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Ghazoan Ali

Pleasures of the Body. Theological and Philosophical Deliberations

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Pleasures of the Body

Theological and Philosophical Deliberations

♦ **ABSTRACT**

This article looks at the positive associations and definitions of bodily pleasure developed within the Islamic intellectual field between the 10th and 14th century. These associations stand in opposition to the negative definitions that deny the existence of real bodily pleasure and reduce it to a cessation of pain and a return to a natural state. The positive approach sees bodily pleasure as a good created by God to guide the body in this life towards the eternal good. Pleasure is developed in this article to be a drive towards what sustains life and as an experiential guide to the eternal pleasures of the hereafter.

Keywords: agreeable – anticipation – body – cause – desire – existential – law – pain – perfection – perception – pleasure – replenishment

♦ **RÉSUMÉ**

Cet article se penche sur les approches et les définitions positives du plaisir développées dans le champ intellectuel musulman entre le dixième et le quatorzième siècle. Ces approches sont en opposition avec les définitions négatives qui nient l'existence d'un plaisir corporel véritable et réduisent le plaisir à la cessation de la peine et à un retour à un état naturel. L'approche positive voit le plaisir corporel comme un bien pour l'être vivant, intentionnellement créé

* Ghazoan Ali, ali.ghazoan@gmail.com.

par Dieu pour guider le corps dans cette vie vers le Bien éternel. Les conceptions du plaisir examinées dans cet article, poussent à préserver la vie et servent de guide empirique vers les plaisirs éternels de l'au-delà.

Mots-clés : anticipation – cause – convenable – corps – désir – douleur – existentiel – droit – perception – perfection – plaisir – reconstitution

* * *

UNDERTAKING the subject of one's relation to bodily pleasure is a way of undertaking the subject of one's relation to life itself. This does not imply that bodily pleasure is what life itself is about, but one's attitude to the pleasures of the body has great implications for how one is to live. It raises certain questions for philosophers, theologians and Sufis: is life an evil that we have been thrown into and must experience modestly, or does life have a good that one must seek? How does bodily pleasure relate to this evil or good that exists in life? Even though these simple questions are not directly explored in some of the texts I have considered, they are nonetheless an implicit challenge to any answer to what the nature of pleasure, and particularly bodily pleasure, may be.

What I aim to explore in this article are the different definitions and associations attached to the discourse on pleasure in general, and to bodily pleasure in particular. It is in the treatment of bodily pleasure in particular that one can find the life-affirming or life-denying definitions of pleasure as such. The life-affirming and life-denying poles are the extremities between which lie a range of associations between pain and pleasure. One's relation to life is related to the tie that exists between pleasure and pain and the nature of one in relation to the other. Is pleasure a thing in itself, thus making pain and pleasure different things? Or, is pleasure simply the lack of pain? The distinction and the relation between pain and pleasure have a particular relevance to our relation to life and to those we share this life with. This is why it is crucial to note the emphasis (or otherwise) on the nature of this relation in the discourse on pain and pleasure.

Bodily pleasure, as explored in this article, will not only be related to life in this worldly existence but will also be related to the heavenly pleasures of the body. I will not attempt to explore what these heavenly pleasures are in themselves or attempt to have a psychological or physiological understanding of what they are. I will, however, relate them to the way they have been used in delimiting the earthly pleasures themselves. I will finally discuss a process that was developed to grasp the experiential nature of pleasure which was considered to be beyond any definition and intrinsically tied to the heavenly pleasures.

In this article I consider the different aspects of pleasure as they appear in the works of three intellectual figures, al-Rāḡib al-Iṣfahānī, al-Ġazālī and ibn Taymiyya. Following an examination of a wide selection of texts on the subject, ranging from Islamic Neo-Platonism,

Avicennian philosophical tradition, and finally, *kalām* and Sufi traditions I focus on these thinkers because they reflect not only the main considerations in the aforementioned fields but also of what might broadly be considered an Islamic attitude towards bodily pleasure.

Al-Rāḡib al-Iṣfahānī (d. 502/1108)

Pleasure for al-Rāḡib is simply “the perception of the desired” (*idrāk al-muṣṭahā*).¹ The word *idrāk* means attainment, acquisition and realisation of something in a physical or intellectual sense.² Pleasure for al-Rāḡib appears to be the conscious attainment of that which is desired. This happens when that which is desired becomes part of the desiring body; in other words, it takes place when the internal desire of the body is substituted with the internalisation of the desired object itself (or a part of it) including its form. As to what this desire is, al-Rāḡib somewhat enigmatically defines it with another word with a very similar meaning: desire (*al-ṣāhwa*) is “the soul’s drive to obtain what it yearns for” (*inbi‘āt al-naḡs li-nayl mā tataṣawwaquhu*).³ One of the differences deducible from this relation between desire and yearning is that the former involves a movement and the latter does not. In this case, yearning

1. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darī‘a*, p. 203. For the first appearance of the definition of pleasure as ‘the perception of the desired,’ see ‘Abd al-Ġabbār (d. 415/1025), *al-Muġnī* 4, pp. 15-20. Pleasure, for al-Bahṣamiyya (followers of the Mu‘tazilī Abū Hāšim al-Ġibbāī (d. 321/933)), is only felt when that which is desired is perceived, see ‘Abd al-Ġabbār, *al-Muġnī* 14, p. 33. They also consider that pleasure is the perception of the desired with desire, see al-Nisābūrī, p. 172.

2. According to the material I have consulted, the use of the term ‘perception’ (*idrāk*) in the definition of pain and pleasure makes its first appearance in *kalām* amongst the Mu‘tazila. In the Islamic philosophical field, the use of this term seems to make its first appearance in the work of al-Fārābī (d. 339/950) who in his *philosophy of Aristotle* considers that “pleasurable means nothing other than that one is apprehending most excellently a most excellent object of apprehension.” See al-Fārābī, *Philosophy*, p. 73. This might correspond to Aristotle’s idea that “when both object and perceiver are of the best there will always be pleasure” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, X, 4, 1174b30, trans. Ross). If that is the case then this misses the point made by Aristotle, *pleasure is always after such an activity and not itself this same activity*. Aristotle also says: “It is not right to say that pleasure is a perceptible process, but it should rather be called activity of the natural state” (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, VII, 13, 1153a14). Peter Adamson, who has kindly provided me with his forthcoming article on Miskawayh (d. 421/1030), links this term to the Platonic replenishment conception of pleasure and he translates Miskawayh’s definition of pleasures as “perfections, but are potential, actualized only through the apprehension (*idrāk*) of [the perfections] by that which has the perfection,” Adamson, “Miskawayh on Pleasure.” The most influential associations with perception in the philosophical field, however, appear to be produced by Ibn Sīnā (d. 428/1037) who, in one instance, defines pleasure as “perception of attainment of the perfection specific to the perceiving power.” See Ibn Sīnā, “al-Adwiya al-qalbiyya,” pp. 227, 229. Closely related to this idea but with the use of ‘sensing’ instead of ‘perceiving,’ al-‘Āmirī (d. 381/991) and Porphyry find pleasure to be a ‘sensing of an affection,’ where bodily affection is a movement that occurs in the body caused by meeting a thing that is pleasurable or painful. See al-‘Āmirī, *al-Sa‘āda*, pp. 139-140. In this article, I use *al-Sa‘āda* as an anthology of the Greek philosophers’ discourse on pleasure. For recent studies on the Greek philosophers’ work on the subject see Van Riel, *Pleasure* and Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure*. For the Aristotelian and Platonic background to the Islamic discourse on the subject see Adamson, “Platonic pleasures” and “Miskawayh on Pleasure.”

3. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darī‘a*, p. 203.

and desire have the same object which is itself the cause of pleasure; however, desire is the driving force that puts the soul on the path that leads to the object it yearns for.

As in many other texts on this subject, al-Rāḡib divides the pleasures of this world into three kinds. The first of these pleasures is *the intellectual*: this is the most elevated because it is exclusively experienced by humans. The second is *bodily pleasure*: this differs from the intellectual pleasure because it is common between humans and animals; it includes drinking, eating and coitus. The final kind is *the pleasures common between humans and some animals*. This is found in some specific power relations amongst the individual members of a species, and it includes the pleasures of leadership and dominance.⁴ It is evident for al-Rāḡib that the higher intellectual pleasure is noble and rare, whilst the low bodily pleasures are base and common.⁵

For al-Rāḡib, bodily pleasure, which concerns us here, is considered in some cases to cure pain and in others to be itself a pain. The little clarification that we have on this point is a saying attributed to al-Ḥasan b. Ali, whereby he describes the human being as “beaten by hunger and killed by fullness”⁶. If hunger is what causes pain in the first instance then we assume that the body would gain pleasure (the cure for this pain) by overcoming the state of hunger through eating, becoming full and returning to a natural state before the pain of hunger. If this state of being full is exceeded, however, the pleasure gained by overcoming the pain of hunger turns into the very pain which one aimed to alleviate. This view of pleasure is clearly the same as the one expounded by Abū Bakr al-Rāzī, which is nothing more than the replenishment theory of pleasure.⁷ Al-Rāḡib offers no other ways of looking at pleasure than in terms of lack of pain, or of becoming pain.⁸

4. These three kinds of pleasure are related to Plato's three types of souls found in Galen, *Galenī Timaei*, p. 23; al-ʿĀmirī, *al-Saʿāda*, pp. 140-142 and in Galen's text on ethics. They are *the reasoning soul* (*al-naḡs al-nāḡiqa*), *the vegetative or the desiderative soul* (*al-naḡs al-nabāḡiyya/al-ṡahwāḡiyya*) and *the spirited soul* (*al-naḡs al-ḡaḡabiyya*). Galen, “al-Aḡlāq,” p. 191.

5. For Galen, these two are in constant battle, and *the rational soul* is ashamed of the pleasures sought by *the desiderative soul*. One of these makes him more angelic and drives him to seek beauty whilst the other is more bestial and drives him to worship pleasure, see Galen, “al-Aḡlāq,” pp. 191, 199.

6. Al-Iṡfahānī, *al-Ḍarīʿa*, p. 203.

7. Al-Rāzī's (Abū Bakr, d. 313/925) theory of replenishment and return to a natural state is found in *Kitāb al-ḡibb al-rūḡhānī*, explored in al-Rāzī, *Rasāʿil*, pp. 36-39. For pleasure in the work of al-Rāzī see Adamson, “Platonic pleasures.” In the debate amongst the Muʿtazila, regarding the nature of pain, we frequently find quoted the opinion of Abū Iṡḡāq b. ʿAyyāṡ (teacher of al-Qāḡī ʿAbd al-ḡabbār) who finds pain to be cessation of balance and pleasure to be the reestablishment of this balance. He also believes that one is in pain when there is separation in the body, see Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Maḡmūʿ* 3, p. 16; *al-Taḡkira*, p. 307; ʿAbd al-ḡabbār, *al-Muḡnī* 4, p. 29. In another version he is also reported by Rukn al-Dīn Ibn al-Malāḡimī (d. 536/1141), who is in agreement with him, to have said that pain is separation in the living structure, or frailty, see Ibn al-Malāḡimī, *al-Fāʿiq*, p. 257. For al-Bahṡamiyya, on the other hand, pain is caused by frailty, for if one does not perceive the separation then pain must be something other, see Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Taḡkira*, p. 308. Al-ʿĀmirī quotes Galen as saying that pain is caused by separating what is joined and joining what is separated. He is also quoted as saying that “pain is coming out from the natural state in a short time and by far... and pleasure is a return to a natural state in a short period.” This is also said to be similar to Porphyry's, Plato's and Pythagoras's idea of action or transformation following a natural course or against a natural course, see al-ʿĀmirī, *al-Saʿāda*, pp. 136, 144. These ideas are also found in Galen's paraphrase of

We can further exemplify this negative association with pleasure in al-Rāḡib's work by recounting a story of an encounter between Ali and 'Ammār b. Yāsir, within which the pleasures of this life are reduced to seven: food, drink, coitus, clothes, smell, hearing and sight. Each one is taken in turn, and the value of the finest example of each category is reduced to a reviled thing. In the food category, for example, honey is said to be from a fly; in the scent category the perfume of *misk* is said to be the blood of a mouse; and finally coitus is reduced to the idea of 'urine in urine'.⁹

To reverse the direction of this type of discourse (linking pleasure to demeaning desire harmful to the human soul), one of the steps philosophers and theologians undertake is to emphasise the 'necessity' of the elements related to this desire. Al-Rāḡib, among others, mentions the idea of 'necessary pleasures', those that are not simply the subjects of likes and dislikes. The pleasures of eating and coitus are not whims one chooses or abstains from undertaking,

the *Timaeus*, see Galen, *Galenī Timaei*, p. 19. In al-'Āmirī's work, Aristotle does not think that all pleasures are a matter of replenishment from lack, this for him only applies to some bodily pleasures but not all. This is a response to Plato who is said to have believed that the pleasure of knowledge is also replenishment from a lack, for lack of knowledge is the most severe, see al-'Āmirī, *al-Sa'āda*, pp. 144-146. Contrary to this, and according to Wolfsdorf, Aristotle considers "what is *naturally* pleasant is that in which we take pleasure when we are in the natural condition" and thus "restorative pleasure is not naturally pleasant, whereas non-restorative pleasure is naturally pleasant," Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure*, pp. 128-129. See also the remaining chapter for Aristotle's changing understanding of pleasure, from a Platonic replenishment theory to its critique and finally to the idea of perfecting an activity, Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure*, pp. 103-133. Ibn Sīnā agrees that there are cases where a return to a natural state produces pleasure, he describes these cases as "leaving the unnatural state." However, for him, this is taking the accidental for the essential, as this is not a necessary condition for pleasure. Pleasure not only occurs in the return to the natural state but may also exist when remaining in a natural state. The reason for this misconception is that some perceptions, those related to touch for example, only occur when there is an alteration in the perceiving part. Perception only occurs when the perceiving organ is contrary to the perceived object which causes a change and transformation until the form and quality of the object becomes mixed with the organ. See Ibn Sīnā, "al-Adwiya al-qalbiyya", p. 228. In Ibn Sīnā's *al-Qānūn fī al-ṭibb* he says that pleasure is of two kinds, the first is the one that changes the natural humoral mixture (*mizāğ ṭabī'ī*) at once, and the other is the one which restores the natural connection at once, see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Qānūn* 1, p. 151. For recent work on Ibn Sīnā's perception and abstraction of form from matter see D'Ancona, "Degrees of Abstraction"; McGinnis, "Making Abstraction"; Hasse, "Avicenna on Abstraction" and "Avicenna's epistemological optimism."

8. A Mu'tazilī critique of the replenishment theory is found in Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Taḍkira*, pp. 308-309. Some of the counterexamples and arguments that he uses are: 1) One may find pleasure in an image or sound without having a prior knowledge of them. 2) One may have the pleasure of seeing something or someone without a following pain due to the cessation of this seeing. 3) In the case of eating, one should not have preference over what is eaten if the sole purpose of eating is to alleviate hunger. 4) Pleasure occurs through perception, and perception is of something specific that takes place, it is not a negative perception of something that is ceasing to exist.

9. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darī'a*, p. 204. Adamson has kindly pointed out that this conversation between 'Alī and 'Ammār also appears in Miskawayh. It is interesting, however, that in Miskawayh's version *hearing* and *sight* are not included in the list of negative pleasures. He declares that these have not been included by 'Alī as "they are from the hereafter and our taste of it is through them." See Miskawayh, "Fī al-laḍḍāt," p. 104. In another saying related to 'Alī, found in the Mu'tazilī tradition, he appears as condemning those who do not enjoy earthly pleasures. See Ibn Abī al-Ḥadīd, *Šarḥ* 6, p. 25.

for they are part of the necessities of life.¹⁰ These pleasures keep humans and animals alive: through food the body is sustained and through coitus the existence of the species is preserved.¹¹ The problem with these pleasures is found in their excess, and the evil associated with them occurs when exceeding the limits defined by the intellect, which is considered to be in accordance with the law.¹² Once the good of the desired object is surpassed, the excess in desire becomes a passion or love (*hawā*) for the desired object. In this case, the quantitative increase in the object of pleasure vitalises this pleasure and strengthens it to the point of becoming a different quality, namely a passion for the desired object.¹³ This passion is not transformed directly into pain as in the previous discussion; it rather becomes for al-Rāḡib the force of evil and the instrument of the devil that makes the human being fall from God's grace.¹⁴

What is good in food and drink is of little significance when the pleasure in the desired food or drink outweighs the benefits it brings to the body. In the case of alcohol, for example, the benefits that one may gain from drinking it are much less than the harm it brings, not necessarily to the physical body but to the human being as a whole. For al-Rāḡib, the benefits of alcohol do exist but they are not necessary for the body, and the damage it causes to the moral being is greater.¹⁵

In the discussion on the beneficial (if not necessary) pleasures of food and drink, two elements of measure are considered. Firstly, in what is necessary, there is a quantity/measure of how much is good, this measure is dictated by the intellect and the law. Exceeding this right measure either leads to a transformation into pain (which was supposed to be alleviated

10. Al-ʿĀmirī indicates that Aristotle considers the pleasures of food, drink, clothing and shelter to be natural and necessary, whilst the pleasure of coitus to be natural but not necessary, and finally, the pleasures of drinking alcohol, *over indulgence* in: eating, drinking and coitus to be neither natural nor necessary, see al-ʿĀmirī, *al-Saʿāda*, p. 136.

11. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darīʿa*, p. 205. The necessity of *the desiderative soul* is also found to be necessary for life and reproduction in Galen, “al-Aḥlāq,” p. 191. In Mānkḏīm, *Šarḥ al-uṣūl*, p. 80, we find these relations: God's blessing is explained by the benefits he bestows on his creatures, and these benefits are said to mean pleasure and joy or that which leads to them. In ʿAbd al-Ġabbār, *al-Muḡnī* 6, 2, p. 35, desire is only attached to what benefits upon acquiring it. Pleasure is attached to the natural desire and not to volition (which is not necessarily attached to the beneficial). Al-ʿĀmirī quotes Aristotle as saying: “Life is pleasurable, thus, all causes that lead to life are pleasurable.” See al-ʿĀmirī, *al-Saʿāda*, p. 135.

12. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darīʿa*, p. 209. See also al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafṣīl*, p. 32. Since balance, for Galen, is achieved when two souls obey one, the control over *the desiderative soul* is exercised by *the rational soul* through the power of *the spirited soul*, see Galen, “al-Aḥlāq,” pp. 191-192, 200. He also finds that excess in the natural inclinations drives us away from our humanity to an animalistic state, see Galen, “al-Aḥlāq,” p. 194. Al-ʿĀmirī quotes Aristotle as saying: “increasing pleasure leads to illness even if this pleasure is all good.” More specifically, Aristotle believes the problem to be in the excess in bodily pleasure, see al-ʿĀmirī, *al-Saʿāda*, pp. 143-144.

13. One of the critiques of the replenishment theory by the Muʿtazila is that there cannot be an increase of pleasure according to this theory since it is defined as the negation of pain, see Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Taḏkīra*, p. 310. Also, the Muʿtazila deny the association of pain and desire, for pain is ‘perception with aversion’ and pleasure is ‘perception with desire’. Aversion is what distinguishes the genus of perceptions as pain and desire is what distinguishes them as pleasure, see Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Taḏkīra*, p. 310, and Heemskerk, *Suffering*, pp. 82-83.

14. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darīʿa*, p. 207.

15. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darīʿa*, p. 207.

by the benefits of what is pleasurable), or this excess feeds back into the desire and leads to the further development of passion. This transforms the desire from being a guide to what is good for one's body to being a force that drags one's self to the servitude of what is evil. Secondly, pleasure is not clearly related to benefits for the body or the soul. Pleasure in these cases does exist, however it is here significantly tied to what is harmful from the outset, despite acknowledging an association with some benefits. In this case, there is no association with excess since what is harmful is there from the beginning. This harm is not described as physical; it is rather seen as being against wisdom and virtue, two aspects that are beyond the realm of the body. When dealing with the body on its own, the measure of balance is between pleasure and the physical benefits. However, when dealing with the whole human being as a member of a group, both virtue and wisdom become significant, and the measure of balance is therefore between pleasure, body, virtue and social benefits.¹⁶

The question of balance is frequently referred to in Islamic texts under the category of *'iffa* or modesty.¹⁷ For al-Rāḡib, this modesty occurs following the betterment (*iṣlāḥ*) of desire.¹⁸ This betterment is an affirmation of the need for desire and involves finding the balance between greed (*ṣarāḥ*) and the annihilation of desire. When modesty is applied to bodily desires, and to the more psychological/intellectual desires related to one's enthusiasm and virtue in action, one brings into being the power of justice.¹⁹ This justice, modelled upon divine justice and applied in the concrete lived world, is practiced by the individual in his own being as well as in his own community. It arises from a modesty that finds expressions, not only in personal psychological/intellectual considerations applied in social relationships, but also in bodily relations which find expression in pleasure. Therefore, one seeks a politics of justice in moderation applied to oneself in relation to one's body and intellect as well as in one's physical and intellectual relation to the other.

With regard to coitus, some of the same concerns associated with food and drink are present in al-Rāḡib's work. What is different however is that in this case there are two delimiting fields of social space involving the individuals who enjoy this pleasure. One of these spaces is within the confines of the religious law (*al-ṣarʿ*) (which defines what is and what is not good) and the other is outside. Within the bounds of the law one has coitus because one intends to reproduce; or to remove pain; or else for the calming effect it has on oneself. Coitus may therefore also be said to bring about the realisation of God's benefits to the individual human being through a release from pain, as well as to the species through its continuous survival. Abstaining from taking part in this act is, according to al-Rāḡib, against the law and discouraged by the medical profession. This is so because the accumulation of unreleased pressure eventually leads one to excessive consumption of what is legally permitted. He believes that

16. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darīʿa*, p. 207.

17. The idea of balance and the use of the word *'iffa* are also found in Galen, "al-Aḥlāq," pp. 191-192.

18. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafṣīl*, p. 95.

19. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafṣīl*, pp. 95-96. One of the examples given for modesty in enthusiasm is courage, which stands between cowardice and recklessness.

this would render the human being a beast consumed by lust.²⁰ We must note that this excess (which also feeds back into the desire to attain this pleasure) is still within the bounds of the religious law, except that it is considered an abhorred thing (*makrūh*). What is feared is that this excess of pleasure is not only physically harmful,²¹ but it also drives one to go beyond the space bound by the religious law.²² If excess of desire, 'lust', cannot be satisfied within the bounds of the law, the surplus pleasure would be sought in the space that is not, and cannot be, regulated by this law. This alternative space, whose existence is acknowledged and rejected, is where the defining and delimiting categories of the law become powerless. The benefit of the species' reproduction becomes insignificant in this space, despite its continued possibility. Al-Rāḡib divides relations within this second social space as either heterosexual or homosexual.

Heterosexual relations belong to the two spaces defined by acceptance and rejection of the religious law. These relations are similar in both cases except that the species' telos in pleasure (reproduction/existence) is determined in the lawful space, yet it is only potential when present in the unlawful space. If what is beneficial to the species finds its expression in a married couple's pleasurable desire to reproduce, then this benefit is absent and only potential in the unlawful relationship between a man and woman. Since, in this second space, the benefit for the species from coitus is denied, what remains is not only the release from pressure and the comfort one finds in this pleasure but also the pleasure in coitus itself.²³

The homosexual relation is thus the pure form of what is denied by the space defined by the law. In this, reproduction is not even a potential element that can bring about the continuous survival of the species. Coitus in this space is both potentially and concretely only for the pleasure that comes from ejaculation.²⁴ Since there is nothing of benefit to the species, and since al-Rāḡib mentions no other social benefits to pleasure in coitus, the homosexual pleasure becomes a symbol of individualistic pleasure-seeking purely for its own sake. As the word 'benefit' is not even mentioned in this section one can draw the conclusion that the space of pleasure unregulated by religious law (the space the law actually tries to eliminate) is considered to be of no benefit for the species. It is where pleasure, however defined, exists for the individual and is generated for its own sake.

20. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darī'a*, p. 209.

21. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darī'a*, p. 209. For al-Rāḡib, the physical harm includes the enlargement of the semen vessels which leads to an increase in the blood flow and the subsequent reduction in one's energy and life expectancy.

22. For more analysis of the space permitted by law see Bouhdiba, *al-Islām wa-l-ḡins*, pp. 160-170. Of particular interest in this work is Bouhdiba's distinction between the implications of the law as it is applied in the cities and the rural areas. In the cities and amongst the slave owners, pleasure becomes the space of the slave women whilst reproduction that of the free women. The rural areas on the other hand, are defined by the space of pure love without coitus.

23. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darī'a*, p. 210.

24. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darī'a*, p. 210.

Al-Rāḡib is not interested in the other in whom one finds the desired pleasure, as he considers pleasure to reside in the individual who experiences it and in the benefit to the species.²⁵ Indeed this 'other', as a significant partner in the relationship producing pleasure, is actually attacked in the short discussion on passionate desire in which a lover's desire is directed to only 'one particular other'. Al-Rāḡib's critique is that the most repugnant of desires which we share with beasts not only drives the passionate lover to release himself from pain through an other, but also requires him to use his intellect to identify the desired other. What he condemns is that the intellect is not used to guide and control this desire in accordance with the religious law, but that it becomes fixated on this particular other. This fixation, for al-Rāḡib, enslaves the passionate, desirous person to his other when in fact 'any other' defined by law could satisfy the animalistic pleasure. The intellect is set the task of controlling the body, guiding it in accordance with the law, but when it participates in the pleasure of the body it enslaves itself to desire. According to al-Rāḡib, it is to desire itself and not to the other that one becomes a slave since he insists on denying the significance of the other in the sexual relationship. Here again is an example for al-Rāḡib of how excess in desire leads one to feebleness, illness and death.²⁶

In *Tafṣīl al-naṣ'atayn*, al-Rāḡib makes important distinctions between two types of pleasure and between the domains covered by these pleasures. The first type is that of bodily pleasure, and the domain of its application covers that which the bodily senses can distinguish in taste, touch, smell, hearing and sight. The other type of pleasure is intellectual, which includes the pleasures of knowing, good moral conduct and doing what is beautiful.²⁷ This in itself marks no difference from the other texts discussed thus far. However, this work deviates in the section on the happiness associated with pleasure. Here, al-Rāḡib distinguishes between two types of happiness, one is the eternal happiness of the afterlife and the other is the changing and ephemeral happiness of this life.

The distinction between these two types of happiness is of no great significance. What is important, however, is that there is a link between them in al-Rāḡib's text. The happiness one has in this life (which one has because of what God has blessed us with) ought to guide us to the everlasting happiness. That which is changing and ephemeral must lead to that which is eternal.²⁸ This relation is initially established through the idea that if a person consumes the benefits that God has bestowed upon him in accordance with His law then this would lead him to the eternal blessings of the hereafter. It appears that the underlying reason for making this connection between one happiness and the other is to emphasise the importance of following the law, in the sense that it is in the appropriate consumption of the ephemeral that one obtains the everlasting. As such, it could be assumed that the link between the two types

25. I have previously mentioned (note 8) a Mu'tazilī critique of the replenishment theory of pleasure that ignores the specificities of what is desired, where any food will cause pleasure as it alleviates the pain of hunger. The same idea is applicable to the point under consideration, see Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Taḍkīra*, p. 309.

26. Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Ḍarī'a*, pp. 210, 211. For an earlier critique of passionate love see al-Rāzī, *Rasā'il*, pp. 40-43.

27. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafṣīl*, p. 31.

28. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafṣīl*, p. 65.

of happiness here is not necessarily intended to demonstrate similarity in kind, but is instead to emphasise the importance of following the law.²⁹

The actual connection between the two types of happiness is established in a separate section of this book. The eternal pleasures of the hereafter are classified as the 'radical other' of the temporary pleasures. They are unimaginable and inaccessible to us in this life where we only encounter what is vanishing. One of the standard experiential examples given to explain this otherness of the eternal pleasures is describing to a young boy the pleasure of coitus, which would mean nothing to the boy, as he has not experienced it. The principle derived from this example is that pleasures cannot be described because they are experiential, and we cannot speak of the eternal pleasures because they are both radically other and not experienced on this earth. For al-Rāḡib one may only know the truth of something when one is directly aware of it, when one experiences it.³⁰

Since the eternal pleasures are not to be experienced in this life by the bodily senses, and yet their reality must be established for the common man, God chooses to link them to the earthly pleasures through the principle of resemblance. There is a divide here between the ordinary people and the intellectuals. While in the first instance the emphasis on understanding 'the truth' of something lay with experience, this now becomes the specific means of understanding for the common people. The ordinary person may only reach an understanding of the eternal pleasures through a comparison with the similar (yet radically different) temporary pleasures of the body. The images and sensations experienced provoke an idea of that which waits beyond the earthly body.

Alternatively, for al-Rāḡib, one may reach an understanding of the eternal pleasures through the pure intellect (*al-'aql al-maḥḍ*) which is rare in this life. Only the few, who distance themselves from the earthly pleasures and purify themselves, can reach a clearer vision of the eternal pleasures whilst remaining on this earth. The logic of this argument asserts that it is only through the death of the body that one reaches that which is beyond, and if this physical death is unattainable, then it is through the distancing of the body from that which links it to this life that one arrives at glimpses of the eternal pleasures. One can deduce from this reasoning that the eternal pleasures are accessible in such a manner because their nature pertains to mind and not to matter.³¹

29. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafṣīl*, p. 65.

30. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Tafṣīl*, p. 66. Al-'Āmirī attributes to Plato the idea that things are known through experience and syllogism. He who knows the pleasures of the intellect must have experienced the other pleasures. It is also in this way that one discovers the difference between the changing nature of bodily pleasure, which stands in opposition to the intellectual pleasure that he and Aristotle consider to be the true pleasure, see al-'Āmirī, *al-Sa'āda*, p. 143.

31. In the Arabic Hermetic tradition we find in *Mu'āḍalat al-naḥs* a critique of those who denounce this earthly existence because of its deception since deception is considered to be of a human origin, not of life itself. Existence in this life is for searching, learning and experimenting with what is sensed and is by nature ephemeral. This is achieved on the basis that all that we see and learn, although it changes and vanishes, is a representation of what is everlasting. Even the false pleasures of this life indicate and point to the eternal

The relationship between the eternal (and perfect) with its earthly other (temporal, imperfect and subject to human knowledge through the immediacy of sense experience) bears a strong resemblance to the relationship between Plato's forms and their objects and phenomena. It is a relationship between the perfect eternal model and its imperfect representation or manifestation through similitude in the changing world of objects and phenomena. The similarity between this model of earthly pleasures and the idealised eternal other poses a serious challenge to the generally accepted notion of the physicality of life in the hereafter; it suggests the nature of eternal pleasure to be more intellectual in nature.

There is an informative anecdote that appears in *Muḥāḍarāt al-udabā'* which refers to this relationship between the model and inferior-similar other. Away from the sphere of theology and philosophy, and in that of the sensual literary world, the nature of similarity between model and object/phenomena is reversed. When asked about the pleasure of drinking wine, Abū Nuwās declares: "Wine in this worldly existence is better than wine in the life to come."³² The roles are here reversed, for this life is the source of what is real and the prototype upon which that which exists in the life to come is modelled. Experience through the body is the experience of what is true and primary, and that which will come only mimics and reproduces that which was once perfect. Abū Nuwās declares this to be the case: "God has made them models and the model is forever better."³³ Since he expressed this view following a question regarding the pleasurable experience of drinking wine, one may assume that it is not only the object of the experience but the experience itself, pleasure, which is better in this life. Thus, in this reversal of roles, it is the earthly experience that establishes what is true, the blueprint of that which is intellectualised by the philosophers, those who elevate the idealised forms of the direct experience to the realm of the intellect.³⁴

and unchanging pleasures. This is why one must yearn to the other life and must distance oneself from the false pleasures of the body in this life, see Hermes, "Mu'āḍalat al-nafs," pp. 56-70.

32. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt 2*, p. 680.

33. Al-Iṣfahānī, *Muḥāḍarāt 2*, p. 680.

34. In opposition to this particularly unique view we have the pessimistic view of Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī (d. 606/1210). He agrees with those who believe that there is nothing that can truly be called pleasure: "There is no reality to pleasure" he states, for it is nothing other than alleviation of pain. If pleasure exists in this life then it is limited, ephemeral and always leaves pain behind. One of the particularly negative associations with earthly pleasures is found in his commentary on Qur'ān 12:101 where he gives reasons for wishing one's own death like Yūsuf. Here, as in his commentary on Qur'ān 7:80-81 we find a striking remark on the consequences of the pleasure of coitus: 'having children'. Despite the positive side of having children and continuing the existence of the human species, he finds that coitus leads one to seek work and income in all kinds of ways to sustain these children and this in turn may lead to one's damnation. Since there is nothing good in seeking these earthly pleasures, and since one's soul is created and formed to seek these perpetually vanishing and restricted pleasures, an intelligent man (like the writer of the commentary) constantly recites Yūsuf's words "let me die a Muslim and make me join the company of the virtuous." See Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr* 18, pp. 223-225; 14, p. 176. Shihadeh, who hasn't considered al-Rāzī's pessimistic views that are clearly expressed in his *Tafsīr*, finds this pessimism to be a late development in his thought, particularly as it appears in *Risālat ḍamm maladḍāt al-dunyā*. On this pessimism see chapter four of the edition and translation of this work in Shihadeh, *The Teleological Ethics*.

Al-Ġazālī (d. 505/III)

Much of what I have discussed so far reappears in a very similar way in the work of al-Ġazālī. It is clear, however, that parts of his work display shifts away from the negative associations presented thus far. For instance, the Muʿtazilī definition of pleasure as “the perception of the desired”³⁵ is found in the work of al-Ġazālī alongside other associations with pleasure such as: ‘perceiving (*darak*) what one needs and yearns for’;³⁶ ‘desiring that which is agreeable (*mulāʿim*) when it is lacking in the one who seeks’;³⁷ and ‘acquiring (*nayl*) that which is lacking’.³⁸

For al-Ġazālī, pleasure is not *only* caused by the cessation of pain, and it is not only known through a relation with pain, for that which is agreeable is desired when it is lacking, and this lack is not necessarily considered in association with pain.³⁹ Understanding pleasure in terms of ‘lack’ may face the challenge that a lack is always associated with some degree of psychological or physical pain and, therefore, there is no escape from the idea of pleasure as replenishment and alleviation of pain in a discourse on pleasure.⁴⁰ This would be a valid challenge, however, I will discuss in this section how al-Ġazālī is constantly expanding the notion of pleasure beyond its direct association with pain.

If lack is assumed to be the source of pain, and if yearning is to that which is lacking, then one may further assume that pain and yearning are also related. This assumption is confirmed and denied by al-Ġazālī in a dialectical way. He writes that even if yearning is pain “it has within it a kind of pleasure provided one supplements it with the *anticipation* of reunion, for anticipation is sweet”.⁴¹ If there is pain in yearning, or even if yearning is caused by pain, the anticipation of acquiring what is yearned for is pleasurable. It is not the reunion

35. Al-Ġazālī, *Mizān*, p. 307.

36. Al-Ġazālī, *al-Iqtīṣād*, p. 113.

37. Al-Ġazālī, *al-Iqtīṣād*, p. 113. In Galen we find the idea of agreeability to be part of our animal nature from infancy. For him, we have a tendency to like and desire what is agreeable and dislike what is disagreeable. The Arabic term that is used in Galen’s text is however (*muwāfiq*) and not (*mulāʿim*) but in this context, this reflects the same meaning, see Galen, “al-Aḥlāq,” p. 193. This idea is also found in al-ʿĀmirī’s work where he states that the pleasurable is what is agreeable to nature, see al-ʿĀmirī, *al-Saʿāda*, p. 134. Ibn Sīnā also uses this term in his definition of pleasure, see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Naḡāt*, p. 282. The relation between the agreeable and the natural can be traced to Aristotle who confirms that: “what is in conformity with nature is to every animal agreeable,” (Aristotle, *History of Animals* VIII, 590a13, trans. Thompson). As to the relation between the agreeable and the pleasant in his work see Aristotle, *On Sensation*, 5, 443b, 20-32, trans. Beare.

38. Al-Ġazālī, *al-Iqtīṣād*, p. 113. The use of *nayl* appears in another definition of pleasure by Ibn Sīnā, see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Iṣārāt*, part 4, p. 11. This term is also used by Al-Iṣfahānī, *al-Darīʿa*, p. 203, and it is mentioned as a definition of pleasure by Miskawayh, “Fi al-laddāt,” p. 98. The addition of *nayl* in the definition emphasises the underlying meaning of acquiring and attaining in the use of the term perception (*idrāk* or *darak*).

39. Al-Ġazālī, *al-Iqtīṣād*, p. 113.

40. A Platonic response to the Aristotelian critique that some sensuous pleasures do not presuppose pain (sounds, smells, memories and hopes) is that absence of pain does not mean absence of lack as there is no escape from the flux of lack and replenishment. Van Riel, *Pleasure*, p. 50.

41. Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 2, p. 279.

or the attainment of what is lacking that is significant, here, for what is pleasant is already contained in the yearning itself at the moment it comes into existence.

The existence of yearning, before the actual reunion with the desired, carries ‘anticipation’ within itself as a constitutive part. In this idea, not only is the object of desire (as a holder of that which is beneficial) the direct cause of pleasure, but it is also a source of pleasure before its acquisition. Before it replenishes the lack or alleviates the pain, the object of desire creates the pleasure of anticipation prior to any union with it.

Pleasure in anticipation is developed further in the context of hearing. Al-Ġazālī considers hearing music and songs to be the source that ignites passion and yearning for reunion with the beloved and desired.⁴² The pleasure of hearing brings about the anticipation of reunion, provoking a limited presence of what is desired and absent. The more effective the sounds we hear and internalise, the more intense both the yearning for the desired and the anticipation to be reunited with them, and thus the more present they become. Pain in the case of an absent other is not only from the lack itself but also from the psychological element of despair, the counterpart of anticipation.⁴³

In the Sufi context, anticipation reflects a *limited presence of the future in the present*. It stems from the belief in the justice of the beloved who promises to come nearer to the worshipping believer who in turn constantly seeks to improve his knowledge and works in order to be nearer to the beloved.⁴⁴ This anticipation is based on the belief and trust that the beloved will reciprocate one’s love and that, with time, the encounter will happen. The idea of ‘anticipation’, which has an important place in Sufi discourse, has the body of the other as the source of anticipation. Al-Ġazālī expects that anticipation will reach a point of consummation. The lover, excited by the music and words that recreate in his mind the one he loves, is expected to finally be reunited with his love, to experience the real pleasure of reunion. The pleasure of the physical encounter is increased because of the thoughts generated in the absence of the beloved with whom real encounter was anticipated. Al-Ġazālī also insists, like al-Rāḡib, that the beloved must be someone with whom a legal bond is established. No reunion is permitted outside the religious bounds of the law.⁴⁵

42. The idea of reunion with the object of pleasure is also present in the notion of food becoming part of one’s body. This appears in Galen’s work in his discussion of *the vegetative soul* which seeks food. The food that is sought after is attractive to *the vegetative soul* because it is homogeneous with its humoral mixture which is similar to and unites with it, see Galen, “al-Aḥlāq,” p. 198.

43. The relation between sound and yearning is also present in the work of Iḥwān al-Ṣafā who find that sounds originate in the perfect world of planets and stars. The good and beautiful sounds that we hear in the world of generation and corruption remind us of the otherworldly sounds and make us yearn for the otherworldly existence. See Iḥwān al-Ṣafā, *Rasā’il* 3, p. 91. On the otherworldly nature of sound and its relation to this existence see also Miskawayh, “Fī al-laddāt,” pp. 103-104.

44. Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyā’* 4, p. 142.

45. Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyā’* 2, p. 279.

In the idea of ‘anticipation’, however, something from outside one’s personal body must be acknowledged: the other body with whom a reunion is anticipated. This nearing to the beloved is a coming together of two people who initially close in on one another through images and ideas.

Unlike al-Rāḡib’s disapproval of loving and yearning for one person, al-Ġazālī thinks that only the beloved ‘one’ can provoke this anticipation.⁴⁶ The physical union of two people, considered by al-Rāḡib to be beneficial only because it leads to the preservation of the species, plays the same part in the work of al-Ġazālī. However, the individual who is the cause of yearning in the heart of the lover is clearly also significant for al-Ġazālī. This is not only because the union with this individual leads to the continuation of the species itself but because for al-Ġazālī ‘playfulness’ (*la’ib*) and ‘enjoyment’ (*tamattu’*) can emerge in the process of a physical union. In this case, the physical act itself not only leads to its teleological end but is also the source and cause of a specific space that binds two particular bodies with a precise psychological bond unique to the individuals involved. ‘Enjoyment’ and ‘playfulness’ in the act of coitus are products of the attraction (*istimāla*) and harmony (*ta’āluḡ*) that exist between the two bodies, which then open the space for ‘companionship’ (*ṣuḡba*) between them.⁴⁷ Further to this, the image that emerges from al-Ġazālī’s brief discussion on the relation between coitus and companionship reveals a circular model, whereby attraction and harmony lead to the act of coitus, which eventually brings about companionship and increases attraction and harmony which in turn leads to an increase in the desire for coitus.

The two factors preceding the act of coitus, ‘attraction’ and ‘harmony’, as well as the one that follows it, ‘companionship’, are elements that become manifest in a particular relationship between two people. These are also, for al-Ġazālī, transferable relations. That which emerges from the physical and psychological drive creates relations specific to the reunited two, yet these are applicable in the broader social life of the community. The bonds and relations that are created by a specific and narrow space *educate through experience* those who are involved, and the qualities gained through this experience are potentially transferrable and applicable in the wider social space. From the Sufi perspective, the psychological relations surrounding the act of coitus are also applicable in the vertical sense, to the relationship between the seeker and her beloved, the one she yearns for, in the same way that it is applicable in a horizontal sense, in her relation with others in the social space. For al-Ġazālī, the heart is educated by being separated from the beloved as it becomes acquainted with the subtle meanings of reunion and separation.⁴⁸

In the physical relation of reunion which is accompanied by pleasure, al-Ġazālī mentions, as noted above, ‘enjoyment’ and ‘amusement’. Then, he appeared to indicate that these two are not intended for themselves as they are possible outcomes of reunion. In other instances

46. The difference between ‘hope’ and ‘anticipation’ is based on the idea of work, more specifically in one’s work towards attaining the desired which is present in ‘anticipation’ and lacking in ‘hope’, see al-Ġazālī, *Iḡyā’* 4, pp. 142-144.

47. Al-Ġazālī, *Ma’āriḡ*, p. 98; *Mizān*, p. 270.

48. Al-Ġazālī, *Iḡyā’* 2, p. 279. On the instrumentality of love, see Leites, “La règle de l’amour.”

however, al-Ġazālī is even more positive about the role of enjoyment and amusement. For him, enjoyment in this existence is permissible by God and in this regard he quotes Qurʾān 29:64: “What is the life of this world but amusement and play?”⁴⁹ This verse, which is often quoted to describe the life of the non-believers, is here utilised to state what life ought to be. This is an affirmation that the pleasure of coitus (and the enjoyment and playfulness that come with it) are a part of life the way it ought to be lived and affirmed.

In this earthly existence, different forms of enjoyment, fun and amusement are permissible for al-Ġazālī. Generally he doesn’t consider them time wasting activities, although they can be so. One allows oneself enjoyment of the pleasures of life because “they calm the heart and relieve from the burden of thinking”.⁵⁰ Al-Ġazālī is clearly directing his discourse to intellectuals (those whose mind is burdened with thinking). Rest (separation from the continuous involvement in thinking) is what is recommended for rejuvenation; seeking knowledge through the hard work of the mind can then be resumed. The physical pleasures during the periods of rest create the necessary disassociation from one’s work and the necessary enjoyment of life that allow one’s return to the demanding intellectual effort without fear of fatigue and ennui.⁵¹

The importance of bodily pleasures is nowhere more evident than in a passage that appears in *al-Maqṣad al-asnā*. In a discussion regarding the reason behind the Sufi’s (*al-ʿarīf bi-Llāh*) worship of Allah, al-Ġazālī finds that God is worshiped for His own sake and that there is no other benefit—neither earthly nor divine—sought behind this worship. The economy of exchanged benefits that exists in human relations is inapplicable in this particular instance. He explains that this is similar to a father’s care for his son where there is no benefit sought in the father’s commitment to his offspring. For al-Ġazālī, “he who seeks a thing for another is not seeking it, since it is not his aim, the other is his aim.”⁵² In this instance, the teleological cause is that which causes a movement to itself passing through ‘lesser causes’ which in themselves are not causes for the movement as such. If a father and a mother work to earn an income for the benefits that this income brings with it, including being able to care for their son, then these benefits are the reasons for working, and not the income itself. Similarly, al-Ġazālī considers that the reasons for seeking gold are the benefits that it can buy—clothing and food—rather than for the possession of the gold itself. Here one might expect al-Ġazālī to state that this is the case because of the benefits that these things bring, such as warmth and being able to live, however, the survival of the species is not considered in this section of the text as the teleological cause behind acquiring gold. Food and clothing bring with them pleasure and defer pain, and these are the final causes. He states: “Pleasure is wanted for itself not for another purpose beyond it, and so is warding off pain. Gold is a means for food, and food is a means for pleasure, and pleasure is the purpose that is not a means to another.”⁵³

49. Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 2, p. 279. Similar statements also occur in Qurʾān 47:36 and 57:36.

50. Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 2, p. 287.

51. Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyāʾ* 2, p. 287.

52. Al-Ġazālī, *al-Maqṣad*, p. 78.

53. Al-Ġazālī, *al-Maqṣad*, p. 78. For a summary of the discussion on the causal nature of pleasure in Aristotle see Van Riel, *Pleasure*, pp. 53-56.

One way of understanding the reason why bodily pleasure is an end in itself that drives one to act, is that pleasure is a good and a perfection.⁵⁴ For al-Ġazālī, pleasures are forms of perception that belong to different instincts and powers. They become realised once these powers and instincts acquire what they were created for. Each power and instinct associated with a particular desire is designed to have a certain perception in reality; for example, sound, taste or sight.⁵⁵ Pleasure occurs in the perception itself of that which is agreeable with the particular power and instinct. That which is agreeable with each power and instinct is its perfection.⁵⁶ The previous teleological association with pleasure (pleasure as the end reason of action itself) can therefore be explained by the desire of each power that exists in us to achieve its perfection, that for which it was created. Pleasure is sought in itself because it is a perfection for the sense, the final cause of the perceiving power with which it is associated, the actualisation of what was a power and its coming into existence.⁵⁷

Ibn Taymiyya (d. 728/1328)

Within the same context of permissible pleasures which are regulated by the intellect and the law, I now explore the work of Ibn Taymiyya. What is evident from his work, and which is confirmed by his student Ibn Qayyim al-Ġawziyya (d. 751/1350), is that there is no definition for pleasure. For them, pleasure is intuitive and self-evident. It may not be defined in more basic terms and may only be discussed in terms of its causes (*asbāb*) and properties (*aḥkām*).⁵⁸ Ibn Taymiyya considers intuitive knowledge to be necessary, without which circularity will occur in our understanding of knowledge. It is the primary and necessary knowledge that is not based on prior knowledge and which requires no proof or introduction; it is simply that from which one begins to know.⁵⁹

54. Ibn Sīnā finds that the pleasure of each power is the attainment of its own perfection, see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Šifā'* 2, p. 370. Elsewhere, he considers that it is the perception of the attainment of what is a perfection and a good in the perceiver, see Ibn Sīnā, *al-Išārāt* 4, p. 11. In al-Ġāmirī's *al-Sa'āda* we find quoted from an anonymous source: "The affections are four, pleasure, pain, desire and fear (...) Pleasure is in the present good... and desire is for the expected good." See al-Ġāmirī, *al-Sa'āda*, p. 138. On Aristotle's conception of pleasure as activity or as perfecting an activity (as something added on) see Van Riel, *Pleasure*, pp. 51-63; Wolfsdorf, *Pleasure*, pp. 119-133.

55. Al-Ġazālī, *Iḥyā'* 4, p. 307

56. Al-Ġazālī, *Ma'āriḡ*, p. 147.

57. Relevant to this discussion is Ibn Sīnā's idea that the soul is brought to perfection by a universal or a particular object of desire. See D'Ancona, "Degrees of Abstraction," p. 64.

58. The critique of a definition of pleasure is also found in Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's commentary on Ibn Sīnā's *Uyūn al-ḥikma*. In this text Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī states that pain and pleasure are self-evident to the mind and sense and it is not logically permissible to define them in less evident and more complex terms such as agreeable, see Ibn Sīnā & Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Uyūn al-ḥikma* 3, p. 135.

59. Ibn Taymiyya, *Al-Istiqāma* 2, pp. 148-149; Al-Ġawziyya, *Rawḍat*, p. 155. The Basran Mu'tazila consider pain and pleasure to be the most evident perceptions and knowns, see Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Maḡmū'* 3, p. 15 and Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *al-Fā'iḡ*, p. 256.

Fundamentally, for Ibn Taymiyya, pleasure is what all living beings seek or aim for (*maḡṡūd wa-maḡlūb*). It is an essential part in one's existence, and, therefore, an 'existential matter' (*amr wiġdānī*) in the words of Ibn Qayyim.⁶⁰ Its relation to intuition, in this instance, is a particularly clear reason for its existential importance, since without intuition, there is no access to the real world in which one lives and interacts.

In the text of *al-Istiqāma*, pleasure is associated with or coupled to what one wants, the object of desire and love. In this case it does not appear that pleasure is what one desires and loves for itself, since it is only what is coupled with it.⁶¹ This leads Ibn Taymiyya to make a clear distinction, repeated throughout his discussions on the subject, between on the one hand the perception and realisation of the agreeable object of desire and on the other hand the associated pleasure that comes with it. Pleasure is not the perception of the agreeable object of desire since it is subsequent to this perception.⁶² Pleasure is dependent on sensation and cognition but it cannot be reduced to them since it comes into existence following their realisation.⁶³

The critique of the idealisation of pleasure is part of Ibn Taymiyya's critique of the philosophers, theologians and Sufis. This attitude towards them is also found in his *al-Ṣafadiyya* where he considers that the pleasure and joy that one finds in knowledge is not itself knowledge but is contingent upon it. He is clear that knowledge is a condition for the existence of pleasure yet does not necessarily lead to it, and that is why he emphasises the point that these are two distinct things.⁶⁴ In his discussion on the philosophers' definition of pleasure, he ascribes to them the idea that "pleasure is the perception of the agreeable in the sense that it is agreeable".⁶⁵ Ibn Taymiyya argues that if pleasure is the perception itself then this perception cannot itself be used in the definition of the opposite of pleasure, pain (which is defined as the perception of what is disagreeable to the perceiving element). This suggests, for him, that the philosophers consider perception to be a genus with two species, pleasure and pain. These are distinguished by the associated opposing differentiae: 'agreeable' and 'disagreeable', which is an illogical distinction.⁶⁶ Ibn Taymiyya writes: "In themselves, it is impossible for knowledge, hearing, seeing and tasting to be at one time painful and at another pleasurable."⁶⁷ What is denied here is not that some noises are, for example, agreeable and pleasurable while others are disagreeable and painful, the critique is rather based on denying that hearing itself

60. Al-Ġawziyya, *Rawḡat*, p. 155.

61. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Istiqāma* 2, p. 149.

62. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Istiqāma* 2, p. 150.

63. Al-Āmirī quotes Aristotle as saying: "pleasure is not an activity for this is in three kinds: sensory, motive and cognitive. It is clear that pleasure is neither an idea nor a sensation and we have shown that it is not motion." See al-Āmirī, *al-Sa'āda*, p. 146. Relevant to this is Aristotle's statement: "Pleasure does not seem to be thought or perception – that would be strange; but because they are not found apart they appear to some people the same" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 5, 1175b33-35).

64. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ṣafadiyya* 2, p. 260.

65. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ṣafadiyya* 2, p. 260.

66. On the logical basis of this argument, see in the Arabic tradition Ibn al-Ṭayyib, *Arabic Logic*, p. 117.

67. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Ṣafadiyya* 2, p. 261.

is pleasurable or painful. Perceiving the agreeable/disagreeable, or knowing it, is not itself pleasure or pain. Pleasure and pain come into existence through perceiving and knowing and are not the same as them.⁶⁸

In Ibn Taymiyya's analysis, perception is the condition and cause of pleasure and pain although it does not always lead to them. Also, beside perception itself, coming to feel or know about an object becomes painful or pleasurable because of the further condition of agreeability with the perceiving agent. The condition of agreeability/disagreeability is what Ibn Taymiyya denotes as love and hate.⁶⁹ Perceiving the agreeable is for him perceiving an object towards which one finds a relation of love; in the case of disagreeability, a relation of hate towards the object appears.⁷⁰ One is first drawn towards an object through a relation of love, when one acquires this object and it becomes a perceived and acquired object of love, then one can experience pleasure. It is only through these two conditions that pleasure comes into existence.⁷¹ For Ibn Taymiyya, what distinguishes his view from that of the philosophers is that he considers 'perception' and 'agreeability' to be *conditions and causes* of pleasure and pain while the philosophers consider 'agreeability' to be the *condition* for 'perception' *itself* to be pleasure or pain.

In causal terms, the text of *al-Istiqāma* describes perception as a cause for pleasure and as an act of the body towards the object. In a text on love, Ibn Taymiyya denotes perception as the moving cause (efficient cause, *al-illa al-fā'ila*) of pleasure and love as the drive that makes the body move towards the object of desire. In this causal scheme pleasure itself occupies the position of the final cause or end (*al-ghāya*) of *volitional motion*.⁷² This volitional movement

68. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Şafadiyya* 2, pp. 260-261. The Basran Mu'tazila consider pleasure to be of the same genus (or class) as pain. The difference for them is a matter of name association which is dependent on a relation to 'desire' or 'aversion'. That is, when the genus of pleasure and pain is associated with desire it is called pleasure and when it is associated with aversion it is called pain. The difference for them is in the name and not in *al-ma'nā*, the differentiae are due to perception with desire or perception with aversion. See Ibn Mattawayh, *al-Mağmū'* 3, pp. 16-17; *al-Taḍkira*, p. 314; al-Nisābūrī, *al-Masā'il*, pp. 166-167. We also find Ibn al-Malāḥimī stating that pleasure and pain "are distinguished in the perception of what is associated with them, for each is like a species to a genus, which is why one must add to their definition what is associated with them," Ibn al-Malāḥimī, *al-fā'iqa*, p. 257.

69. This change from the condition of agreeability to love is also found in Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's commentary on Qur'ān 2:31 where he defines pleasure as perceiving what is loved, and finds the perfection of pleasure to be in perceiving what is loved. See Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī, *Tafsīr* 2, p. 202.

70. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Şafadiyya* 2, p. 271.

71. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-'Ubūdiyya*, pp. 97-98

72. Ibn Taymiyya, "Qā'ida fi al-maḥabba," pp. 246, 249. For Galen, he who chooses to make his final end pleasure and not beauty, has decided to be in the rank of swine, see Galen, "al-Aḥlāq," pp. 196, 199. In other places he states that pleasure is neither the final end nor a good for *the vegetative soul* but the bait that makes us do what is good for our survival, p. 202. He also believes that one must not desire pleasure for itself (as this pertain to the life of beasts) but must want the beautiful and the good, p. 196. The idea of pleasure as bait also appears in Faḥr al-Dīn al-Rāzī's *tafsīr* of Qur'ān 7:80-81, *Tafsīr* 14, p. 176, and in Miskawayh, "Fī al-laddāt," p. 100. In al-'Āmirī's *al-Sa'āda*, we find Aristotle saying: "Pleasure is the end of the unimpeded natural actions of the living being so that it becomes coupled with happiness, existing when it exists, and without it being happiness." He is also quoted as saying: "Pleasure is an end, not as a disposition that occurs in the person

is triggered by something that is sought in the object towards which one commits to move, and in attaining this object one also acquires pleasure.⁷³ It seems that Ibn Taymiyya considers the reason for seeking the object (for choosing to move towards it) is the pleasure that coexists with it at the moment of attainment. Attached to this conception is the idea that the path that leads to this final end is also assumed to be pleasurable, or at least does not contain what contradicts the conclusive aim. Pleasure in this sense, on the path to an other, would not be said to be sought for itself since it is sought for another more significant pleasure.⁷⁴

In another text, Ibn Taymiyya criticises the philosophers for not considering bodily pleasures to be real and for reducing them to recovery from pain. For him, this statement ignores one of the clearest and most obvious existential and sensual experiences in the animal kingdom. However, he does concede that there is a contingent relation between pleasure and pain in this life. The fact that pleasure exists in itself does not stop one from noting that it always follows a state of pain. He even concedes that without pain there would be no pleasure and that pain is a cause (*sabab*) for pleasure in this life. This, therefore, makes pleasure an intermediary between its cause, pain, and its final end (*al-illa al-ġā'iyya*), the perfection of the body and procreation.⁷⁵

It is clear that this is a different representation of the causal relations surrounding pleasure from that previously presented. In the previous analysis love was conceived as the cause of pleasure, yet in this alternative causal scheme it is pain that is considered as cause. Love and pain are indeed different, but it is possible to consider that one arises because of the other: in some cases, love is towards what is absent and lacking, or in another sense, love is of that which causes pain in its absence. Pleasure, on the other hand, was conceived as a final end for the one who wills to move towards a desired object, and the fact that this object brings other benefits was neglected in that analysis. In this case, one is not necessarily actively conscious of the benefits associated with a particular driving pleasure, for the movement towards the desired object is caused by pleasure itself and not because of an awareness of a further benefit beyond. It is possible to think the two causal schemes to be linked if, on one level, the final end for the act is considered to be pleasure, but on another level, the final end of pleasure is considered to be attaining the benefits themselves: the perfection of the body and procreation. All these causal relations do not stop Ibn Taymiyya from thinking that pleasure is a thing in itself and that these causal relations only exist in this life as they are absent in the hereafter.⁷⁶

who experiences pleasure but as a completeness, as a perfection that is in the order and not in the form." Porphyry is said to have commented: "Pleasure is like an end in the order because it occurs last" and "it is not complete because we stop at it for we seek something else." See al-Āmirī, *al-Sa'āda*, pp. 146-147. This idea corresponds to Aristotle's statement: "Pleasure completes the activity not as the corresponding permanent state does, by its immanence, but as an end which supervenes" (Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics* X, 4, 1174b31).
73. In this respect, al-Āmirī states in agreement with Aristotle that every action is followed by pleasure, see al-Āmirī, *al-Sa'āda*, p. 135.

74. Ibn Taymiyya, "Qā'ida fī al-maḥabba," pp. 246, 249.

75. Ibn Taymiyya, *Ġāmi' al-masā'il* 6, p. 185.

76. Ibn Taymiyya, *Ġāmi' al-masā'il* 6, p. 185.

Ibn Taymiyya's attack on the philosophers' treatment of pleasure is based on two criticisms, the first is of their idealism: their reduction of pleasure to sensory perceptions and mental activities; and the second is of their reduction of it to a cessation of pain. For him, pleasure occurs after perception or cognition. As to the pain/pleasure link, he admits a causal relation between the two in this life but not in the hereafter. In this respect, pleasure is not solely the end of pain, but is a thing in itself, despite being contingent on the preceding pain and perception. This conception of pleasure is formed for use in the argument for the non-idealistic experience of pleasure in the hereafter, where the greatest pleasure of all is seeing God. Although the consensus is that this seeing is the greatest pleasure of all, there are different interpretations of its meaning. Ibn Taymiyya opposes the philosophers and the Sufis who use different expressions to identify and acknowledge this seeing which to them is a matter of intellectual perception, not sensory vision.

Within the idea of different degrees or stages in this life toward attaining the final pleasure, Ibn Taymiyya condemns pleasures that either lead to pain, or do not lead to a greater pleasure. The measure of what is good pleasure may be understood in terms of other earthly pleasures experienced in this lived life. However it may also be understood, as I believe Ibn Taymiyya intends, in terms of the pleasures of paradise. The good pleasures one experiences in life are the ones that lead to the final eternal pleasures of paradise; the bad pleasures are the ones that lead to the final pain in the hereafter. According to this vision, we are created in this life to benefit from it and experience the pleasures that will ultimately lead us to other pleasures, the final eternal pleasures. Every kind of pleasure we experience in this life gives us a taste of its equivalent in the eternal life; every pleasure we experience in this life is created to lead us to its corresponding eternal pleasure. Earthly pleasures are thus not truly an aim in themselves, for in attaining them we move closer towards reaching their corresponding promised pleasures.⁷⁷ In this economy of pleasure, seeking *lesser passing pleasures* for the sake of gaining *higher eternal pleasures* is expressed in terms of seeking pleasure itself and for itself, with nothing beyond it. Here, one is rewarded for seeking the finite pleasures, in accordance with the law, with the eternal pleasures. The distinction between good and bad pleasures, or redundant pleasure, is that the former leads to a greater pleasure in another life whilst the latter is temporary and leads to nothing else beyond itself, and as such brings no real benefits.⁷⁸

77. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Istiqāma* 2, p. 152.

78. Ibn Taymiyya, *al-Istiqāma* 2, p. 153.

Conclusion

It is clear from the above considerations that there is no escape from the association of pleasure and pain in this earthly existence. As the entanglement between the two experiences is far too strong to be eliminated, they have been considered in some cases to be of the same species. However, and despite this strong bond between the two, the meanings associated with pleasure are numerous and mostly affirmative in substance. Despite the link with pain, pleasure is affirmed in most cases to be a thing both in itself and sought for itself, in this life and the hereafter.

For al-Rāḡib and Ibn Taymiyya, the earthly and heavenly pleasures are intricately related, yet opposite in nature. One is limited and the other is infinite and everlasting; one is real and the other is its shadow on earth. However, these two opposites are similar, for the shadow gives a taste of what is real and in seeking it one seeks the good in this life, and the real good in the hereafter.

Aside from the enjoyment derived from pleasure and the release from the tensions and ennui of the regularity of working life, al-Ġazālī also considers the educational aspect of pleasure. In terms of pleasure with another human being, one learns to have pleasure in the pain of yearning, enjoy being with another and be playful in the reunion with the unique other, with whom one is in harmony. One also learns how not to despair in solitude and anticipate the reciprocation of one's love by the other. Finally, one learns to translate one's learning from the pleasure of reunion with the beloved into one's relations with other fellow beings and one's relation with God.

Pleasure has been found to be a good that God bestowed onto his creation. This is why the Muslim theologians encouraged seeking pleasure, as God intended for life to be lived and experienced with its pleasures. What is sought, however, must be consumed in moderation and with balance in order to achieve the intended benefits. The divine law decrees this balance, interpreted and institutionalised by the men of law, and is in keeping with the human intelligence, which is able to discern the limits of excess.

Pleasure, in some sense, has been considered to be an experience of change/difference towards what is good and not a mere return to a natural state. The idea of replenishment and return to a balanced natural state is but a particular case of this positive change/difference. Seeking balance is not simply a movement towards a natural state but it is a control over a measured change/difference and a regulated movement to what is a good. When in balance, pleasure is sought for itself and is believed to lead to other pleasures whether in this life or in the next. Pleasure is thus the reason for one's motion, not only in the context of return to what refuses to be in stasis, the natural state, but towards what is good, whether it is an object, an other of the same species or the transcending other.

Ultimately, for Ibn Taymiyya, pleasure is an existential matter that goes beyond any reductive definition, and its creation is for the betterment of the human being. The existential experience only leads to pleasure when he who experiences the positive difference (and the realisation of the potential power of the perceiving element) is conscious of the presence of the desired object. Finally, bodily pleasure is necessarily attached to perceptions and ideas but cannot be reduced to them.

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