

## Article

# Transcendental Happiness in the Thought of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ‘Arabī

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**Abstract:** This article explores the concept of transcendental happiness in the philosophies of arguably the two most important figures in Islamic intellectual thought, Abū ‘Alī ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240). The most striking parallels between the philosophy of Ibn Sīnā and that of Ibn ‘Arabī is in their agreement on the Aristotelian principle of transcendental happiness as the comprehension of God, combined with their emanationist cosmologies. Based on Neoplatonist emanationism, especially as it is put forth by Plotinus, Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ‘Arabī argue that there is a necessary emanation from God that results in the existence of the universe. As corollaries of the divine emanative process, those endowed with rationality seek to return to the divine in a reciprocal upward motion that aims to ‘reverse’ the downward motion of the original divine descent. The impetus for the two-way process incorporating divine descent through emanation and the longing for ascent found in humans is love. Despite these points of confluence, there are others of divergence. Ibn ‘Arabī disagrees with his predecessor that transcendental happiness is found in absolute annihilation in the divine, while still maintaining that annihilation of the self is a necessary first step in the attainment of transcendental happiness. Transcendental happiness, argues Ibn ‘Arabī, is ultimately the realization of human potentiality to become a complete locus of divine manifestation. This is carried out through the body for Ibn ‘Arabī, whereas for Ibn Sīnā, transcendental happiness requires the divestment of materiality.

**Keywords:** Ibn Sīnā; Ibn ‘Arabī; Aristotle; Plotinus; annihilation; emanation; Perfect Man



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## 1. Introduction

This article explores transcendental happiness in the philosophies of arguably the two most important figures in Islamic intellectual thought, Abū ‘Alī ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) and Muḥyī al-Dīn ibn ‘Arabī (d. 638/1240). The Thomistic definition of transcendental happiness is adopted, in which true happiness can only be found with God (Theron 1985, p. 361; Wang 2007). It is known that St. Thomas Aquinas’ conception of happiness was influenced by Ibn Sīnā (Dudley 2018, pp. 180–81); however, this article argues that traces of Ibn Sīnā’s conception of happiness can also be found in Ibn ‘Arabī’s works, in which he retrofits his theological ideas to those of his predecessor in his own way. It is the parallels in terms of what constitutes happiness, how it is attained, and what relationship it has with the overarching metaphysics of these two thinkers that constitute the unique contribution this work makes to the existing literature on transcendental happiness. This study, therefore, builds on the work of Seyyed Hossein Nasr, ‘Happiness and the Attainment of Happiness’, in the Islamic tradition (2014). More specifically, it reveals the ways in which Ibn ‘Arabī’s meditation on the concept of transcendental happiness has many of the same features as that of Ibn Sīnā, as delineated by Shams Inati in her work, ‘The Relevance of Happiness to Eternal Existence’ (Inati 1995).

This paper first discusses Ibn Sīnā's conception of happiness as a synthesis of Aristotelian eudaimonism and Plotinian emanationism (Inati 1995). It investigates the distinct amalgamation of these systems within the Islamic framework that is the hallmark of the Avicennan notion of happiness. The main works in which these ideas are explored are: *Al-Najāt*, *Al-Shifā'*, *Al-Ishārāt wa'l-tanbīhāt*, the various treatises of Ibn Sīnā, especially *Risāla fi'l-'ishq*, and the commentaries written on these works. Content analysis of these texts provides an overall conception of transcendental happiness according to Ibn Sīnā. Subsequent to this, the concept of happiness, and matters related to it, are expounded in the mystical thought of Ibn 'Arabī, who combines Aristotelian, Plotinian, and Avicennan trends. This allows the excavation of influences and the modes of reformulation that the latter adopts in order to devise an entirely unique interpretation of happiness that is predicated on, but nevertheless varies significantly from, that of his philosophical forebear. Content analysis of Ibn 'Arabī's two most popular works, the multi-volume, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, and the terse, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, along with the latter's numerous commentaries, is carried out. In the *Futūḥāt*, special attention is paid to the chapter entitled 'On the esoteric knowledge of the alchemy of happiness' (*Fī ma'rifat kīmīyā' al-sa'āda*) which specifically deals with the concept of happiness.

## 2. Ibn Sīnā's Exposition of Happiness

### 2.1. The Influence of Aristotle

It is well known that Aristotle was one of the most important influences on Ibn Sīnā. Dmitri Gutas explains that this was due to the fact that:

Avicenna derived his conception of the history of philosophy from the late antique tradition of Alexandria, which presented Aristotle as the pinnacle of philosophy, perfecting all the tendencies previous to his time (Gutas 2014a, p. 286).

On the topic of happiness in particular, Ibn Sīnā is affected by Aristotle's (1999) *Nicomachean Ethics*, in which the philosopher begins by rejecting the idea that happiness is a state, as was commonly conceived. If that were the case, argues Aristotle, then a person could be asleep their whole lives, essentially living the same sort of life as a plant, and still be happy, which he does not accept (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 6, p. 162). If it is not a state, then happiness has to be an activity. Now, he continues, there are those activities that we perform in order to gain some other benefit, and then there are those that we do because they are good in themselves; happiness belongs to the latter category (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 6, p. 162). Aristotle then makes the claim that 'this seems to be the character of actions in accord with virtue; for doing fine and excellent actions is choiceworthy for itself' (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 6, p. 162). He acknowledges that performing actions that give physical pleasure also seem as though they are 'choiceworthy in their own right', but considers that this argument is erroneous since everyone thinks that 'the things they honor are best' (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 6, p. 162). Taking his cue from Aristotle, Ibn Sīnā would come to dismiss the commonly accepted primacy of physical pleasures over internal ones, and, especially, over intellectual pleasures, in the *Ishārāt*:

It is part of the delusions of common folk (*awhām al-'amma*) that pleasures (*ladhdhāt*) that are strong and obviously superior (*musta'liya*) are [those that are] sensual (*ḥissiyya*), and the ones besides them are weak pleasures; these being things imagined (*khayālāt*) that have no reality (*ghayr ḥaqīqa*). . . . So it would be said to [someone like] him, 'Is not the most pleasurable (*aladhdh*) of that which you describe from this perspective sex, or food, or things like them?' But you know that someone who has the power (*mutamakkīn*) to win something—even if it is insignificant (*ḥasīs*), like chess or backgammon—if food or [the possibility of] sex were put in front of him, would reject them due to the non-sensual pleasure of victory that they would get<sup>1</sup> (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 8, chp. 1, pp. 7–8).

The pleasure of victory, which is in the domain of the internal senses, is, thus, privileged over the pleasures of food and sex, which are in the domain of the external senses.

Aristotle then observes that since everyone has the perception that whatever they honor is best, the thing that is truly ‘honorable and pleasant is what is so to the excellent person’ (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 6, p. 162). This is because:

to each type of person, the activity that accords with his own proper state is most choiceworthy; hence the activity in accord with virtue is most choiceworthy to the excellent person [and hence is most honorable and pleasant] (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 6, p. 162).

Ibn Sīnā echoes this sentiment when he writes:

Indeed, food and [the possibility of] sex could be presented before a person who is virtuous [but] . . . due to the presence of modesty, he withdraws his hand from them in order to observe modesty (*hishma*) (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 8, chp. 1, p. 8).

Since the virtue of modesty is ‘most choiceworthy to the excellent person’, it is more pleasurable, and the person then ‘withdraws his hand’ from food or sex in order to act in accordance with that virtue.

Having shown that happiness is found in acting in accordance with virtue, Aristotle argues that it therefore stands to reason that the greatest happiness is to act in accordance with the greatest virtue:

If happiness is activity in accord with virtue, it is reasonable for it to accord with supreme virtue, which will be the virtue of the best thing. The best is understanding . . . and to understand what is fine and divine, by being itself either divine or the most divine element in us. Hence, complete happiness will be its activity in accord with its proper virtue, and we have said that this activity is the activity of study (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 6, p. 163).

‘Complete happiness’, then, is found in the activity that is most in accordance with ‘the most divine element in us’, which, he tells us, is understanding. This means that the activity that leads to complete happiness is ‘the activity of study’. Accepting this premise, Ibn Sīnā explains that this is why the pleasures of the internal senses, such as victory, are preferred to those of the external senses, such as food and sex, and that the internal senses themselves are lower than the theoretical intellect that carries out ‘the activity of thinking’. Consequently, after proving that the internal senses trump the external ones, he asks, rhetorically, ‘So if the internal pleasures (*al-ladhdhāt al-bāṭina*) are greater than the external ones (*al-zāhira*), even though they are not intellectual (*‘aqliyya*), then what do you think about the intellectual [pleasures]?’ (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 8, chp. 1, p. 9). Thus, Ibn Sīnā delineates a ‘pecking order’ when it comes to pleasures that is based on Aristotle’s works, with the exercise of contemplation resulting in the greatest happiness and the pleasures of the external senses constituting the least (McGinnis 2010, p. 218). In his *Treatise on Happiness* (*Risāla fi’l-sa’āda*), Ibn Sīnā draws a direct equivalence between the pleasure and joy that a person experiences and the happiness that they feel (Ibn Sīnā n.d.b., pp. 259–80; Khademi 2014).

Ibn Sīnā goes on to say, ‘Surely, pleasure is to perceive (*idrāk*), and to obtain what is needed to arrive at (*naḥl li wuṣūl*), what the person who perceives (*mudrik*) to be perfection (*kamāl*) and good (*khayr*)’ (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 8, chp. 3, p. 11). This means that pleasure has two constituents, as he makes clear when he writes, ‘Every pleasure is related to two things’ (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 8, chp. 3, p. 15). These are: (1) perceiving that something is good, and (2) attaining that thing. Now, the thing that is perceived to be good and is, therefore, sought, says Ibn Sīnā, ‘is the perfection that is particular to it (*yakhtaṣṣ bih*), and in the direction of which it goes with its first preparedness (*isti’dād awwal*)’ (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 8, chp. 3, p. 15). Thus, each thing desires its own perfection, that which is bespoke to it because of its ‘first preparedness’. Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī (d. 672/1274), who is regarded as a faithful interpreter of Ibn Sīnā’s doctrine (Adamson and Noble 2022), elaborates that by ‘first preparedness’, Ibn Sīnā refers to the fact that:

A thing can have two preparednesses (*isti'dādān*), where one overtakes the other, but the thing to which something moves towards with its second preparedness (*isti'dād thānī*) cannot be better than the relation it has to its essence (*dhāt*) (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 8, chp. 3, p. 15).

Each thing, then, has a first preparedness, which is related to the essence of that thing and allows it to actualize, along with a second preparedness that allows the function of the thing to actualize (Inati 1996, pp. 10–11). Therefore, there is an essential preparedness, comprising the first preparedness, and a functional preparedness, comprising the second. Ibn Sīnā is adamant that the true perfection that is desired by all things is the perfection of its essence, or its essential or first preparedness. This, in turn, means that there is nothing that desires a perfection that is not in accordance with its own essence. Ibn Sīnā bases this argument on the Aristotelian view that:

What is proper to each thing's nature is supremely best and most pleasant for it, and hence, for a human being, the life in accord with understanding will be supremely best and most pleasant (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 7, p. 165).

Since the proper perfection for the theoretical soul is the contemplation of the divine, this is what it (1) perceives as good, and, therefore, (2) seeks to attain. Fakhr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1209), one of the most influential of the Ash'arite theologians (Griffel 2007), explains in his commentary of this work that:

The things perceived by the senses (*mudrikāt al-hawās*) are only the particulars like colors, tastes, smells, hotness, and coldness, whereas the things that the intellect perceives are the essence of the Originator (*Al-Bārī*), the Exalted, His attributes (*ṣifātih*), and His actions. It is therefore known [from this perception] that there is no relation (*nisba*) between one and the other in terms of honor. So, if it is proven that . . . the things that the intellect perceives are more honorable than that which the senses perceive, then [it is known] . . . that intellectual pleasure (*al-ladhdha al-'aqliyya*) is more perfect than sensual pleasure (*al-ladhdha al-hissiyya*) (Al-Rāzī n.d., vol. 2, p. 92).

The theoretical intellect, al-Rāzī elucidates, perceives 'the Originator' Himself, as opposed to the particulars that are grasped by the senses, which is why the theoretical intellect is so superior to the external (and internal) senses. However, not all theoretical intellects are the same. Ibn Sīnā writes:

The perfection of the intellectual substance (*al-jawhar al-'āqil*) is such that the lucidity (*jaliyya*) of the First Truth (*Al-Ḥaqq al-awwal*) is represented (*tatamaththal*) in it, so far as it is possible for it to attain the splendor (*bahā'*) that is particular to it (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 8, chp. 9, p. 22).

Thus, the theoretical intellect becomes the locus in which the divine is represented. Ibn Sīnā is careful to attach the proviso that the 'lucidity' with which the divine is manifested in the theoretical intellect is commensurate with what is possible. This means that not only is there a hierarchy when it comes to the pleasures, with the intellectual pleasures being at the summit, there is also a hierarchy within the intellectual pleasures, in terms of the lucidity with which the divine is represented. The more lucid the representation of the divine, the greater the pleasure.

At this point, it is generally assumed that Ibn Sīnā transitions to the Plotinian model because he identifies this contemplation of the divine with union with Him. Inati explains:

We find that the Aristotelian notion of contemplation is transformed into the notion of union or being with the object. A human is no longer to seek knowledge as such; he is now to seek union or being with the object (Inati 1995, p. 13).

While there is no denying that Ibn Sīnā's major influence in articulating union with the divine is the writings of Plotinus (see below), it would be a little hasty to attribute this notion entirely to Plotinus; even in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, we find the intimation of some kind of deep association with the divine when Aristotle says:

If understanding is something divine in comparison with a human being, so also will the life in accord with understanding be divine in comparison with human life. We ought not to follow the makers of the proverbs and ‘Think human, since you are human’, or ‘Think mortal, since you are mortal’. Rather, as far as we can, we ought to be pro-immortal and go to all lengths to live a life in accord with our supreme element (Aristotle, book 10, chp. 7, pp. 164–65).

He may not go as far as to assert union with the divine, in the Plotinian sense, but the contemplation of the divine, says Aristotle, does imbue us with ‘pro-immortality’ and takes us beyond our mere humanity to something approaching divinity, which he claims brings us the greatest happiness. Nevertheless, as stated, Ibn Sīnā commits more fully to Plotinian emanationist cosmology.

## 2.2. The Influence of Plotinus

Ibn Sīnā believes there is an ‘ontological descent from God by necessary emanation’ and the ‘ascent of the creature in a movement of love’ (Houben 1956, p. 217). This ‘emanationistic doctrine’ (Morewedge 1971, p. 469) has ostensible similarities with Plotinus’ model of the cosmos as an emanation from ‘the One’ (Peters 1968, p. 14). However, there are significant differences between Ibn Sīnā’s conception of God and Plotinus’ idea of ‘the One’; whereas Ibn Sīnā’s God is self-aware (Ibn Sīnā 1993, book 3, tenet 4, chp. 28, p. 53), Plotinus’ figure of ‘the One’ is not (Plotinus 2018, pp. 880–98). Indeed, this was one of the explicit attacks leveled against Aristotle by Plotinus, whose Self-Thinking Intellect was clearly conscious of Itself (Plotinus 2018, pp. 880–98). Furthermore, Ibn Sīnā seems to view God as a determination of ‘being-qua-being’; Plotinus, in contrast, places ‘the One’ above ‘being’ since it is the generative force behind ‘being’ (Morewedge 1972, p. 11). In light of these key differences, it would be more accurate to assert that Ibn Sīnā’s conception is Neoplatonized Aristotelianism (Wolfson 1976, pp. 444–48; Dastagir 2001–02, pp. 1–14). Indeed, as Dimitri Gutas observes, Ibn Sīnā’s theological system:

[ . . . ] is unique in comparison to the theology and philosophy that came before him, since he synthesized in a comprehensive fashion Aristotelianism, Islamic theology, and Islamic tenets into his metaphysical scheme (Gutas 1988, p. 252).

Yet it may be argued that he was unique only in the *manner* in which he synthesized these myriad trends, for his predecessor, Abū Yūsuf al-Kindī (d. 259/873?), had synthesized Aristotelianism, Neoplatonism, Islamic theology, and Islamic tenets in his own way and to serve his own ends (Al-Kindī 1948; Adamson 2016, pp. 26–32). Ibn Sīnā was, thus, operating in a tradition that was inaugurated by al-Kindī, but he made a highly original contribution to that tradition through his unique mode of synthesis.

The impetus for the two-way process of divine descent through emanation and the longing for ascent by humans, Ibn Sīnā tells us, is love (Ibn Sīnā 1899, pp. 1–27; Anwar 2003, pp. 331–45). Ibn Sīnā elaborates that the innate love humans have for God, and the longing that they feel to return to Him, is a direct corollary of His effulgent emanation, which caused the emergence of the cosmos (Ibn Sīnā 1986, pp. 106–8). God, the Highest Being (*al-Mawjūd al-‘ālī*), is the object of love and the cause of its dissemination and reciprocity in sensible existence (Ibn Sīnā 1899, pp. 1–27). It is God’s self-love that is manifested in humans’ longing for Him and it is that which galvanizes them to seek a return to Him. This is their supreme happiness. Goichon explains that God’s self-love necessitates the emanative process, and it also provides the impetus for the reverse ascent of the soul. Quoting from the *Najāt*, she writes:

The Necessary Being is, thus, He Himself for Himself, the greatest Lover and the greatest Beloved, the One who enjoys the greatest bliss and is the greatest object of bliss. His love for his essence is, therefore, the most perfect and the most faithful. (Goichon 1956, pp. 116–17)

Ibn Sīnā is influenced by the Aristotelian tradition when he underscores the idea that God is the supreme object of love, as mentioned previously (Dudley 1983, pp. 126–37);



however, in his theoeroticization of this love, he is drawing on the Sufi tradition in which the love of the human for the divine takes on a distinctly individualistic and personal connotation, wherein happiness can only be attained with the divine (Massignon 1982; Anwar 2003, p. 341). Unification with the divine, says Ibn Sīnā, is the utmost perfection of the human soul, and thus, its greatest happiness (Ibn Sīnā 1899, pp. 1–27). Deep parallels between Ibn Sīnā's conception of human perfection and the Sufi concept of annihilation in the divine (*fanā'*) are perceptible here (Sells 1996; Karamustafa 2007). Since a human being can achieve perfection and complete transcendental happiness through their annihilation in the divine, Ibn Sīnā asserts that the yearning for the divine is simultaneously a yearning for self-perfection (Anwar 2003, p. 343).

Delineating this emanatory process in the *Ishārāt*, Ibn Sīnā writes:

Think about how existence (*wujūd*) began, from the noblest (*al-ashraf*) to what is noble, until it ended up in matter. Then, it returned from what is basest (*al-akhass*) to the less base, then to what is nobler to what is noblest, until it reached the rational soul (*al-naḥs al-nāṭiqā*) and the acquired intellect (*al-'aql al-mustafād*) (Ibn Sīnā 1993, book 3, tenet 7, chp. 1, pp. 241–42).

God is the noblest (*al-ashraf*), says Ibn Sīnā, and existence began with Him and descended to the less noble intellects, which are also not sensible, until it ended up in matter, which is the basest point. As one would expect, he provides more detail about this in the *Ilāhiyyāt*:

Since existence begins from the One, every proceeding existent being from Him is of a lower level (*adwān martaba*) than the first, and the ranks continue to fall. The first of these is purely spiritual angels (*al-malā'ika al-rūḥāniyya al-mujarrada*) that are called 'intellects' (*'uqūl*). Then come the levels of the spiritual angels called the 'souls' (*nufūs*) . . . then the levels of the heavenly bodies. . . . Then, after these, begins the existence of matter (*al-mādda*) (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 10, chp. 1, p. 435).

The resultant existents seek to return to the perfection whence they came, which is why, according to Ibn Sīnā, 'the fundamental principle is that everything that exists desires its perfection; some sort of an ontological love', as Louis Gardet observes (El-Bizri 2001, pp. 762–63). It is, thus, their ontological love for and need to meet God—the source of perfection—that drives their ascent upward in order to attain transcendental happiness. Thus, ontological love is the force behind the upward creational motion toward God that imbues us with transcendental happiness.

Taking his cue from Plotinus, Ibn Sīnā states that, through a process of contemplative emanationism, from the One is derived the intellects, the souls, the heavenly bodies, then the sensible realm, which means that all existents are the result of this divine emanative process:

It is proven for us, through that which we have adduced, that the Necessary Existent (*Wājib al-wujūd*) in itself is one, and that He is not a body (*laysa bi-jism*), nor in a body (*fi jism*), and that He cannot be divided in any way. The existence of all existent beings (*mawjūdāt*), thus, comes from Him (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, p. 402).

Due to the fact that everything comes from Him by means of the emanative process, it seeks a return to Him, its divine source, and this return constitutes absolute transcendental happiness. Ibn Sīnā precludes intentionality as the impetus for the emanative process when he says:

It is not possible that there is, for Him, a principle (*mabda'*) in any way, nor a cause (*sabab*), not in that which comes from Him, and not in that in which something comes to exist in it or by it, or because of it. It is due to this that it is not possible for the being of everything (*kawn al-kull*) to come from Him through an intention (*qaṣd*), like our intention for creating everything, and for the existence of everything because, in that case, He would be intending [this] for the sake of something other than Him (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, p. 402).

Ibn Sīnā believes that God, inasmuch as He is the Necessary Existent, is knowable, unlike Ibn ‘Arabī’s absolute essence of God. Thus, he regards the emanation of the universe from Him to be nothing but a manifestation of Himself, in the same way that Ibn ‘Arabī regards the emanation of the universe as a manifestation of God’s divine Names (see next section). Ibn Sīnā argues that, because it is impossible that there should be any cause for God’s existence, it likewise follows that all things emanating from Him would neither have another cause, because no other cause exists, nor that God would intend the emanation of all things for some other reason, since there is no other existent but Him. In other words, it is God’s self-love that drives the emanative process, and it is the reversal of this process that constitutes transcendental happiness. Ibn Sīnā continues:

His essence (*dhāt*) knows that His perfection (*kamāl*) and His exaltedness (*‘uluww*) are such that from them emanate goodness, and that this is one of the requisites (*lawāzim*) of His majesty (*jalāl*) that the object of love is in itself (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, pp. 402–3).

The levels of existence are the corollaries of this self-love, which are numerous before they enter our sensible world in Ibn Sīnā’s ontology. Ibn Sīnā explains that the first product of the emanation from God cannot be sensible and must, therefore, be immaterial:

The first of the existent beings (*mawjūdāt*) that comes from the First Cause (*Al-‘Illā al-ūlā*) is one, and its essence (*dhāt*) and quiddity (*māhiyya*) is one, but its matter (*mādda*) is not. So nothing of [sensible] bodies (*ajsām*)—or the forms, which are the perfections of the bodies—is a proximate effect (*ma’lūl qarīb*) of God. The first effect (*al-ma’lūl al-awwal*) is a pure intellect (*‘aql maḥḍ*) because it is a form (*ṣūra*), and it does not have matter (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, p. 404).

The first product of the emanation from God is one, in terms of its essence and quiddity, says Ibn Sīnā. He uses the terms essence and quiddity synonymously here, in opposition to existence (*wujūd*). This bifurcation constitutes one of the most basic distinctions in Islamic philosophy, as Toshihiko Izutsu notes:

The distinction between ‘quiddity’ and ‘existence’ is undoubtedly one of the most basic philosophical theses in Islamic thought. Without exaggeration, the distinction may be said to constitute the first step in ontologico-metaphysical thinking among Muslims (Izutsu 1969, p. 49).

The essence and quiddity of the first existent to proceed from God, reasons Ibn Sīnā, is immaterial because God, the First Cause of the universe, is a pure intellect and is thus entirely free from matter. Through careful argumentation, Ibn Sīnā proves that if matter were to proceed from God and if it were the first product of the emanative process, this would mean that matter is the cause of further products of emanation, but this cannot be the case since it is only a recipient of emanation and not the cause of it (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, pp. 404–5). This means that ‘it is necessary (*wājib*) for the first effect [of emanation] to be in a form that is not material (*ṣūra ghayr māddiyya*): in fact, it is an intellect’ (*‘aql*) (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, p. 405).

Ibn Sīnā answers the question of how unity leads to multiplicity by appealing to the intrinsic activity of the intellect. As an emanation from God, the first intellect is one and has ‘pure unity’ (*waḥda maḥḍa*); however, because it is an intellect, it understands that it has necessary existence through God, and has possible existence (*mumkinat al-wujūd*) in itself. Thus, ‘the multiplicity (*kathra*) is not from the First [Cause]’, says Ibn Sīnā (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, pp. 405–6). Ibn ‘Arabī has a completely different answer to this question, one that involves the multiplicity of the divine Names, which is the way in which God is known by His creation, but not as He truly is in His essence (see Section 3). Nevertheless, Ibn ‘Arabī agrees with the essential simplicity and immateriality of the first product of divine emanation (Chittick 1982, p. 113).

When the first intellect thinks about God, it causes the emanation of another intellect, and when it thinks about itself as the product of God’s thought, it causes the emergence of a celestial sphere (*falak*) with only its matter and form, which Ibn Sīnā calls its soul (*nafs*).

Finally, when it thinks about itself as having a possible existence, it brings forth the body of the celestial sphere. Ibn Sīnā writes,

There is, under every intellect, a celestial sphere—with its matter (*mādda*) and form (*ṣūra*)—which is its soul (*nafs*), and an intellect under it. This means that, under every intellect, there are three things in existence (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, p. 406).

The three things in existence comprise the celestial intellect (the result of the intellect thinking about God as the cause of its coming into being), the celestial soul (the product of its thinking about its necessity, inasmuch as it is the necessary corollary of God's thought), and the celestial body (the outcome of its thinking of its intrinsic possibility (*imkān*)) (Inati 1995, p. 14). These, then, are the intellectual, the spiritual, and the celestial levels of existence, which Ibn Sīnā delineates more concisely in the *Ishārāt* (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 10, chp. 1, p. 435). He dubs the first level the 'purely spiritual angels' (*al-malā'ika al-rūḥāniyya al-mujarrada*), which corresponds to Ibn 'Arabī's 'angelic world of determinations' (Corbin 1997, p. 225). Ibn Sīnā calls the second level the rank of the souls, which correlates with Ibn 'Arabī's 'determinations of the souls' (*ta'ayyunāt rūḥiyya*) (Corbin 1997, p. 225); the third level he calls the ranks of the heavenly bodies, which Ibn 'Arabī dubs the 'world of the Idea-Images' (*ālam al-mithāl*) (Corbin 1997, p. 225). These levels would come to be formalized by his followers as the divine presences (*ḥaḍarāt*) (Chittick 1982).

These three levels pertain to each of the ten intellects (besides God), souls, and celestial bodies, says Ibn Sīnā, the last of which is the lunar sphere, when there is the emergence of the corporeal realm:

There is always the necessary [emanation of] an intellect after every intellect until the sphere of the moon (*kurraṭ al-qamar*) comes into existence, and then the elements come into existence (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, p. 409).

This rounds off the levels of existence, according to both scholars. However, because it is so many emanations or differentiations away from the level of divinity, this material realm is the least perfect of the levels of existence, according to both thinkers. Ibn 'Arabī agrees with Ibn Sīnā that the physical world is the least perfect of all the levels of existence, not only because it is furthest removed from the divine Essence, in the same way as the lower intellects are further removed from the First Cause than the higher ones and the physical world is the product of the most remote intellect from God, but also because the sensible world is dependent on the pre-sensible world, in the same way that lower intellects are dependent on those intellects that are above them. Ibn Sīnā explains that:

[ . . . ] every intellect is higher in level (*martaba*) [to others] because of a 'meaning' (*ma'nā*) that it has, which is that because it thinks about the First [Cause], there is necessarily the existence of an intellect under it, and because it thinks about its own essence, there is necessarily a celestial sphere (*falak*) from it, with its own soul and body (*jirm*) (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 4, p. 409).

It is the process of undoing this emanative process that—in its furthest differentiation from the divine—brings about sensible reality, which constitutes transcendental happiness, according to Ibn Sīnā. He adds that since the soul is eternal, after the body passes away, it unites with God; that is its absolute transcendental happiness. Here, again, Ibn Sīnā parts ways with Aristotle, for although Aristotle maintains that humankind has the capacity for the divine activity of contemplation, he denies that it can ever be 'identifiable with God' (Morewedge 1972, p. 8).

### 2.3. Transcendental Happiness as Union with the Divine

Many scholars argue that union with the active intellect is what constitutes transcendental happiness for the rational soul, as suggested by Ibn Sīnā, and that there is no union with the divine (Gutas 2014a; Rapoport 2019, p. 180). Dmitri Gutas, for instance, writes that Ibn Sīnā 'saw the supreme happiness in the contact of the human intellect with the active intellect during the split-second of hitting upon the middle term' (Gutas 2014b, p. 10),



which is something that the rational soul of the philosopher would continually achieve after detachment from the body (Gutas 2014b, p. 62). It is fair to say that Ibn Sīnā defines transcendental happiness as both of these things (Fakhry 1976), which would make it rather plausible that while both constitute transcendental happiness, this conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with the active intellect represents a lower level than the supreme transcendental happiness that is achieved by union with the divine (Inati 1995, pp. 15–16). This is because Ibn Sīnā sees no barrier to union with the divine; he writes in numerous works that he has proven ‘the Necessary Existent . . . is, in His essence (*dhāt*), the act of intellecting (*‘aql*), the One who intellects (*‘āqil*), and the article of intellection (*ma’qūl*)’ (Ibn Sīnā n.d.a., p. 200; n.d.b., p. 248; 2007, p. 131), going so far as to dedicate a chapter to this topic in his *Najāt* (Ibn Sīnā n.d.a., pp. 200–1).

This being the case, supreme transcendental happiness would be found in union with the divine, in a reversal of the emanative process. Indeed, Ibn Sīnā makes many references to union with the divine in the mystical section of his *Ishārāt*:

The one who deems it permissible to make God an intermediary is the recipient of mercy (*marḥūm*) only from a certain perspective (*min wajh*) because he is not nourished with (*yut‘am*) the pleasure of magnificence in Him (*ladhdhat al-bahja bih*), so he can seek this attachment (*yata’tafah*). His knowledge of pleasure is deficient (*mukhdaja*), so he yearns for it (*hanūn ilayh*), oblivious to what is beyond it (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 9, chp. 6, p. 74).

There are many points worthy of note in this passage. First, Ibn Sīnā mentions that God should not be an intermediary but the absolute purpose, and that supreme transcendental happiness only lies in this. Ibn Sīnā then defines what he means by this kind of happiness and says that it is ‘the pleasure of magnificence in Him’. He, therefore, seems to articulate that it can only be union with the divine that can afford a person supreme transcendental happiness. He follows this up by stating that those who make God an intermediary do not ‘seek this attachment’ with God; again, he is intimating that it is an absolute attachment to God that yields transcendental happiness. Furthermore, he chastises those who do not have this conception of pleasure and happiness, describing their view as ‘deficient’ (*mukhdaja*). It is significant that the term he uses denotes ‘the young one of a camel brought forth imperfectly formed, even if the period of gestation have [sic] been completed’ (Lane 2003, vol. 2, p. 707). What Ibn Sīnā insinuates is that despite having had the same length of time as the philosophers to know what transcendental happiness is, those who do not realize that it is found in union with the divine have an incomplete or deficient understanding of it. This is why they ‘yearn for’ their own deficient conception of happiness and do not seek ‘what is beyond it’.

Later, Ibn Sīnā says of the advanced knower of God (*‘ārif*), who has reached the penultimate stage in his path, that:

If he crosses over from spiritual exercise (*riyāḍa*) to attainment (*nayl*), his essence [lit. his secret, *sirrūh*] becomes a polished mirror (*mir’āt majluzwa*), through which he faces the direction (*shaṭr*) of God, and the exalted pleasures (*al-ladhdhāt al-‘alī*) flow copiously on him (*darrat ‘alayh*). So he rejoices within himself due to the traces of God that are in it/them (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 9, chp. 16, p. 91).

After perfecting his spiritual exercises, says Ibn Sīnā, the knower can achieve ‘attainment’ of the divine, whereby his essence becomes a polished mirror in which is reflected the divine. Therefore, he rejoices because the traces of the divine are present in it/them. The pronoun can refer to two things here: either it refers to what flows copiously on him from the exalted pleasures or, as is more fitting, it refers to his soul (*nafs*). It would, therefore, mean that the traces of the divine are present in the soul of the knower, due to his union with it. Indeed, this is how al-Ṭūsī seems to understand it, writing in his commentary:

The knower (*‘ārif*), if he has perfected his spiritual exercises, and if he does not need them to arrive (*wuṣūl*) at what he seeks, which is his permanent conjunction (*ittiṣāl*) with God, his essence becomes void (*khālī*) of everything that is not God,

like a polished mirror . . . so the traces of God are represented (*yatamaththal*) in it (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 9, chp. 16, p. 91).

Al-Ṭūsī speaks of the knower having a ‘permanent conjunction with God’, which means that he unambiguously interprets Ibn Sīnā’s view as championing union with the divine. He further consolidates this position with the statement that in this station, the essence of the knower ‘becomes void of everything that is not God’, which is why it becomes a ‘polished mirror’ in which the divine is faithfully reflected. The astronomer and philosopher, Shams al-Dīn al-Samarqandī (d. 710/1310?), who was instrumental in promulgating the ideas of Ibn Sīnā, as well as making some original contributions, especially in the field of Avicennan logic (Faydei 2020), also seems to favor this interpretation. He writes in his commentary on this passage that in the soul of the knower, ‘the traces of God are represented, and true pleasures (*al-ladhdhāt al-ḥaqīqiyya*) are poured on him, as well as the trace of divine perfections (*athar al-kamālāt al-ilāhiyya*)’ (Al-Samarqandī 1979, vol. 3, p. 411). Al-Samarqandī identifies the acquisition of ‘divine perfections’ and the ‘traces of God’, as represented in the rational soul, with experiencing ‘true pleasures’. Transcendental happiness, then, only occurs when there is union with the divine.

In the following stage, which represents the final step in the progress of the knower, Ibn Sīnā explains that there is absolute conjunction with the divine, such that the knower:

[ . . . ] withdraws (*yaghīb*) from his soul, and observes (*yalḥaẓ*) only the side (*jānib*) of sacredness (*quds*). And if he observes his soul, it is only in the sense that he notices [the divine], not in the sense that his soul is bedecked with it. And, at this point, the arrival (*wuṣūl*) is complete (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 9, chp. 17, pp. 92–93).

In this final stage of the knower’s progress, the soul no longer observes itself as being a separate entity from the divine; it observes only the divine and does not even realize that it is ‘bedecked’ with divinity, according to Ibn Sīnā. This represents absolute union with the divine, or complete arrival, which is when the soul experiences supreme transcendental happiness. Al-Ṭūsī draws an equivalence between this stage and the Sufi terms of ‘effacement’ (*maḥẓw*) and ‘annihilation’ (*fanā*) in God (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 9, chp. 17, p. 92) when there is absolute union with the divine, according to some Sufi writers (Massignon 1982). Al-Rāzī employs the same term of ‘annihilation’ (*fanā*) to describe this stage, writing:

It is the first of the stations of ‘absolute arrival’ (*al-wuṣūl al-tāmm*) to God, and it is the complete annihilation (*fanā*) of everything besides God, and the complete subsistence in Him (*baqā’ bih*) (Al-Rāzī n.d., vol. 2, p. 119).

According to al-Rāzī, at this stage, everything besides God vanishes, and the only existence that is left for the soul is its subsistence in the divine.

These commentators of the *Ishārāt* are clearly of the view that Ibn Sīnā believes that union of the rational soul with the divine, and not just with the active intellect, represents the highest level of transcendental happiness. Ibn Sīnā provides more detail on this issue in *Al-Shifā’*, when he speaks of the exalted rank of the rational soul:

The perfection that is particular to (*khāṣṣ bih*) the rational soul is that it becomes an intellectual realm (*‘ālam ‘aqliyy*) wherein the form of everything (*ṣūrat al-kull*) is inscribed, as well as the arrangement (*nizām*) of everything that is comprehended, and the good (*khayr*) that pours forth to everything. This starts with the basis of everything (*mabda’ al-kull*), then goes to the exalted, purely spiritual substances (*al-jawāhir al-sharīfa al-muṭlaqa*), then to the spiritual substances that are related to bodies in some way (*al-muta’alliqā naw’ mā bi’l-abdān*), then to elevated bodies (*al-ajsām al-‘ulwiyya*) with their formations and their faculties, then it carries on until it exhausts in itself the formation of all of existence (*wujūd*). So it turns into an intellectual realm that completely corresponds to the existing realm. It therefore bears witness to absolute excellence (*al-ḥusn al-muṭlaq*), absolute goodness (*al-khayr*

*al-muṭlaq*), and the beauty of the absolutely existent Truth (*Al-Ḥaqq al-muṭlaq*) and is united with it (*muttaḥida bih*) (Ibn Sīnā 1998, book 9, chp. 7, vol. 1, pp. 425–26).

In this long passage, Ibn Sīnā clearly states that the rational soul becomes an intellectual realm that mirrors the sensible world, which is an idea that Ibn ‘Arabī makes extensive use of in his conception of transcendental happiness (see Section 3). He elaborates that this mirroring starts with ‘the basis of everything’, which is an unambiguous reference to God, and then proceeds to ‘the exalted, purely spiritual substances’, which are the celestial intellects that have no connection to matter. After this, the rational soul reflects ‘the spiritual substances that are related to bodies in some way’, which are the celestial souls. Next, it reflects the ‘elevated bodies’, which are the celestial bodies. Finally, ‘it carries on until it exhausts in itself the formation of all of existence’, which refers to the sensible world. When it has completed this reflection, it becomes an ‘intellectual realm that completely corresponds to the existing realm’; therefore, it bears witness to ‘the beauty of the absolutely existent Truth,<sup>2</sup> and is united with it’. This means that once the rational soul has become a complete mirror for the whole of existence, it witnesses the beauty of God and is *united with God*. Ibn Sīnā writes a virtually identical passage in the *Najāt* (Ibn Sīnā n.d.a., pp. 240–41), underscoring his commitment to the idea that supreme transcendental happiness for the rational soul lies in becoming a microcosmic mirror for all of sensible reality, and, ultimately, in union with the divine. Although Ibn ‘Arabī does not agree with union with the divine as a source of supreme transcendental happiness, he is conspicuously influenced by Ibn Sīnā’s general conception of transcendental happiness.

### 3. Ibn ‘Arabī’s Exposition of Happiness

#### 3.1. The Influence of Aristotle

Ibn ‘Arabī is known to have been influenced by Ibn Sīnā (Inati 1996, p. 62) and his exposition of transcendental happiness bears the hallmarks of Aristotelian contemplative perfection and Plotinian emanationism, by which Ibn Sīnā’s conception is characterized. Ibn ‘Arabī declares that all happiness lies only in comprehending God (Chittick 1989, p. 151; Nasr 2014, p. 84). This declaration has ostensible similarities with Aristotle’s notion of happiness in terms of exercising the activity of our ‘most divine element’—the rational soul—that is, understanding (see above).<sup>3</sup> In his most detailed exploration of this topic, comprising chapter 167 of his *magnum opus*, *Al-Futūḥāt al-makkiyya*, and entitled *On the esoteric knowledge of the alchemy of happiness* (*Fī ma’rifat kīmiyā’ al-sa’āda*),<sup>4</sup> he explains the concurrence between alchemy and happiness:

Alchemy is a term for knowledge that relates to [things] . . . that have the capacity for transformation (*istiḥāla*), I mean, to change the states (*taghayyur al-aḥwāl*) of one essence (*al-‘ayn al-wāḥida*) (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 270).

The main point of confluence between alchemy and happiness, Ibn ‘Arabī reveals, is the capacity to change from one state to another, even though the essence is the same. It is the transformation from potentiality to actuality that is the definition of happiness, according to Ibn ‘Arabī. Deep resonances with Aristotle’s notion of happiness are felt here (Blumenfeld 2022; also, see above). Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates that:

[ . . . ] all minerals (*ma’ādin*) come from one base. This base seeks, in its essence (*bi dhātih*), to attain the rank of perfection (*darajat al-kamāl*), which is ‘goldness’ (*dhahabiyya*) (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 270).

‘Goldness’, then, is the full actualization of the potentiality that is present in the essence of all minerals, according to Ibn ‘Arabī; this is their ‘rank of perfection’, which they seek to attain. In the same way, humans seek to attain their own rank of perfection, in which lies their supreme transcendental happiness. However, much as humans face the obstacle of materiality that impedes their path to the perfection of universal intellection, according to Aristotle (Inati 1995, p. 13), minerals encounter similar obstacles because they are a ‘natural affair’ (*amr ṭabī‘ī*) (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 270). Ibn ‘Arabī gives examples of the effects of nature, from the ravages of time to the fluctuations of temperature and moisture, etc.,

which hamper their path to the full actualization of their potentiality of perfection (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 270). The analogy of alchemy and transcendental happiness, therefore, is an apt one.

He emphasizes the parallel between the human quest for perfection and transcendental happiness with that of minerals when he says:

In the same way as the bodies of minerals (*ajsād al-ma’ādin*) are [arranged] in levels (*marātib*) due to causes (*‘ilal*) that affect them while they are being created—even though they all seek the rank of perfection (*darajat al-kamāl*), on account of which their essences (*a’yān*) are manifest—so, too, is humankind created for perfection. Thus, the only things that can turn it away from that (*ṣaraf ‘an dhālik*) are the deficiencies (*‘ilal*) and diseases (*amrād*) that affect it, either in the essences themselves (*aṣl dhawātihim*), or because of accidental (*‘arāḍiy*) causes (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 272).

Ibn ‘Arabī explains that the potentiality of humans, as with minerals, is to achieve actuality, which is perfection. However, despite both humans and minerals seeking perfection, not all attain it. He has already mentioned the external impediment to this attainment in the case of minerals, when he spoke of the effects of nature. Likewise, for humans, the external impediments are those causes that prevent them from pursuing contemplation of the divine. Nevertheless, he adds another cause in this passage, which is what is found ‘in the essences themselves’. Whereas Aristotle attributes the desires of the body as a corollary of materiality that impedes full actualization, Ibn ‘Arabī effects a bifurcation in which parts of the essence are one of the obstacles to perfection and transcendental happiness, while the natural effects of the world represent the other. In the characteristic emphasis that he places on homonymy (Lala 2019, 2023a), he states that the ‘causes’ (*‘ilal*) that negatively affect the minerals during their stages of formation are the same as the ‘deficiencies’ (*‘ilal*) that afflict the essences of humankind. This, then, is their intrinsic preparedness (*isti’dād*), which, in addition to the natural effects of the world, determines whether they can achieve the perfection of transcendental happiness (Lala 2023b).

Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates on this preparedness when he says:

Know that souls, in terms of their essence, are made ready (*muḥayya*) to accept the preparedness (*isti’dād*) that emanates for them from what the divine carries out (*al-tawqī’āt al-ilāhiyya*). So, among them are those who just obtain the preparedness for carrying out sainthood (*isti’dād tawqī’ al-wilāya*) and do not go past that. And among them are those who are given the preparedness for all or some of the stations (*maqāmāt*) that we have mentioned (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 272).

Every person, therefore, has a preparedness that is divinely imbued. For Ibn ‘Arabī, as for Aristotle, the preparedness that each person possesses to achieve transcendental happiness is in their contemplation of the divine. Ibn ‘Arabī makes this clear when he writes:

God has given mastery (*mallaka*) to particular souls (*al-nufūs al-juz’iyya*) over conducting the affairs of (*tadbīr*) the body, and He has appointed them as vicegerents (*istkhlaf*) of them. He has, therefore, made it apparent to the bodies that they are their vicegerents, in order for them [i.e., the souls] to alert them (*tatanabbah*) [i.e., the bodies] to the fact that they have an Originator (*Mūjid*) who has appointed them as vicegerents, so it is their duty (*yata’ayyan ‘alayhā*) to seek knowledge about He who appointed them [i.e., the souls] as vicegerents of them [i.e., the bodies] (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 272).

Ibn ‘Arabī, as does Aristotle, asserts that the practical intellect of the rational soul has the function of managing the body. He argues that the only reason God appointed the rational soul as a vicegerent over the body was so that this would lead to the realization that there must be someone who gave the rational soul this power. The rational soul, thus, alerts the body that it has an Originator who gave it this power and that it is the *raison d’être* of humankind to seek knowledge of this divine Originator; it is only in this search that its transcendental happiness resides.

In much the same way as Ibn Sīnā—who discusses the role of the prophet-legislator in terms of the individual pursuit of transcendental happiness, asserting that obedience to him is necessary and is in accordance with the dictates of the rational soul to contemplate God (Ibn Sīnā 1968, book 4, tenet 9, chp. 4, pp. 60–67)—Ibn ‘Arabī argues that the prophet-legislator:

[ . . . ] prescribes laws that make apparent the path that allows one to attain the rank of perfection and happiness (*darajat al-kamāl wa’l-sa’āda*), in keeping with what contemplation necessitates (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 273).

The role of the prophet-legislator, therefore, is to make clear the path to transcendental happiness, which lies in the contemplation of the divine. Ibn ‘Arabī writes that the prophet-legislator ‘makes clear the path of knowledge (*ṭarīqat al-‘ilm*) that leads to Him, on which lies their happiness’ (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 273). This, argue Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ‘Arabī, is why the laws of the prophet-legislator are in conformity with the essential activity of the rational soul. However, not everyone will attain transcendental happiness. Revealing the rationale behind calling the chapter ‘The Alchemy of Happiness’, Ibn ‘Arabī writes:

It is on account of there being no happiness except in it. Furthermore, there is nothing that people—from among the people of God (*ahl Allāh*)—have that is better than it. And it is that He gives you the rank of perfection (*darajat al-kamāl*) that behooves humankind to attain. This is due to the fact that not every person who is happy (*ṣāḥib al-sa’āda*) is given perfection, so that all those who have perfection (*ṣāḥib al-kamāl*) are happy, and not all who are happy are perfect. Happiness is a term denoting the attainment of a lofty rank (*darajat al-‘ulyā*), which is imitation (*tashabbuh*) of the Cause (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 272).

There are many topics of interest in this passage. Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that transcendental happiness only lies in full actualization, ‘which it behooves humankind to attain’. However, he then goes on to explicate that while it is axiomatic that everyone who has achieved full actualization possesses transcendental happiness, there are also those who are happy but who have not attained perfection. There are similarities here with Ibn Sīnā’s classification of people into seven classes, of which three classes are afforded transcendental happiness, two classes are given relative happiness or suffering, and three classes are doomed to absolute suffering (Inati 1996, pp. 18–27). This is because, according to Ibn Sīnā:

[ . . . ] eternal happiness or eternal suffering . . . are caused by theoretical perfection and theoretical imperfection, respectively. It is obvious, though, that not all theoretical imperfection leads to suffering, but only that which is accompanied by knowledge of one’s perfection (Inati 1996, p. 27).

Ibn Sīnā says that one requires theoretical and moral perfection in order to achieve supreme transcendental happiness without undergoing any suffering in the hereafter. Those who attain moral perfection, but who do not attain theoretical perfection because they were unaware of what the latter entailed, will only attain relative happiness in the second life (Inati 1996, p. 19). Ibn ‘Arabī, likewise, accords those who achieve moral perfection but who are not aware of the true reality of things a state of relative happiness, but they do not have the supreme transcendental happiness that is the preserve of the spiritual elite. These are the people who have attained the ‘lofty rank (*darajat al-‘ulyā*), which is imitation (*tashabbuh*) of the Cause’. It is in this aspect of imitating the Cause, or God, that Ibn ‘Arabī is most influenced by the writings of Plotinus.

### 3.2. The Influence of Plotinus

Ibn ‘Arabī adheres to the Plotinian notion of ontological love as a downward motion from the divine to the creation, along with an upward motion that seeks to return to Him, as espoused by Ibn Sīnā. However, for Ibn ‘Arabī, God is being in its most unrestricted sense, not as a determination of it, as William Chittick explains when he says that:

[ . . . ] anything that exists is a particular mode, within which the One Being displays Itself. But being is not any *thing* that exists, for, if it were one thing, it



could not be, at the same time, another thing. Being is the ‘thing in every respect’, not in one respect or another (Chittick 1982, p. 111).

Chittick makes it clear that, for Ibn ‘Arabī, everything that exists is a manifestation of the One Being that is God. God is not, as Ibn Sīnā asserts, a type of being. He is all being. As being itself, which is what God is in His absoluteness (Izutsu 1983), God is beyond human understanding, according to Ibn ‘Arabī. However, since Ibn Sīnā views God as a determination of ‘being-qua-being’ (Morewedge 1972, p. 11), he proceeds from a level below that espoused by Ibn ‘Arabī. This means that, unlike Ibn ‘Arabī, Ibn Sīnā believes that the Necessary Being is humanly comprehensible; however, he argues, much like Ibn ‘Arabī, that all existents are nothing but God. There is also a difference in the overall purpose served by emanationism. Ibn Sīnā conscripts the emanatory process as a justification for the denial of creation ex nihilo (Morewedge 2001, p. 79), in opposition to Ibn ‘Arabī, for whom the divine yearning for self-expression does not contradict its temporal unfolding (Ibn ‘Arabī 2002, p. 48).

Ibn ‘Arabī begins his most popular work, *Fuṣūṣ al-ḥikam*, by delineating the impetus for the emanation coming from Him. In one of the most well-known and often-translated passages, he states:

God, be He exalted, desired to see the essences of His most beautiful Names (*Al-Asmā’ al-ḥusnā*), which cannot be counted, or, you could say, He wanted to see His essence. So, He chose to do this through a comprehensive creation (*kawn jāmi’*) that encapsulates the whole matter through being characterized by existence (*wujūd*). God’s secret would, thus, be manifest to Him via this creation because seeing something in itself is not the same as seeing it in something else that becomes like a mirror for it (Ibn ‘Arabī 2002, p. 48).

The cause of this emanation from the divine was the love that God had to see Himself manifested in the Other, or as Ibn ‘Arabī puts it, God wanted to see the essences of ‘His most beautiful Names’ (*Al-Asmā’ al-ḥusnā*), which are ‘His essence . . . in a comprehensive creation’ (*kawn jāmi’*). Ibn ‘Arabī bases this opinion on a tradition in which God declares, ‘I was a hidden treasure (*kanz makhfiyy*), and I wished to be known, so I brought forth the creation so that through it they would know Me’ (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 303). Ibn ‘Arabī offers a commentary on this tradition, in which he says:

So, God wished to be manifested in the forms of existence (*ṣuwar al-wujūd*), and He wished for Himself to be known to Himself in the mirrors of contingency (*marāyā al-mumkināt*), just as humans observe their forms in the mirror so as to attain something that they could not attain in themselves without the existence of this form. So that is the love that is the cause (*‘illa*) of the creation of the world, and it is the true basis (*al-asās al-ḥaqīqī*) for which He brought forth existence (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 303).

Ibn ‘Arabī explicitly declares that the ‘cause of the creation of the world’ is God’s self-love, which is the ‘true basis’ for His bringing forth existence. This ontological love results in the existence of the universe as the disparate loci of divine manifestation and imbues them with a love to return to Him. For Ibn ‘Arabī, then, because divine ontological love is a love for self-manifestation in the form of His most beautiful Names (as mentioned in the Qur’an), it is by manifesting these Names most precisely that this proximity to the divine is achieved (Lala 2021; Nettler 1978, pp. 219–29; Nettler 2003, pp. 17–22).

This means that even though Ibn ‘Arabī and Ibn Sīnā agree on Plotinian emanationism, they disagree about the essential impetus behind it, in addition to viewing transcendental happiness as perfection in different ways. Ibn ‘Arabī’s explanation suggests that there was a divine ‘yearning’ to be known, which is the reason why God brought about existence. Even though Ibn ‘Arabī does not accept that this ‘yearning’ implies a lack in the way that humans yearn for self-perfection, wherein lies their transcendental happiness, because they do not possess it, yet, here, he differs from Ibn Sīnā, who rejects the idea that there could

ever be divine yearning because that would mean God does not possess something, as Inati explains:

God does not, and cannot, yearn for anything because . . . yearning implies some lack, and God does not lack anything. Even if no other beings conceive the presence of His essence and, therefore, love Him, He would still not lack anything (Inati 1996, p. 28).

Therefore, even though divine self-love brings to pass the emanative process for Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ‘Arabī, the latter’s conception admits of some form of ‘yearning’, whereas the former’s does not. In addition, for Ibn Sīnā, perfection and transcendental happiness can be found in an upward motion in which the rational souls (*al-nufūs al-nāṭiqā*) become more and more perfect as they acquire perfections. One of these is the perfection of the acquired intellect (*al-‘aql al-mustafād*), which enables the rational soul to have the intelligibles, so that it can perceive the intelligibles, which are universal concepts, whenever it wishes (Inati 2014, p. 201). At this stage, Ibn Sīnā repeatedly asserts that the rational soul becomes ‘like a polished mirror upon which are reflected the forms’ of things as they are in themselves [i.e., the intelligibles without any distortion]’ (Gutas 2012, p. 424).

Ibn ‘Arabī agrees with the essential notion of acquiring perfections, but rather than believing that it is an upward motion in which the baseness of materiality is divested, he views it in completely the opposite way. Since the purpose of the universe is so that God could see Himself in the Other, in something that is not Him, materiality is not something that is base, according to Ibn ‘Arabī, and thus an impediment to perfection, as it is for Aristotle and Ibn Sīnā. Instead, it is the opposite: it is the way in which the divine purpose for the universe is achieved. This is because, as Ibn ‘Arabī clarifies in his commentary of the tradition in which God likens Himself to a hidden treasure, what is gained by the form of the divine Names that exist in sensible reality cannot be gained from the self in itself, much as the form of a person that exists in a mirror cannot be perceived without the mirror.

It is in this sense of manifesting the divine Names, and in this sense alone, that Plotinian union with the divine occurs for Ibn ‘Arabī, and it is this that constitutes supreme transcendental happiness. Ibn ‘Arabī rules out absolute union with the divine that Ibn Sīnā seems to allow. Indeed, he regards annihilation (*fanā*) as an initial stage in which the person annihilates their creaturely traits and takes on divine traits. This is why he pairs annihilation with subsistence (*baqā*) (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 203), as al-Ḥakīm elaborates:

Annihilation (*fanā*) is when the blameworthy characteristics (*al-khiṣāl al-madhūma*) are annihilated from a person. And subsistence (*baqā*) is that praiseworthy characteristics (*al-khiṣāl al-maḥmūda*) are maintained and made firm in a person. So, the seekers on the spiritual path (*sālikūn*) differ about annihilation and subsistence: some of them annihilate their base desires, that is, what they desire of worldly things, so when their desires are annihilated, their [pure] intention (*niyya*) and sincerity (*ikhlas*) in servanthood (*‘ubūdiyya*) remain. And whoever annihilates their blameworthy traits, like envy, pride, hatred, and others, will be left with magnanimity and sincerity (Al-Ḥakīm 1981, p. 202).

Considering that one needs to divest oneself of creaturely traits before divine traits are adopted, annihilation precedes subsistence, and subsistence represents a higher level than annihilation. However, there is also another reason why subsistence is superior, as Ibn ‘Arabī explains:

The connection (*nisba*) of subsistence, in our opinion, is more exalted in the spiritual path than the connection of annihilation . . . for annihilation is that which annihilates in you [creaturely traits] . . . and subsistence is your connection to God (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 515).

Since annihilation is simply breaking free from the shackles of creaturely desires, whereas subsistence is a state in which the connection to the divine is maintained, the latter represents a higher level than the former. Taking on divine traits, then, or subsistence, is the actualization of human potentiality and, therefore, constitutes transcendental happiness.

However, this is not a divestment of materiality, as it is for Aristotle and Ibn Sīnā. Quite the contrary. For Ibn ‘Arabī, materiality is a conduit for transcendental happiness, for it is only when the physical form of a person becomes a locus of manifestation of all of God’s most beautiful Names that they attain full actualization and transcendental happiness. This is the rank of the Perfect Man (*Al-Insān al-kāmil*) (Al-Jīlī 1997; Morrissey 2020).

### 3.3. Transcendental Happiness as the Perfect Man

Ibn ‘Arabī asserts that the reason for the creation of the whole universe was so that God could see His knowable aspect—as represented by His most beautiful Names—in something other than Himself. The whole of the universe, therefore, is a manifestation of God’s most beautiful Names, as Ibn ‘Arabī elaborates in his commentary of Q45:37.

*For Him is all majesty (kibriyā’)* in the heavens and the earth, and that is the essence of God, so it is not possible for His essence not to be a locus because all that is in the heavens and earth is a locus (*maḥall*) for Him. And His being praised in the universe itself is what ‘majesty’ means, for He is too exalted for anything to be not Him (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 3, p. 538).

Everything in the universe is a locus of divine manifestation because that was the very purpose for His bringing it into existence. Ibn ‘Arabī states that God is far too exalted for there to be anything besides Him that exists in the universe. Therefore, all that exists is a locus of manifestation of one of His most beautiful Names.

Even though all individual things in the world represent individual Names from the list of God’s most beautiful Names, the rank that humankind—with Ādam as its representative—occupies is different, as Ibn ‘Arabī explicates:

God, the Exalted, brought forth the whole universe in a form of existence (*wujūd*) that was vague and undifferentiated, which had no soul; that is why it was like an unpolished mirror (*mir’āt ghayr majlūwwa*). And it is the nature of the divine decree (*al-ḥukm al-ilāhī*) that it only prepares a locus if it is to receive the divine spirit (*rūḥ ilāhī*) . . . so Ādam was the very polish (*jalā’*) of this mirror and the soul of this form (Ibn ‘Arabī 2002, p. 49).

Ādam specifically, and humankind more generally, holds a special rank because of being the polish of the mirror in which God sees Himself, in something other than Himself (Sells 1988, pp. 121–49). Ibn ‘Arabī then explains what it means to be the polish of the mirror: ‘All the divine forms that are the [divine] Names are manifest in the formation (*nash’a*) of humankind, so it has attained the degree (*rutba*) of completeness and all-inclusiveness’ (Ibn ‘Arabī 2002, p. 50). Thus, humankind has the potential to be the locus of divine manifestation for all of God’s most beautiful Names, which represents its ‘degree of completeness and all-inclusiveness’. However, it is only when humankind fulfills this potentiality that it reaches the rank of the Perfect Man, who has the right to be called the vicegerent (*khalīfa*) of God, according to Nūr al-Dīn al-Jāmī (d. 898/1492) (Al-Jāmī 2005, p. 79), one of the most important disseminators of Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophical thought (Rizvi 2006). It is the fulfillment of this potentiality that represents perfection and supreme transcendental happiness, as Ibn ‘Arabī clarifies when he states that happiness is:

[ . . . ] the perfection (*kamāl*) that is sought, which is the reason humankind was created to be a vicegerent, that Ādam, peace be upon him, attained by divine providence (*al-‘ināya al-ilāhiyya*) (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 2, p. 272).

Transcendental happiness, says Ibn ‘Arabī, lies in becoming a manifestation of all the divine Names in a single locus, which represents the actualization of our potentiality. Al-Jāmī elaborates that this is why Ādam (and humankind more generally) has a ‘divine form’ (*ṣūra ilāhiyya*) (Al-Jāmī 2005, p. 74). It is the true meaning, he continues, of the prophetic tradition: ‘Surely God created Ādam in His form (*‘alā ṣūratih*)’ (Muslim n.d., vol. 4, p. 2017; ‘Abd al-Razzāq 1983, vol. 9, p. 444; Ibn Hibbān 1988, vol. 12, p. 420; Al-Bazzār 1988–2009, vol. 15, p. 161; Ibn Ḥanbal 2001, vol. 12, p. 275). The potentiality of this form can only be fulfilled when all the creaturely traits are divested, and all the divine traits are

adopted. This is the point when one becomes a mirror for the divine, and this can only be achieved through orthopraxy.

To emphasize his fidelity to orthopraxy as the only vehicle by which to attain this level (Addas 1993; Chittick 1992, pp. xii–xiii; De Cillis 2014, p. 169), Ibn ‘Arabī states:

In the same way as your happiness is secured from your actions, likewise, the divine Names (*al-asmā’ al-ilāhiyya*) are only affirmed through His actions, which are you and are originated. Thus, in terms of His traces (*āthār*), He is called ‘God’, and in terms of your actions, you are called ‘happy’ (Ibn ‘Arabī 2002, p. 95).

It is only by following the formalistic aspects of religion through the body and by being cognizant of one’s inner reality that one can attain the rank of the Perfect Man, in which one becomes a mirror for the divine and achieves transcendental happiness. God is so named in terms of the manifestation of His actions in the universe, but it is only through these actions that humankind achieves transcendental happiness. The commentators of the *Fuṣūṣ* are in complete agreement with Ibn ‘Arabī on this issue. The influential early commentator, Mu’ayyid al-Dīn al-Jandī (d. 700/1300?), whose commentary became a model that subsequent generations would emulate (Dagli 2016, pp. 95–104), states in his commentary on this passage:

There is no doubt that your following the commands of God are your actions and that in respecting His commands and prohibitions resides your happiness. . . . So, it is only your actions that lead to your happiness, which are only Him in reality because the actions of God are originated and established by the most beautiful Names (Al-Jandī 2007, p. 330).

Al-Jandī explains that because humans are merely the loci of manifestation of all the divine Names, their actions are the actions of God. It is in this respect that the actions of God are ‘originated’ because they are nothing but the actions carried out by the manifestation of the divine Names, which are originated in themselves. Therefore, it is only through these acts, and through realizing their true reality, that humans can achieve transcendental happiness.

Following the writings of al-Jandī, ‘Abd al-Razzāq al-Qāshānī (d. 736/1335?), whose formalization of Ibn ‘Arabī’s philosophical thought exerted an abiding influence on the reception of the former’s ideas (Lala 2019), articulates that it is only actions that lead to happiness because ‘happiness is an attribute that you possess, and this attribute is only achieved by your actions, so your happiness is derived from your actions because every action is voluntary (*ikhtiyārī*) and inevitably produces an effect in the agent’ (Al-Qāshānī 1951, p. 125). He concludes by echoing the sentiment of his predecessor that these actions are only performed by a locus of the divine Names and so, are in that sense, divine (Al-Qāshānī 1951, p. 125). Al-Qāshānī’s disciple and author of the most widely circulated commentary on the *Fuṣūṣ* in the Ottoman era, Dawūd al-Qayṣarī (d. 751/1350) (Rustom 2005), clarifies that this does not mean that ‘actions are the causes of the Names since it is the Names that are the causes of the actions and their source. But as the Names are the divine realities hidden within creation, their manifestation is only achieved through their traces and actions.’ This is the source of happiness for humankind because it is through this that the ‘fixed essences’ (*a’yān thābita*), or intrinsic preparedness to achieve transcendental happiness, can be realized (Al-Qayṣarī 1955, p. 669). Al-Jāmī stresses that it is not only adherence to formalistic worship that enables one to achieve transcendental happiness; rather, it is achieved by the full realization of the body as a locus of the divine, and its actions as manifestations of the effects of the divine Names in phenomenality (Al-Jāmī 2009, p. 210). The important early-modern commentator, ‘Abd al-Ghanī al-Nābulusī (d. 1143/1731), is even more explicit when he declares that the perfection (*kamāl*) of the divine Names can only be expressed through actions, which means that ‘actions are . . . from His perfection’ (Al-Nābulusī 2008, vol. 1, p. 338). Ibn ‘Arabī and his commentators agree, then, that transcendental happiness is only attained through the fulfillment of one’s potentiality through the physical body and the actions that it performs. In other words, it is only through materiality that transcendental happiness is achieved. Ibn Sīnā speaks of

transcendental happiness occurring when the rational soul becomes an intellectual realm that mirrors the sensible world, which corresponds to Ibn ‘Arabī’s notion of the Perfect Man becoming the ‘microcosmic universe’ (*al-‘ālam al-saghīr*), along with the universe being ‘the macrocosmic man’ (*al-insān al-kabīr*) (Ibn ‘Arabī n.d., vol. 3, p. 11). Both become mirrors for the divine when they attain transcendental happiness. Nevertheless, the rational soul, according to Ibn Sīnā, becomes polished when it divests its materiality since it is materiality that is an impediment to transcendental happiness. For Ibn ‘Arabī, the opposite is true. As God only achieves His purpose of manifesting His Names in the Other through materiality, it is only through materiality that transcendental happiness is attained. It is only when the physical self—the divine form—fulfills its potential of manifesting all the divine Names through orthopraxy that this occurs. It is in the sense of taking on all the divine traits and divesting all the creaturely traits that true contemplation of, and ‘union’ with, the divine takes place.

#### 4. Conclusions

There are many parallels between Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ‘Arabī’s notions of transcendental happiness. Both writers agree with the Aristotelian conception of happiness as an understanding of the divine. They also agree on the Plotinian idea of divine emanation; for both writers, this is driven by divine self-love, as is the reciprocal upward motion that seeks to ‘reverse’ it. This upward motion, both writers maintain, is propelled by love for God. However, they disagree as to how transcendental happiness is attained. For Ibn Sīnā, when the rational soul is completely liberated from materiality, it becomes a mirror for the divine and the soul is then able to unite with it. This is its supreme, transcendental happiness. While agreeing that to become a mirror for the divine is the realization of the potentiality of humanity, and that in this lies transcendental happiness, Ibn ‘Arabī makes materiality a necessary ingredient for the attainment of that happiness. Thus, it is in the acceptance of divine traits and the divestment of creaturely traits that transcendental happiness resides. It is also only in this sense that humans can unite with the divine.

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#### Notes

<sup>1</sup> All translations from the Arabic are our own, unless otherwise indicated.

<sup>2</sup> ‘The Truth’ is commonly used to refer to God by the Sufis (Al-Jurjānī 1845, p. 96).

<sup>3</sup> A key figure in Shi’ite philosophy, Mullā Ṣadrā (d. 1045/1636), synthesizes the ideas of Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ‘Arabī in his conception of transcendental happiness as the point at which the virtuous soul meets God (Murtada’i 2012). Mullā Ṣadrā underscored the principality of existence (*wujūd*) over quiddity (*māhiyya*); he asserted that change in the phenomenal world was not just accidental change but also existential change, which he called ‘trans-substantial motion’ (*al-ḥarakat al-jawhariyya*) (Nasr 2014). This change is the cause of the gradations of existence. Therefore, just as there are gradations of existence, there are gradations of happiness; indeed, the former is the cause of the latter (Kalin 2010). The lowest level, as Ibn Sīnā and Ibn ‘Arabī delineate, is the happiness that derives from the body, followed by intellectual happiness, and culminating in the transcendental happiness of meeting with the divine (Kalin 2010; Nasr 2014).

<sup>4</sup> Ibn ‘Arabī clearly had the work of the same name by his predecessor, Abū Ḥamid al-Ghazālī (d. 505/1111), in mind when he wrote this chapter, which lends credence to the assertion that he viewed himself as someone who was dealing with the issues raised by his forebear, but in a very different way (Ibn ‘Arabī 2017, pp. 1–2). Indeed, Franz Rosenthal suggests that the overall layout of the *Futūḥāt*, which mimics that of the *Iḥyā’*—al-Ghazālī’s most popular work—implies that it was offered by Ibn ‘Arabī as an alternative to the former (Rosenthal 1988, p. 35).



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