APPLYING THE LESSONS: IDEALS VERSUS REALITIES OF HAPPINESS FROM MEDIEVAL ISLAM TO THE "FOUNDING FATHERS"

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ABSTRACT

The idea of happiness and its pursuit have been taken up by thinkers in many times and places. This article examines the role of happiness as a concept and goal in medieval Islamic thought and, especially, in the work of Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī and Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī. In examining Ghazālī's and Fārābī's perspectives on happiness, the article looks at the influence of Plato and Aristotle on these medieval Islamic thinkers and puts Islamic thought on happiness in conversation with the views of the American founders.

KEYWORDS: Islam, happiness, Ghazālī, Fārābī, Founding Fathers

Man does not desire happiness; only the Englishman does.

—*Friedrich Nietzsche*[1]

There is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness.

—*George Washington, First Inaugural Address, April 30, 1789*

It is a pleasure for me to respond to Dr. Seyyed Hossein Nasr's eloquent and thought-provoking paper, "Happiness and the Pursuit of Happiness: The Islamic Perspective," delivered at Emory University's Pursuit of Happiness Conference.[2] I consider Dr. Nasr one of my teachers, although I have never had the privilege of taking a class with him. Instead, like many other scholars of Islam, I first came to know him through his books, starting with *Sufi Essays* (1972), which I read as a Peace Corps volunteer in Morocco almost forty years ago. Since then, I have had the satisfaction of knowing Dr. Nasr personally and have sought his wisdom several times. Like many of his works, his essay provides an important critique of the effects of modernity on traditional spirituality. His comments remind me of the poem "Dover Beach" by Matthew Arnold (d. 1888), in

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[1] Quoted in Isaiah Berlin, *The Roots of Romanticism* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1999), 142.

[2] The Pursuit of Happiness Conference, Emory University School of Law, Atlanta, GA, October 17–18, 2010.

which the Victorian-era poet and social critic lamented how Charles Darwin's theory of evolution and Herbert Spencer's notion of the "survival of the fittest" had affected Western civilization with the result being a second fall from Eden:

> Ah, love, let us be true
> To one another! For the world, which seems
> To lie before us like a land of dreams,
> So various, so beautiful, so new,
> Hath really neither joy, nor love, nor light,
> Nor certitude, nor peace, nor help for pain;
> And we hear as on a darkling plain
> Swept with confused alarms of struggle and flight,
> Where ignorant armies clash by night.[3]

Arnold lived, as he put it in his poem, in "a land of dreams." Like many writers inspired by romanticism, he was an idealist who believed that tradition had to be preserved so that the "best self" of humanity could rise above the "ordinary self." For Arnold, the problem of both the scientific theory of evolution and the political theory of democracy was that their underlying values privileged the ordinary over the best.[4] However, as he also acknowledged in his poems, one of the ironies of modernity is that no matter how much we may lament the changes it brings about, there is little that we can do about them. We cannot turn the clock back just for the sake of a nostalgic memory. As Peter Ochs of the University of Virginia has observed, we are all born into "the original sin of modernity."[5] The cultural theorist Homi K. Babha describes the modern self as located in a sort of limbo between former ideals and contemporary realities. He calls this existential condition "unhomeliness." To be "unhomed," says Bhabha, is not to be homeless, but rather to resist easy assimilation or accommodation.[6] The problem with the unhomed person is that she is unable to find a home for herself in any location that is really suitable for her. Matthew Arnold expressed a similar sense of dislocation in another of his poems, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartruese" (1855):

> Wandering between two worlds, one dead
> The other powerless to be born,
> With nowhere yet to rest my head
> Like these, on earth I wait forlorn.[7]

Such pessimistic views of the modern (or postmodern) condition bring to mind the problem that lies behind the present collection of essays: Can religion help us to find happiness in the modern world? Religious critiques of modernity often highlight the materialism of the modern world and its market-driven culture of gratification, in which happiness is conceived as the fulfillment of personal desires. Moral philosophers call this culture of gratification *hedonism* (from the Greek *hēdonē*,

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3   Matthew Arnold, "Dover Beach," in *The Portable Matthew Arnold*, ed. Lionel Trilling (1867; repr., New York: Viking Press, 1949), 166.

4   See, for example, John Armstrong's comments on Arnold's book *Culture and Anarchy* (1869), in John Armstrong, *In Search of Civilization: Remaking a Tarnished Idea* (2009; repr., Minneapolis, Minnesota: Graywolf, 2011), 34–38.

5   Peter Ochs, personal communication with the author.

6   Homi K. Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (1994; repr., London: Routledge, 2004), 13.

7   Matthew Arnold, "Stanzas from the Grande Chartruese," *Poetry Foundation*, http://www.poetryfoundation.org/poem/172861, accessed October 13, 2013.

"pleasure"), and the type of hedonism that is most characteristic of modern American culture is *quantitative hedonism*. In popular terms, the premise of quantitative hedonism is expressed in a slogan that was often used in the "greed is good" era of the 1990s: "He who dies with the most toys wins." The social scientific premise of quantitative hedonism is not very different: If we could systematically measure the value of everything we experience and do, we could know what best contributes to our happiness.[8] Thus—so the theory goes—we should be able to prescribe the best approach to happiness in the same way that a doctor prescribes medicine. Whatever produces the greatest amount of pleasure for the greatest number of people produces the greatest happiness.

A recent article in *Time* magazine[9] illustrates how the theory of quantitative hedonism can be used as part of social policy. The article describes how the Himalayan kingdom of Bhutan developed a Gross National Happiness Index (GNH) as a scientific measure of well-being. This index was based on "four pillars" that were seen to reflect universal values: (1) sustainable economic development, (2) conservation of the environment, (3) the preservation of culture, and (4) good government. Based on these premises, the government of Bhutan, with the help of the local United Nations mission, surveyed 8,000 of its citizens to develop a baseline Gross National Happiness Index. Unsurprisingly, perhaps, Bhutanese researchers, whose government promotes Bhutan for tourism as "the happiest country on earth," came up with a happiness score of 0.743 on a scale that went up to 1. Pundits, such as the Nobel Prize-winning economist Joseph Stiglitz, have praised the Bhutanese GNH Index as an objective and statistically valid measure of happiness. Recently, the province of Alberta, Canada, and the United Kingdom's Office of National Statistics have begun to develop similar statistical measures of national well-being. British Prime Minister David Cameron is said to be a major advocate of happiness research.[10]

Joseph Stiglitz's approval of the Bhutanese GNH Index reveals the origins of the model in the disciplines of experimental psychology and market research. He and other advocates of quantitative hedonism promote the GNH Index as a supplementary measure of economic well-being along with Gross National Product (GNP). However, apart from the obvious irony of a Buddhist kingdom such as Bhutan measuring happiness in material terms, there are significant problems not only with the GNH Index, but also with quantitative hedonism in general. Although it seems to be a powerfully systematic tool for measuring happiness, in the words of the University of California–Irvine philosopher Nicholas White, quantitative hedonism is "too powerful to fit the facts that it needs to fit if it's to be convincing."[11]

A major problem with social scientific studies of quantitative hedonism is that the premises on which their systematic measurements are based are in fact quite unsystematic. For example, from the perspective of formal logic, the findings of such studies are questionable because their premises are insufficiently established. While the four pillars of the Bhutanese GNH Index may be good public policy, one cannot simply assume that they are sufficient to define happiness for everyone, especially in a country where Buddhism teaches that material life ultimately leads to unhappiness. Quantitative hedonism studies are also of limited value in statistical terms because our definitions of happiness are too varied and inconsistent to constitute a single basis for measurement. Quantitative hedonism reduces the definition of happiness to a single thing: quantity of pleasure. The problem is, not only is the concept of pleasure insufficient to define a uniformity of aims, but we are unable

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8   Nicholas White, *A Brief History of Happiness* (Walden, MA: Blackwell, 2006), 41.

9   Jyoti Thottam/Thimphu, "The Pursuit of Happiness," *Time*, October 22, 2012.

10   Thottam/Thimphu, "The Pursuit of Happiness," 1–4.

11   White, *A Brief History of Happiness*, 41.

even to agree on what pleasure is in the first place.[12] There are simply too many variables to account for statistically. Thus, although studies of happiness based on quantitative hedonism may look interesting in theory, at best, they are inaccurate measures of happiness, and at worst, when they are applied in practice, they may constitute an arbitrary imposition of values and a net impoverishment of the means of human flourishing.

HAPPINESS IN THE QUR'ĀN

As Dr. Nasr states in his essay, according to the traditional Islamic system of values, the answer to quantitative hedonism and other utilitarian approaches to happiness is to recall that human flourishing cannot be measured according to material pleasures alone. Rather, a deeper and more lasting form of happiness can be assessed according to the acquisition of virtues that lead one closer to God. Although the satisfaction of worldly needs is better than poverty or despair, no amount of physical or emotional pleasure is sufficient by itself to constitute the good life. This is why the Qur'ān instructs Muslims to seek satisfaction in both this world and the next: "Oh Lord, grant us good in the world and good in the hereafter, and preserve us from the punishment of the fire!"[13] An important aspect of the Qur'ānic worldview is the concept of balance (Arabic *mīzān*). In the preceding verse as in many others, the Qur'ān acknowledges the value of worldly goods but balances them in the divine economy with spiritual goods.

Overall, the Qur'ān is more accepting of ordinary pleasures than many of its commentators have been. Surprisingly, the verbal noun *sa'āda*, the most common Arabic term for the concept of happiness used by Islamic philosophers and theologians, is nowhere to be found in the Qur'ān. Even words derived from the verb *sa'ida* (the root of *sa'āda*) are used only twice in the text. Both uses of this root occur in the same discourse, *Sūrat Hūd*,[14] which is named after the South Arabian Prophet Hūd. In the first instance, the term *sa'īd* (happy) is used as an adjective: "A day on which no soul will speak except by [God's] permission: among them are those who are unhappy (*shaqī*) and those who are happy (*sa'īd*)."[15] In the second instance the past participle of the root *sa'ida* is used as a predicate: "As for those who have attained happiness (*wa ammā alladhīna su'idū*), they are eternally in Heaven."[16] Both of these references in *Sūrat Hūd* refer to happiness as occurring in the afterlife. Verse 105 speaks of the fortunate souls that will be happy on the Day of Judgment, while verse 108 speaks of those who have attained happiness as residing eternally in heaven.

In other words, the concept of happiness in *Sūrat Hūd* is equivalent to the concept of salvation: those who are saved are happy (*sa'īd*) because they have been judged positively by God and reside eternally in heaven. Conversely, those who are unhappy (*shaqī*) have been judged harshly by God and do not reside in heaven. Thus, just as happiness in the Qur'ān connotes both pleasure and salvation, *shaqāwa*, the antonym of *sa'āda*, connotes both unhappiness and perdition. This is, in fact, how these terms have most often been used in Islamic writings. For example, both connotations—happiness as both pleasure and salvation and unhappiness as both pain and perdition—are used in the following maxim by the fifteenth-century Moroccan Sufi Muḥammad ibn Sulaymān al-Jazūlī

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12 Ibid., 41–45.
13 Q. 2:201.
14 Q. 11.
15 Q. 11:105.
16 Q. 11:108.

(d. 1465): "Know that happiness (*sa'āda*) is in God, His saints, and the Prophets of God, and that unhappiness (*shaqāwa*) is in the ego (*nafs*) and what arises from it."[17]

However, as Dr. Nasr also states, *sa'ida* is not the only Arabic root that is used to connote happiness in the Qur'ān. A root that is used even more often is *faliḥa* (to succeed or prosper), which appears in various forms no fewer than forty times in the text. The most common form of *faliḥa* used in the Qur'ān is *aflaḥa* (Form IV), which means "to attain success or prosperity." Much like the utilitarian concept of happiness advocated by John Stuart Mill,[18] this term refers to happiness as well-being or the fulfillment of human needs. In the Qur'ān, it often connotes recompense for acts of virtue, as it does in the following verse: "He who gives charity prospers" (*qad aflaḥa man tazakkā*).[19] A similar meaning is associated with the term *mufliḥ* (prosperous or successful): "They command virtue and forbid vice; it is they who have prospered" (*wa ya'murūna bi-l-ma'rūf wa yanhawna 'an al-munkar hum al-mufliḥūn*).[20]

Conversely, those who are not virtuous or deny God's commands do not prosper. For example, "Verily, the oppressors do not prosper" (*innahu lā yufliḥu al-ẓālimūn*),[21] and "Sorcerers do not prosper" (*lā yufliḥu al-sāḥirūn*).[22] At times, the use in the Qur'ān of the root *faliḥa* to connote success or prosperity is even put in economic terms that would have been understandable to Adam Smith: "Verily, his account is with his Lord; those who deny God do not prosper" (*fa-innamā ḥisābuhu 'inda rabbihi innahu lā yufliḥu al-kāfirūn*).[23] Although the account books in this verse are not of the world, the Qur'ān acknowledges in other verses that people without virtue may actually prosper in the world. Thus, when it is used in the context of the material life, the notion of prosperity denoted by the root *faliḥa* is morally ambiguous. However, when the root *faliḥa* is used to connote success or prosperity in the afterlife, its meaning is equivalent to salvation, just as with the root *sa'ida*. For example, the notion of salvation is reflected in the Islamic call to prayer, which exhorts believers, "Come to prosperity" (*ḥayā' 'alā-l-falāḥ*): in other words, "Come to salvation."

Although the Qur'ān clearly considers happiness in the afterlife to be the best form of happiness, it does not ignore ordinary happiness, which is expressed by the Arabic root *fariḥa*. This root, which means "to be happy" or "to rejoice," also appears frequently in the Qur'ān, in verses such as the following: "The disputers (in Medina) rejoiced in their position against the Messenger of God" (*fariḥa al-mukhlifūna bi-maq'adihim khilāfa Rasūlillāh*).[24] However, much as with the root *faliḥa*, worldly pleasure is contrasted with the happiness that comes as a result of divine mercy or grace: "When We (Allāh) caused the people to experience divine mercy, they rejoiced in it" (*wa idhā adhaqnā al-nāsa raḥmatan fariḥū bi-hā*).[25] In this verse, happiness as an emotion is expressed by the term *adhaqnā*: literally, "We caused them to taste." The use of this latter term confirms that whenever the root *fariḥa* is used in the Qur'ān, it connotes happiness

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17 Vincent J. Cornell, *Realm of the Saint: Power and Authority in Moroccan Sufism* (Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998), 182.
18 See, for example, John Stuart Mill, "Of Individuality As One of the Elements of Well-Being," chap. 3 in *On Liberty* (New York: Liberal Arts, 1859; New York: Cosimo Classics, 2005), 67–90.
19 Q. 87:14.
20 Q. 3:104.
21 Q. 12:23.
22 Q. 10:77.
23 Q. 23:117. See, for example, Adam Smith, "On the Accumulation of Capital or of Productive and Unproductive Labour," chap. 3 in *The Wealth of Nations* (Amherst, NY: Prometheus Books, 1991), 270–90.
24 Q. 9:81.
25 Q. 30:36.

as the experience of satisfaction or pleasure. At the same time, however, the Qur'ān reminds us that compared with the pleasures of the afterlife, the pleasures of the world are fleeting: "They rejoiced in the life of the world, but compared with the afterlife the life of the world is but a fleeting pleasure" (*wa fariḥū bi-l-ḥayāt al-dunyā wa mā al-ḥayāt al-dunyā fī-l-ākhirati illā matāʿin*).[26] In this verse, the noun *matāʿ* refers to pleasure as a good or a commodity. Thus, worldly happiness may be a taste of the greater happiness to come, but it is not the same as ultimate happiness.

PLATO AND ARISTOTLE MEET THE QUR'ĀN

The comparison of the pleasures of the world with the pleasures of the afterlife in Qur'ān 13:26 recalls the discussion of happiness as pleasure in Plato's *Protagoras*, which is often taken to be the origin of the concept of quantitative hedonism: "If you weigh pleasures against pleasures, you of course take the more and greater; or if you weigh pains against pains, you take the fewer and the less."[27] In this text Plato equates good with whatever causes pleasure and evil with whatever causes pain. Just as in quantitative hedonism, his moral calculus is based on an "art of measurement" that compares quantities of pleasure and pain. Since in Qur'ān 13:26 the pleasures of the afterlife are compared with the pleasures of the world, it seems at first glance that the Qur'ān agrees with Plato's concept of the measurement of pleasure.

However, if, as Plato states, pleasure equals good and pain equals evil, what does this say about the situation in which one's pleasure is derived from causing pain to others? Does this mean that sadism is good? Where are the virtues in the quantitative hedonism of *Protagoras*? Although in *The Republic* Plato acknowledges that happiness also depends on virtue,[28] his approach to happiness throughout the dialogues is inconsistent. Aristotle sought to correct this deficiency by integrating virtue more systematically into Plato's art of moral measurement. In the *Nicomachean Ethics*, Aristotle defines happiness as the attainment of the best and most complete virtues: "The good of man [i.e., the pursuit of happiness] is an activity of the soul in conformity with excellence or virtue, and if there are several virtues, in conformity with the best and most complete."[29]

Aristotle's approach to happiness is teleological; in other words, the value of happiness is related to the end for which it is sought: "What is always chosen as an end in itself and never as a means to something else is called final in an unqualified sense. This description seems to apply to happiness above all else, for we always choose happiness as an end in itself and never for the sake of something else."[30] Both of these notions—happiness as caused by an act of virtue and happiness as teleological—also agree with the message of Qur'ān 13:26 above. If, as the Qur'ān indicates, happiness in the afterlife is to be attained by practicing the virtues, then, as Aristotle says, virtue must be regarded as essential to the concept of happiness. However, Aristotle did not believe that happiness was only to be found in otherworldly virtues. Rather, he felt that happiness could also be found in the pursuit of different modes of living. As long as they were governed by reason and the virtues, the

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26   Q. 13:26.
27   Plato, "Protagoras," in *The Dialogues of Plato*, trans. Benjamin Jowett (New York, NY: Scribner, Armstrong, 1874), 1:156, 356b–d.
28   See, for example, Plato, *The Republic*, 2nd ed., trans. Allan Bloom (New York: Basic Books, 1991), 352–354a.
29   Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. Martin Oswald (Indianapolis, IN: Liberal Arts Press, 1962), p. 17, 1.7.1098a15.
30   Ibid., p. 15, 1.7.1097b1.

life of sensual enjoyment, the contemplative life, and even the political life could all lead to valid forms of happiness.[31] For Aristotle, each mode of good living has its own set of virtues, and happiness consists in living in conformity with the best and most complete virtues in each.

For Plato, the concepts of virtue and happiness were based on his theory of archetypes. Plato viewed the good as an idea, or ideal (Greek *eidos*), that existed separately from the things that participated in it. Happiness, as one of the most important examples of the good, was measured against the ideal of perfect goodness. Plato also viewed humanity and society organically in a relationship of microcosm to macrocosm: both the individual and society are happiest when reason creates a perfect balance between the virtues and the acts that are appropriate to them. Thus, the happy life is a rationally organized and fully integrated life, in which conflicting aims are harmonized under the universal ideal of the good.[32]

By contrast, Aristotle denied that the good could have a single definition or fall into a single category. He believed that there is no universal good, common to all cases; rather, "The term good has as many meanings as the word 'is.'"[33] For Aristotle, ethics are embodied not in ideals but in actions. For this reason, in the *Nicomachean Ethics*, he advocates a more expansive definition of happiness than Plato did. For Aristotle, the teleological aim or goal of a specific act of virtue was more important than the Platonic ideal of the good in itself. Thus, although he agreed with Plato that the greatest happiness was spiritual, this did not mean that worldly forms of happiness had no value when measured against the ideal.

For Aristotle, legitimate happiness can be found in the attainment of one or more of three classes of goods: the goods of the soul, external goods, or the goods of the body.[34] He uses two different terms in Greek to describe happiness as the attainment of these goods. The term *eudaimōn* (happy) is used for the person who possesses all three classes of goods. Much like Plato, Aristotle saw a harmony of aims governed by the virtues as leading to the most complete or perfect happiness. Thus, his concept of *eudaimōnia* (happiness) is comparable to our modern notion of a complete life, or human flourishing.[35] As a term for happiness, *eudaimōnia* is also comparable to "good in the world" as described in Qur'ān 2:201, referred to earlier in this essay.

By contrast, Aristotle uses the term *makarios* (blessed) for the person who primarily possesses the goods of the soul. In his time, the Greek word *makaria* (blessedness) connoted happiness as a good bestowed by fortune or the gods. In the way that Aristotle uses this term, it most closely corresponds to "good in the Hereafter" as described in Qur'ān 2:201. Thus, if one were to translate Aristotle's discussion of happiness in Qur'ānic terms, the Arabic word *sa'īd* (happy) would in most cases be equivalent to the Greek *eudaimōn*: the happy person is satisfied with regard to the goods of both body and soul, along with a sufficient number of external goods. However, when the Arabic term *sa'īd* is taken to refer primarily to salvation, this would be closer in meaning to Aristotle's *makaria* than to *eudaimōnia*. What is significant is that in both of these cases the Qur'ān seems to be in general agreement with Aristotle's definition of happiness.

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31 Ibid., pp. 8–9, 1.5.1095b15–1096a10.

32 White, *A Brief History of Happiness*, 19–24; see also Plato, *Republic* 443d–e.

33 Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, p. 11, 1.6.1096a25. When one reads this passage, one cannot help but be reminded of Bill Clinton's famous deposition statement of September 13, 1998: "It depends on what the meaning of the word 'is' is."

34 Ibid., 1.8.

35 Sissela Bok, *Exploring Happiness: From Aristotle to Brain Science* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 2010), 38.

THE PITFALLS OF PLATONISM: HAPPINESS AS AN IDEAL IN GHAZĀLĪ'S ALCHEMY OF HAPPINESS

Muslim philosophers and theologians did not overlook the correspondence between Aristotelian and Qur'ānic ethics. However, when writing about happiness most of them preferred Plato's idealistic approach over Aristotle's more empirical and pragmatic approach. This reliance on Plato's definition of happiness often led Muslim theologians to create idealized, restricted, and elitist models of happiness that were virtually unattainable for most human beings, including most Muslims. An important example of this tendency can be found in the writings of the great Sunni theologian Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad al-Ghazālī (d. 1111). Ghazālī's debt to Plato is clearly revealed in one of his most famous works, *The Alchemy of Happiness* (originally written in Persian as *Kīmiyā-yi sa'ādat*). In the foreword to this work, Ghazālī explains that he used the word "alchemy" in the title because his purpose was to "transform the essence of man from his baseness and bestiality to the purity and preciousness of the angelic state in order to achieve everlasting happiness."[36] Thus, we can see from the outset that Ghazālī's view of human nature is pessimistic: we must remove ourselves from our ordinary condition as far as possible in order to attain happiness.

Ghazālī further states that the object of his alchemy is to strip away all that should not be (i.e., the attributes of imperfection) and adorn the self with what should be (i.e., the attributes of perfection).[37] This reveals the Platonic perfectionism of his ethics, which is common to Sufism in general. He goes on to state that the true essence of the human being is to be found in the heart or inner soul (Persian *dil*), whose ideal and angelic nature is stored in God's treasury of forms. Like Plato's ethics, Ghazālī's alchemy of the soul is both idealistic and perfectionistic. He calls the heart the "philosopher's stone" because it represents the ideal of what it means to be a perfect human being. The purpose of his spiritual alchemy is to smelt away the impurities that prevent the "gold" of the heart from showing through the "copper" of human nature. The fact that we appear as "copper" instead of "gold" in our daily lives is because the impurities of the world have caused us to misperceive our true essence. As Ghazālī observes, "[t]he difference between copper and gold lies not in [their superficial] yellowness." He concludes the introduction to *The Alchemy of Happiness* by stating that the value of happiness is in its otherworldly nature: "The varieties of pleasure have no end, nor shall any annoyance tarnish its pleasure."[38] This statement also reveals that, despite his rejection of the world as a means to true happiness, Ghazālī still relies on Plato's notions of happiness as pleasure and quantitative happiness, as defined in *Protagoras*.

The problem with Ghazālī's approach to happiness is not that it is based on a model to emulate, but that the ideal is taken as the only true reality. His exclusive focus on a perfect form of happiness that is attainable (in his words) only by prophets, saints, God's true lovers, and the spiritual elites, leads Ghazālī to undervalue ordinary forms of happiness, which, as Aristotle noted, are also necessary for human flourishing.[39]

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36 Abū Ḥāmid Muḥammad Ghazzālī (*sic*) Tūsī, *The Alchemy of Happiness (Kīmiyā-yi Sa'ādat)*, trans. Jay R. Crook, 2nd ed. (2005; repr., Chicago: Great Books of the Islamic World, 2008), 1:3. My translations of Ghazālī's terminology differ at times from those of Jay R. Crook, who translated this edition of *The Alchemy*.

37 Ibid., 1:4.

38 Ibid., 1:3.

39 Muhammad Abul Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazali: A Composite Ethics in Islam* (1975; repr., Delmar, New York: Caravan Books, 1978), 57–58. Part of Ghazālī's spiritual elitism comes from his *Ash'arī* theology, which (much like early Calvinism) strongly privileges divine voluntarism and views salvation as an act of grace; thus, those who are saved—and even those who are pious—are predestined to be such. Ghazālī's hierarchy of

When comparing body and soul, Ghazālī's ethics reflects the mind-body and moral dualisms of Neoplatonic and Stoic philosophy even more than the ideas of Plato himself. In *The Alchemy of Happiness*, he states that the human self consists of three parts: spirit or ego (Arabic *nafs*), life or vital force (Persian *jān*), and heart or inner soul (Persian *dil*). Although the vital force connects the soul to the body, for Ghazālī, the soul is never truly embodied: "The true nature of the soul is not of this world. It has come to this world as a stranger and a wayfarer."[40] He also states: "The created 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. It acquires this knowledge of God Most High through the knowledge of His handiwork, and this is the totality of the universe. It learns about the wonders of the universe by means of the senses, and the senses are established in the body."[41] In other words, the chief purpose of mind, body, and the senses is to help the soul to find its way out of the material world in which it is imprisoned and to attain the spiritual end for which it was created. This Neoplatonic notion of a "pneumatic" soul that, when freed from the body, will rise up to join the Divine Soul from which it is separated is commonly associated with the late-antique philosopher Plotinus (d. 270).[42]

Ghazālī's understanding of the relationship between body and soul is also dependent on Plato's macrocosm/microcosm model in *The Republic*. This view reflects *The Republic*'s hierarchical view of society, although Ghazālī modifies it somewhat to fit the contours of the medieval Islamic state.[43] In this system the heart-soul (*dil*) is the ruler of the body, and the body is the physical kingdom of the soul. The attainment of happiness is described as a royal hunt: knowledge of God (and hence of the soul's origin in God) is the "quarry" that the soul pursues, and the senses, which act through the body, are the "nets" that entrap the quarry. Much as in Plato's *Republic*, each part of the body has an appropriate and predetermined role to play in this microcosm of political society:

> Carnal appetite (*shahwa*) is the tax collector, anger is the policeman, and the heart is the king. Reason (or intellect, Arabic *'aql*) is the king's chief minister. The king needs all of these in order to rule his kingdom properly . . . should King Soul act at the advice of Minister Intellect and keep appetite and anger under tight control and in obedience to reason, then he will not be mastered by them; nor will the highway to happiness and reaching the Divine Presence be cut off to him. But should reason become the prisoner of appetite and anger, then the kingdom will be desolate, and the king will become wretched and destroyed.[44]

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salvation is discussed most fully in *IḥyāI 'ulūm al-dīn* (*Revival of the Religious Sciences*) but is also implicit in *The Alchemy of Happiness*, which was written as an epitome of the former work.

40 Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 1:9.

41 Ibid., 1:11. The epistemology that lies behind this statement is strongly influenced by Stoic philosophy.

42 Plotinus said: "As pure souls we were Spirit . . . we were a part of the spiritual world, neither circumscribed nor cut off from it . . . now we are no longer only the one we were, and at times, when the spiritual person is idle and in a certain sense stops being present, *we* are only *the person we have added on to ourselves*." See Pierre Hadot, *Plotinus or the Simplicity of Vision*, trans. Michael Chase (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1993), 28 (emphasis added). Ghazālī's soul-body dualism is so pronounced that it continues even after death. At the resurrection, the disembodied soul will remain as the real essence of the resurrected person, and the body will be resurrected only so that it can take on the punishments that it may deserve after judgment. See Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazali*, 73n35.

43 "[T]he metaphor of the body is a state and its limbs and organs are its workers." Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 1:12.

44 Ibid., 1:12–13. On the Platonic origins of this model, see the section, "Platonic Structures of Harmony and Nature," in White, *A Brief History of Happiness*, 81–88.

In the second half of *The Alchemy of Happiness*, and also in *The Revival of the Religious Sciences* (*Iḥyā' 'ulūm al-dīn*) on which *The Alchemy* was based, Ghazālī acknowledges that worldly goods have a certain—although limited—value and may be used as a means to happiness.[45] In *The Revival* this argument draws from Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics* and includes the latter's tripartite division of goods into external goods (Arabic *al-faḍā'il al-khārijiyya*), goods of the body (*al-faḍā'il al-jismiyya*), and goods of the soul (*al-faḍā'il al-nafsiyya*). To Aristotle's list, Ghazālī adds a fourth category, "goods of divine providence" (*al-faḍā'il al-tawfīqiyya*).[46] It was necessary for Ghazālī to add this additional category of goods because of the tenets of Ash'arī theology, which conceived of God in strongly voluntaristic terms and saw all of the virtues that lead to happiness as divine gifts, because the human being possesses nothing on her own. This theology is reflected in the term, *al-faḍā'il al-tawfīqiyya*, which literally means "goods of divine acceptance." Ghazālī defines these goods as divine guidance (*hidāya*), divine direction (*rushd*), divine leadership (*tasdīd*), and divine support (*ta'yīd*).[47] Not a single one of these virtues can be attained without the help of divine intervention. In addition, for Ghazālī, external goods, the goods of the body, and the goods of the soul can be used as means to happiness only after one has been granted the goods of divine providence.[48]

In *The Alchemy of Happiness*, Ghazālī departs from the more balanced Aristotelian approach to spiritual and worldly goods that he used in *The Revival*, and he devalues the goods of the world in a way that is almost Manichaean in its severity. Seeing the world as the source of all sins, he cites a tradition (*khabar*) of the Prophet Muḥammad: "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.'"[49] Muslim scholars have often criticized Ghazālī for using unsubstantiated or weak Prophetic traditions in his works. This tradition is theologically problematical in three ways: First, it seems to reflect the Manichaean notion, which is rejected in Islam, that God created the world as evil; second, it implies that God created a rival to himself; and third, it implies that God is not concerned with what happens in the world. All of these views are rejected by numerous verses of the Qur'ān, which describes God as an active participant in the affairs of the world and makes a point of insisting that even Satan acts by God's command.[50] Later on in the same passage, Ghazālī quotes another tradition that seems to anticipate Homi K. Bhabha's concept of the "unhomed": "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."[51]

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45 Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazali*, 58.

46 Ibid. The Arabic term *faḍīla* (pl. *faḍā'il*) literally means "thing of worth" or "benefit," and thus is a close approximation of the concept of a "good" in English.

47 Ibid., 60–61.

48 Ibid., 63, 77n117. In Ash'arī theology, the only action that the human being can undertake for herself with respect to the goods of divine providence is to petition God through prayer. However, the granting of providential goods is entirely at God's discretion and is not dependent on either the supplications or the virtues of believers.

49 Ghazālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 2:551. Ghazālī uses *khabar* (pl. *akhbār*) for "tradition" in this section because the traditions of prophets and religious figures other than the Prophet Muḥammad are also cited; he also uses this term because it allows him to cite weakly substantiated or unsubstantiated Prophetic traditions, which are termed *khabar* instead of *ḥadīth*.

50 See, for example, Q. 15:26–44, especially verse 42, where God says to Satan, "You will have no authority over my servants except for those who are lost (*al-ghāwīn*) and who [willingly] follow you."

51 Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 2:551. I have modified this passage somewhat from the cited translation to more accurately reflect the original Persian text.

In *The Ethics of al-Ghazali* (1978), Muhammad Abul Quasem speaks of Ghazālī's "composite ethics" because his philosophical theology combines elements of Platonic, Aristotelian, Neoplatonic, and Stoic ethics along with Qur'ānic ethics.[52] In *The Alchemy of Happiness*, Ghazālī constantly shifts between these perspectives in his discussions of the world's pitfalls and dangers. Although some of his arguments are framed in the more pragmatic terms of Aristotle's *Nicomachean Ethics*, the reader is left with the impression that, for Ghazālī, the choice between God and the world is a zero-sum game in which every concession given to the world is a denigration of God and a hindrance to the spiritual life. For example, although he acknowledges that worldly and bodily needs must be provided for, he states that even the permitted comforts of life are "seeds of hubris and heedlessness and the leaven of all sins."[53] In a tradition that opens the chapter on the antidote for love of the world, the Prophet Muḥammad passes by the body of a dead sheep and says, "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 Muḥammad, 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."[54] The pessimistic view of the world that is expressed by Ghazālī in such passages is strongly reminiscent of Stoic philosophy. For example, in *Meditations*, Marcus Aurelius (d. 180) speaks of the way of the world as "dust, stench, sediment, and blood."[55]

Since virtually everything about the world—including the good things that are found in it—is devalued in *The Alchemy of Happiness*, it is possible to view this work as an example of what Friedrich Nietzsche meant when he characterized the ascetic ideal as a form of *ressentiment*. Because *The Alchemy* denigrates the world to an extent that goes beyond both the Qur'ān and other works on Islamic ethics, it seems tailor-made for a Nietzschean critique. Although this is not the place to make such a critique, suffice it to say that one might observe about Ghazālī as Nietzsche did about the philosopher Arthur Schopenhauer (d. 1860): "His anger was, just as in the case of the Cynics of antiquity, his balm, his refreshment, his reward, his specific against disgust, his happiness."[56] In other words, it is hard to avoid the impression that Ghazālī found personal satisfaction (i.e., happiness) in disparaging the pleasures of others.

As noted previously, in both *The Revival* and *The Alchemy* Ghazālī urges his readers to seek the Aristotelian mean and cites verses of the Qur'ān and rulings of the *Sharī'a* to prove that the ethical mean is one of the most beloved things of God: "The aim is the mean in all qualities and character-traits . . . if the soul deviates to one of the two extremes it should be corrected."[57] However, this advocacy of the mean does not apply to ultimate happiness. In its overall contours, Ghazālī's moral theology is elitist and is based on the hierarchical model of society that medieval Islamic civilization inherited from late antiquity. However, his notion of hierarchy is based not just on wealth but on knowledge; thus, his most basic dichotomy is between the ignorant masses who live by the passions and are restrained by the *Sharī'a*, and an educated spiritual elite that lives by the soul and is governed by reason and divine inspiration. In *The Alchemy*, Ghazālī defines happiness as the

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52 The full title of this work is *The Ethics of al-Ghazali: A Composite Ethics in Islam*.

53 Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 2:558. In the *Revival*, Ghazālī calls this perspective "the denial of the permissible" (*al-zuhd fī-l-ḥalāl*).

54 Ibid., 2:550. I have modified this passage somewhat from the cited translation to more accurately reflect the original Persian text.

55 James A. Francis, *Subversive Virtue: Asceticism and Authority in the Second-Century Pagan World* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1995), 32.

56 Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo*, trans. and ed. Walter Kaufmann (1967; repr., New York: Vintage Books, 1989), 106.

57 Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazali*, 85. This quotation is from *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*.

knowledge of God, following the example of the angels, who seek "their nutriment and their happiness in their contemplation of the Divine Presence."[58] However, although his narrative lays out a detailed path for the attainment of knowledge of God, only a few can succeed in this quest.

For Ghazālī, three virtues of the soul lead to the attainment of ultimate happiness: purification from vice, intimacy with God, and love of God.[59] Spiritual perfection is to be found in the two superior states of divine intimacy and divine love. However, the majority of Muslims cannot attain such perfection; instead, they must be content with purifying their souls of vices under the guidance of the *Sharī'a*.[60] In *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*, Ghazālī states that the search for perfection is not appropriate for everyone; only those who are intellectually and temperamentally qualified to seek perfection should do so. In fact, he believed that perfection for all people would be dangerous: should everyone aspire to perfection, the order of the world would be upset and the concept of perfection itself would disappear.[61] Perhaps most surprisingly, Ghazālī does not seem to share the Qur'ānic view of ultimate happiness as equivalent to salvation. For Ghazālī, happiness (*sa'ādat*) is reserved only for the elite souls who contemplate God in paradise. By contrast, salvation (*najāt*) refers to an intermediate category whose membership is confined to the insane, the children of unbelievers, and those who are unaware of religion. These persons are "saved" because they are not subject to punishment after death; however, they are barred from attaining the reward of heaven.[62]

It should be clear from the above discussion that Ghazālī's approach to the pursuit of happiness contradicts the Qur'ān in important ways and owes more to classical Greek and medieval Middle Eastern cultural prejudices than it does to the Qur'ānic message. Although many Muslims regard *The Alchemy of Happiness* as one of the great spiritual classics of Islam, the value of its message is diminished by its less appealing qualities. Ghazālī provides very little for the ordinary Muslim to look forward to; as a matter of fact, the ordinary Muslim is not his audience. Unless one belongs to the spiritual elite (women need not apply), the only gold to be gleaned from Ghazālī's *Alchemy* is in the tailings that are to be found in the lowest level of paradise. Even in the world of the spirit, the common believer is relegated to the same subaltern status that he most likely occupied in worldly life. For Ghazālī, the common Muslim's access to heaven is through the servants' entrance: ordinary believers are barred from the upper floors of the divine mansions because they are judged unsuitable for divine proximity. They continue to occupy the lowest grade of everything in heaven as they did on earth. To add insult to injury, Ghazālī even denies the value of the simple pleasures that people enjoy in their ordinary lives. It is a bleak world indeed where the common believer is denied the fruits of ordinary happiness in the name of an ideal that he or she cannot hope to attain. Perhaps the worst thing about Ghazālī's moral misanthropy is that it ignores the faith in human potential that is so prominent in the Qur'ān.

THE VALIDATION OF ORDINARY HAPPINESS BY FĀRĀBĪ AND THE FOUNDERS

Near the end of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, there is a well-known passage that asks the question, "In what ultimate ambition had all concurrent and consecutive ambitions now coalesced?" This

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58 Ghazzālī, *The Alchemy of Happiness*, 1:8.

59 The term that Ghazālī uses for these virtues is *mus'īdāt*, from the Arabic root *sa'ida* (to be happy).

60 Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazali*, 68.

61 Ibid., 69. This statement comes from Book 3 of *The Revival of the Religious Sciences*.

62 Quasem, *The Ethics of al-Ghazali*, 56–57.

question is essentially the same as the one that Ghazālī asks in *The Alchemy of Happiness*: "What is (or what should be) the ultimate source of happiness in human life?" For Leopold Bloom, the protagonist of *Ulysses*, the answer is strikingly prosaic: the ultimate goal of life is to possess "a thatched bungalowshaped 2 storey dwellinghouse of southerly aspect, surmounted by vane and lightning conductor," which will carry the name of "Bloom Cottage. Saint Leopold's. Flowerville."[63] Joyce's meticulously detailed description of Bloom's dream-cottage goes on for several pages and often in extremely long sentences. One cannot imagine a starker contrast than that between Ghazālī's idealistic notion of ultimate happiness and the prosaic aspirations of Leopold Bloom.

However, most Americans are likely to think that Bloom's view of ultimate happiness is closer to the founders' idea of "the pursuit of happiness" than to Ghazālī's Platonically-inspired ideal. In a letter to a friend, the young Thomas Jefferson stated, "Perfect happiness, I believe, was never intended by the Deity to be the lot of one of his creatures in this world." However, he added, "[H]e has very much put in our power the nearness of our approaches to it."[64] According to Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, when drafting the Declaration of Independence, Jefferson substituted the phrase, "the pursuit of happiness" for "property," which was originally written into the Declaration by George Mason.[65] Apparently, Mason's view of ultimate happiness was quite close to that of Leopold Bloom.

However, other American political leaders have shared Ghazālī's idealistic view of happiness. For example, in a February 29, 2012, campaign speech in Knoxville, Tennessee, former Pennsylvania senator and presidential candidate Rick Santorum asserted that for the founders, "Happiness was not doing what you wanted to do but doing what you ought to do, because that's what leads to true happiness."[66]

Although Santorum was criticized for this statement, he was probably right. There is much evidence to support the contention that Jefferson, Mason, and the other drafters of the Declaration of Independence believed in a moral philosophy that was strongly influenced by the Protestant Christian notions of "conscience" and "personal calling." In addition, neither of these notions contradicts the Qur'ān, which partly explains how Santorum and Ghazālī could share similar views on the relationship of happiness to moral virtue. In *Notes on the State of Virginia in 1781*, Thomas Jefferson asserted that personal liberty had a theological justification. He claimed that liberties are "the gift of God" and that "they are not to be violated but with [God's] wrath."[67] Such liberties include the right to pursue happiness in a number of different ways, according to the dictates of reason and with the caution that one's pursuit of happiness does not cause unhappiness to others.

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63 James Joyce, *Ulysses* (Seedbox Press, 2012), Kindle Edition.

64 Thomas Jefferson to John Paige, 15 July 1763, in *The Life and Letters of Thomas Jefferson: Being His Autobiography and Select Correspondence from Original Manuscripts*, ed. Henry Augustine Washington (New York: Edwards, Pratt & Foster, 1858), 187.

65 Kathleen Kennedy Townsend, "The Pursuit of Happiness: What the Founders Meant—and Didn't," *The Atlantic*, June 20, 2011, http://www.theatlantic.com/business/archive/2011/06/the-pursuit-of-happiness-what-the-founders-meant-and-didnt/240708/. Townsend also claims that the phrase "the pursuit of happiness" was Benjamin Franklin's suggestion.

66 "Rick Santorum Says Happiness 'at the Time of Our Founders' Was 'Doing What You Ought to Do,'" *PolitiFact.com*, March 7, 2012, http://www.politifact.com/truth-o-meter/statements/2012/mar/07/rick-santorum/rick-santorum-says-happiness-time-our-founders-was/.

67 James H. Hutson, ed., *The Founders on Religion: A Book of Quotations* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2005), 198.

Religious conservatives in both the United States and the Islamic world often forget that granting citizens the legal right to have wrong opinions is not the same as condoning wrong behavior, nor does it mean that the virtues have no role to play in the pursuit of happiness. George Washington affirmed the connection between virtue and happiness in his 1791 inaugural address: "There is no truth more thoroughly established than that there exists in the economy and course of nature an indissoluble union between virtue and happiness."[68] According to Thomas Jefferson, the pursuit of God-given virtues is best respected when people are given the chance to make their own decisions. In 1794, John Jay said on this subject: "Among the strange things of this world, nothing seems more strange than that men pursuing happiness should knowingly quit the right road and take a wrong road, and frequently do what their judgments neither approve nor prefer. Yet so is the fact, and this fact points strongly to the necessity of our being healed, or restored, or regenerated by a power more energetic than any of those which properly belong to the human mind."[69]

Although the regenerative power that Jay speaks of came from what he called the "Christian dispensation," his words also resonate with what he might have called the "Mohammedan dispensation." Jay said: "To see Things as they are—to estimate them aright—and to act accordingly is to be wise."[70] This statement is very similar to the sentiments expressed by the Islamic philosopher Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī (d. 950) in *The Attainment of Happiness* (*Taḥṣīl al-saʿāda*), another important work of Islamic ethics. This often-overlooked work deserves a closer examination in the present context because it was written as a handbook for what John Jay referred to as "estimating things aright." As such, it provides a better bridge than Ghazālī's *The Alchemy of Happiness* between the ideas of the American founders and Islam.

The first thing to note about Fārābī's *The Attainment of Happiness* is that, despite its title, it does not tell the reader how to attain personal happiness. Instead, as its modern editor and translator Muhsin S. Mahdi observes, "It enumerates four human things (theoretical virtues, deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical arts) whose presence in political communities (nations or cities) indicates that happiness is present and that the citizens are already in possession of it."[71] In other words, it is a book of Islamic political science in which the means to individual happiness are linked to the perfection of state and society, following the example of Plato's *Republic*. However, unlike Ghazālī, who concentrates on Plato's idealistic models, Fārābī seeks to balance ideals with social realities as Aristotle did. Although worldly happiness ranks below spiritual happiness on the scale of values, it is still valued for its own sake.[72] *The Attainment of Happiness* is thus a more pragmatic work than Ghazālī's *The Alchemy of Happiness*. Although it is mostly about how to approach the problem of happiness theoretically, its focus on logic and problem solving provides better guidance for concrete situations. In addition, although significant differences can be found between Fārābī and the US founders, both acknowledge the validity of worldly happiness and both believe that the realm of the moral virtues includes political life.

In present-day America, where many conservative politicians consider the *Sharīʿa* to be the antithesis to the US Constitution, it is important to note that some of the most significant figures

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68 However, George Washington was more inclined to appreciate the Epicurean praise of simple pleasures, which is evidenced by his references to the writings of Cicero (d. 43 BCE). See White, *A Brief History of Happiness*, 52–53; Hutson, *The Founders on Religion*, 12.

69 John Jay to Lindley Murray, 22 August 1794, quoted in Hutson, *The Founders on Religion*, 202–03.

70 John Jay to William Wilberforce, 8 November 1809, quoted in ibid., 203.

71 Muhsin S. Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2001), 173.

72 Alfarabi, "Taḥṣīl al-saʾāda" (The Attainment of Happiness) in *Alfarabi: Philosophy of Plato and Aristotle*, trans. Muhsin Mahdi, rev. ed. (1962; repr., Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2001), 13.

of premodern Islam were both practical and pragmatic thinkers. Abū Naṣr al-Fārābī was one of these. Although he did not write mystical poetry, like Avicenna, and was not a Sufi, like Ghazālī, the discipline of Islamic philosophy could not have existed without him. In today's climate of religious and civilizational conflicts, he serves as an important corrective to common stereotypes: this highly respected Islamic philosopher learned his philosophy from Christian monks who kept alive the Hellenistic philosophy of pagan Alexandria. Even more, he received his education not in the Middle East but in Central Asia: Fārābī was a Turk from what is now Uzbekistan, and today his face appears on Kazakhstan's version of the dollar bill. Finally, he died on the road to Damascus, although unlike Saint Paul, his ultimate life-changing encounter was allegedly with highway robbers instead of Christ.[73]

Fārābī was famous for believing that the teachings of Plato and Aristotle could be reconciled. For this reason, in *The Attainment of Happiness* he interprets Plato's *Republic* (on social and political life) and *Timaeus* (on spiritual life) in an Aristotelian way. This approach allows him to come up with strikingly different conclusions from those of Ghazālī. For example, he attempts to transform Plato's and Ghazālī's ideal ruling elites into real-life "statesmen" by accepting the fact that wealth and illustrious ancestry may be valid qualifications for leadership along with the virtues.[74] This is a realpolitik interpretation of Aristotle's aristocracy of merit, where wealth, background, and good breeding play a role along with education in the formation of political leaders. Although he does not mention the title of the work, Fārābī seems to have been acquainted with Aristotle's *Politics* as well as with Plato's *Republic*. This is because his discussion of the implementation of Plato's ideals draws heavily on Aristotle's more empirical approach to political philosophy.[75] Philosophy for Fārābī was a way of life that combined theoretical and practical pursuits. As he put it, "To be a truly perfect philosopher one has to possess both the theoretical sciences and the faculty of exploiting them for the benefit of others according to their capacity."[76] In holding this view he was not unlike the Enlightenment figures of Thomas Jefferson or George Washington, who applied practical wisdom along with philosophical knowledge in the creation of a new political order.

The seventeenth-century cleric and philosopher Richard Cumberland (d. 1718), a precursor to Jefferson and Washington, believed that promoting the well-being of humanity in general was essential to the pursuit of happiness.[77] Fārābī agreed with this point of view. In *The Attainment of Happiness* he states, "When the theoretical sciences are isolated and their possessor does not have the faculty for exploiting them for the benefit of others, they are defective philosophy."[78] For Fārābī, the value of philosophy is in its application, and the value of the philosopher depends on his ability to put his ideas into effect for others. For this reason, building on Aristotle's theory of knowledge, he broadened the meaning of science (Arabic *'ilm*, in the Greek sense of *epistēmē*) to include not only the theoretical, but also the rhetorical, the poetical, and the political.[79] He was

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73   For an accessible introduction to Fārābī's life and works see, Majid Fakhry, *Al-Farabi, Founder of Islamic Neoplatonism: His Life, Works, and Influence* (Oxford: Oneworld, 2002).

74   Alfarabi, "The Attainment of Happiness," 42.

75   Alfred North Whitehead famously observed, "Western philosophy is nothing but a series of footnotes to Plato's dialogues." On the influence of the exegeses of Plato's works in the history of philosophy, see the chapter, "Philosophy, Exegesis, and Creative Mistakes," in Pierre Hadot, *Philosophy as a Way of Life*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson and trans. Michael Chase (Oxford, UK: Blackwell, 1995), 71–77.

76   Alfarabi, "The Attainment of Happiness," 43.

77   Richard Cumberland, *A Treatise of the Laws of Nature* (Indianapolis, IN: Liberty Fund, 2005), 523–24.

78   Alfarabi, "The Attainment of Happiness," 43.

79   Mahdi, *Alfarabi and the Foundation of Islamic Political Philosophy*, 186–87.

thus one of the earliest Islamic philosophers to introduce the concept of "applied science" in the way that we think of it today.

According to Fārābī, this multidisciplinary approach to knowledge is what ancient cultures meant by the word wisdom (*ḥikma*). In advocating this definition of wisdom in *The Attainment of Happiness*, he does not claim to be an innovator. Rather, the real innovators (in a bad sense) are those who restrict the domain of science to the theoretical sciences alone. Although Ghazālī lived nearly two centuries after Fārābī, this critique could be applied to the impractical idealism of *The Alchemy of Happiness*, which provides theoretical, rhetorical, and poetic inspiration, but little in the way of practical wisdom. For Fārābī, a theoretical model that cannot be used practically to instruct and form the character of the common people is defective philosophy.[80]

The Attainment of Happiness is best known in Islamic scholarship for the distinction that it draws between philosophy and religion. In this work, philosophy is depicted as an epistemological and scientific enterprise while religion is depicted as a rhetorical and educational enterprise. For Fārābī, religion is popularized philosophy, which is taught to the general public through the use of commonly accepted symbols, rules, and rhetorical techniques.[81] However, the most important contribution to the question of happiness—which, after all, is what *The Attainment of Happiness* is supposed to be about—lies in four questions that, for Fārābī, are fundamental to the notion of a systematic ethics.

These questions are derived from Aristotle's *Posterior Analytics*, where they originally appear in a discussion of the question: Why?[82] When applied to the subject of happiness, they enable the philosopher to answer the question: Why happiness? Thinking through each question in turn leads to an understanding of the various types (*naw'*) of the genus (*jins*) "happiness." Since one must know concepts theoretically before applying them in practice (just as philosophical knowledge is prior to religious knowledge), answering these questions constitutes for Fārābī a necessary first step toward the attainment of happiness. Because they are logically constituted, these questions are universal in nature and do not only apply to Muslims: as questions of a general nature, they are relevant to all human beings, regardless of their religion or background.[83] These questions are reproduced below, in the form in which Fārābī might have applied them to the question of happiness:

> What? What is happiness?
> How? How is happiness achieved?
> From what? From what does happiness come?
> For what? For what purpose is happiness intended?[84]

Ghazālī asks similar questions about happiness in *The Alchemy of Happiness*. The influence of Aristotle was so great in medieval Islam that virtually no one could approach a problem systematically without referring to Aristotle's approach first. However, the main difference between Fārābī and Ghazālī is that Fārābī seeks to answer questions about the origins and ends of happiness theoretically, while Ghazālī tries to do so religiously. For Fārābī, the latter approach is a mistake, because religion deals with the rhetoric of happiness, not the principles of happiness. Thus, such an

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80 Ibid., 189.

81 Alfarabi, "The Attainment of Happiness," 44.

82 Ibid., 134n6.

83 Ibid., 24. The "science of man" (*'ilm al-insān*, literally, "the science of the person") is the final stage of inquiry that Fārābī advocates in "The Attainment of Happiness"; it investigates the "what" and the "how" of the purpose for which the human being is made and the means to ensure human perfection.

84 For a full discussion of these questions and how to interpret them, see ibid., 15–25.

approach can only lead to misunderstanding, because the rhetoric of religious discourse, unlike the theoretical discourse of philosophy, does not provide an accurate basis for understanding how things really are.

For Fārābī, questions about happiness are to be answered deliberatively, morally, and practically, as well as theoretically. For most individuals, the deliberative, moral, and practical aspects of happiness are sufficient to understand what happiness is about. As an introduction to moral and political philosophy, *The Attainment of Happiness* contains an abridged description of the hierarchy of virtues, from theoretical virtues through deliberative virtues, moral virtues, and practical virtues. If one separates the gist of Fārābī's discourse from his reliance on Aristotle's logic and Plato's political theories, one finds that it contains a process of reasoning not unlike that which was used by the US founders. American political thinkers and moral philosophers, from Thomas Jefferson to Henry David Thoreau and John Dewey, asked similar questions about happiness. When thinking of happiness, they all deliberated systematically on the definition, means of attainment, and ends for which happiness is sought. In fact, the most significant difference between Fārābī and American founders such as Jefferson, Washington, Franklin, and Jay is that American thinkers tended to approach the question of happiness pragmatically—the "How?" and "For what?" of happiness—rather than theoretically—the "What?" and "From what?" of happiness. In other words, the most important difference between the founders and Islamic political philosophers, like Fārābī, was not in their definition of happiness per se, but rather in which aspect of happiness they chose to emphasize the most.

In the present era, in which Islam is seen by most Americans as alien and antithetical to "American values," it is necessary to ask ourselves an important question: When we abstract Ghazālī's and Fārābī's theories of the pursuit of happiness from their medieval Islamic context—when we clear away the residue of time, culture, and epistemology that separate them from our own views—how much difference is left between their values and ours? In some cases, such as that of Ghazālī, the differences are more significant than the similarities: Ghazālī's idealism and perfectionism make him most comparable not to the founders but to religious activists and moral conservatives in both modern Christianity and modern Islam. The difference between Fārābī and the founders is less significant: it is one of emphasis more than of fundamental orientation. Because of Fārābī's Aristotelian methodology, the theoretical definition and telos of happiness had to be figured out before its practical application. This is different from the founders' pragmatism, which led them in the opposite direction. However, it is not so different from the approach of the moral philosophers Alasdair MacIntyre and Charles Taylor, who criticize modern political philosophy for stressing emotivism over rationalism and for ignoring the ends of social reform in favor of its means. This realization leads to a second question that may have profound implications for our understanding of the global "free market of ideas." Are not Fārābī's basic questions about the "What?," "How?," "From what?," and "Why?" of happiness as important for our own understanding of happiness as they were for his, and might they not also help us to gain a deeper understanding of how "American" or "universal" our notion of the "pursuit of happiness" really is?