkers such as Farabi, Ghazali and Ibn Sina, presents a balanced view of how desires, reason, and morality intersect in the pursuit of true happiness. The study emphasizes that happiness is not merely the absence of suffering or the fulfillment of fleeting pleasures, but a holistic state that encompasses spiritual and ethical dimensions.

As a contribution to the existing literature, this research offers valuable insights into the connection between emotional well-being, ethical conduct, and the pursuit of happiness through the lens of Islamic thought. The integration of philosophical teachings with psychological principles offers a fresh perspective on mental health, emphasizing virtues such as resilience and moral excellence. For future research, it is recommended to further investigate how contemporary psychological theories intersect with traditional philosophical frameworks, particularly in relation to Islamic views on happiness. Additionally, exploring how cultural and religious contexts shape individual experiences of happiness could provide valuable insights into the diverse ways people approach well-being across different societies. Such studies could enrich the broader understanding of happiness and its practical implications in modern life.

In conclusion, this research not only advances our knowledge of happiness but also highlights the vital role of education—both philosophical and religious—as a tool for fostering emotional intelligence, ethical conduct, and personal fulfillment. By cultivating these qualities, individuals can enhance their mental and spiritual well-being, contributing to a more harmonious and meaningful existence in both their personal lives and broader communities.

## ACKNOWLEDGMENT

This work was not supported by any research fund.

## AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

Prof. Dr. Müfit Selim Saruhan is the sole contributor for this article.

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