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A Critical Examination of Western Happiness-Oriented Theories Within the Framework of Islamic Ethics

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ABSTRACT

SUBJECT & OBJECTIVES: This paper critically examines Western, happiness-oriented theories through the framework of Islamic ethics. It aims to compare the conceptualization and pursuit of happiness in the works of Greek philosophers (Plato, Aristotle) and contemporary Western thinkers (Marcuse, Rand) with the perspectives of Muslim philosophers (Fārābī, Ibn Miskawayh, Ṭūsī).

METHOD & FINDING: Using an analytical-descriptive approach, the study conducts a comparative analysis of the concept of happiness in selected philosophical traditions. The findings reveal that each thinker offers distinct interpretations of human nature, collective life, and the relationship with transcendence. Additionally, the influence of the socio-economic and cultural context of the contemporary West on happiness is highlighted. In contrast, Muslim philosophers present a more holistic view, linking happiness to spirituality and moral transcendence.

CONCLUSION: The study concludes by emphasizing the need to revisit and revive certain concepts proposed by Muslim philosophers in the modern world. Reintegrating these Islamic perspectives could address the shortcomings of Western theories in defining and achieving human happiness.

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30	1	(Iran)

Introduction

In recent years, the study of happiness has seen a significant revival across the social sciences. This renewed interest extends beyond philosophy, encompassing fields such as psychology and political science, and reflects a broader engagement with concepts of well-being and the good life. Contemporary Western academia is now re-examining these themes through both traditional philosophical lenses and perspectives from outside the Euro-American intellectual tradition. As noted by Beyta and Calvo (2011), there has been an accelerated growth in annual publications and media discourse on happiness in Spanish, English, and French.

Efforts to measure happiness have increasingly adopted hybrid methods, combining objective indicators (e.g., economic metrics, access to services) with subjective assessments (e.g., psychological well-being, satisfaction with leisure time). This empirical shift has gained institutional support from bodies like the OECD and the UN, which advocate for incorporating happiness metrics into formal policy frameworks. (OECD, 2013; United Nations, 2013)

Beyond methodological debates, this resurgence is significant because it emerges amid a crisis in dominant Western philosophical and political paradigms. The re-examination of happiness—a timeless subject in philosophy—demands a critical reassessment of Western concepts and an engagement with non-Western perspectives. This approach allows for a more pluralistic discourse that transcends Eurocentric limitations.

Within this intellectual landscape, Islamic thought is a crucial point of dialogue, challenging Western assumptions through a history of mutual influence. A conversation with Islamic conceptions of happiness can enrich the contemporary search for meaning and help avoid intellectual narrow-mindedness. By comparing classical and modern Western theories (e.g., Platonic-Aristotelian traditions, Herbert Marcuse, Ayn Rand) with foundational Islamic ethical frameworks (e.g., Fārābī, Ibn Miskawayh, Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī), we can highlight the aspirations and limitations of each tradition.

This study aims to critically compare Western and Islamic philosophical conceptions of happiness to demonstrate the continued relevance of Islamic ethical thought in addressing the existential challenges of the modern global order.

Conceptual Framework

The conceptual framework of this study is anchored in two primary philosophical traditions—Western and Islamic—each offering distinct yet intersecting perspectives on the nature of *Saʿāda* (happiness, eudaimonia). The analysis is structured around three foundational pillars:

1. Classical Western Eudaimonism

The Western tradition, rooted in Greek philosophy, posits happiness as the highest human good (*summum bonum*), achievable through the cultivation of virtue and rational activity. Plato's tripartite soul theory links individual happiness to justice and harmony within the soul and polity (see *Republic*). Similarly, Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* formalizes happiness, or *eudaimonia*, as an "activity of the soul in accordance with virtue" (Aristotle,2009) For Aristotle, this entails both intellectual contemplation (*theōria*) and civic engagement, with politics serving as the mechanism for collective flourishing. These ideas were later critiqued and adapted by modern thinkers like Herbert Marcuse, who fused Marxist and Freudian frameworks to argue that happiness under capitalism is constrained by systemic alienation and repressed instincts (*Eros and Civilization*), and Ayn Rand, who equated happiness with rational self-interest and laissez-faire capitalism (*Virtue of Selfishness*) (McMahon, 2006).

2. Islamic Ethical Philosophy

Islamic philosophers synthesized Greek thought with Quranic and metaphysical principles, framing *Saʿāda* (happiness) as the soul's ascent toward divine proximity through intellectual and moral perfection. Fārābī's *The Path to Happiness* integrates Aristotelian ethics with Neoplatonic emanationism, positioning the 'Agent Intellect' as the bridge between human reason and transcendent truth (Fārābī, 2002). Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* emphasizes the refinement of *Akhlāq* (character) through balancing theoretical wisdom and practical virtues (Ibn Miskawayh, 1968), while Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī's *The Naṣīrean Ethics* expands happiness to encompass civic life, delineating a tripartite felicity—psychical, bodily, and civic—grounded in societal harmony (Ṭūsī, 1964). Central to this tradition is the interdependence of individual and collective flourishing, mediated by *sharīʿa* (divine law) and communal ethics.

3. Critique of Modernity and Comparative Synthesis

The rupture between classical and modern Western conceptions of happiness—marked by the rise of instrumental reason, consumerism, and the disenchantment of secular modernity (Agamben, 2012; Cabanas & Illouz, 2019a)—serves as a critical counterpoint to the enduring transcendentalism of Islamic ethics. Where modernity often reduces happiness to subjective well-being or material consumption, Islamic philosophy retains a teleological orientation toward the Absolute, resisting the fragmentation of the self and society. This study leverages comparative analysis to highlight:

- The epistemic divergence between secularized Western modernity and Islam's sacralized worldview.

- The resonance of classical Greek virtues (e.g., justice, wisdom) in Islamic thought, contrasted with their erosion in contemporary Western discourse.
- The potential for Islamic ethics to address modern alienation by recentering happiness in divine proximity, communal bonds, and holistic human development.

By interrogating these theoretical lineages, the study establishes a dialectical framework to evaluate happiness as both an individual and collective pursuit, while challenging the hegemony of Eurocentric paradigms in contemporary ethical discourse.

Literature Review

The concept of happiness has been a central theme in both Western and Islamic philosophical traditions. This review synthesizes key contributions from classical and contemporary sources, highlighting the intersections and divergences between these two intellectual traditions.

1. Western Philosophical Perspectives

The Western exploration of happiness began with Greek philosophers, particularly Plato and Aristotle. Plato's *Republic* frames happiness (*eudaimonia*) as a condition of inner harmony, achieved through the cultivation of justice and the alignment of the soul's tripartite structure (reason, spirit, appetite) (Boeri & Tursi, 1992). Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* further systematizes this notion, defining happiness as "an activity of the soul in accordance with virtue (*aretē*)," emphasizing both intellectual contemplation (*theōria*) and civic participation (Aristotle, 2009).

Modern reinterpretations of these ideas reflect the shifting socio-economic landscapes of the 20th century. Herbert Marcuse's *Eros and Civilization* (2005) critiques capitalist modernity for distorting happiness into a commodity, arguing that true fulfillment requires "liberation from repressive societal structures." Conversely, Ayn Rand's objectivist philosophy posits happiness as the outcome of rational self-interest and unfettered individualism (*The Virtue of Selfishness*), rejecting collective moral frameworks. Recent scholarship, such as Cabanas and Illouz's *Happycracy* (2019b), critiques the neoliberal co-optation of happiness, reducing it to "measurable well-being metrics devoid of ethical depth."

2. Islamic Ethical Traditions

Islamic philosophy engages with *Saʿāda* (happiness) as both an epistemological and ontological pursuit, integrating Greek thought with Quranic and metaphysical principles. Fārābī's *The Path to Happiness* (2002) synthesizes Aristotelian ethics with Neoplatonic cosmology, positioning the "Agent Intellect" as the conduit for human perfection and divine proximity (Guerrero, 2002). His vision of happiness is inherently communal, necessitating an *al-Madīna al-Fāḍila*

(utopia) to cultivate collective virtue. Ibn Miskawayh's *Tahdhīb al-Akhlāq* (1968) expands on this framework, emphasizing *Tahdhīb* (character refinement) through the balance of theoretical and practical virtues. His concept of *Insān al-Kāmil* (perfect man) underscores the interdependence of individual and societal flourishing (Zurayk, 1968). Naṣīr al-Din al-Ṭūsī's *The Naṣīrean Ethics* (1964) further systematizes this by delineating three dimensions of felicity—psychical, bodily, and civic—arguing that holistic happiness requires alignment with divine wisdom and social justice (Lameer, 2015).

Contemporary scholars like Sara Ahmed in the book *The Promise of Happiness* (2019) and Giorgio Agamben (2012) critique the secularization of happiness in Western thought, echoing Islamic philosophy's insistence on "transcendence and communal ethics as antidotes to modern alienation."

3. Comparative and Critical Scholarship
Comparative studies between Western and Islamic ethics remain limited but growing. Recent works, such as Lameer's (2015) analysis of Ṭūsī, highlight the creative adaptation of Greek ideas within Islamic metaphysics, while Margot (2007) and Fierro (2011a) trace the evolution of *eudaimonia* from antiquity to modernity. Critically, this literature reveals:

- **Divergences:** The secular-materialist turn in Western modernity contrasts with Islam's sustained integration of spirituality and ethics.
- **Resonances:** Both traditions prioritize virtue, reason, and communal well-being, though their metaphysical foundations differ.
- **Gaps:** Few studies examine how Islamic ethical models might address contemporary Western crises of meaning (e.g., consumerism, isolation).

This review underscores the need for deeper interdisciplinary dialogue, positioning Islamic philosophy not as a historical relic but as a vital resource for rethinking happiness in an increasingly fragmented world.

Research Method
This study uses a qualitative, analytical-descriptive approach to compare theories of happiness in Western and Islamic philosophy. The methodology is designed to provide a deep, critical analysis of key philosophical texts within a comparative framework.

Research Design
This study uses a comparative framework to analyze selected Western (Plato, Aristotle, Marcuse, Rand) and Islamic (Fārābī, Ibn Miskawayh, al-Ṭūsī) philosophical texts. The design integrates three main elements: a historical-contextual analysis, to understand the evolution of ideas; a thematic synthesis, to identify core themes such as virtue and transcendence; and a critical discourse analysis, to evaluate how socio-cultural contexts shape philosophical viewpoints.

Data Collection

The research uses both primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include the original works of the philosophers, such as Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and Fārābī's *The Path to Happiness*. Secondary sources consist of scholarly commentaries, peer-reviewed articles, and books on comparative ethics and philosophy, such as Lameer's analysis of al-Ṭūsī and Cabanas & Illouz's critiques.

Data Analysis

The analysis follows a three-stage process. First, a textual examination involves close reading of primary texts to extract definitions and arguments related to happiness. Second, a comparative juxtaposition systematically compares Western and Islamic theories across four dimensions: metaphysical foundations (secular vs. transcendent), ethical frameworks (virtue-based vs. materialist), socio-political implications (individualism vs. communal harmony), and critiques of modernity (alienation, consumerism). Finally, a synthesis identifies both convergences and divergences between the traditions, such as the shared emphasis on virtue in Aristotle and Fārābī versus the stark contrast between Rand's individualism and Ibn Miskawayh's communal ethics.

Theoretical Lens

The study applies several key theoretical lenses. Inter-civilizational dialogue theory (Fierro, 2011) is used to bridge Western and Islamic epistemologies. Critical theory, drawing on the works of Marcuse and Habermas, helps assess modernity's impact on happiness discourses, and Islamic hermeneutics (Margot, 2007) is used to properly contextualize the spiritual and ethical dimensions.

Limitations and Rigor

The study acknowledges several limitations: its scope is focused on only six philosophers, which limits generalizability; it has a potential language bias due to reliance on translations of Arabic and Persian texts; and it faces challenges from temporal gaps when comparing classical and modern theories.

To ensure validity and rigor, the study uses triangulation by cross-referencing multiple interpretations, peer validation through engagement with existing scholarship, and reflexivity by acknowledging the researcher's positionality as a scholar in Islamic ethics. This methodology provides a strong foundation for a nuanced critique of Western paradigms while highlighting the value of Islamic ethics for contemporary happiness studies.

1. Happiness in the Western Perspective

To analyze Western proposals on happiness, we must first look to the Greek philosophers, not because their ideas are the only ones to have shaped Western philosophy but because all

subsequent reflection returns to them, either to agree or to disagree.

The Spanish academic Adela Cortina (2001) argues that "practical knowledge"—referencing the Aristotelian distinction—should focus on three fundamental human problems: justice, the legitimacy of political power, and happiness. The areas of knowledge responsible for this inquiry are legal philosophy, political philosophy, and ethics, respectively. This means that the final goal of ethical reflection, according to this author, is none other than obtaining happiness (Cortina, 2001, p. 21). Although the study of morals can encompass several aspects (Cortina & Martínez, 2001, p. 39), including those pertaining to life in society, this paper will define its scope from the outset as the search for the realization of the good life, or the happy life. This holds true whether happiness is understood as pleasure or as self-realization (Cortina & Martínez, 2001, p. 31).

Within philosophical reflection in Western thought, we find different currents that, from the perspective of ethics, have made the search for human happiness the axis of their thoughts; we will call them "Ethics of Happiness." Both Plato's and Aristotle's proposals can be included in this kind of ethics.

The Greek noun *eudaimonia*, which is usually translated as "happiness," is formed by the prefix *eu* (good) and a suffix related to the noun *daímon*, which refers to an unidentified divine power that grants each one its part. The word *eudaimonia* is then originally linked to the idea that God has assigned us a good portion or destiny and hence derives the sense of happiness (Fierro, 2011, p.34). However, in the Hellenic tradition, happiness, which is both the supreme goal and the meaning of human existence, is not a gratuitous gift; it is the fruit of a whole moral life, which becomes independent of the time when it is reached (Margot, 2007, p. 60).

In this sense, Fierro (2011b) points out that for Plato (Athens, c. 427-347 BCE), happiness is not related to external goods granted by the gods, but rather to obtaining, through personal effort, the state of wisdom with which happiness is identified. She notes, "In this way, the fact that one 'does well' will in turn depend on one's doing well—that is, wisely and justly" (p. 34). The threefold composition of the soul in Plato is intimately related to the way of accessing happiness. The Greek philosopher established a system of virtues intended to govern human conduct at both the individual and the political level.

With respect to the soul, he maintains that there are three cardinal virtues in it: love for knowledge (*to philomathes*), spiritedness (*to thumoeides*), and love for gain (*to philochrematon*) (Fierro, 2011b)

The love for knowledge corresponds to the so-called "rational part" of the soul, which fulfills two main functions:

to investigate the truth, thereby increasing knowledge, and to govern and direct the soul as a whole. Ardor corresponds to the "irascible part" or "fiery part" of the soul, referring to the natural tendency toward aggression and violence. The love for profit corresponds to the "appetitive" part of the soul and refers to the chaotic desires focused on bodily appetites, such as those for food, drink, or sex. (Plato, 1992) Justice, as Boeri and Tursi point out, does not appear as a virtue that manifests itself in a particular part of the soul but is the condition of possibility of all virtues. In this respect, they said, "Justice is that which gives the other virtues the capacity to be born, so that once born, it preserves them as long as it resides in them" (Boeri-Tursi, 1992, p. 88). Justice orders the parts of the soul, making them a harmonious whole that leads man to his full development through the search for Truth.

On the other hand, Plato proposes to think of the ideal State with the same criteria as those who think of the human soul. The virtues in the State are also related to a specific part of the State that fulfills a specific non-transferable function (Plato, 1992).

Wisdom is the virtue associated with the guardians-philosophers, the class prepared and with the necessary conditions to guide the whole community. Courage is the virtue related to the guardians - auxiliaries, the

warrior class dedicated to the care and defense of the community, guaranteeing the preservation of it. Moderation or temperance is the virtue associated with the productive class (merchants, artisans, farmers, etc.). This virtue "(...) consists of an agreement or harmony between what is by its nature inferior and what by its nature is superior" (Boeri-Tursi, 1992; 87).

Also, in the case of the State, it is justice that must prevail so that each class acts according to its function, developing the virtues that correspond to it, for the benefit of the whole community.

But it was Aristotle (Stagira, c. 384 - 322 BCE) who, among the Greek philosophers of antiquity, has joined his name with the most systematic reflections related to happiness, its characteristics, types, and conditions (Kenny, 1992). The Aristotelian Ethics is intimately related to the idea of "happiness". Precisely, his *Nicomachean Ethics*, considered one of the most important works of moral philosophy of all time, begins by analyzing what happiness is, as the final goal of all human activities. From the Aristotelian perspective, the most perfect human happiness lies in the exercise of theoretical intelligence— that is, in the contemplation and understanding of knowledge. Aristotle approaches a definition of happiness by introducing a central element: virtue. Of all the goods to which a

human can aspire, only happiness (as distinct from pleasures or honors) can be considered the supreme good. So, for Aristotle, happiness, as a supreme good, is an activity of the soul according to perfect virtue. Aristotle explains that when speaking of virtue, it refers to the very human being. He said, "We call human virtue not to the virtue of the body, but to that of the soul; and we say that happiness is an activity of the soul" (Kenny, 1992).

Virtue relative to reason is shown in the Aristotelian text as the means to achieve eudaimonia, insofar as this is the best of the goods that man can achieve, because if reason is that which is proper and exclusive of being human, the best regarding reason will be the proper of that to what we call *eudaimonia*. In this sense, virtue is defined as the best, or the excellent, since, as previously stated, "adding excellence to the work is virtue (Kenny, 1992).

Although Plato established a correspondence between the parts of the soul with those of the harmonic State, supposing that it contributed to creating the conditions so that those with philosophical inclinations could acquire full happiness, Aristotle gives even greater importance to the state organization when it comes to seeking happiness for most of those who comprise it. Politics appears in Aristotelian thought as superior to ethics, since while the former aspires to obtain the good for a person, politics aspires to obtain the supreme good collectively (Aristotle, 1998).

The antagonism between Plato and Aristotle is proverbial in the history of Western philosophy, although it is not convenient to exaggerate at this point, since we find many similarities between them. Both start from the Socratic principle, that the object of science is not the individual that changes but the universal; both admit that the essence of being resides in their idea and form, not in their matter; and both argue that perfection is the reason for being (Russell, 1945).

The contemporary Western authors we have selected, for their part, though they are located at the ideological antipodes, synthesize conflicting contemporary visions that, in any case, claim to feed on the thoughts of ancient Greece.

Both Marcuse and Rand elaborate their proposals, taking into account and paying special attention to the economic-social framework prevailing in the West and positioning themselves with respect to it. Both develop their ideas by analyzing the relationship between the possibility of access to happiness and the capitalist system as an economic and social framework that establishes limits and possibilities.

Although Herbert Marcuse (Berlin, 1898-1979) dialogues and discusses with the ideas of ancient Greece, his proposal incorporates concepts from both Marx and Freud, in an attempt to understand how the postwar capitalist

system operates in the human search for happiness. Three concepts are crucial to advance Marcuse's study: alienation, drive, and Eros. The first of them refers to Marxist thought, while the last two are extracted from Freudian psychoanalysis.

These three elements converge in the definition that Marcuse proposes for a *New Man*, that truly capable of accessing happiness. In this regard, he said, "The new man supposes such a transformation of the instinctual structure that the destructive energy gradually becomes subject to the erotic energy, until the quantity is transformed into quality and the human relations between [the men and with nature] are pacified and open to happiness" (Marcuse, 1955).

Marcuse said, "Happiness is not in the mere feeling of satisfaction but in the reality of freedom and satisfaction. Happiness involves knowledge: it is the prerogative of the animal rationale" (Marcuse, 2005, p. 104). But we should not assume that we are faced with an Aristotelian proposal; Marcuse combined features of eudaemonism with the hedonistic protest against the repression of sensuality.

The proposal of Marcuse supposes the construction of a social, collective order, in which the human capacities are developed, attending to the concept of reason explained previously. It is not an individual search for happiness but

a joint action where the idea of solidarity is fundamental.

Ayn Rand (1905–1982), in contrast, occupies the antipode of Marcuse's thought. She analyzed happiness in a series of very precise topics: the valuation of the capitalist system, the content of the concept of happiness, and the clearly individual proposal of the Russian-North American author. Happiness in Rand's thinking means guaranteeing a successful life, referring to it in terms that seem to come from the world of business rather than philosophy (Rand, 1964).

The happy man, says Rand, builds his life on three fundamental values that are intimately related: Reason—Purpose—and Self-esteem. The man Rand proposes as an ideal model is a selfish being who concentrates exclusively on his own happiness. The community sense is not only lost completely in the proposal of this author, but viscerally rejected models that focused on collective proposals such as religion, altruism, socialism, and even the Welfare State (Rand, 1964).

Although she was an explicit admirer of the Aristotelian Logic, there is no heritage of Aristotle's thinking in Rand's ethical proposal and, at times, it seems closer to a radical hedonism. This man proposed by Rand finds the possibilities of access to a happy life only within the framework of the capitalist system; the difference with Marcuse at this point is total, for the

German author, capitalism is the most sophisticated mechanism of domination, while for Rand, it is the only system that serves as a framework for the full development of the human being (Rand, 1964).

2. Happiness in Islamic Ethics

Just as the previously selected authors represent only a sample of Western philosophical production on human happiness, the selected Muslim philosophers—Abū Naṣr Fārābī, Abū 'Alī Ibn Miskawayh, and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī—constitute a small portion of the extensive literature on happiness in Islamic ethics.

As is evident, the Western and Islamic authors brought into dialogue in this work belong to vastly different historical periods and cultural spaces. Nevertheless, they all emphasize the human pursuit of happiness or the supreme good.

The selected authors—Fārābī, Ibn Miskawayh, and Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī—consistently draw upon the essential sources of Islamic knowledge (contained in the Holy Qur'an and the teachings of the Ahl al-Bayt) to provide a framework for conceptualizing "human happiness" from an Islamic perspective. This framework offers a meaningful alternative to contemporary Western proposals.

Abū Naṣr Fārābī (870-950) was notably influenced by *The Nicomaquean Ethics*, as can be seen from his reflection on happiness, which follows the line of argument used by the Greek philosopher. He said, "Happiness is an end that every man desires. It is clear that among goods, happiness is the greatest good and among the preferable things it is the most preferable, and it is the most perfect of all the ends towards which man strives" (Fārābī, 2002, p. 44).

The happiness in which Fārābī thinks is obtained through a double way, individual— the acquisition of happiness means the perfection of that faculty of the human soul that is specific to man: his reason — and social aspect. In this regard, he said, "It is a happiness that only man, in the actualization of his individual potentialities, can achieve through the cultivation of moral and intellectual virtues, but that can only be fulfilled within a society" (Fārābī, 2002, p. 45).

At this point, it is essential to take into account the concept of *Aql* (intellect) presented by Fārābī, since it is the 'instrument' that allows one to achieve full happiness. In Fārābī's thinking, the concept of 'intellect' gradually goes from being thought of as a human faculty to an intellect that is the giver of ontological forms, ruler of the terrestrial world, and to an intellect that is the cause and principle of every being (theoretical intellect).

Fārābī fused the theory of Neoplatonic emanation with that of the celestial spheres of Aristotle. The ontological hierarchy that constitutes it is formed by six principles: the First

Being, the second or separate intellects, the Agent Intellect, the soul, the form, and the matter. The Agent Intellect is the tenth of the intellects emanating successively from the First Being and gives rise to the existence of sublunar souls and, through the celestial spheres, to the four elements, which, duly combined, will be informed by the vegetative, animal, and rational souls (Aquinas, 1981).

With the aforementioned, it is clear that the mediating role of the Agent Intellect, between the sublunar existence and the First Being. The exercise of theoretical and practical virtues leads the human being to union with the Agent Intellect and to full happiness, because through the Agent Intellect one will arrive at the union with God, which is the peak of happiness.

In Fārābī's thinking, obtaining individual happiness is inseparable from the collective pursuit of supreme happiness. Hence, a need to think of an ideal political order that is capable of leading the entire community towards that goal. Happiness, politics, and philosophy come together in the thought of Fārābī.

Fārābī's proposal regarding happiness is highlighted by three elements that we have recovered in the preceding lines: the role of knowledge in the search for the First Truth, the importance of virtuous behavior, and the need to think of happiness in communitarian terms, where the State and its organization occupy a central position.

Despite being scarcely analyzed in the West, with only a few Spanish articles dedicated to him, Abū 'Alī Aḥmad ibn Muḥammad ibn Yaʿqūb ibn Miskawayh (932–1030) remains one of the most important figures in the history of Islamic ethics.

The concept of happiness is the central element in the ethical philosophy of Ibn Miskawayh. As he maintains in *Tahdhib ul-Akhlaq*, happiness is the supreme good and the ultimate goal of life (Miskawayh, 1969).

The notion of happiness is related to that of perfection; the perfection of each creature is its greatest good, its happiness. As Ibn Miskawayh said, "Happiness, it is the good in relation to its possessor and constitutes to him a perfection" (Miskawayh, 1969).

The virtues which Ibn Miskawayh thinks are not only theoretical but also practical. There are two aspects of human perfection:

- Theoretical Perfection (perfection in knowledge and sciences)
- Practical Perfection (perfection in all kinds of action and governance)

According to Ibn Miskawayh, the accomplishment of both aspects of human perfection leads to complete happiness. The goal is to lead the human being to the happiness that belongs to him as a creature, and for that, in *Tahdhib ul-Akhlaq*, Ibn Misawayh not only points out what

human happiness is, but also develops what virtues this happiness can be achieved through (Miskawayh, 1969). The knowledge of the human soul and the development of the virtues in it is analyzed by ibn Miskawayh, who proposes (and subdivides) four cardinal virtues that lead to human perfection: wisdom, courage, temperance, and justice (Mustafa et al., 2024). The final result of the process of character refinement and the development of the perfection of the human being is the Perfect Man, and it is this *Insan ul-Kamil* who accedes to extreme happiness.

We must add two characteristic elements of Ibn Miskawayh's thinking that seem especially relevant to us. In the first place, ibn Miskawayh points out very clearly the need to think not only of the happiness of the soul but also of the body. Second, Ibn Miskawayh points out on numerous occasions the central importance of life in society. It is not about the needs of other human beings, only for the satisfaction of the fundamental material issues for survival. In Ibn Miskawayh's viewpoint, there is no possibility of achieving perfection, and therefore happiness, if it is not through social life. We can, then, highlight three important aspects in Ibn Miskawayh's proposal regarding happiness: it is acquired through the development of theoretical and practical virtues, the happiness of the

body and soul must be considered, and perfection is not achieved, and therefore happiness, if one does not live in society (Miskawayh, 1969).

Naṣīr ud-Din Ṭūsī (1201-1274) has been one of the most important figures in the development of philosophical ethics in the history of Islam, with works of the magnitude of *Akhlaq-i Naṣīrı* (The Naṣīrean Ethics) that, according to Joep Lameer, is the single most important work on philosophical ethics in the history of Islam (Ṭūsī , 1964).

To place Ethics in the framework of philosophy, Ṭūsī states that the latter is divided into two: Theory and Practice. In this regard, he said, "Theory conceives the true natures of existent things, and acknowledges the laws and consequences thereof as they in fact are, within the measure of the human faculty. Practice is the exercise of movements and the perseverance in disciplines, to bring what is in the area of potency out to the limit of the act, so long as it leads from defect to perfection, according to human ability" (Ṭūsī, 1964, p. 28).

Ethics, therefore, within Practical Philosophy, refers to the work that each soul must perform on itself. It is necessary, then, to know the characteristics and peculiarities of the human soul to be able to take it towards perfection and consequent happiness. Starting from the idea that the human being is the greatest of creatures, our philosopher points the way to direct and

discipline the human soul towards perfection and justice, which necessarily produces felicity, to access the highest possible degrees of happiness.

Ṭūsī recognizes three faculties that identify with three types of souls in the human being: the faculty of rationality, the concupiscible faculty, and the irascible faculty. These three faculties are also called the Angelic Soul, the Savage Soul, and the Bestial Soul, respectively. Through the correct use of the exclusive faculty of the human being (the faculty of rationality), the last two souls that compose it can be oriented in a virtuous way. So, each one of these souls will generate, respectively, Wisdom, Pleasure, and Generosity, leading the human to happiness.

But Ṭūsī does not remain only with the development of the individual soul and, to the happiness of the body and the soul, he adds the happiness that he calls "civic." It maintains in this sense that felicity is of three kinds: psychical felicity, bodily felicity, and civic felicity, the last about assemblage and civilization (Ṭūsī, 1964, p. 112).

Psychical felicity relates to the acquisition of the science of the Correction of Dispositions, the science of Logic, the science of Mathematics, Natural Science, and Divine Science. Bodily felicity relates to the acquisition of the science of Medicine. And civic felicity has to do with the sciences pertaining to the ordering of the state of the community and the realm, and the affairs of daily life and society:

these may be the sciences of the religious law, such as Jurisprudence, Scholastic Theology, Tradition, Exegesis and Interpretation; or they may be exoteric sciences, like Literature, Rhetoric, Grammar, Calligraphy, Reckoning, Surveying and Accounting, and the like" (Ṭūsī, 1964).

In Ṭūsī's proposal regarding happiness, we find two central elements: the emphasis on the position and dignity of the human being in the hierarchy of creation, and the incorporation of a special type of human happiness related to civic life, in addition to the corporal and spiritual ones analyzed by the previous authors (Ṭūsī, 1964).

3. The Accepted Theory by The Author

As we saw in the preceding lines, we find great similarities between many of the proposals of the Greek philosophers analyzed (Plato and Aristotle) and the Muslim philosophers we selected in this work (Al Fārābī, Ibn Miskawayh, and Naṣīr ud-Din Ṭūsī). In fact, the mentions and recognition of the contribution of the former by the latter are permanent. Fārābī permanently mentions both of them, combining them in an Aristotelian and Neoplatonic synthesis. Ibn Miskawayh draws especially on the *Nicomaquean Ethic*s of Aristotle, and Ṭūsī does not stop talking with both in his *Naṣīrean Ethics* (Adamson, 2016).

However, reflections on happiness have followed distinct trajectories in

different cultural spaces due to their unique historical paths. In the West, modernity and the consolidation of the capitalist system—with their respective value scales and cultural proposals—precipitated a fundamental shift in worldview, centering it on the concepts of the 'individual' and 'consumption.'

The modern Western reflection on happiness is situated within a specific cultural and economic framework, as exemplified by the works of Marcuse and Rand. As Edgar Cabanas and Eva Illous point out, we are witnessing a double process regarding the notion of happiness: first, the concept is degraded and it connects with the consumption of material goods and the "docile" acceptance of the social, economic and cultural established order and, secondly, there is a reacts against the notion of happiness without recovering the classical ideas linked to the exercise of certain virtues (Cabanas & Illouz, 2019a).

In the Western world, the second half of the 20th century meant the collapse of the great philosophical and historical accounts. This decomposition came from the hand of a process of accelerated globalization that questioned how people and cultures think of themselves and reorder their scales of values.

The last decades of the last century not only brought with it the collapse of the Soviet bloc and the end of a bipolar world, but also the profound questioning of the budgets of the Enlightenment as well as the imposition of a unique paradigm of aspirations within the framework of the capitalist system. These profound changes reverberated in the West in the way in which the full man is conceived, the happy man, registering a dangerous movement towards the identification of this with the consumer of goods. The satisfaction of false needs generated by the large propagandists of the market constitutes the parameter of happiness. While desacralization seems to be a characteristic of modern Western thought, the Italian philosopher Giorgio Agamben (2012) argues that the place traditionally occupied by God, as a destination for the search for human beings and as the ultimate source of all true happiness, is replaced by money and material objects.

In this sense, our proposal on happiness involves the following points:

The Pursuit of the Supreme Good: Every human being seeks happiness and the Supreme Good, which is characterized by eternity and stability. Drawing from the Greek and Muslim philosophers, we conclude that true happiness can only be achieved through proximity to God, as the ultimate source of all goodness.

Self-Knowledge as a Prerequisite: This pursuit requires a deep knowledge of human nature—our position in the hierarchy of creation, our faculties, virtues, and weaknesses. As the

prophetic tradition states, "who knows himself knows his Lord." This is central to Ṭūsī's philosophy, where any deviation from the path to perfection and full happiness is considered a degradation of the self.

Holistic Human Happiness: We must re-embrace the multiple aspects of human happiness—the corporeal, the spiritual, and the social. This approach prevents falling into individualistic or ascetic viewpoints that isolate the individual from society.

The Indispensable Role of Others: We must restore the role of other human beings in achieving happiness. Ibn Miskawayh's ideas are crucial here, as they move beyond a utilitarian approach and consider human relationships to be an essential part of attaining complete happiness.

Reclaiming Politics and Social Organization: It is essential to return to politics and social organization the central role that Fārābī attributed to them. We must liberate this concept from its current negative connotation and instead see it as a collective search for happiness under the direction of a leader with outstanding moral and spiritual qualities.

Conclusion

We began by examining the fundamental ideas of happiness from classical Western and Islamic philosophers. We then highlighted how modern Western thinkers like Marcuse and Rand responded to different cultural contexts. Finally, we proposed a path forward that integrates these insights to overcome the alienation of modern life. Here are the main points we can draw from this analysis:

- **Continuity and Dialogue:**
There is a clear line of continuity between the ancient Greek and Islamic philosophers. The Muslim thinkers we studied — Fārābī, Ibn Miskawayh, and Ṭūsī — were not merely translators but active participants in a philosophical dialogue with their Greek predecessors, Plato and Aristotle. They adopted, critiqued, and built upon Greek concepts within a distinct Islamic cosmological framework. Both traditions emphasize the importance of self-knowledge, the need for a system of meaning, the pursuit of a higher Good, and the crucial role of collective life in achieving happiness.

- **Modernity's Disruptive Role:**
Modern Western thought, especially as it relates to God, humanity, and happiness, represents a significant break from its Greek heritage. Although the modern West presents itself as the heir to Greek thought, it has set aside key points that were vigorously developed in Islamic philosophy. We can define the contemporary West not by geography or culture, but by its core characteristics: a capitalist economic formation, a "disenchanted" bureaucratic system of domination, and a purely techno-scientific relationship with "truth" (instrumental reason).

- **A Call for a Holistic Approach:**

We must recover a vision of happiness that protects human beings from individualism, alienation, and anxiety. This requires placing humanity back within a cosmic system and a hierarchy of beings. A focus on transcendence—with an eye toward proximity to God as the ultimate happiness—protects a person from the pitfalls of consumerism and hedonism. At the same time, an emphasis on the importance of social life forces individuals to value the role of others on the path to true happiness. Furthermore, a renewed focus on reason as more than a simple instrumental tool allows us to see knowledge as more than just an accumulation of data. All these elements are present and remain absolutely valid in Islamic philosophy.

Questioning the current Western ways of thinking about happiness by recovering Islam's transcendent proposal is not just a philosophical exercise. It is also a political and religious act that challenges the very foundation of what shapes the contemporary West.

Author Contributions

I have written this article by myself. The author of this study takes full responsibility for the conception, research, writing, and analysis presented in this paper.

Conflict of Interests

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this manuscript.

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The author(s) declare that no AI tools or services were not used or not highly applied during the preparation of this work.

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