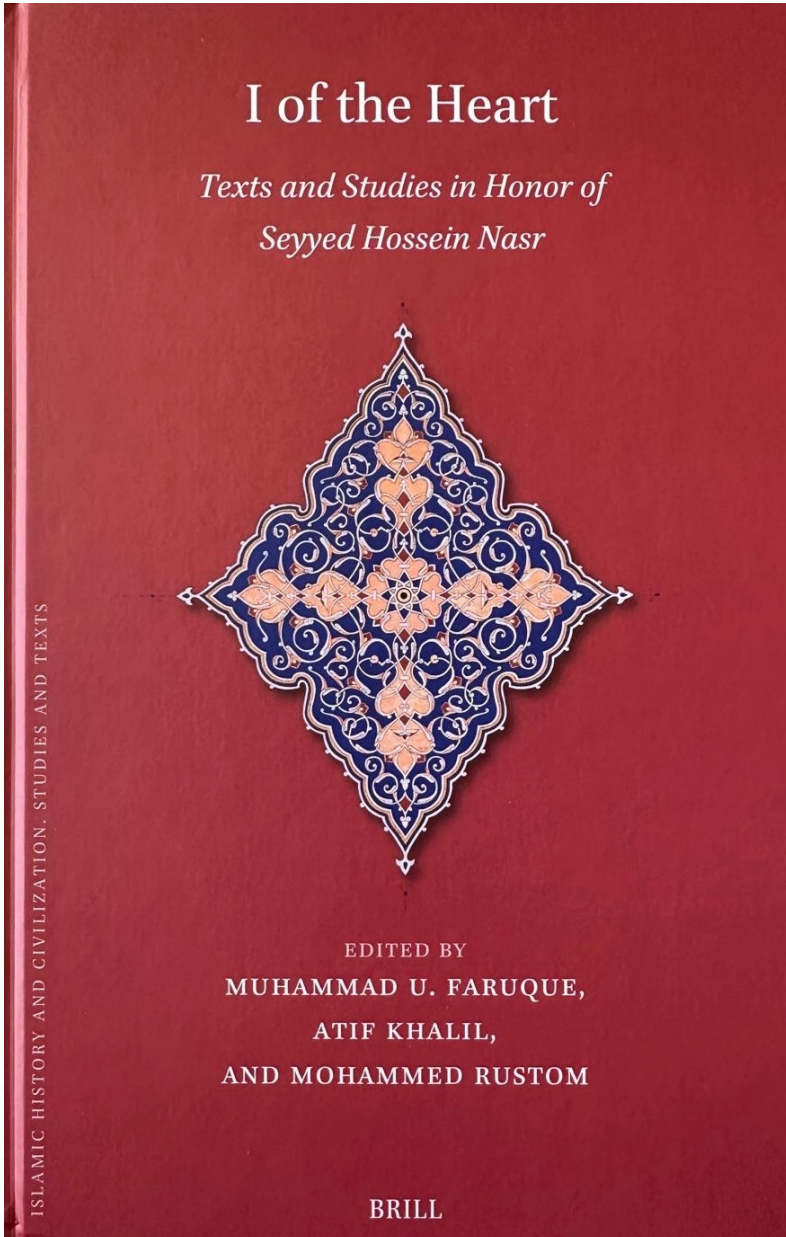


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[Pleasures_Sensual_and_Spiritual_A_Chapter_from_Nāṣir_i_Khusraw_s_Pilgrims_Provision](#)
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Pleasures—Sensual and Spiritual

A Chapter from Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Pilgrims' Provision

Shafique N. Virani

In order to encourage virtue and obedience, [the prophets] attract people by speaking of those things that delight and cheer them in the physical world. For example, they say that Paradise is a garden filled with fragrant flowers, flowing streams, silvery trees, delightful meadows, and the company of handsome youths and beautiful maidens. Palaces there are of gold, studded with gems, and there will be delectable fare of roast lamb, fruits, and sweets. As noble Nāṣir-i Khusraw (may God be pleased with him) says:

None would have the name of highest heaven on his tongue
Were it not for the pleasure of roast chicken, bread, pastries
and sweets!¹



1 A Life of Pleasure?

Nāṣir-i Khusraw (d. after 462/1070) was one of the most illustrious thinkers of the Muslim world. In the erudite *Cambridge history of Iran*, he is the only

1 Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib, Ṣalāḥ al-Dīn, *Haft bāb*, ed. and trans. Seyyed Jalal Hosseini Badakhchani, *Spiritual resurrection in Shi'i Islam: An early Ismaili treatise on the doctrine of Qiyāmat. A new Persian edition and English translation of the Haft bāb by Ḥasan-i Maḥmūd-i Kātib*, London: I.B. Tauris in association with Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2017, ed. 40, cf. trans. 81. All translations are my own unless otherwise indicated. It is an honor to dedicate this piece on pleasure to Professor Seyyed Hossein Nasr, whose contributions have brought so much pleasure, particularly spiritual and intellectual pleasure, to generations. I'm grateful to Dr. Shaftolu Gulamadov, Abbas Behnejad, Dr. Ebrahim Rezaei, and Mohammad Asgary for their valuable help with this article. This piece was supported in part by funding from the

author honored with his own chapter.² For centuries, his poetry has delighted connoisseurs, his verses appearing “in nearly every major anthology of Persian poetry compiled since his death.”³ Persian speakers enrich their conversations with his countless proverbs and pithy aphorisms, much as English speakers cite Shakespeare’s insightful adages without even realizing it. In fact, ‘Alī Akbar Dihkhudā (d. 1956), the Iranian scholar whose name graces the most weighty multi-volume dictionary of the Persian language ever published, credits the poet with “wise maxims” (*amthāl wa ḥikam*) exceeding those of all other Persian authors, including Firdawsī, ‘Aṭṭār, Rūmī, Sa’dī, and Ḥāfiz.⁴ The author’s *Book of travels* (*Safarnāma*), a mine of fascinating observations of the people and places he had seen, is recognized as one of the finest specimens of chaste Persian prose.⁵ Besides his belle-lettristic writings, Ḥakīm Nāṣir penned many works endeavoring to harmonize the intellectual and revealed sciences. Among them was his *Pilgrims’ provision* (*Zād al-musāfirīn*), whose eighteenth discourse, “On Pleasure,” is translated here.

Born into a family of landowners and officials, Nāṣir-i Khusraw lived a life full of comfort and gratification. He secured prestigious positions in the Ghaznawid and then Seljuk court because of his sound education. As he relates in his *Book of travels*, “I was a government official by profession and one of those in

Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council of Canada and by a fellowship from the University of Toronto’s Jackman Humanities Institute.

- 2 Corbin, Henry, “Nāṣir-i Khusraw and Iranian Ismā‘īlism,” in Richard N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Iran: The period from the Arab invasion to the Saljuqs*, 8 vols., iv, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, 520–542. ‘Umar Khayyām and Ḥāfiz are each given prominent subsections of a chapter. See Boyle, John Andrew, “‘Umar Khayyām: Astronomer, mathematician and poet,” in Richard N. Frye (ed.), *The Cambridge history of Iran: The period from the Arab invasion to the Saljuqs*, 8 vols. iv, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975, 658–664; Schimmel, Annemarie, “Ḥāfiz and his contemporaries,” in Peter Jackson and Lawrence Lockhart (eds.), *The Cambridge history of Iran: The Saljuq and Mongol periods*, 8 vols., v, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1968, 929–947.
- 3 Hunsberger, Alice C., “Editor’s introduction: Nāṣir-i Khusraw and philosophical poetry,” in Alice C. Hunsberger (ed.), *Pearls of Persia: The philosophical poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, London: I.B. Tauris in association with Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012, xi.
- 4 See Dihkhudā, ‘Alī Akbar, *Amthāl wa ḥikam*, 4 vols., Tehran: Amīr Kabīr, [1984]; Zakeri, Mohsen, “The *Rawshanā‘ī-nāma* and the older Iranian cosmology,” in Alice C. Hunsberger (ed.), *Pearls of Persia: The philosophical poetry of Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, London: I.B. Tauris in association with Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012, 103; Hunsberger, “Editor’s introduction” xii.
- 5 Hunsberger notes that this work is “studied as a basic text in literature by Persian-speaking schoolchildren today in Iran, Afghanistan, and Tajikistan, and wherever else Persian literature is taught” and that “its language [is] praised as a shining example of elegant, early Persian prose.” Hunsberger, “Editor’s introduction” xi.

charge of the sultan's revenue service. In my administrative position, I applied myself for a time and gained no small reputation among my peers."⁶ Despite his worldly achievements, a feeling of emptiness haunted him. Ethically, intellectually, and spiritually, he felt hollow. In his poetry, he ruefully recounts the purposeless life of merrymaking he once pursued:

You once wrought such mischief that were you to call it to mind
Dishonor would blacken your face; your heart would darken in disgrace⁷

He echoes these sentiments in his *Book of travels*. Citing the prophetic tradition, "Speak the truth, though it be against yourself," he admits to having been a drinker, a shame for any observant Muslim.⁸ This internal turmoil precipitated a crisis. At about the age of forty, a vision transformed his life forever. He writes:

One night I dreamt a figure approached me and admonished, "How long will you quaff this wine that cripples human intellect? 'Tis better to be sober!" I replied, "The sages have failed to find a better elixir to drive away the world's sorrows." "Drunkenness is no comfort," he chided. "Can you call someone a sage who leads people to stupor? Seek what increases intellect and wisdom!" I asked, "But where can I find such a thing?" He replied, "He who seeks shall find." And then, pointing in the direction of prayer, he fell silent.⁹

6 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn, *Safarnāma*, ed. and trans. Wheeler M. Thackston, *Nasir-i Khusraw's Book of travels (Safarnamah): A Parallel Persian-English text*, Costa Mesa: Mazda, 2001; original publication: Albany: SUNY Press, 1986, ed. 1, trans. 1. Translation slightly modified.

7 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn, *Dīwān-i ashʿār-i Ḥakīm Nāṣir-i Khusraw Qubādiyānī*, ed. Muḥtabā Minuwī and Mahdī (Mehdi) Muḥaqqiq (Mohaghegh), 2 vols., i, Tehran: Muʾassasa-yi Muṭālaʾāt-i Islāmī, Dānishgāh-i Makgīl, Shuʿba-yi Tihārān bā Hamkāri-yi Dānishgāh-i Tihārān, 1978 (reprint ed.); original publication: Tihārān: Dānishgāh-i Tihārān, 1974, 102, *qaṣīda* 46, ln. 17; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn, *Dīwān-i ashʿār-i Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn Ḥamid al-Dīn Nāṣir-i Khusraw Qubādiyānī: Ba-inḍimām-i Rawshanāʾī-nāma, Saʿadat-nāma, wa Risālah-i ba-nathr dar jawāb-i nawad wa yak suʾāl*, ed. Naṣr Allāh Taqawī and Muḥtabā Minuwī, [Gilān]: Chāp-khāna-yi Gilān, [1960] (Mahdī Suhaylī reprint ed.); original publication: Tehran: Kitābkhāna-yi Tihārān, 1925–1928, 156.

8 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn, *Safarnāma*, ed. Muḥammad Dabīr Siyāqī, Tehran: Zawwār, [2005], 2; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Book of travels* 2. He also mentions this vice in the above *qaṣīda*.

9 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Book of travels*, ed. 2, cf. trans. 2. On the likeliness that the word sage

Nāṣir-i Khusraw rose with a start, the vision still vivid in his mind. He lamented, “I may have woken from last night’s dream, but now I must awaken from a dream that has lasted forty years!”¹⁰ He forswore his self-harming ways, knowing that he would never find true happiness until he did so. Surely enriched by his personal experiences, he wrote extensively about sensual and intellectual pleasures (*ladhdhat-i ḥissī* and *ladhdhat-i ‘aqlī*), elaborating a philosophy couched in Neoplatonic vocabulary of how the Universal Soul’s quest for perfection gives it pleasure and eventually leads it to the eternal happiness and beatitude that transpires when it reunites with the Universal Intellect. Thus, all beings that strive for perfection find pleasure in this. Over the course of centuries, both his philosophy and his life story have inspired people to seek the everlasting pleasure of which he spoke.

2 The Pilgrims’ Provision on Pleasure

Ḥakīm Nāṣir regarded *The pilgrims’ provision* (*Zād al-musāfirīn*) as one of his most important compositions.¹¹ He exults:

Of my writings, *The pilgrims’ provision*
Is the intelligibles’ fount and canon

(*ḥakīm*) in this passage refers to Nāṣir-i Khusraw’s own title, see Browne, Edward Granville, *A literary history of Persia: From Firdawsī to Sa’dī*, 4 vols., ii, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1906, 225.

- 10 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Book of travels*, ed. 2, trans. 2. This dream’s powerful impact is apparent, as he mentions it not only in his *Book of travels*, but his poetry as well:

Bīdār shaw az khwāb-i khwush ay khufta chihil sāl
Bingar kih zi yārān’t na-māndand kas īdar
Awake from sweet slumber you who’ve slept for forty years!
Behold, none of your friends here remain

Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq) i, 506, *qaṣīda* 242.

- 11 The latest edition of this text prefers the singular form *Pilgrim’s Provision* (*Zād al-musāfir*) to the plural *Pilgrims’ Provision* (*Zād al-musāfirīn*), based on the form in one of the manuscripts and as found in the author’s *Book of Poetry*. See ‘Imādī Ḥā’irī, Ismā’il and Muḥammad ‘Imādī Ḥā’irī, “Muqaddima-yi muṣaḥḥiḥ,” in Ismā’il ‘Imādī Ḥā’irī and Muḥammad ‘Imādī Ḥā’irī (eds.), *Zād al-musāfir*, Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Mirāth-i Maktūb (Miras-e Maktoob), 2014, 32. However, I prefer the plural form. This is the form found in other manuscripts of the work and is also the form recorded in *The Face of Religion* (*Wajh al-dīn*) and *Uniter of the Two Wisdoms* (*Jāmi’ al-ḥikmatayn*). The poetic form may be attributed to the exigencies of meter. Moreover, the plural form *Zād al-musāfirīn* accords better with how Nāṣir-i Khusraw titled his other works, such as *The Brethren’s Feast* (*Khwān al-ikhwān*) and *Guide for the Perplexed* (*Dalīl al-mutaḥayyirīn*).

Were it to be read on Plato's grave
His very dust would sing my praise¹²

The work's title comes from verse 2:197 of the Quran, "And take along the journey's provision. Surely, the best provision (*zād*) is God-consciousness (*taqwā*)."¹³ This is the volume's uniting motif. The human soul arrives as a traveler in the world and must carry along piety to return to its original abode, the world of divine Command. Two essential principles—true knowledge and virtuous actions (*ilm* and *amal*)—are necessary to obtain this provision.¹⁴ Nāṣir-i Khusraw explains that the Holy Spirit (*rūḥ al-qudus*) is the source of this knowledge, manifested from the time of Adam in God's earthly representatives in the sacred lineage of Prophets and Imams. The chapter on pleasure from the *Pilgrims' Provision* is presented here.¹⁵ After a brief introduction, the author divides the chapter into three main parts. First, he introduces Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' Rāzī's philosophy of pleasure, then discusses what should be dismissed and what is acceptable in it, and finally explains his own thoughts on the subject.

Rāzī, known to the Latin West as Rhazes (d. ca. 313/925), was an influential physician and philosopher from the Muslim world. While he wrote dozens of philosophical works, only a handful survive. Goodman explains the reason why: "Given the general repugnance toward al-Rāzī's philosophical ideas among his contemporaries and medieval successors, few of these works were copied."¹⁶ Rāzī's rejection of central elements of religious thought, such as

12 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq) i, 145, *qaṣīda* 65, ln. 39; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Taqawī and Mīnuwī), 330. Similarly, in another ode, he writes:

The *Pilgrim's Provision* is one of my treasures

I write prose like that, and poetry like this!

Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq) i, 372, *qaṣīda* 177.

13 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn, *Zād al-musāfir*, ed. Ismā'īl 'Imādi Ḥā'irī and Muḥammad 'Imādi Ḥā'irī, Tehran: Markaz-i Nashr-i Mirāth-i Maktūb (Miras-e Maktoob), 2014, 3. On this concept, see Nāji, Ḥamid, "Tūsha-yi rah-rawān dar Zād al-musāfirin," in *Nāma-yi Pārsī* 7.2 ([2003]), 257–278.

14 See, for example, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq) i, 480, *qaṣīda* 231, lns. 17–18.

15 I have benefitted from the work of my friend, Ghulam Abbas Hunzai, whose master's thesis is the most thorough study to date of Nāṣir-i Khusraw's thoughts on pleasure. See Hunzai, Ghulam Abbas, *The concept of pleasure propounded by Nāṣir-i Khusraw*, Montreal (MA Thesis): McGill University, 1993. The chapter presented here is part of my complete translation of *Zād al-musāfirin*, under active preparation.

16 Goodman, Lenn E., "al-Rāzī, Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā'," in *EI² Online*. For al-Nadīm's (commonly, but incorrectly called Ibn al-Nadīm) account of Rāzī's writings, see al-

prophecy, reward for good deeds, and punishment for evil, discredited him in the eyes of most.¹⁷ The general sentiment among Muslim thinkers is reflected in the *Golden maxims* (*al-Aqwāl al-dhahabiyya*) of the Fāṭimid luminary, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Kirmānī (d. after 411/1020):

I chanced upon a book written by Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' Rāzī called *Spiritual medicine* (*al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*). I deeply pondered its chapters and fully comprehended the direction of its message. I realized that what he had embarked upon in his claims about spiritual medicine bore no resemblance to his considerations of physical medicine (*al-ṭibb al-jismānī*). In the latter, he is a skilled and agile knight galloping on the field. In the former, he is like a blindfolded lumberjack plunging in and gathering what he neither knows nor understands, mistaken in the compilation of what he ought to relate about the subject.¹⁸

Nadīm, Muḥammad b. Abī Ya'qūb Ishāq al-Warrāq, *al-Fihrist*, ed. Muḥammad Riḍā Tajaddud., Tehran: Maktabat al-Asadī, [1971], 356–359; al-Nadīm, Muḥammad b. Abī Ya'qūb Ishāq al-Warrāq, *al-Fihrist*, ed. and trans. Bayard Dodge, *The Fihrist of al-Nadīm: A tenth-century survey of Muslim culture*, 2 vols., ii, New York: Columbia University Press, 1970, 701–709.

- 17 Abū Ḥātim Rāzī's contentions with Abū Bakr Rāzī on the topic of prophecy are preserved in his *A'lām al-nubuwwa*, ed. and trans. Tarif Khalidī, *The proofs of prophecy*, Provo: Brigham Young University Press, 2011. Several examples of condemnation from various schools of Muslim thought are recounted in Arberry, Arthur J., "Introduction," in Arthur J. Arberry (ed.), *The spiritual physick of Rhazes*, London: J. Murray, 1950, 1–17. In this regard, see Corbin, "Nāṣir-i Khusrau" 540.
- 18 Kirmānī, Ḥamīd al-Dīn Aḥmad b. 'Abd Allāh, *al-Aqwāl al-dhahabiyya*, ed. Ṣalāḥ (Salah) al-Ṣāwī (al-Sawī), *Golden sayings*, Tehran: Anjuman-i Shāhanshāhī-yi Falsafa-yi Irān, 1977, 2. This critical edition appeared in the Imperial Iranian Academy of Philosophy's "Series on Ismaili Thought," for which Prof. Seyyed Hossein Nasr was the General Editor. The English rendering is from my and Dr. Javad Fakhkhar's joint translation of the volume, which is in active preparation. Rāzī's most important works on "physical medicine" include the *Kitāb al-Manṣūrī*, *Kitāb al-Mulūkī*, and the encyclopedic *Hāwī*. See Arberry, "Introduction" 3. That Kirmānī's reference to *al-Ṭibb al-jismānī* is to *al-Kitāb al-Manṣūrī* is clear, as Rāzī wrote his *Spiritual Medicine* as the companion to that book, referring to the latter as *al-Ṭibb al-jismānī*. See his "*al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*," in 'Abd al-Laṭīf Muḥammad al-'Abd (ed.), *Iṣlāḥ al-naḥs bayna l-Rāzī fi l-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī, wa-l-Kirmānī fi l-aqwāl al-dhahabiyya, wa-ma'ahumā l-Munāzarāt li-Abī Ḥātim al-Rāzī*, Cairo: Maktabat al-Nahḍa al-Miṣriyya, 1978, 33; *al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*, trans. Arthur J. Arberry, *The spiritual physick of Rhazes*, London: J. Murray, 1950, 18.

Kirmānī's admiration for Rāzī's medical prowess was widely shared, even as far as Europe centuries later. Chaucer's famous *Canterbury Tales* testifies to this celebrity. In the "Physician's Tale," the 8th/14th century "father of English literature" counts Rāzī among the most illustrious representatives of the profession. A skilled physician had to be familiar with Rāzī's work, hence Chaucer wrote:

Nāṣir-i Khusraw shared Kirmānī's assessment. While the physician's independent work on pleasure has been lost, he briefly summarizes his views in chapter five of his *Spiritual medicine*.¹⁹ Nāṣir-i Khusraw was not the first to criticize Rāzī's ideas on the subject. Rāzī's contemporary sparring partner Shahīd b. al-Ḥusayn al-Balkhī wrote a refutation of the work, short extracts of which are cited in the 4th/10th century *Cabinet of wisdom* (*Šiwān al-ḥikma*).²⁰ Rāzī and Balkhī challenged each other vigorously, and al-Nadīm tells us they would try to destroy each other's arguments.²¹

In the first part of the discourse translated here, Nāṣir-i Khusraw dispassionately relates Rāzī's views, before engaging in a spirited critique in the second part. Here, he takes issue with many arguments, including Rāzī's premise that all pleasures presuppose a prior pain. Rāzī's conception of pleasure has often been described as Epicurean, so the critique might be seen as the author's appraisal of Epicureanism.²² In the third and final part, Nāṣir-i Khusraw discusses his own views of the subject. He asserts that not only humans, but animals and even plants and minerals seek a type of "pleasure" in their own manner.²³ However, its pursuit becomes ever more epistemological in higher forms of life. For example, he writes:

Wel knew he the oldé Esculapius
And Deyscorides, and eek Rufus,
Olde Ypocras, Haly and Galyen,
Serapion, Razis and Avycen

Chaucer, Geoffrey, *Canterbury tales*, ed. Alfred W. Pollard, i, London: Macmillan and Co., 1894; repr. 1907, 22–23. The figures mentioned are, in order, Dioscorides, a second century physician who wrote *Materia Medica*; Rufus, a physician of Ephesus who wrote on anatomy; Hippocrates, known well to modern physicians who still take the Hippocratic oath; Abū l-Ḥasan 'Alī b. Abī l-Rijāl, the Arab astronomer; Galen, the renowned Greek physician; Serapion of Alexandria, who wrote against Hippocrates; Abū Bakr Muḥammad b. Zakariyyā' al-Rāzī; and Ibn Sīnā.

19 Rāzī, *al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī* 53–64; Rāzī, *Spiritual Physick*, 38–49.

20 This work itself is lost, but several abbreviated versions survive. Al-Sijistānī (attrib.) Muḥammad b. Ṭāhir, *Muntakhab Šiwān al-ḥikma*, ed. Douglas M. Dunlop, The Hague: Mouton, 1979, 127. For a bibliography of studies and a discussion of authorship, see Griffel, Frank, "On the character, content, and authorship of *Itmām tatimmat Šiwān al-ḥikma* and the identity of the author of *Muntakhab Šiwān al-ḥikma*," in *JAOS* 133.1 (2013), 1–20. See also al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* 357; al-Nadīm, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm* ii, 702; A. Badawi, Abdurrahman, "Muḥammad ibn Zakariyya al-Rāzī," in Mian Mohammad Sharif (ed.), *A history of Muslim philosophy*, 2 vols., i, Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 1963, 436–437.

21 Al-Nadīm, *al-Fihrist* 357; al-Nadīm, *Fihrist of al-Nadīm* ii, 702. See also Ibn Abī Uṣaybī'a, Aḥmad b. al-Qāsim, *'Uyūn al-anbā' fī ṭabaqāt al-aṭibbā'*, ed. Nizār Riḍā, Beirut: Dār Maktabat al-Ḥayāt, 1965, 416.

22 For a review of discussions on Rāzī's position, see the sources cited in Goodman, Lenn E., "How epicurean was Rāzī?," in *Studia Graeco-Arabica* 5 (2015), 247–280.

23 See, for example, Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 224–225.

Plants, endowed with a growing soul, find pleasure in absorbing suitable nourishment, growing, and reproducing through seeds, fruits, and other means. Animals, endowed with a sentient spirit, experience greater pleasure than plants, as they have senses, intentional movement, imagination, vigilance, a desire to mate, and wariness of predators.²⁴ Humans, endowed with a rational spirit, experience greater pleasure than other animals. Indeed, they enjoy two types of pleasures: sensual and intellectual.²⁵

Even in the realm of the sensual, human beings are in a different category from the other animals, for they derive pleasure from hearing melodious voices, seeing exquisite paintings and smelling fragrant perfumes. What truly sets human beings apart from the other animals, however, and arrays them in degrees of nobility, is the pleasure of the intellect, a concept Nāṣir-i Khusraw connects with that of the spirit. Parallel to the five external senses, he thus posits a theory of five internal senses (*ḥawāss-i bāṭin*). The external senses recognize the perceptibles (*maḥsūsāt*), while the intelligibles (*ma'qūlāt*) must be conceived by the tools of the intellect. Sensory pleasures are necessary, but ephemeral, and so should never be indulged in to excess. Rather, they are symbolic of eternal, spiritual pleasures.²⁶

While human beings may delight in the “fruits” of paradise, eating too much physical fruit would soon make them sick, he tells us, and so such a paradise could hardly be desirable.²⁷ The pleasure that never ceases is that of knowl-

24 Read *takhayyul* for *taḥayyul*. Include the addition recorded in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 254, n. 14.

25 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 225. This distinction between intellectual and sensual pleasures has become relevant for many modern thinkers. See, for example, Savedoff, Barbara E., “Intellectual and sensuous pleasure,” in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* 43:3 (1985), 313–315.

26 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 364.

27 In one of his odes, after critiquing materialist philosophies that maintain the elements combined themselves and “created” human beings and the dualist ideologies that posited a rivalry between a “good god” and an “evil devil,” Nāṣir-i Khusraw castigates religious literalists who imagine paradise to be a place of earthly bounties:

Then there's the one who tells you, “Atop the seventh firmament
Are flowing streams, gardens, pines, and juniper trees
Thousands upon thousands of beauties there live
Each, you'd say, like a luminous moon”
For anyone who aspires beyond gluttony and sleep
Such words are repugnant and ridiculous
Our thoughts shall remain below this earthly tent

edge, which can never be in excess, and which draws human beings ever closer to their Creator. The wise are therefore those who constantly seek knowledge and derive pleasure from it. Nāṣir-i Khusraw states that true paradise is consummate knowledge, while true hell is consummate ignorance. In fact, he avers that the very purpose of human existence is the attainment of consummate pleasure, which is found in knowledge.²⁸

Nāṣir-i Khusraw seems to make a nuanced distinction between pleasure and happiness.²⁹ As Seyyed Hossein Nasr has argued, “Islamic thought ... concerns itself above all with true happiness as a reality that is abiding and permanent and not just a transient experience.”³⁰ Along these lines, Ḥakīm Nāṣir avers that the Universal Intellect, the first principle of existence, is characterized by absolute joy, happiness, and delight (*khurramī-yi muṭlaq*, *shādī*, and *surūr*).³¹ The concept would be immediately familiar to the readers of the Upanishads, for whom Brahman, the ultimate reality, was *satchitānanda*, truth, consciousness, and bliss. Ontologically separated from the Universal Intellect, the Universal Soul seeks to unite with its origin by attaining knowledge.

As expressed in the passage quoted at the outset, Nāṣir-i Khusraw is critical of literal understandings of scripture and its depictions of the comforts of the afterlife, of those who desire paradise for its “pleasure of roast chicken, bread, pastries and sweets.” Regarding such symbols of eternal pleasure, he writes in *The face of religion* (*Wajh al-dīn*):

Beyond this tent is God's mystery ...
Those who seek silver and gold as God's rewards
Are wretched, ill-fated simpletons ...
Were there golden houses in paradise
Caesar would already be there!

Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq) i, 33–34, *qaṣīda* 16.

28 See Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn, *Wajh al-dīn*, ed. Faquir Muhammad Hunzai and Shafique N. Virani, Tehran: Bunyād-i Mawqūfāt-i Duktur Maḥmūd Afshār, 2025 (in press), guftār 7; Hunzai, Faquir Muhammad and Shafique N. Virani, *Islam's spiritual pillars: The meaning of Muslim practice in Nāṣir-i Khusraw's Face of religion*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2025 (in press), Discourse 7.

29 Hunzai, “Concept of pleasure” 93 n. 5.

30 Nasr, Seyyed Hossein, “Happiness and the attainment of happiness: An Islamic perspective,” in *Journal of Law and Religion* 29.1 (2014), 77.

31 Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn, *Khwān al-ikhwān*, ed. ‘Alī Akbar Qawīm, Tehran: Intishārāt-i Kitāb-khāna-i Bārānī, [1959], 177, cf. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn, *Jāmīʿ al-ḥikmatayn*, ed. Henry (Hanrī) Corbin (Kurbīn) and Moh. (Muḥammad) Moʿīn (Muʿīn), *Kitāb-e Jāmīʿ al-Hikmatayn: Le livre réunissant les deux sagesse; ou harmonie de la philosophie Grecque et de la théosophie Ismaélienne*, Tehran: Département d'Iranologie de l'Institut Franco-Iranien, 1953; repr. 1984, 116; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Muʿīn, *Jāmīʿ al-ḥikmatayn*, trans. Eric Ormsby, *Between reason and revelation: Twin wisdoms reconciled*, London: I.B. Tauris in association with Institute of Ismaili Studies, 2012, 112.

A mirror symbolizes this world, reflecting that world's blessings like a phantasm. Just as nobody's hand can reach out and catch a phantasm, the enticing forms in the mirror can be seen, but not caught.³² Since this world's adornments and pleasures are transitory, they must be accidental. However, since the accident is the substance's impression, we conclude these blessings are impressions of the spiritual world, which is the substance.

The wise seek the everlasting world through this ephemeral world. They care not for transitory blessings. Instead, they seek everlasting blessings by engaging in acts of obedience, restraining their sensual desires, and disdaining temporal things.³³ Understand that this world is the door to that world. Without departing through this door, you cannot reach the abode of (eternal) life.³⁴

Among the most fraught questions in the early Muslim community was how to interpret the scriptures' "earthly" descriptions of the pleasures of paradise and anthropomorphic descriptions of God. Nāṣir-i Khusraw and his peers championed esoteric interpretation (*ta'wīl*) of such passages, sublimating them with

32 Nāṣir-i Khusraw evokes the same mirror imagery in poetry:

This world mirrors that one
 Reflect well on this splendid parable
 If betimes it's phantasm and betimes not
 Then what do you not say, save phantasm?
 If you see not religion's path in this world
 Nor gather perfection on wisdom's path
 Rest assured from this, your phantasm-filled realm
 You will gain naught save sin
 Seek knowledge from its own home
 Quit your "Tom, Dick, and Harry related such-and-such from so-and-so!"
 For 'twas none save the Prophet who spoke first
 After him, discourse belonged to his progeny alone
 Who was the Chosen Prophet's progeny?
 None but Zahra, 'Alī, and their lineage!

Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq), i, 73–74, *qaṣīda* 34; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Taqawī and Mīnuwī), 240.

33 These sentiments are echoed in poetic form in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn, "This old hag by Nasir-i Khusraw," trans. Faquir M. Hunzai and Shafique N. Virani, in Hermann Landolt, Samira Sheikh and Kutub Kassam (eds.), *An anthology of Ismaili literature: A Shi'i vision of Islam*, London: I.B. Tauris, 2008, 276–278.

34 The rendering is from my forthcoming new critical edition and translation of *The face of religion* with Dr. Faquir M. Hunzai. Currently, refer to Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Wajh-i dīn*, ed. Gholemreza Aavani, Tehran: Anjūman-i Shāhanshāhī-yi Falsafa-yi Īrān, 1977, 51. Cf. Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Dīwān* (ed. Mīnuwī and Muḥaqqiq), i, 10, *qaṣīda* 5, ln. 8.

deeper meanings. This is why the five physical senses that experienced worldly pleasures had to be complemented by five inner senses that revealed the pleasures of intellectual and spiritual life. The pleasures of the physical senses were, after all, faint shadows of the abiding pleasures of the inner senses.

John Launcelot Cranmer-Byng, a scholar of Chinese thought, edited the series in which the translation of Rāzī's *Spiritual medicine* appeared. In a note preceding the text, he wrote:

The object of the editor of this series is a very definite one. He desires above all things that, in their humble way, these books shall be the ambassadors of good-will and understanding between East and West, the old world of Thought, and the new of Action. He is confident that a deeper knowledge of the great ideals and lofty philosophy of Oriental thought may help to a revival of that true spirit of Charity which neither despises nor fears the nations of another creed and colour.³⁵

In a world where the consumerist pursuit of sensual pleasures has driven our species to the brink of unmitigated disaster, it is urgent that we reassess what “pleasure” means to us. Materialistic philosophies, unsustainable economic growth, and metastasizing material cravings have endangered the very future of human life on our planet. About one hundred years ago, Aldous Huxley wrote in an essay on “Pleasures,” “of all the various poisons which modern civilization, by a process of auto-intoxication, brews quietly up within its own bowels, few are more deadly ... than that curious and appalling thing that is technically known as ‘pleasure.’”³⁶

In one of his most famous works, *The perennial philosophy*, Huxley insisted on accepting the importance of realities beyond the five physical senses, and of the need for human beings to see beyond the pleasures of these senses.³⁷ Huxley and Nāṣir-i Khusraw would certainly have had much in common to discuss. In times like ours, philosophies such as those of Nāṣir-i Khusraw, which speak of the importance of deeper, abiding and more noble pleasures than those of the physical senses, have much to teach us.



35 Rāzī, *al-Ṭibb al-rūḥānī*, “Editorial note,” unnumbered page before page 1.

36 Aldous Huxley, “Pleasures,” in *Complete essays: 1920–1925*, ed. Robert S. Baker and James Sexton, 6 vols. (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 2000), vol. 1, 355.

37 Huxley, Aldous, *The perennial philosophy*, New York: Harper, 1945, *passim*.

On Pleasures

From Nāṣir-i Khusraw's *Pilgrims' Provision*

Introduction

At this juncture, we should discuss pleasure, as absolute pleasure arises with the inscription of divine writing on the page of the absolute soul.³⁸ The stages of pleasures and souls correspond, culminating in absolute pleasure and the absolute soul. To put it differently, those with nobler souls experience greater pleasure. Due to its greater nobility, the human soul enjoys many pleasures inaccessible to the souls of inarticulate, non-rational animals. Like a genus, absolute pleasure comprises various species of pleasures. Likewise, the absolute soul is a genus comprising various species: the growing, sentient, and rational souls (i.e., plant, animal, and human souls), among others.

We aim to challenge Muḥammad-i Zakariyyā' [Rāzī]'s arguments about the foundation of pleasure, because a correct understanding of this concept awakens the soul, strengthens certitude and religion, and weakens doubt and depravity. According to him, "Pleasure is merely relief from pain. Pleasure only arises after experiencing pain." We reject this.

We hold that understanding what constitutes pleasure will strengthen religion and weaken depravity because true religion affirms that the righteous and virtuous will be blessed with paradise. "Paradise" is the source of pure pleasures. Absolutely no pain exists there. Indeed, God (exalted be He) speaks of the reward for the people of paradise after enjoying its abundant pleasures. He says, "Therein shall they recline upon couches, witnessing neither sun nor bitter cold. Upon them shall be its shades, and its clusters hanging humbly low" (Q 76:13–14).

We also base our judgment on the idea that the wicked and sinful deserve punishment. This punishment is "hell," the source of pure pain. Absolutely no pleasure exists there. God (exalted be He) says about the denizens of hell, "Those in the Fire will say to the guardians of Gehenna, 'Pray to your Lord to lighten for us the chastisement for a day!' They will reply, 'Did your messengers not bring for you clarifying explanations?' They will say, 'Yes, indeed.' They will reply, 'Then you pray! But the prayer of deniers is naught save in error'" (Q 40:49–50).

Humanity's welfare depends on justice, along with heedfulness, rectitude, forgiveness, compassion, loyalty, clemency, and other praiseworthy virtues.

38 Read, with Ghulam Abbas Hunzai, *kitābat* rather than *kitāb-hā*. Hunzai, "Concept of pleasure" 64 n. 9.

These qualities spread among humanity when people hope for paradise, replete with pleasure, and fear hell, filled with affliction. Meanwhile, humanity's decline results from injustice, along with aggression, shamelessness, brutality, cruelty, and oppression. These evils are prevalent among the depraved and faithless. Such vices rear their ugly heads when such people deny reward and punishment. The reward is ultimate pleasure, while the punishment is ultimate affliction.

Human souls [in this world] experience a wide range of pleasures and pains. These demonstrate the existence of their sources: the source of pure pleasure without pain, which we call "paradise," and the source of pure torment without respite, called "hell." The divine writ has etched this knowledge on the human soul to the exclusion of other souls. We will delve deeper into this topic when discussing different kinds of pleasures. Here, we will establish the existence of "paradise" and "hell" [which we have defined as pure pleasure and pure pain] through syllogistic demonstration.

Justice, equity, honesty, trustworthiness, kindness, loyalty, forgiveness, and other praiseworthy virtues that we alluded to flourish among people who hope to attain paradise and be delivered from hell. The welfare of both the world and humanity hinges on these virtues. This is the first premise according to sound reasoning.

Next, these praiseworthy virtues are the effects of paradise and hell. Paradise and hell are their causes. Humanity's welfare lies in such virtues. This is the second sound premise.³⁹

Based on these premises, we can conclude that if the effects exist, their causes must also exist. Effects cannot exist without causes. This is a logical syllogism.⁴⁰

I will start by describing Muḥammad-i Zakariyyā's stance on pleasure. Next, I will refute the contradictions in his position. Finally, I will elucidate how the degrees of pleasure and souls correspond. In so doing, I seek God's grace.

Muḥammad-i Zakariyyā's Stance on Pleasure

Muḥammad-i Zakariyyā argues that "pleasure is nothing but relief from pain. Pleasure cannot exist unless pain precedes it." According to him, continuous

39 Ignore the phrase *bah miyān-i khalq*.

40 "This syllogism is based on Nāṣir's doctrine of dual worlds which is traceable as far back as Plato, who systematically developed the theory that beings of the corporeal world are the effects or the impressions of the beings of the spiritual world. The beings of the corporeal world are sensibles (*maḥsūsāt*) which are empirically verifiable, whereas the corresponding spiritual substances are intelligible (*ma'qūlāt*)," Hunzai, "Concept of pleasure" 64 n. 12.

pleasure inevitably turns into pain. He also maintains that “the natural condition is devoid of both pleasure and pain and is imperceptible to the senses.” In his view, “pleasure is perceiving respite, while suffering is perceiving pain. Sense perception involves the influence of something perceptible on those who perceive it, while the influence is the catalyst’s action causing the effect on those affected. Being affected alters the state of those affected. This state may or may not be the natural condition.” He explains, “When the catalyst for the effect disturbs the natural condition of the affected individuals, they endure pain and suffering, but when it returns those affected to their natural condition, they experience pleasure.”

He goes on, “People impacted by this influence experience both [pain and pleasure] until they return to their natural condition, which is the medial state, at which point the influence ceases to affect them.” He states, “thus, people affected experience pain and suffering when driven from their natural condition and pleasure while returning to their natural condition.” He continues, “The only way to experience pleasure is by first being driven away from the natural state. This causes people to suffer.” Thus, he proclaims, “I have proven pleasure is nothing more than the alleviation of pain.”

He tells us, “We cannot perceive the natural condition since the influence is what causes perception. The influencer’s influence changes the previous state of those affected. We don’t arrive at the natural state from another state through a change or influence. As this is the case, no sensation exists to perceive for those affected. Human sense perception only occurs when a state changes, whether something drives them from or returns them to the natural state. Thus, the natural state involves neither a departure from nor a return to it.”

He continues, “I have made clear that the senses cannot perceive the natural state. They do not find pleasure or affliction in what they cannot perceive.” He also says, “when an influence [pushing back toward the natural state] succeeds a contrary influence, it brings pleasure to those affected so long as the first influence persists and those affected haven’t yet returned to their [natural] state. Once the original influence ends and those affected return to their natural state [of equilibrium], that very influence that once brought pleasure now brings pain and suffering instead.” According to him, once the previous influence ends and people return to their natural state, they are pushed in the opposite direction. This new departure from the natural state pains those affected. As long as the latter influence leads them back to their natural state, it brings pleasure, but once they return to this state, their pleasure stops. If this influence persists, pushing them beyond the natural state in the opposite direction, they again endure suffering. Therefore, he says, “I’ve established that the natural state serves as the midpoint balance. Leaving it brings pain and suffer-

ing. Returning brings pleasure and ease. Yet, the state itself, being natural, lacks both pain and pleasure.”

Ibn Zakariyyā’ uses an example to clarify his perspective. “Imagine someone living in a house. The house is not cold enough for him to shiver, nor hot enough for him to perspire. If his body is used to the house, he doesn’t feel hot or cold. Suddenly, the temperature in the home soars, causing the man to feel extremely distressed, restless, and exhausted. Following this, a soft, gentle breeze cools the interior of the house. The man who was distressed by the heat that altered his natural state now derives pleasure from the coolness, which restores him to his natural state. The pleasure continues until he returns to his initial state, which is neither too hot nor too cold. If the cool wind were to persist after this, the same cold he found pleasurable would now distress him because it would push him away from the natural state [of equilibrium], but this time in the other direction. Following this cold, were the house to warm once more, the man would find the warmth pleasurable until he reached his natural state.” Thus, he says, “Clearly sensual pleasure is nothing but relief from pain, and pain is nothing but being driven from the natural state. Meanwhile, the natural state involves neither pleasure nor pain.”

He continues, “if the departure from the natural state is gradual and the return sudden, pleasure results without pain. If the departure from the natural state is sudden and the return gradual, suffering results without pleasure.” Therefore, he holds, “We call this sudden return to the natural state ‘pleasure,’ though it is simply relief from pain.” He illustrates this situation with an example: “Picture someone who gets progressively hungrier and thirstier.⁴¹ This removes her from her natural state. Once she feels sufficiently hungry or thirsty, she immediately eats or drinks to return to her original state. She finds pleasure in this because it is a sudden return to her natural state. However, she didn’t perceive the pain of hunger and thirst that drove her from her natural state. As these developed gradually, she remained oblivious to them. We call returning to this pain-free state ‘pleasure,’ although it is nothing but swift relief from gradual pain that had accumulated.”

He illustrates his other contention as follows. “When a healthy person is injured suddenly, instantly driven from his natural state, he suffers pain. However, he experiences no pleasure as his wound slowly heals with time. Consequently, we term a sudden departure from the natural state pain and suffering,

41 Follow the variant in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 239, n. 1 and read *āyad* in place of *ranjānad*. To read *ranjānad* here would be nonsensical, as Rāzī argues that she *doesn’t* experience pain in the gradual process of getting hungrier and thirstier.

as it is noteworthy. However, we don't call the return to the previous state pleasure, since it goes unnoticed."

He goes on to explain that sexual pleasure follows a similar pattern. A substance accumulates in a place highly receptive to tactile stimulation. We experience pleasure when that substance, accumulated over a long period, is suddenly released. He says, "This pleasure resembles the one we get when we scratch an itch." He explains that the pleasure of seeing a beautiful face results when we weary of looking at unattractive, ugly companions, which drives us away from our natural state. Regarding the experience of hearing melodious voices, he explains that the situation is the same here. "Listening to a delicate voice for an extended period will result in finding pleasure in listening to a gruff voice afterwards." He says, "People find illumination pleasurable. However, if they experience it for too long, they will find closing their eyes and darkness pleasurable."

These words were from Muḥammad-i Zakariyyā's treatise on pleasure. I shall discuss for the wise what holds true in his discourse and where he contradicts himself. In so doing, I seek God's grace (exalted be He).

Refutation of Muḥammad-i Zakariyyā's Contradictions

This fellow began his discussion by asserting that sensual pleasure is simply relief from pain. Pain simply means being driven from the natural state, while pleasure is merely returning to the natural state. We can only return to the natural state after being driven from it. He then concludes that we can only experience pleasure after suffering pain and that pleasure is recovery from pain.

At the end of the discussion, he says people find pleasure in observing light, but if they see too much of it, they also experience pleasure by closing their eyes and seeing darkness. This latter assertion contradicts his initial premise that we only experience pleasure after pain while returning to the natural state after being driven from it.

He also mentioned that the natural state lies at the threshold between pain and pleasure but is itself imperceptible. Thus, he ought to tell us, "What is the threshold natural state between observing light and looking at darkness? What is the natural state to which we're returning when we experience pleasure observing light?" This fellow's affirmation of an observer's finding pleasure in seeing light, and pleasure being a return to a natural state, is an invalid premise, resulting in an ill-conceived and illegitimate conclusion. Then, he says, "When the observer wearies of seeing light, she finds pleasure in closing her eyes and seeing darkness. This statement contradicts and undermines the premise that people only experience pleasure when returning to their natural state after being forced out of it. The contradiction arises because the viewers' exposure

to light leads them away from their original natural state of balance, but they felt pleasure, not pain. This confutes Ibn Zakariyyā's judgment. According to his own testimony, it would be pleasurable to return to that. In fact, there is no borderline between the states of seeing and not seeing that is neither seeing nor not seeing. According to his assertion, this middle ground would lack both pain and pleasure. However, the experience of both seeing and not seeing was pleasurable.

He further contended that the sight of beautiful faces brings pleasure to those distressed at the sight of hideous faces. This claim is utterly flimsy and meaningless because people do not experience pleasure observing lovely faces because they are weary of seeing ugly ones. Experiencing this pleasure is intrinsic to the human soul (i.e., it is substantial, *jawharī*). Other animals do not experience this, just as they derive no pleasure listening to melodious music or sublime poetry in measured meters.

This assertion also contradicts his previous assertion about the pleasure of viewing light and darkness. If the premise had been true, those who had never seen the fair or foul-faced would have been in the natural state, making it contradictory. Encountering a fair-faced beauty would therefore be distressing, as it would disrupt their natural state. After that, they would derive pleasure seeing someone grotesque, as doing so would bring them back to their natural state. However, this contradicts the actual state of affairs. Therefore, we have clarified that this fellow's premise, that pleasure can only follow pain, is incorrect.

This philosopher's followers must address this question: "After experiencing pleasure from seeing a beautiful person or an exquisite painting, what is the natural state they return to? When were they driven from this state so that returning to it would bring them pleasure?" [As they can't respond], clearly, the pleasure we derive beholding beauty has nothing to do with the beholder's leaving some "natural state" of not seeing anyone, whether lovely or repulsive. Therefore, Muḥammad-i Zakariyyā's claim that pleasure is simply reverting to the natural state has been disproven.

In my refutation of Ibn Zakariyyā, I argue against his claim that sense perception only happens through the impact of perceptible objects on the perceivers' sense organs. Their natural state is disrupted by that perception, causing distress. This is the first influence (*ta'thīr*). If a second opposing influence brings them back to their original state, they feel pleasure. [This doesn't hold.] Picture those with the capacity to see and hear who have yet to experience anything with these senses, this being their natural state. Their natural state is disrupted when they see a breathtaking portrait, flourishing garden, or ravishing figure. Yet, they would find this experience pleasurable. Likewise, if they were to hear the captivating sound of a lute played by a skilled musician along

with a melodious song filled with rhythmic poetry and enchanting lyrics, their state would once again change, causing them to depart from their natural state. However, contrary to the philosopher's premise, they would find this pleasurable, even if it transported them from their natural state (rather than returning them to it).

Additionally, picture a man repeatedly gazing upon a woman of exceptional beauty, deriving pleasure from it, and being transported from his natural state. Deprived of seeing her, he may be in such anguish he would risk life and limb to search for her, putting himself in great danger and not even fearing for his own life. Yet, not seeing the woman would return him to his natural state, as he was before he ever set eyes on her. This outcome is diametrically opposite the premise laid by this philosopher at the outset of his treatise. He theorized that we experience pain when our sense perception leads us to depart from our natural state under the influence of something that affects us, and pleasure when we return to our natural state. However, this man was in his natural state before ever laying eyes on the enchanting woman. Seeing her drove him from his natural state. According to this philosopher, he should necessarily have been distressed. However, he experienced pleasure instead. When deprived of the vision of this beautiful woman, he returned to his natural state. According to this philosopher, at this point he should necessarily have experienced pleasure, yet he was in agony.

How could there be a clearer rebuttal and more compelling refutation of this philosopher than what we have presented here? The same holds for our example of those listening to melodious music and elegant poetry. They experience pleasure while hearing it yet depart from their natural state. Deprived of this or made to listen to a mule's braying or a donkey's hee-haw afterward, they would return to their natural state, yet would suffer.

Furthermore, this fellow said, "Though people may experience pleasure constantly listening to a delicate voice, if they listen to a gruff voice after this, they will also experience pleasure." This statement contradicts his premise that "pleasure cannot exist except in returning to the natural state after being driven from it." This contradiction is because the listener's natural state was to hear nothing at all, whether delicate or gruff, just as the natural state of the sense of touch is to feel nothing at all, neither cold nor heat, neither hardness nor softness. When listeners hear a delicate voice reciting a poem, they depart from their natural state yet experience pleasure, contrary to the judgment of the philosopher, who said, "When those with sense perception depart from their natural state, they suffer."

Imagine people finding pleasure in listening to a harp's melody strummed by a talented harpist accompanied by the recitation of lilting poetry. Accord-

ing to this philosopher's assertion, their return to their natural state necessarily requires a state opposite to this, such as a donkey's braying accompanied by the gruff voice of his master cursing him. Thus, the faculty of hearing of those who were transported from their natural state by the harp and delicate song may return to equilibrium, giving them pleasure.

However, we all know that nobody suffers listening to a melodious tune and the sound of a harp, nor takes pleasure in a donkey's braying. This fellow asserts that if people derive pleasure from listening to a delicate sound, they would find pleasure listening to a gruff sound immediately in its wake. However, this would invalidate his claim (about the definition of pleasure being a return to the natural state), because the person would have found pleasure in hearing a delicate voice despite leaving her natural state and in hearing a gruff sound while returning to her natural state. However, he claims people feel distress, not pleasure, leaving their natural state. People don't take pleasure in the delicacy or gruffness of the voice but in its harmony. You must have noticed no sound is more delicate than the flapping of a mosquito's wings and none more gruff than a donkey's braying, but people derive pleasure from neither. Thus, such arguments are not philosophy but clear ignorance and folly.

We shall also discuss the pleasure derived from the sense of touch. Nothing touchable is softer than air. Suppose someone were sitting naked such that his body was acclimatized to air, this being his natural state. Imagine he were then to dress in sable fur so that he left his natural state. He would not feel distress but rather pleasure. This contradicts this philosopher's proposition, as he said, "Pain derives from leaving one's natural state, while pleasure derives from returning to it." If this man were to remove the fur cloak returning to his natural state, he would feel no pleasure. Thus, we've demonstrated the falsity and contradictions of this fellow's assertion in such cases.

We shall also discuss the sense of taste. If someone has not tasted something, her sense of taste remains in its natural state. When she puts honey in her mouth, her sense of taste departs from its natural state, yet she takes pleasure in this. Nonetheless, this philosopher would have us believe she ought to feel distress because honey's sweetness would have made her sense of taste depart from its natural state. This is the first influence on her sense of taste. This philosopher suggests that if she experiences another opposing influence, such as bitter colocynth pulp, it should return her to her natural state, giving her pleasure. Nevertheless, reverting to her natural state will greatly distress her. Tasting honey would give her pleasure, though leading her away from her natural state, while tasting colocynth pulp would cause distress despite returning her to her natural state. Clearly, this fellow's views on the topic are mistaken. The experience of tasting sweet sugar and honey doesn't consistently

result in people returning to their natural state, nor does tasting colocynth and myrobalan always lead them away from it.

Furthermore, at the beginning of his treatise, this fellow argues that sensual pleasure involves relief from pain, which arises when sentient beings depart from their natural state. He supports his argument by recounting experiences of feeling heat after coolness and coolness after heat. According to him, the same holds true for the other senses. He affirms, "We made it clear that pleasure is only experienced after pain. What we call 'pleasure' is relief from pain."

To counter his viewpoint, let's consider a scenario. Imagine a man who is physically well and whose senses are intact. He meets someone else who pampers him, feeding him sugar candy, presenting him musk and flower bouquets, regaling him with eloquent poetry in a soothing voice, unfurling and gifting him sumptuous, embroidered brocade, and wrapping him in the most delicate garments. All this would drive his senses away from their natural state. According to this philosopher, those who experience a change to their natural state will undergo pain. Therefore, such a man would surely experience excruciating agony from tasting the sugar, smelling the musk and flowers, listening to the sweet music, wearing the delicate garments, and seeing the embroidered silk brocade. However, the wise know the man's state would be precisely the opposite of what this philosopher opines.

If this fellow's opinion were true, nothing vile in this world would distress human beings alone to the exclusion of other animals. The wise recognize that touching sable fur removes us from our natural state, like touching sackcloth or thorns. However, pleasure arises from the former, while pain stems from the latter.

The natural state of sight is disrupted whether it observes a fair maiden adorned in an embroidered silk dress or a foul and hideous hag wrapped in a horrid goatskin mantle. Yet the former gives pleasure, while the latter causes distress.

The natural state of a man's sense of hearing is altered whether he hears his wife has given birth to a beautiful baby boy or that his brother passed away and the sultan has seized his property. However, his state in these two cases contradicts this philosopher's claims.

The human sense of smell changes from its natural state whether it detects the fragrance of ambergris and sweet basil or the stench of a corpse and excrement. Despite this, we seek out the former and flee from the latter.

Our position is that this philosopher's theory applies only to a specific instance of touch and is not universally applicable to this sense. Put differently, the theory is relevant only to temperature since extreme temperatures

cause discomfort.⁴² For instance, people find pleasure in feeling warmth after enduring extreme cold or experiencing coolness after exposure to extreme heat. Nevertheless, this only pertains to a single aspect of the sense of touch. Aside from temperature, the sense of touch perceives four additional sensations: smoothness, roughness, motion, and stillness. Human beings experience these differently from heat and cold. Touching something rough after something soft doesn't bring them pleasure, and of course, neither does touching a moving object after a stationary one. Therefore, we have determined that touch senses three contrasting qualities: hot and cold, smooth and rough, and motion and stillness. Among these three pairs, this philosopher's theory is only valid for one and incorrect for the other two. The theory is equally invalid when it comes to the other four senses: sight, taste, hearing, and smell.

This fellow theorizes about pleasure experienced through the five senses and has a notion that pleasure is nothing but relief from pain and can only exist after experiencing pain. This reminds me of a story about a man in the desert. Never before had the man encountered any kind of fruit. One day, he came across raw green walnuts with (their bitter green) husks in a bowl with dates, figs, almonds, and melons. He grabbed a raw walnut, still in its green husk, and tried a bite. It left a horrible taste on his tongue and palate. It never crossed his mind that a tastier treat might be hiding beneath the bitter husk or that the other fruits could be distinct. Instead, he theorized that all fruits are bitter, dreadful tasting, and tongue-numbing. However, none of these are anything like he imagined.

The philosopher's theory resembles the desert dweller's judgment. By extrapolating from his findings on one-third of a single sense, he assumed his theory applied to all five senses. Yet, if someone were to question him, his lack of knowledge and carelessness would become evident, just as we have exposed his ignorance and foolishness.

By contrast, our stance is that pleasure and relief from pain should be considered separate notions. When people experience pleasure, departing from their natural state, they rejoice and feel revitalized. When deprived of this feeling, they become distressed. Picture a scenario in which a destitute, famished, parched, and lonely person attains great wealth and has food, drink, gregarious friends, intimate companionship, and more besides. He rejoices and feels revitalized. If he were deprived of these things, he would not find his original state as it was, and he would be in distress.

42 In place of *ḍidd*, read *shiddat*, as per the variant noted in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 249, n. 10.

Meanwhile, relief from pain means that once people return to their natural state, they are able to maintain that state [without experiencing pain again]. Take the case of those who lose their good health and fall ill—they would undoubtedly become distressed. Following their recovery and return to their previous state, they would feel neither pleasure nor distress, as one would expect. Having disproven the fellow's theory and differentiated between pleasure and relief from pain, we will now delve into pleasure's various stations, as we promised at the beginning of this discourse.

Correspondence between the Stations of Pleasures and Souls

We hold that it is the soul that experiences pleasure. The soul reveals itself to us through its actions. The soul's actions manifest themselves in the [four] natures.⁴³ Nature has three stations: the first inclines and moves toward the world's periphery; the second inclines and moves toward the world's center; and the third inclines to and orbits around the four mothers (i.e., the elements) that have converged around the center of the world.⁴⁴ Similarly, the soul, whose actions reveal its existence, has three stations: the first is the vegetative soul, which absorbs nourishment and grows; the second is the sentient soul, which moves of its own accord; and the third is the rational soul, which discerns between things.

Thus, we hold that divine providence (*hidāyat-i ilāhī*) safeguards these two substances: natures and souls. It links them to the most august firmament (*ḥalak al-a'zam*), which the sages call "God's Throne" (*kursī-yi Khudāy*). Both nature and souls demonstrate this providence by striving to preserve their welfare. To accept capacities from the celestial bodies and avoid scattering, remaining at the center of the world ensures earth's welfare.

Water, which is higher than earth, either flows or remains still upon the earth.⁴⁵ An inherent force, called its "nature," compels it to move and incline

43 On the wide-ranging concept of nature (*ṭabī'a*) in Islamic thought, see Haq, S. Nomanul and David Pingree, "Ṭabī'a," in *ET² Online*. On his detailing of the various views in his time, and his own view, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* 122–134; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Twin wisdoms reconciled* 117–125. The discussion of nature in this section should be read in light of this work.

44 On these stations of nature, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Jāmi' al-ḥikmatayn* 131; Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Twin wisdoms reconciled* 123. These are similar to the concepts of centrifugal force, centripetal force, and inertia. In the medieval cosmology, air and fire move toward the periphery, earth and water move toward the centre, and the celestial spheres, which are the "fathers," orbit these elements, which are the "mothers." Thus, life evolves from mineral, to plant, to animal, and finally culminates in human beings endowed with intellect.

45 In place of *jamāl-i khāk badūst*, read *az khāk bartar ast*, as per the variant noted in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 252, n. 1.

toward the center. We have addressed this issue in the appropriate place. Water's welfare depends on its being higher than earth, thus remaining useful. Its unique characteristic involves descending from high to low, but renewing itself through vaporization, to be transported by air and support plant growth [when it precipitates as rain].⁴⁶ While it moves toward the center, it is above the earth. Earth and water's positioning in these stations accords with nature's desire, as their acquired movements have led them to these positions.

This applies equally to the states of air, fire, the celestial spheres, and the supernal celestial bodies. Every entity has a natural inclination towards a place that ensures its welfare and the survival of its essence. When it benefits their welfare, each entity combines with the others, like earth with water, or wind with fire. These combinations don't lead to their demise. Rather, they enhance their beauty and ability to survive. If it serves their welfare, they will avoid each other to prevent incompatibility that could result in their destruction, as in the case of water and fire or wind and earth. These avoid each other to ensure their actions aren't impeded.

Clearly, there is beauty, durability, and increase for one who finds pleasure. Meanwhile, there is decay, destruction, and loss for one who undergoes pain. Thus, we hold that merging two natures results in their finding power, beauty, and increase. The combination gives them "pleasure," [as it were]. Conversely, if contact disturbs two natures and they suffer decay and loss, deviating from their proper action, they experience "pain" and "suffering."

Since these natural bodies are in state of flux, they gravitate toward something that serves their welfare. This indicates that this movement brings pleasure to these natures. On the other hand, changes in the opposite direction cause them pain and suffering. For example, if earth rises to the sky, it scatters, corrupts, and loses its ability to perform its distinctive function. Depriving any agent of its unique function causes pain and suffering. Meanwhile, performing its distinctive function gives it pleasure. Hence, we have clarified that divine providence guides the preservation of the natures' welfare, resulting in their experience of pleasure.

The natures, lacking sense perception, rely on divine providence in the same way (other creatures) rely on the spirit (*rūḥ*) to avoid corruption, decay, and pain. This same divine providence links to souls in the order (of their nobility). Guided by divine providence, plants endeavor, to the extent of their soul's

46 For the author's discussion of related topics, see Nāṣir-i Khusraw, Ḥakīm Abū Mu'īn, *Gushāyish wa rahāyish*, ed. and trans. Faquir M. Hunzai, *Knowledge and liberation: A treatise on philosophical theology*, London: I.B. Tauris in association with Institute of Ismaili Studies, 1998, 36–39, trans. 65–77.

nobility, to preserve their welfare by drawing in sustenance, growing, and reproducing their own kind through seeds and roots. Animals, guided by this providence, search for nourishment and remain vigilant against internal threats, such as poisonous food, and external threats, such as predators. The need to ensure the survival of their species drives their quest for mates.

Humans have a nobler soul than animals, so they receive a greater share of divine providence, which encompasses the soul's pleasures. Animals have a greater share of this providence than plants, and plants have a greater share than the natures. Every being is vouchsafed a share of divine providence to ensure its survival, as we have explained. God supports beings through these providences, while His own eternity (hallowed be He) is inherent in His very essence.

Without the connection between the human soul and divine providence, people wouldn't have an innate understanding that a part is smaller than the whole and that each among multiple equivalent things is equal to all other members of the group (i.e., if $a = b$ and $b = c$, then $a = c$). Divine providence is the intellect's source of these self-evident axioms.

Thus, we affirm that every being possesses a distinct function, seeks sustenance, and safeguards its welfare as a divine gift. These three gifts are vital for the existence of every being. The sages refer to these collectively as "divine governance" (*siyāsat-i ilāhī*).⁴⁷ Consequently, plants, endowed with a growing soul, find pleasure in absorbing suitable nourishment, growing, and reproducing through seeds, fruits, and other means. Animals, endowed with a sentient spirit, experience greater pleasure than plants, as they have senses, intentional movement, imagination, vigilance, a desire to mate, and wariness of preda-

47 Naṣīr al-Dīn al-Ṭūsī writes:

"In the discussion of justice in our first discourse, we mentioned that government (*siyāsat*) requires law, a ruler, and finances. If its administration accords fully with wisdom's requirements and principles leading to the perfection of the potential in every species and individual, we call it 'divine governance' (*siyāsat-i ilāhī*). If not, we attribute it to whatever else is the source of that governance." *Akhḷāq-i Nāṣirī*, ed. Muḥtabā Mīnuwī and 'Alī Riḍā Ḥaydari, Tehran: Shirkat-i Sihāmī-yi Intishārāt-i Khwārazmī, [1977], 252. My translation benefits from al-Ṭūsī, Naṣīr al-Dīn Muḥammad b. Muḥammad, *Akhḷāq-i Nāṣirī*, trans. George Michael Wickens, *The Nasirean ethics*, London: Routledge, 2011 (digital repr.), original publication: London: Allen and Unwin, 1964, 191. Ṭūsī further discusses the relationship between governance and welfare (*maṣlaḥat*). For some developments in this concept, see the chapter "Custom in Sharia and in the *Siyasat-i ilahi* (Divine *Siyasa*)" in Meshal, Reem A., *Sharia and the making of the modern Egyptian: Islamic law and custom in the courts of Ottoman Cairo*, Cairo: American University in Cairo Press, 2014, 41–68.

tors.⁴⁸ Humans, endowed with a rational spirit, experience greater pleasure than other animals. Indeed, they enjoy two types of pleasures: sensual and intellectual.

While they share sensual pleasures with animals, which are also sentient, this commonality is limited. Humans experience more profound sensual pleasures. Let the wise reflect on pleasures that captivate people's senses, taking taste as an example. They should consider the sheer variety of foods ranging from sweets to sour dishes, the myriad flavors with countless variations for each, the range of raw to cooked foods, and the combinations of these flavors with one another, whether uncooked or cooked, each having its own special pleasure.⁴⁹ In so doing, they will realize the pleasure inarticulate animals experience is but a fraction of the full spectrum of pleasures.⁵⁰ Shared pleasures between inarticulate animals and humans are limited to gratifications such as food and sexual intercourse. Sensory pleasures exclusive to humans include finding pleasure in hearing melodious tunes and glad tidings even before the matter materializes, and in hearing of the arrival of friends or the downfall of foes.⁵¹ We may add the pleasures of exquisite artwork, luxurious gardens, and the joy of seeing the fair-faced, inhaling captivating scents like musk, camphor, fragrant herbs, and much more. The countless pleasures in which we take pleasure are extremely intricate. They far surpass the simple pleasures of inarticulate animals, which cannot appreciate such experiences. There's an entire category of human pleasure we haven't even mentioned yet: the pleasure found in precious metals like gold, silver, and beyond, and acquiring opulent estates, leadership, and authority.

Then, there are intellectual pleasures. The human soul recognizes these with its most noble capacity. They are superior to sensual pleasures and far more abundant—in fact, limitless. Their infinitude results from the rational soul's deriving these pleasures through its essential capacity. There is no question

48 Read *takhayyul* for *taḥayyul*. Include the addition recorded in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 254, n. 14.

49 Read *maza-hā* for *muzha-hā*.

50 In place of what is written in the critical edition: *az ān juzw-i nā mutajazzī az kull jism andakī ast*, read *az ān juzw-i nā-mutajazzī ast az kull ladhdhāt*. This reading accepts the following variants in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 255: n. 11, n. 12, n. 13.

51 Parts of this sentence are corrupt in the critical edition, which reads: *wa ladhdhāt-i ḥissī kih mardum badān makhšūš ast, chū shunūdan-i āwāz-hā-yi khwush wa khabar-hā-yi shād-kunandah—pīsh az ānkih ānchih khabar az ū bāshad badū rasad yā na-rasad*. Following the variants recorded in Nāṣir-i Khusraw, *Zād al-musāfir* 255, n. 17 and n. 18, a possible reconstruction is: *wa ladhdhāt-i ḥissī kih mardum badān makhšūš ast, chū shunūdan-i āwāz-hā-yi khwush wa khabar-hā-yi shād-kunandah pīsh az ānkih ān chīz badū rasad*.

that the soul, as a simple substance, is infinite. The infinite nature of something infinite means its capacity is also infinite. Accepting knowledge is an essential quality of the human soul. Human beings find pleasure in any knowledge they discover. Then, this knowledge helps them advance to superior knowledge that brings even greater pleasure. Their pleasure multiplies as they scale the higher stations of knowledge. The human soul must always be capable of accepting knowledge. The very definition of the soul's substance is that it infinitely receives its own qualities. We discussed this earlier in the discourse on "The Definition of Soul and Body." Everything the soul learns helps it acquire further knowledge. Acquiring knowledge never constrains the soul from learning more. Human beings can never reach a point when nothing remains to be known, for the entirety of knowledge is reserved for God alone (hallowed be He). Far be it for the created to be like the Creator. Humans cannot come to resemble God in their knowledge, so they will never attain its totality. There will always be more to learn.

Thus, we have established that human sensual pleasure is vast, and this pleasure goes beyond returning to their natural state after departing from it. As for intellectual pleasure, it is infinite. As the human soul progresses in knowledge, it transitions from its natural state to a higher state and finds pleasure in that.

Therefore, we've proven the fallacy of the fellow who held pleasure to be nothing beyond returning to the natural state after departing from it. On the contrary, the pleasure of natures, which lack sensation, is guided by divine providence. Safeguarding their inherent forms through changes that serve in the place of spirits is what we call "divine providence." Plants find pleasure in absorbing nourishment and safeguarding their species through seeds, fruits, and other means. As we have explained, inarticulate animals experience greater pleasure than plants. Sensual human pleasures are vast. In fact, the entirety of these pleasures belongs to humans. Beyond this, human beings have infinite intellectual and theoretical pleasures.

As we have explained, souls experience varied pleasures based on their station on the scale from inferiority to nobility. The most noble of these souls is endowed with intellect, for intellectual pleasures are infinite. As (human) souls immerse themselves in infinite intellectual pleasures, their desire for finite sensual pleasures diminishes, except to the extent necessary to seek knowledge. This is why the prophets (upon whom be peace) and sages, who were linked to the pleasures of the intellectual world (*'ālam-i 'aqlī*), refrained from indulging in this world's sensual pleasures. They saw the life of this world as a fleeting play because they compared it with that world's eternal life. As God (exalted be He) has said through the tongue of Muhammad the Chosen (God bless him and his family), "Know that this world's life is but play and amusement, pomp,

a cause for boasting to each other, and rivalry in wealth and children. It is like rain whose vegetation delights unbelieving tillers. Then it withers, you see it turning yellow, and then it becomes crumbled debris. And in the Hereafter is severe chastisement and forgiveness from God and [His] good pleasure. What is the life of this world save the joy of delusion?" (Q 57:20).

Hence, the wise seek intellectual pleasure in order to attain universal pleasure. The mine of universal pleasure is the supernal world. They understand that they have been brought into this world to search for that one. When people experience the pleasure of learning, of which other animals are oblivious, and each stage of knowledge guides them toward the next stage, knowledge being infinite, they realize they have been brought to this realm to find that pleasure, and there is no weariness in learning.

The pleasure people find in knowledge is like a divinely appointed commander that tells human beings, "Learn so long as you are alive!" This is so, [just as it is for sensual pleasures]. Clearly, as long as people find pleasure in eating, they don't stop. This pleasure is like a commander that tells them, "continue eating!" The situation is the same in the case of knowledge. When people find pleasure in knowledge, this pleasure acts as a commander that commands them, "continue learning!" This pleasure is also a line from the divine script inscribed on the page of the human soul.

At this point, we say that human beings, as the fruit of the world's tree, have three souls: the vegetative soul, the sentient soul, and the rational soul. Initially, they enjoy the pleasure of the vegetative soul, absorbing nourishment. Without first experiencing the pleasure of the vegetative soul, they could never have experienced the next stage: sensual pleasure. The last sensual pleasure to develop in human beings is from sexual relations, which facilitates reproduction. The ability to engage in sexual relations is the perfection of the human bodily form, after which no new sensual pleasure develops.

When human intellect matures enough to recognize self-evident truths—that a part is smaller than the whole or that things of equal size are comparable—they commence their journey into intellectual pleasure, a pleasure that knows no end. Their perfection in this pleasure is when they can guide others along the path of knowledge. They follow the example of the prophets and sages, engaging in spirituous reproduction to ensure their own survival and that of others. Had sensual pleasures not existed, the creation of pleasurable things would have been futile, plants would not have grown, and animals would not have reproduced. If intellectual pleasures did not exist, neither would divine grace and mercy: "Our Lord, You did not create this in futility; hallowed are You (beyond such a thing), so protect us from the fire's chastisement" (Q 3:191).

The wise reflect deeply upon the Innovator's wisdom (may He be hallowed), hidden in the manifestation of pleasures and their seekers, and witness that the existence of every being depends on various types of pleasures. They marvel at the sagacious and omniscient God's knowledge. Without ever having experienced the various sensual pleasures, He encompasses them. They know that the creatures desire to experience these pleasures, and in striving for and seeking them out, for a fixed period, they safeguard themselves from extinction, whether as individuals or as a species. We have now completed this discussion.

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