The Philosophy of Happiness: A Comparative Study between Western and Islamic Thought

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Abstract. The concept of happiness is an equally important topic of discussion in both Islamic and Western philosophy. This article presents a comparative analysis of happiness concepts from Islamic as well as Western points of view. The article aims at discovering the influence of al-Ghazali (a medieval Muslim scholar of Sufi persuasion) upon Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a present-day Malaysian Muslim philosopher, concerning the philosophy of happiness. It also focuses on the Aristotelian philosophy of happiness, underscoring the discussion from his seminal book *The Nichomachean Ethics*, and includes an in-depth study of happiness as discussed by modern Western philosophers like Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant. The study follows a qualitative, non-empirical, textual and contextual analytical approach, which comprises several texts and journal archives composed by the aforementioned scholars and philosophers from the ancient medieval period to the present. The analysis reveals that Islamic philosophy always underscores happiness in this present life and the eternal life after death, while Aristotelian pagan philosophy stresses happiness only in this sublunary life. The study also argues that virtue is a predominant aspect necessary to attain happiness in the worldly life and in the afterlife.

Keywords and phrases: Islamic philosophy of happiness, Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, al-Ghazali, Aristotle, Western concept of happiness

Introduction

The philosophy of happiness is not something new. Plato believed that it was the end goal of life. Later, philosophers would define happiness in different ways,

but what is obvious is the fact that happiness and human life are intertwined. There has been no human being from the outset of the world who has not longed for happiness. Behind all human efforts and struggles is the need for happiness. Unlike friendship, wealth, health or honour, happiness is the sole aspect for which a human yearns for his own sake.

There has been an enormous number of studies done on happiness by both Muslim and Western non-Muslim scholars and philosophers. Ibn Hazm (1908), Aquinas (1964), Augustine (1950) and al-Ghazalī (2005) are noteworthy philosophers who have engaged in such philosophical study. Among recent philosophers, Sayyed Hossein Nasr, who is highly regarded, says that happiness is a matter of spirituality and an enduring state of paradise (Nasr 2014, 78). However, Ricard (2013) defines happiness differently, describing it as lasting well-being, which becomes reality when we can free ourselves from "mental blindness" and "affective emotions", which finally denotes "the joy of moving towards inner freedom and loving-kindness and compassion that radiates towards others" (ibid., 344). Laam (2010) maintains that happiness is related to two critical discourses—philosophy and psychology and there are no essential differences between philosophical and psychological realms of happiness and that they are interconnected.

The happiness index, recently published in the *Sustainable Development Solutions Network: A Global Initiative for United Nations*, shows how happiness is viewed as a major concern in the current world (Helliwell et al. 2021).

Mineo (2017), a Harvard staff writer, has eloquently written an intriguing article regarding happiness titled "Good genes are nice, but joy is better". In this article, Mineo focuses on a longitudinal study that Harvard scientists carried out in 1938 on 268 Harvard second-year students. It was the time of the Great Depression. The scientists anticipated that this study would reveal ample clues about how to live happy and healthy lives. The researchers obtained informative data concerning mental as well as physical health in this regard (Mineo 2017).

In "Happiness: A Psycho-Philosophical Appraisal", Begum, Jabeen and Awan (2014) postulate that happiness is a state of one's inner self and does not depend on any material gain. Rather, it depends on the contentment of the soul. Individuals and society are reciprocally related, depending on each other in terms of happiness. If the individuals in a society are happy, the credit automatically goes to the society; the whole society is accepted as a happy society and vice versa. However, individuals must follow the rules of their respective societies in order to be happy. Thus, despite the beliefs of antiquity, happiness does not rely on fate alone; recent research has revealed it to be a skill that can be attained by proper habituation and

conscious efforts. Here, the authors of this article agree with the views of Aristotle, which are discussed in some detail below.

Classical conceptions of ethics centred on concepts of happiness and virtue have occurred to many as an intriguing option for presenting theories. Nevertheless, this cannot be determined unless we comprehend classical ethics – and we ought to analyse not just the intricacies of a theory or two but the essential framework of ancient ethical philosophy. In *The Morality of Happiness* (1993), Julia Annas pulls together the outcomes of a comprehensive history of classical moral philosophy, which is readily available to anybody interested in classical and recent ethics. She discusses the rudimentary concepts of virtue and happiness, the significance of nature in moral reasoning and the relationship between self-interest and interest in others. Her thorough study of classical arguments and debates reveals that many common speculations of classical ethics are quite erroneous. Classical moral conceptions are not egocentric and do not rely on teleological metaphysical exegesis for their acceptance.

This study, however, attempts to present a comparative analysis of happiness focusing on the concept of happiness of Aristotle, the most influential Greek philosopher and those of Jeremy Bentham, John Stuart Mill and Immanuel Kant, the most recent and modern of the dominant Western philosophers. This study also focuses on Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a present-day Malaysian Muslim philosopher and al-Ghazali, one of the most influential medieval Muslim Sufis and philosophers of all time.

Western Views of Happiness

This section explores how the West—mainly the European countries, including Greece—views happiness. The discussion spans ancient to modern philosophy, covering concepts of happiness as proposed by Aristotle followed by later and modern philosophers like Bentham, Mill and Kant.

Aristotle's philosophy of happiness

Aristotle was given importance in the Renaissance by literary historians such as Edward Crantz, Paul Oskar Kristeller, Charles Lohr and Charles Schmitt. Schmitt and Crantz accumulated a catalogue of texts composed by Aristotle, which revealed that there are translations of those works in English, Italian, Spanish and French languages besides Greek and Latin versions. Schmitt pointed out that various versions of Aristotelian works were produced to be read publicly, which was deemed permissible for "people of different intellectual capacities" (Schmitt 1983).

Despite the rising middle class, like merchants, tradesmen and bankers, having no rudimentary knowledge of Latin, they had a rich knowledge of Aristotle. Even the common people were not unacquainted with Aristotle. Kristeller stressed that in the early modern period, scholastic and humanist professors affirmed the moral value of reading Aristotle. They claimed that classics such as *The Nicomachean Ethics* (2009) could bring positive social changes in people and render them worthy of exercising power and, above all, make them more virtuous (Kristeller 1990).

The philosophy of Aristotle concentrates on human perfection and how one can achieve worldly happiness; and that to be happy, one needs to live a virtuous and moral life. Aristotle's seminal treatise, *The Nicomachean Ethics* (2009), significantly influenced the early modern attitudes toward happiness, which, with a moral philosophical view, connects happiness to living with virtue and urges that humankind should struggle for the perfection of good character. Aristotle characterises virtue as a matter of character that deals with moral preference, recommending that doing good for humanity is the virtue that exhibits the soul. However, a human can inculcate these virtues by his/her effort and habituation. To achieve this, Aristotle argues, unlike Aquinas, that one does not need any divine help and mercy. As Kathleen French (2016) observes, citing Aristotle's idea of virtue, "Virtue is concerned with passions and actions and virtuous behaviour is a skill learned by experience and developed as a result of habit since the moral virtues do not arise in us by nature" (Aristotle 2009, 9–10).

Aristotle visualises politics optimistically in the sense that effective communication between personal virtue and public values ensures a personal level of happiness as well as happiness for society. When the populaces of a certain country are educated and enlightened with values and virtue, which is the basis for civic virtue and strengths in personal character, the Aristotelian hope is that they can build a government with justice that can provide individual and communal happiness.

"Happiness" necessitates vigilant contemplation of undertaking moral or immoral actions, and as sensible action is tuneful with values and virtue, the Aristotelian affirmation is that making the right choices develops the likeliness of the *Polis*'s (i.e., the state) citizens (Aristotle 2009, 16–17). Aristotelian "moral virtues include courage, temperance, justice and liberality" as well as "philosophical wisdom", is characterised as the intellect's virtue (Aristotle 2009, 4–7). According to Aristotle, these two virtues are tied with practical wisdom. It is also stressed by Aristotle that until reason leads to their emotive flourish, citizens cannot achieve moral virtue. Nevertheless, despite his postulation of enjoyment, Aristotle emphasises that dominating the cravings of base desires is one of the rudimentary goals of wisdom. Both philosophical wisdom and practical wisdom produce the right actions.

Although Aristotle's conceptions of happiness are discussed earlier, little is mentioned on Aristotle's eudemonia (*eudaimonia*). Thus, what follows is an elaborate discussion of Aristotle's observations on eudemonia.

The happiness concept or eudemonia brings beauty and heavenly pleasure to human life. Howsoever, behind all the labours of all people is the longing for getting eudemonia, which makes their lives the most desirable. This pursuit of eudemonia, according to Aristotle, is an end itself and it is self-sufficient. An enlightened and happy person is so content in practical life that despite his suffering from sporadic hardship, he is innately uninterrupted and assuredly by no means howls for any damage or loss for his life is encompassed by happiness. Gabriel Richardson Lear, in examining Aristotelian ideas on happiness, noted that adopting a eudemonic outlook is enough on its own to enjoy an appealing and meaningful life and anything that ultimately leads to that could be sufficient (Lear 2004, 53).

The following sections discuss the philosophies of happiness espoused by the modern philosophers Bentham, Mill and Kant. These sections are followed by discussions providing Islamic perspectives on happiness from various scholars.

Bentham's concept of happiness

Bentham was born in London in 1784 and died in 1832. He was a prolific British philosopher, social reformer and jurist. He founded the modern theory of utilitarianism and was the father of the great principle of "the greatest happiness for the greatest number". He was deeply associated with this principle and made it quite popular. Unlike other philosophers, he adhered to and rendered this principle so significant that it became a "central desideratum in all areas of analysis concerning the social relations of human beings" (Mill 1838, 43).

"The greatest happiness for the greatest number" was the usual way of expressing Bentham's principle. However, he also used the phrase "the greatest happiness of all the individuals" as an alternative to the preceding phrase, in which he emphasises that every government of a country should ensure this for all its citizens (Bentham 1838, 5). However, Goldworth (1969) has questioned whether these two phrases are interchangeable in their meaning.

Bentham's central focus was predominantly on the issue of the maximisation of aggregate happiness. While considering several cases regarding the distribution of wealth and how these shifts negatively impact overall happiness, Bentham paid little attention to the issue of the number of people who would be considered in the distribution of wealth (Halevy 1955, 19 and 22). Indeed, equity in monetary

income is always more desirable than merely maximising the allocation of money. Impartiality or equality in monetary income is such a significant factor that it is considered a prerequisite for attaining the maximisation of aggregate happiness. In other words, equity in earning money has been deemed a methodology rather than an objective per se.

Bentham's main concern was not bringing equity in distributing monetary income. Rather, he wanted to maximise overall happiness. To achieve this goal, Bentham established an ideology called the DPP theory based on the disappointment preventive principle, wherein he preferred equality to security. He suggested that when these two are in opposition, we should choose the former (Bentham 1838, 311).

Finally, Bentham recommended some means through which it would be possible to determine how to ensure equality in distributing wealth without hampering the security. The first way was the reduction of inheritance rights, while the second was a free distribution of wealth, which could be attained by eliminating legislation. So, by the phrase, "the greatest happiness of the greatest number", he did not refer to making the greatest happiness for the greatest number of individuals, but rather simply the making of the greatest happiness.

Mill's concept of happiness

Mill, a prolific 19th-century British philosopher and an influential writer, was born in 1806 in London and died in 1873 in France. He was greatly influenced by Bentham. Originally published in 1863, *Utilitarianism* is his masterpiece, wherein he discusses the concept of happiness. Recently, Berger (1984) conducted extensive research on Mill and his scholarship. Berger asserts that his book widely covers Mill's corpus of work. Delving into the pros and cons of Mill's views on happiness, he substantially demonstrates the significance of Mill's accounts of liberty, moral rules and rights. The plausibility, unity and complexity of Mill's political and moral theory are thus divulged by this author. The theme this book expresses is how Mill defends his theory of liberty by depending on a unified and consistent theory of happiness, which is necessarily non-hedonistic, hierarchical and pluralistic, although there is a traditional belief that Mill's moral theory represents hedonism.

Being influenced by his predecessor Bentham, Mill defines happiness as the production of pleasure and the absence of pain. Apart from "pleasures and pains" (Hoag 1986, 189), many other premises are available bearing testimony to Mill's hedonism. The first, which is that pleasure is the only essential good

to pursue, denotes Mill's devotion to psychological hedonism. Mill claimed that people actively seek happiness, which itself is proof of their pursuit of it. Mill also maintained that pleasure is the only essential good since people pursue it for themselves. Therefore, it is arguably plausible that Mill's happiness concept is imbued with ethical psychology, which provides a hedonistic exegesis. However, moral psychology intrinsic to Millian argumentation is misconstrued (Berger 1984). Mill argues that the very planning for accomplishing actions can produce pleasures or pains (ibid.). Mill believes that persons can anticipate committing certain acts without considering any pleasure. He adds that they can perform sympathetic works and social acts associated with humanity and can cultivate character embedded with virtues in themselves without hoping for or having any desire for pleasure. Likewise, Berger mentions Mill's rejection of moral, psychological hedonism, stating that people are able to perform some acts for themselves only from their desire, not for any kind of pleasure.

Kant's concept of happiness

Another influential Western philosopher and Enlightenment scholar is Immanuel Kant, a German, born in 1724 in Konigsberg, present-day Kaliningrad, Russia, who died in 1804. Kant, in his ethics, developed a subjective conception of happiness, which is in modern philosophy a replacement for classic or ancient happiness conceptions. In modern moral philosophy, it is not surprising that happiness performs a varied and often diminishing role. An evocative and dominant instance of this movement is Kant's philosophy. He defines happiness as individual fulfilment and success in attaining the goals we set for ourselves and he contends that morality is an impediment to pursuing happiness rather than a way to it or a constituent of it. Indeed, in Kant's moral philosophy, the moral obligation to contribute to other people's happiness is more unlikely than many other present-day theories that, like Kant's, reject the commonly held classic concepts of what is called "happiness".

There are conflicts and congruencies in classical moral theories; however, Aristotle's account of happiness—or human flourishing—can be treated as a model for this discussion. According to Hill (2002), the central focus of this account is what follows. When properly perceived, "happiness" refers to an aggregate and active life that necessitates virtue and the use of practical reasoning in decision-making. In a "happy" life, intrinsic characteristics and natural human capabilities are fulfilled and embellished altogether. Good fortune, community, moral exemplars and effort are supposedly intrinsic to a happy life. If an individual is virtuous as well as wise, he/she can distinguish whether certain actions are beneficial to his/her happiness; however, imperfect and ordinary people very often fail to discern

what is conducive to them. The elements of a happy life differ from individual to individual; however, it is not merely with their chosen ends, desires, or considered preferences. Although a life full of pleasures and contentment, which a wise man wishes to cherish, is a happy life, content and pleasant life is not essentially and necessarily a happy one. When desires naturally arising in our minds are forged into a shape in accordance with situations and thereby it is assumed that our predominant desires are satisfied and in no way are depressed or frustrated, we call it a perfectly happy and therefore virtuous life. If we fail to shape our lives accordingly, it is what Hill (2002) calls a life "far from the ideal of a 'happy' life" (Hill 2002, 168).

Kant seemingly orbits among various happiness concepts. Although happiness, in all cases, is perceived as something indeterminate, subjective and varied from individual to individual, it differs from traditional human-flourishing conceptions. Kant is harmonious with Aristotle and other philosophers regarding virtue, which includes more elements than simply feeling content and satisfying our desires. Practical reason must be used for determining what is virtuous in order to objectively choose what is morally right. However, Kant divides constituents seemingly accumulated in the human-flourishing concepts of Aristotle by strongly differentiating happiness and virtue. Kant perceives happiness as an element of subjectivity differing from person to person and premised on desires, which do not properly follow reason, while he treats virtue and moral elements as "objective, common to all human beings, distinct from desires and discerned by reason" (Hill 2002, 146).

Islamic Views on Happiness

The following discussion of Islamic views on happiness predominantly focuses on the happiness concepts developed by Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas and Abu Hamid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad at-Tusiyy al-Ghazali. The former is a recent Islamic scholar and philosopher, and the latter is a medieval Islamic Sufi and prolific scholar. There are certain reasons for choosing al-Attas and al-Ghazali in the Islamic section of this article. Al-Attas and al-Ghazali are more likely to be relevant and important in all areas of the concept of happiness than many other Muslim philosophers and scholars from the recent and medieval period who have written treatises about the concept of happiness. These two philosophers, indeed, have analysed happiness as a central desideratum. The discussion begins with the philosophy of al-Attas.

Al-Attas on the concept of happiness

Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas, a present-day Malaysian philosopher and scholar, was born in 1931 in Buitenzorg, now Bogor, Indonesia. He is greatly influenced by al-Ghazali and deeply rooted in the traditional Islamic sciences. He has equal mastery over philosophy, theology, literature, metaphysics and history. He is one of the masterminds of the concept of Islamisation of knowledge. He is the founder of ISTAC, The International Institute of Islamic Thought and Civilisation. He has authored 27 books, which predominantly focus on Sufism, cosmology, Malay language, and literature and philosophy. Al-Attas reflects al-Ghazali's philosophy in most of his books, including *Prolegomena to the Metaphysics of Islam* (1995) and *Islam and Secularism* (1993).

Al-Attas does not draw the limit of happiness as confined to worldly life; rather it permeates life after death. Even if we confine this happiness only to "the temporal, secular dimension of life without any reference to the hereafter", it is such a condition that experiences fluctuations and deviations "in degrees from moment to moment" (al-Attas 1995, 94). In other words, even if one can attain happiness in this world, he has to live a virtuous life in a favourable milieu. However, Islam does not limit the essence of "happiness only to the domain of temporal, secular life, since it has a great affinity with the present life" (ibid.). In this regard, al-Attas (1995, 94) explains, "We do not agree, therefore, with the Aristotelian position that virtue and happiness relate only to this world".

Western philosophy divides the concept of happiness according to ancient and modern conceptualisations. The former goes back to Aristotle along with the influential Medieval theologians and philosophers—al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina—by whom al-Attas was influenced and the latter gradually developed in the Western world in the process of secularisation, which is an outcome of the Renaissance. "This philosophic and scientific process", which al-Attas calls "secularisation", "involves the divesting of spiritual meaning from the world of nature, the desacralisation of politics from human affairs and the deconsecration of values from the human mind and conduct" (al-Attas 1995, 95). This is the modern happiness concept of today's modern discourse that is predominant in the present Western world and which has brought "not only moral decadence and crisis but political dissension and conflict as well" (al-Attas 1995, 95).

Unless they agree with "religious virtues", which are alien to Greek philosophical norms, such as virtues from the Quran and the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life, philosophic virtues cannot guarantee true feelings of happiness. Religious virtues, according to al-Attas, are knowledge of God in harmony with the Quran, which

is derived from wisdom, which is a Divine gift rather than an achievement by habituation or reason. Religious virtues are of two kinds: external and internal. The first refers to obeying the Divine commandments, such as worshipping only God, duty towards humanity and one's neighbourliness and etiquette concerning food, clothing, companionship etc. The other implies the actions of the heart, which are foregrounded by the knowledge of God and the self and derived from reason and revelation. This self-awareness must be followed by "good intention (*niyyah*), the sincerity of purpose (*ikhlas*) and truthfulness to oneself (*sidq*)", which establish a good "relationship between self and God" (al-Attas 1995, 97). Al-Attas also maintains that for a sound relationship with God and therefore the attainment of perfect happiness, one must inculcate the following internal virtues: "Meditation (*tafakkur*), repentance (*tawbah*), patience (*sabr*), gratitude (*sukur*), hope (*raja*), fear (*khawf*), divine unity (*tawhid*), trust (*tawakkul*) and finally the highest virtue for the attainment of happiness in worldly life, love of God (*mahabbah*)" (al-Attas 1995, 97). In fact, the external and internal virtues overlap with each other and thus both virtues are mandatory for acquiring happiness in this life and true happiness in life after death.

Apart from all the above virtues, there is one more virtue, *iman*, which is the source of all other virtues. *Iman* is inter-connected with the sense of happiness in this world and the ultimate happiness in the hereafter. The root of *iman* is *amina*, which conveys the meaning of becoming secure and becoming free from fear. Here, the fear implies the fear of "the unknown, of utter solitude and incommunicability, of death and what lies beyond, a foreboding of dread – in short, it is the fear that refers to ultimate destiny" (al-Attas 1995, 103). Those who have *iman* and try wholeheartedly to perform righteous deeds and keep themselves engaged in the obedience of God are not affected by such fear (*khawf*). Al-Attas (1995) divides this fear into two psychological conditions. One who turns himself away from the obedience of God is subject to the fears explained above.

Conversely, another kind of fear is the reverential fear experienced by believers who always take care obedience to God. The Quran asserts the condition of the hearts of these believers: "those who have faith (*amanu*) and whose hearts are rendered tranquil (*tatama'innu*) by remembrance (*dhikr*) of God, for surely in the remembrance of God are hearts made tranquil" (Quran 13:28). Therefore, "faith (*iman*) and remembrance of God are necessary for the attainment of the stable and peaceful calmness of heart that is called *tuma'nnah*" (al-Attas 1995, 104). *Tuma'nnah* is freedom from all kinds of worries and doubt, which is an internal joy, peace and happiness, coming only through the submissiveness of the soul or self to God.

The next step of *iman* is *yaqin*, which refers to the certainty of the truth and is the opposite of doubt (*shakk*). As stated above, remembrance of God brings tranquillity to the soul, which, along with other virtuous activities, denotes "a prior consciousness in the soul of the truth which comes from the guidance of divinity" (al-Attas 1995, 106) and which arises as certainty (*yaquin*). In this context, al-Attas (1995, 106) asks "how then can one who forgets God find peace of heart and mind and calmness of the soul when in reality forgetfulness of God also involves forgetfulness of the soul itself?" Al-Attas continues to assert that this forgetful soul is quite unlikely to attain the 'consciousness of certainty' of the truth since the soul has forgotten itself. This implies that the animal aspect of the soul dominates its rational aspect, which resultantly "becomes conscious only of its involvement in its bodily faculties and amusements of worldly life, or the pursuit of secular philosophy and science and contemplation of facts derived from them, or even of both together" (al-Attas 1995, 106). Those who prioritise bodily desires over rational or spiritual self are "baser than the lowest of the low" (Quran 95:4).

The people who are truthfully acquiescent to their Lord and follow His commandments in every aspect of their lives experience the true essence of happiness in this worldly life and are capable of winning their Lord's love in this present life, which is the maximum achievement for them. The attainment of contentment in worldly life never means the fulfilment of the carnal need or bodily desires, nor does it mean a temporary state of mind or feeling of pleasure or amusement. Rather, it refers to the certainty (*yaqin*) of the ultimate truth, which is a permanent state in man observed by the heart (*qalb*), the spiritual organ. Through the heart, he realises sanctity, calmness and tranquillity, and he ultimately meets the knowledge of genuine faith (*iman*) through which he constructs the ability to build a sound relationship with God and finally, he achieves the love of God.

Al-Ghazali's concept of happiness

Abu Hamid Muhammad Ibn Muhammad at-Tusiyy al-Ghazali was born in 1058 at Tus, Iran, then part of the Seljuq empire and died in 1111. He was one of the most influential and renowned 12th-century Sunni Sufis in Islam. He was also a theologian, philosopher, logician, mystic and jurist of Islam. He was greatly influenced by Plato. In Islamic tradition, he is called *Hujjat al-Islam*, or the proof of Islam. He contributed impressively to the concept of happiness. His two seminal books are *The Alchemy of Happiness* (2005) and *The Revival of Religious Sciences* (2016), originally written in Persian and later translated into English.

Cornell's (2014, 99) article titled "Applying the Lessons: Ideals Versus Realities of Happiness from Medieval Islam to the 'Founding Fathers'" characterises the happiness concept as regarded by al-Ghazali. Howsoever, Cornell emphasises that Muslim philosophers and theologians have written on Aristotelian and Quranic ethics over the times. However, when they endeavoured to write on the happiness concept, they placed more importance on Plato than Aristotle. They have preferred Plato's "idealistic approach" to Aristotle's "empirical and pragmatic approach". The Islamic scholars were very often inspired by the explanation of happiness given by Plato and fashioned an "idealised, restricted and elitist" edifice of happiness that was essentially a far-off achievement for the majority of the people, including the people of the Islamic world. A remarkable example of this trend is available in *The Alchemy of Happiness*—initially transcribed in Persian as *Kimiya-yi-sa'adat*—a ground-breaking treatise written by al-Ghazali in which his debt to Plato is conspicuous.

Al-Ghazali locates this purpose of alchemy that is referred to as removing the things that must not persist and embellishing "the self with what" must persist (al-Ghazalī 2005, 4), which divulges the perfectionism theory as postulated by Plato that equates with Sufism. He continues by saying that the inner soul or the heart is the place where the true nature of a man is located, whose angelic and ideal essence is preserved in the custody and treasury of the forms of God. The chemistry of the soul, according to al-Ghazali, comprises both perfectionism and idealism. As the soul embodies the model of a complete being, he discourses it as one would the philosopher's stone. The objective of his "spiritual alchemy" is what Cornell perceives as deconsecrating filth through the "copper" of human essence, which prevents the "gold" of the heart from shining (Cornell 2014, 99). Since the mundane filth facilitates us to misapprehend our real quintessence. We stare at "copper" instead of "gold" in our everyday lives. That the distinction between gold and copper does not necessarily exist in their artificial yellowness is viewed by al-Ghazali (2005). What al-Ghazali points out in *The Alchemy of Happiness* is the notion of real contentment that is not obtainable in the present life; rather, it is achievable in the hereafter—where people will live forever. This is also observed in *Treatise on Happiness* (1983)—a persuasive book written by Thomas Aquinas. Moreover, according to al-Ghazalī (2005), in this sense, there will be no end to the diversity of enjoyment or any frustration that can taint it.

Quasem (1978, 57–58) observes that the restriction of the happiness discourse promoted by al-Ghazali is that it entirely prefigures a formula of happiness that is immaculate and that "is attainable (in al-Ghazali's words) only by prophets, saints, God's true lovers and the spiritual elites". Al-Ghazali is quite likely to refute the

chance of achieving happiness in this temporary life. However, it is perceived by the Aristotelian view that this happiness is indispensable to developing man's life.

Stoic and Neoplatonic philosophy permeates the ethics of al-Ghazali, which mirrors the latter's moral and mind-body dualism. In *Alchemy of Happiness*, al-Ghazali mentions three spiritual organs: "the heart or inner soul (Persian *dil*), life or vital force (Persian *jan*) and spirit or ego (Arabic *nafs*)" (Cornell 2014, 100). Although the body is entangled with the soul by life, al-Ghazali perceives that the soul never flourishes here: "The true nature of the soul is not of this world. It has come to this world as a stranger and a wayfarer" (al-Ghazalī 2005, 9). Al-Ghazali further elaborates that the "soul was created for the hereafter. Its work is the seeking of happiness; and its happiness is in the spiritual knowledge of God Most High" (al-Ghazalī 2005, 11).

Similarly, the soul of humans is confined in this physical universe and the core duty of the body, mind and senses is to help the soul be unchained from this custody to attain the celestial accomplishment for which the Supreme God has created it. As it is suggested by Neoplatonic philosophy, the spirit looks forward to being freed from the physical body and as soon as it is liberated, it sails up to touch the Celestial Spirit that was disjointed from it long before (Hadot 1993). Cornell equates this separation "with the late-antique philosopher Plotinus" (Cornell 2014, 100).

Al-Ghazali acknowledges the value and needs for worldly goods that may contribute—although scantily—to bringing happiness in the middle parts of *The Revival of Religious Sciences* (*Ihya' 'ulumal-din*) (al-Ghazalī 2016) and *The Alchemy of Happiness*. In the former, al-Ghazali divides these goods into three types, which are taken from *Nichomachean Ethics* (2009)—a masterpiece of Aristotle: "external goods (Arabic *al fadil al-kharijiyya*), goods of the body (*fadil al-jismiyya*) and goods of the soul (*al fadil, al-nafsiyyah*)" (Cornell 2014, 101). Al-Ghazali adjoins a fourth category to the tripartite of Aristotle: "goods of providence" (*al-fadail al-tawfiqiyya*) (Quasem 1978, 58). This needed to be incorporated since Ash'ary theology regarded it as a vibrant facet that observed God willingly and considered that whatever good deeds led one to delight and happiness are unescapably favours from the Creator. This theology holds the belief that we the human creatures have not anything of our own and we cannot do anything on our own. The phrase *al-fadail al-tawfiquiyya* denotes a good of heavenly approval that echoes Ash'ary mysticism. Al-Ghazali characterises these four classes into "divine guidance (*hidaya*), divine direction (*rushd*), divine support (*tayid*) and divine leadership (*tasdid*)" (Quasem 1978, 60–61). Al-Ghazali emphasises, as it is done by Aquinas (1964) somewhere else, that without celestial

recognition, nobody can accomplish a single good deed. "Only after one is granted the divine providence" is he permitted to apply what al-Ghazali advocates as "external goods, the goods of the body and the goods of the soul", in the hope of achieving happiness and bliss (Quasem 1978, 63).

Al-Ghazali, in *The Alchemy of Happiness*, underestimates worldly goods and departs from the approach of Aristotle, which is much well-adjusted regarding worldly and spiritual goods. This, Cornell characterises as "Manichean in its severity" (Cornell 2014, 101). He envisaged the universe as a habitat of evils, which is similar to Augustine's view (Augustine 1950) and hence quotes the tradition (*khabar*) of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH): "The Messenger said, 'God Most High has not created anything more hostile to Himself than the world and, having created it, He has not looked at it'" (al-Ghazalī 2005, 551). Al-Ghazali was harshly criticised by Muslim theologians for applying such an undocumented or weak Hadith (tradition) of the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) in his write-up, which is devotedly dubious in numerous ways: firstly, it is an ostensibly Manichean denial of Islam that God has created the world as evil; secondly, it denotes to God as having moulded a rival to Himself; and thirdly, it denotes God as having remained cataleptic of the daily businesses of the universe. The Quran abandons all the above features and argues that God constantly watches all happenings occurring in all the junctions of the universe and even the demon's deeds done in every nanosecond (Surah al-Hijr 15: 26–44). Al-Ghazali, in addition, quotes one more tradition of the prophet that replicates the "unhomed" notion of Bhaba (1994):

> The world is the home of the homeless and it is the property of those without property. The person who accumulates it is foolish. The person who hates [another] for its sake is unwise. The person who envies [another] for its sake is without knowledge. The person who seeks it is without certainty. (Al-Ghazalī 2005, 551)

The "composite ethics" (Quasem 1978, 85) of al-Ghazali, which is an influential scriptural philosophy, combines various components from diverse fields of beliefs, including "elements of Platonic, Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, Stoic and Quranic ethics" (Cornell 2014, 102). As in *The Alchemy of Happiness*, he effortlessly leaps among these philosophical arguments while characterising the troubles and perils of this present life. He establishes various arguments in harmony with the *Nichomachean Ethic* of Aristotle. Yet, the readers of al-Ghazali get the impression that choosing between God and the world looks like what Cornell refers to as a "zero-sum game" (Cornell 2014, 102) wherein compromise with this worldly life is quite unlikely to be the recommended course of action. If anybody thinks this mundane life is superior to God, it is like belittling Him and this could be

the hurdle on the way to attaining spiritual embellishment. To demonstrate, if somebody acknowledges that bodily and earthly inevitabilities are compulsory to be contented, he/she admits that these permitted enjoyments are the basis of arrogance and wildness and the origin of all evil (al-Ghazalī 2005). He relates from one Hadith of Hazrat Muhammad (PBUH) that once he was going by a deceased sheep along with his confidantes (*sahabah*) and notes, "Do you see how despicable this carrion is so that a person does not look at it? By the God in whose hand is the life of Muhammad, the world to God Most High is more despicable than this. If it were worth an atom's weight to Him, He would not have given the unbeliever even a swallow of water" (al-Ghazalī 2005, 550). This cynical outlook that al-Ghazali replicates are akin to Marcus Aurelius' (d. 180)—stoic philosopher—vision of this universe. He assesses this material life in *Meditationa*s "dust, stench, sediment and blood" (Francis 1995, 32).

Conflicts and Congruencies

In the following section, we show the conflicts and congruencies between Western and Islamic philosophies of happiness.

Conflicts between Western and Islamic philosophies of happiness

There are many contrasting points extant between Western and Islamic philosophies of happiness, regardless of their many congruencies. In Aristotelian philosophy, virtue, intrinsic to attaining happiness, can be acquired by habituation and reason. However, al-Attas, like al-Ghazali, argues that in most cases, virtue is a divine gift. Al-Ghazali underscores that no one can acquire virtue without the grace of God, Most High, since we human beings are nothing and can do nothing on our own.

Modern Western philosophy adheres to Greek philosophy, which is, in other words, a pagan philosophy imbued with secular values devoid of religious norms. It is, as al-Attas says, divested of spiritual meaning and deconsecrated of values from the human mind, which has brought moral decadence, political dissension and conflict (al-Attas 1995). Above all, it fails to guarantee its followers a true feeling of happiness. Conversely, the Islamic philosophy of happiness is interpreted from the Quranic point of view and imbued with spirituality, human values and teachings from the Prophet Muhammad's (PBUH) life. It guarantees its followers a real feeling of happiness. It stresses faith in God and His recurrent remembrance to attain happiness and the serenity of the heart since the Quran says, "For without doubt, in the remembrance of Allah do hearts find satisfaction" (Surah ar-Ra'd 13:28).

It is evident in present Western philosophy that its followers regard diseases, any obstacles, etc. as real difficulties—since they do not hope for any reward from God—which hampers the process of attaining happiness. Therefore, it is evident that Western philosophers guide their people to suicide to divert them from the tragedy of non-attainment of happiness (al-Attas 1995). However, the followers of Islamic philosophy deem any sorts of diseases or difficulties such as fear, hunger, loss of lives and wealth as what al-Attas refers to as *ibtila* or tests from God and they expect that God will relieve them from these unwanted situations and reward them for the patience they keep. In this regard, the Holy Quran articulates, "And We will surely test you with something of fear and hunger and a loss of wealth and lives and fruits, but good tidings to the patient" (Surah al-Baqarah 2:155).

Western philosophy predominantly focuses on the present life or the worldly life. As Aristotle affirms that happiness is attainable in this life, he implies that the present world is the only place for human embellishment. This philosophy values worldly goods for achieving happiness. On the other hand, Islamic philosophy considers this world as a place of fleeting happiness and the hereafter as the only place of real contentment and "everlasting felicity and bliss" (al-Attas 1995). Thus, al-Ghazali argues that there is little chance of enjoying happiness in this life (al-Ghazali 2005). In Islamic tradition, true happiness lies in the spiritual knowledge of God. Al-Ghazali (2005) regards this world only as a prison for human souls and he disregards the value of worldly goods in the process of attaining happiness, for these goods are only the sources of pride and sins.

Happiness for modern Western philosophers like Bentham is maximising the pleasure for the greatest number of people. For Mill, happiness is the presence of pleasure and the absence of pain. For Kant, happiness is subjective, indeterminate, differs from person to person, is grounded on desires and does not properly follow reason. However, Bentham argues that equal pleasure for everyone is intrinsic to aggregate happiness, which can be ensured by the equal distribution of money or equality in monetary income. He also advocates for the reduction of inheritance rights to maximise happiness. Islam rejects Bentham's concept of "equality in money income", for it is not possible that everyone in a society will have an equal amount of wealth. There will, for example, be differences in owning property, which Islam compensates for by encouraging charity and zakat. God is unlikely to give equal wealth to everyone. The Holy Quran asserts, "You grant sustenance to whom You will, beyond all reckoning" (Surah al-Imran 3:27). Therefore, it can be argued that Bentham's philosophy of happiness is not appropriate for ensuring happiness for all. Table 1 shows the sharp contrast between Western and Islamic philosophies of happiness.

Table 1. Differences between Western and Islamic philosophies of happiness

No.	Western philosophy	Islamic philosophy
1	Virtue is acquired by habituation and reason	Virtue is a divine gift
2	Happiness is concerned with worldly life	Happiness is concerned with both lives, here and the hereafter
3	Happiness has a secular exegesis	Happiness has a Quranic exegesis
4	Happiness is divested from spirituality	Happiness is imbued with spirituality
5	Has brought moral decadence, political dissension and conflict	Has brought harmony and moral embellishment
6	Has affinity with Greek philosophy	Mostly alienated from Greek philosophy
7	Cannot guarantee a true feeling of happiness	Guarantees actual feeling of happiness
8	Values worldly goods for happiness	Unlikely to value worldly goods
9	Unlike stoic philosophy	Like stoic philosophy
10	Does not believe in the vision of God	Believes in the vision of God

Congruencies between Western and Islamic philosophies of happiness

Both of these philosophies have the following characteristics:

1. Concentration on human perfection.
2. Stress on virtues and moral agency for attaining happiness.
3. Definition of virtue as moral preference.
4. Consider the soul, not the body, as the centre for all happiness.
5. Underscore reason as leading moral virtue.
6. Emphasise that intellect or reason must dominate the bodily pleasures or cravings to fulfil base desires.
7. Suggest sympathetic works and social humanitarian works.
8. Advocate "higher pleasures" or pleasures derived from intellect.
9. Argue that only feeling content and satisfying our desires cannot be defined as happiness.
10. Emphasise doing good to others, which is the greatest good.
11. Define social hierarchies based on virtues, not wealth.
12. Recommend contemplation for attaining happiness.
13. Consider friendship (virtuous friends) as important to encourage the performance of good deeds.

Conclusion

Both Islamic and Western scholars and philosophers deem the concept of happiness a matter of significance. Being heavily influenced by al-Ghazali, al-Attas describes the notion of happiness intriguingly. Moreover, Western philosophers (e.g., Aristotle, Bentham, Mill and Kant) describe happiness magnificently. However, while Aristotle and other recent philosophers position happiness only in this world, al-Attas situates it in both lives—here and the hereafter. But most Western philosophers, especially Aristotle, agree concerning virtue as a pre-requisite for attaining happiness in this world. For al-Attas, *iman* (belief in God) and the *yaqin* (the certainty of the truth) are the two significant sources of all the virtues and they play remarkable roles in achieving happiness in both lives. Al-Attas emphasises the awareness and remembrance of God to acquire true happiness; however, Aristotle stresses human perfection, rationality, virtues and moral agency for true happiness – in this sublunary life. He does not, per se, say anything about happiness in the afterlife.

Like Augustine and unlike Aquinas, al-Ghazali does not admit to the importance of worldly happiness—since this life is not the place to enjoy happiness—regardless of his confession of the necessity of the value of worldly goods that play a limited role in bringing happiness in this life. However, al-Ghazali strongly suggests the purification of the soul and intimacy with and love of God as the key components for achieving final happiness in the next world.

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