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Happiness (*Sa'āda*) in Ibn al-'Arabī's Thought

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In this article, by happiness (*sa'āda*) we mean the highest perfection, not well-being, joyfulness, amusement, and other pleasant feelings, although some states, such as health, may contribute to the attainment of this happiness.¹ In the first part of the present treatise we survey different views of this issue beginning with Plato and Aristotle and ending with Muslim philosophers and mystics. In the second part, a discussion of Ibn al-'Arabī's thought is addressed.

We discuss the following topics: the essence of happiness; its possible identification with the good, or with perfection; is it objective or subjective; when it takes place, in this or in the next world; the ways to attain it; its state, whether natural or acquired; happy people and wretched people; and society's role in obtaining it.

Aristotle expressed the view, which he shared with Plato, that the highest perfection of the human being is the activation of the faculty of the intellect, or engaging in philosophic activity, which he identifies with happiness.² The principal reason for his view is the notion that reason is the highest faculty of the human being and that the highest activity of reason is theoretical thinking. Moral behavior serves as a necessary condition of attaining the highest perfection.³ The objects of this contemplation are metaphysical matters, the highest of which is God.⁴ However, Aristotle and some of his followers opined that happiness has degrees, and that perfect happiness can be obtained in this world.⁵

In post-Aristotelian philosophy, three main Hellenistic philosophical schools—Cynicism, Epicureanism, and Stoicism—instead of focusing on

¹ Lobel, *Philosophies* 1f.

² Aristotle, "Ethica Nicomachea," 1, x; Kraemer, *Humanism* 19. Lobel, *Philosophies* 14–15. Socrates was the first Greek philosopher who identified virtue and happiness with knowledge. Tirosch-Samuelsen, *Happiness* 12, 20–21, 23.

³ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* ii, pt. 2, 89–90. Aristotle, "Ethica Nicomachea," 1177^a. For a partial list of secondary literature on Aristotle's conception of happiness, see Tirosch-Samuelsen, *Happiness* 452, n. 20. This is not the place to discuss the question of whether, according to Aristotle, there is one highest virtue (contemplation) or there are different excellences (both theoretical and practical). Tirosch-Samuelsen, *Happiness* 41–47. Seemingly, posterity preferred the first interpretation.

⁴ Copleston, *A History of Philosophy* ii, pt. 2, 91.

⁵ Donaldson, *Studies* 180.

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