

Rethinking True Happiness: A Comparative Study of Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawayh's Philosophical Thought

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Abstract

This research aims to examine and compare the concept of true happiness in the philosophy of Taoism by Chuang Tzu and the ethical thought of Ibn Miskawaih. This study is motivated by the differences in views between Eastern and Islamic traditions in the definition of happiness, each of which offers a distinctive approach to man's relationship with nature and with God. This research uses a qualitative method with a descriptive-comparative approach through a literature study of the main works of the two figures, such as *Chuang Tzu* and *Tahdzīb al-Akhlāq*. The results of the study show that Chuang Tzu viewed true happiness as an inner state born of harmony with nature and acceptance of the Taoist path, without attachment to worldly ambitions. Meanwhile, Ibn Miskawaih emphasized that true happiness is obtained through purification of the soul, mastery of reason, and the embodiment of moral virtue as the path to human perfection. The similarities between the two lie in the emphasis on mental equanimity and liberation from material impulses, while the difference lies in the basis of metaphysics and theological orientation. This research is expected to enrich the treasures of the philosophy of happiness across traditions and contribute to the understanding of modern human spiritual ethics.

Keywords: True Happiness; Philosophy of Taoism; Chuang Tzu; Ibn Miskawaih; Ethics; Comparative Studies.

1. Introduction

Happiness is a universal life orientation that is inherent in every human being. Although it is often measured through material indicators, the ownership of wealth or a simple life cannot be used as a definite benchmark of happiness, because happiness is subjective and is more determined by non-material factors.¹ Happiness is relative and determined by the purpose of each individual's life. When wealth, power, and worldly pleasures are used as the goal of life, they become the measure of success. On the other hand, if the purpose of life is directed to faith, piety, and righteous deeds to attain happiness in the hereafter, then that is the source of true happiness.² The issue of happiness has long been a concern of writers, religious scholars, and philosophers. The discussion of happiness continues to develop because the meaning of happiness is not

¹ Irja Nasrullah, *Recipe for Happy Life According to the Qur'an*, Cet. 1 (South Tangerang: Alvabet Library, 2019), p. 7.

² Latifatul Masrurroh and Izatul Milah, "The Concept of Happiness According to Islam and Psychology", *Journal of COUNSELIA: Islamic Education Counseling Guidance*, Wialodra University, Vol.1, No. 2, July 2021, pp. 23-24.

easy to determine and is personal as an individual inner experience. Therefore, various figures offer diverse interpretations in formulating the concept of happiness.³

One view of happiness was put forward by Socrates, who viewed kindness as the main path to happiness because wisdom is understood as knowledge that encourages good behavior. However, he did not formulate in detail the meaning of happiness, so his thoughts were then interpreted by his disciples.⁴ Plato, as a disciple of Socrates, argued that the highest happiness is not attained in the world, but when the soul has been separated from the body. He believed that true happiness originated in the soul and was only fully experienced after the end of the world's life.⁵ In addition, Al-Farabi also pays attention to the discussion of happiness, although it is not the main theme of his philosophy. He specifically discusses happiness in two of his works, namely *Tahshīl al-Sa'ādah* and *al-Tanbīh 'alā al-Sa'ādah*.⁶ According to Al-Farabi, true happiness is achieved when the soul achieves perfection without depending on material things and can be achieved in this world and in the hereafter through the fulfillment of theoretical, intellectual, moral, and practical virtues.⁷ Thus, for Al-Farabi, the highest happiness can be felt by humans in this world as well as in the hereafter.

The various views of these philosophers show that the concept of happiness has long been a central theme in the course of human thought, both in the Western world and in the Islamic tradition. Although their ideas differ, they all seek to answer the same question: what is the true nature of happiness and how to achieve it. However, these views do not fully reflect the spiritual dimension and inner balance that characterize Eastern philosophy and classical Islam. Therefore, it is interesting to trace the concept of happiness from two figures who have strong spiritual and ethical depth, namely Chuang Tzu, a major figure in the philosophy of Taoism, and Ibn Miskawaih, one of the ethical philosophers in the Islamic tradition.

According to Chuang Tzu, happiness is not the ultimate goal, but the result of a life that is in harmony with nature and the laws of nature. True happiness is achieved when humans combine understanding and experience in walking the Taoist path, so that life is lived with awareness and harmony with nature.⁸ In contrast to Chuang Tzu, Ibn Miskawaih views happiness as a pure emanation of the soul and can only be achieved through the mastery of science and moral development. According to him, there is no shortcut to happiness, because true happiness is the result of a process of purification of the soul based on knowledge and moral philosophy.⁹

³ Muskinul Fuad, "The Psychology of Human Happiness", *Journal of COMMUNICATION: Da'wah and Communication*, STAIN Purwokerto, Vol. 9, No. 1, January-June 2015, p. 112.

⁴ Muhammad Hatta, *The Nature of the Greek Mind*, (Jakarta: Tutamas Indonesia, 1980), p. 83.

⁵ Ahmad Tibry, *The Concept of Happiness of HAMKA: Alternative Solutions for Modern Humans*, (Padang: IAIN-IB Press, 2006), p. 51.

⁶ Ibrahim Madkour, *Islamic Philosophy: Methods and Application*, ed. Yudian Wahyudi et al, (Jakarta: PT. Raja Grafindo Persada, 1996), part 1, cet. 4th, p. 32.

⁷ Abu Nashr Al-Farabi, *Tahshil al-Sa'adah*, (Lebanon: Dar wa Maktabah al-Hilal, 1995), p. 25.

⁸ Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu*, Terj. Fung Yu Lan, (Heidelberg: Springer, 2016), hlm. 13.

⁹ Mohd Annas Shafiq Ayob, Noor Syahida Md Soh & Mohd Norazri Mohamad Zaini *UMRAN – International Journal of Islamic and Civilizational Studies*. Vol. 8, No.1, (2021), p. Sec. 41.

Although they both discussed true happiness, Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih came from different philosophical traditions. Therefore, this study aims to examine in depth the concept of true happiness in the philosophy of Taoism Chuang Tzu and the ethical thought of Ibn Miskawaih, as well as analyze the common points and differences between the two. Through a comparative approach, this study seeks to uncover how the two figures view the relationship between humans, nature, and God as the basis of true happiness. Thus, this study is expected to contribute to the development of the discourse on the philosophy of happiness across traditions, as well as enrich modern man's understanding of the true meaning of happiness.

2. Literature Review

Research on the concept of true happiness has been conducted by several researchers from different philosophical perspectives. Stephanus Djunatan, in his article entitled *"Becoming Happy on the Dao Path (道): True Happiness according to Chuang Tzu"*, explains that happiness according to Chuang Tzu is not determined by external conditions, but by inner freedom and harmony of man with the nature of nature, which is achieved through the release of attachments and a rigid perspective on reality. Meanwhile, the study of Ibn Miskawaih was carried out by Imam Iqbal in his research entitled *"The Concept of Happiness According to Ibn Miskawaih"* (2016), which emphasized that true happiness is the ultimate goal of human life and can only be achieved through moral perfection and moral virtue. This view is reinforced by Ernita Dewi through her article *"The Morals and Happiness of Ibn Miskawaih's Life"*, which emphasizes that happiness is closely related to character development and the balance of the potential of the soul. Based on these studies, it can be seen that happiness in the thought of Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih is understood as a mental condition. However, until now there have not been many studies that specifically compare the two thoughts, so this comparative research has academic relevance.

3. Method

This research uses a qualitative approach with a philosophical comparative method. This approach was chosen to analyze and compare the concept of true happiness in the thought of Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih in depth and systematically. The primary data source in this study is in the form of the main works of the two figures, namely *Zhuangzi*, which represents the thought of Chuang Tzu, and *Tahdzib al-Akhlāq* by Ibn Miskawaih. Meanwhile, secondary data sources were obtained from scientific journal articles, books, and academic studies relevant to the themes of happiness, Chuang Tzu's thoughts, and Ibn Miskawaih's ethics. Data collection was carried out through literature studies by identifying, selecting, and reviewing relevant literature. The data that has been collected is then analyzed using descriptive-analytical methods to explain the concept of true happiness according to each character. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was carried out to find similarities and differences in the views of Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih, especially related to the nature of happiness, the way to achieve it, and the goal of happiness in human life. The results of the analysis are then interpreted philosophically to obtain a complete and deep understanding of the concept of true happiness in both thoughts.

4. Results

4.1 Taoism

The beginning of the emergence of Taoism is related to the condition of the Chou Kingdom in the 6th century BC, which experienced a period of decline due to rampant irregularities and fraud in the government. According to written sources, the Taoism that developed in China and abroad originated from the teachings of Lao Tzu. One of the famous works that became the source of Taoist teachings is *Tao Te Ching* (Classics of the Way and Power).¹⁰ Nonetheless, the early initiator of Taoism was Yang Chu, and his teachings were later popularized by Lao Tzu. According to Chinese tradition, only then is Lao Tzu considered the official founder of Taoism.

Lao Tzu's teachings were outlined in a book called *Lao Tzu*, which became known as *Tao Te Ching*. This book contains short poems that discuss ethics, psychology, and metaphysics. Furthermore, Lao Tzu's work was used as a holy book by Taoists because it contained guidelines and rules of practice in the teachings. *The Tao Te Ching* was socially known in the 6th century BC, although the ideas contained in it had developed before the 6th century BC and were later refined by Lao Tzu. In addition, *Tao Te Ching* also explained the theory of yin and yang, which is the basis for everything in the world, and contained the idea of Chi, which is the energy of life that allows all living things to move and survive.¹¹

In an attempt to understand the teachings of Taoism, the first thing that needs to be understood is the meaning of *the term Taoism* itself. Literally, *Tao* means "the way" or a way of acting, and in the context of philosophy, this term reflects the correct way of behaving in the moral, social, and political spheres.¹² In its development, the Taoist religion carries the mission of justice and humanity, thus placing the teachings of virtue (*Te*) as a guideline for life. In addition to being interpreted as "virtue", *Te* can also be interpreted as "power". However, what needs to be understood is that virtue in this context is not the opposite of badness, but rather refers to simplicity, reasonableness, innocence, purity, and naturalness in life. A wise life is a life that follows *His Te*. To achieve virtue, one must act in accordance with the Taoist way of life. As Lao Tzu stated, the quality of a person's virtue is reflected in his daily way of life, so humans should place simplicity as a principle of life. Lao Tzu described *the Tao* as an "unengraved block", symbolizing the nature of being innocent, simple, and simple. Nothing is simpler than *Tao*, and *Te* is the next simplicity. Therefore, people who follow the *Taoist* path should live their lives as simply as possible.¹³

In the Taoist system, there is a division between *yu* (which exists) and *wu* (which does not exist), as well as between *yu ming* (which has a name or can be named) and *wu ming* (which has no name or cannot be named). These two divisions are essentially a single entity, since *yu* and *wu* are just abbreviated terms of *yu ming* and *wu ming*. The

¹⁰ Lasiyo, *Chinese Taoist Philosophy Series*, (Yogyakarta: Faculty of Philosophy UGM, 1994), p. 3.

¹¹ M. Ikhsan Tanggok, *Getting to Know the Taoist Religion Closely*, (Jakarta: UIN Jakarta Press, 2010), pp. 48-49.

¹² H. G. Creel, *Chinese Thought-From Confucius to Mao Tse-tung*, Terj. Soejono Soemargono, (Yogyakarta: Pustaka Siswa, 2007), p. 107.

¹³ Fung Yu Lan, *A Brief History of Chinese Philosophy*, Ed. Soejono Soemargono, (Yogyakarta: Liberty, 1990), p. 133

heavens, the earth, and everything that exists can be named; The sky is called the sky, the earth is called the earth, and each type of object has a name according to its nature and type. Because of the existence of the heavens, the earth, and everything else, names arise for each of them, as Lao Tzu said: "As soon as the blocks are engraved, there are names". However, *the Tao* itself cannot be named, as well as being the source that allows everything that can be named to exist. Therefore, Lao Tzu declared: "What cannot be named is the beginning of the creation of the heavens and the earth; which can be named is the mother of all things".¹⁴

Based on the explanation above, the author concludes that *Tao* is an approach to adapting to nature. The main idea of Taoists is to cultivate in man the awareness that human life is only a small part of the whole great natural process. A good human life is achieved when humans live in harmony with nature. By placing harmony between humans and nature as a priority, friction and violence can be avoided.

4.2 Chuang Tzu

Chuang Tzu was one of the most influential figures in the Taoist tradition in the early period. He is thought to have been born around 369 BC in an area called Meng, located near the border of Shandong and Henan provinces (around present-day Sangqiu, Henan province), and is thought to have died around 286 BC. Chuang Tzu lived contemporaneously with Mencius, a disciple of Confucius, and Hui Shih, the founder of the school of Names. His personal name was Zhou, and he lived during the reign of Prince Wei of Chu, thus a contemporary of Mencius, a famous Confucian scholar who was dubbed the "second sage" in China. Chuang Tzu is widely known for his work titled *Zhuangzi*, which is also known as *Nanhua Zhenjing* or *Nanhua Pure Classic*.¹⁵

4.3 True Happiness According to Chuang Tzu

To understand Chuang Tzu's view of true happiness, it is first necessary to know the basics of his thinking in discussing various aspects of human life. Only then can we learn what the concept of true happiness is according to him. Based on his journey to happiness, Chuang Tzu aspired to achieve a state of absolute freedom, in which there is no distinction between "me" and "you", between happiness and misery, nor between life and death; All these dualities are set aside so that man becomes one with the infinite. According to Chuang Tzu, "transcendental" experiences will bring people to peace of soul and allow for a harmonious life. On the other hand, humans who live in harmony with the environment and do not follow nature will experience suffering. Chuang Tzu illustrated his thinking by saying that "if one travels on water, there is no more proper or safe way than by boat", and "if one travels by road, the only way is by train"; However, if the boat is used on land, it will not function as it should. He emphasized that in order for humans to be able to escape from man-made things, it is necessary to withdraw from the hustle and bustle of the world. This withdrawal process is carried out through three levels, namely: first, staying away from all worldly things, then the world as a whole, and finally one's own existence; second, uniting with the Tao which will bring sudden

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹⁵ Retrieved from <https://delphipages.live/id/filsafat-agama/filsuf/zhuangzi>, on October 23, 2025.

enlightenment; and third, to become an eternal sage through the attainment of the highest science.¹⁶

In the book titled *The Book of Chuang Tzu*, in chapter 18, which discusses true happiness, Chuang Tzu begins with some basic questions: "*Is it possible anywhere in this whole wide world to have perfect happiness or not? Is there a way to keep yourself alive or not? Now, what can be done and what is to be trusted? What should be avoided and what adhered to? What should be pursued and what abandoned? Where is happiness and where is evil?*" Meaning: "Is it possible anywhere in this vast world to have perfect happiness or not? Is there a way to stay alive or not? Now, what can be done and what can be trusted? What to avoid and what to adhere to? What to pursue and what to leave behind? Where is the happiness and where is the unhappiness?"¹⁷

To answer the essence of true happiness, Chuang Tzu emphasized the importance of cognitive recognition and understanding in living life and following the Taoist path. These recognitions and understanding are not in conflict with each other, but rather are interrelated with the experience gained on the other side. These two natural human abilities complement each other when one seeks to live in harmony with the Taoist path or develop insights that strengthen his or her life. The question then is, what is the relevance of activating cognitive abilities and life experiences following the Taoist path in achieving happiness? According to Chuang Tzu, when these two abilities are used to walk the path of the Tao, at that moment a person will feel happiness. In his book, Chuang Tzu also stated: "Following the common nature of the whole, they are happy", which means: following the common nature of the whole, then those who follow it will feel happiness.¹⁸

In the first chapter of *Chuang Tzu's* book entitled "Happy Excursion", a simple manuscript is presented containing stories of human pleasure, with the idea that there are several levels in achieving happiness. The free development of human nature allows the attainment of relative happiness, while absolute happiness is obtained through the understanding of the nature of all things. In this effort, man should make full use of his natural ability, which is called *Te* and is derived from *the Tao*. Chuang Tzu explained that in the beginning what exists is not what exists, which has neither nature nor name; from this comes the One Almighty. When something acquires a form, this form is called *Te*, which forms man as he is. Humans will achieve true happiness if *Te* is used fully and freely without hindrance. He also distinguishes between the natural and the human; The natural ones are inward, such as having four legs for oxen and horses, while the human ones are outward, for example, wearing a necklace on the horse's head. Following the natural is a source of happiness and goodness, while following the human causes suffering and ugliness because it tends to violate the laws of nature.¹⁹

In taking the *Taoist* path, humans need to understand and experience the natural conditions inherent in them. Chuang Tzu explained that there are two types of

¹⁶ Lasiyo, *Chinese Philosophy Series of Taoism*, pp. 22-24.

¹⁷ Chuang Tzu, *The Book of Chuang Tzu*, Terj. Martin Palmer, (USA: Penguin Group, 2007), hlm. 290.

¹⁸ Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu*, Terj. Fung Yu Lan, h. 13

¹⁹ M Ikhsan Tanggok, *Getting to Know the Taoist Religion Closely*, pp. 124-125.

happiness. First, the happiness that arises from the effort to activate the inherent abilities of each individual, or *Te*. When this ability manifests itself in thoughts and actions, a person feels that happiness. Second, the happiness that arises from the experience of life that is in harmony with *the Tao*, which is achieved after man has adapted to the innate natural ability to know and experience reality.²⁰

In Chapter 18, Chuang Tzu tells of a seagull that was captured in the capital of the Lu Kingdom. The local rulers took care of the seagull by giving him wine, various types of meat, and even had musicians play Jiushao music to entertain him. However, the seagull refused to eat and was distracted by the music, until three days later he died. Chuang Tzu explained that the natural ability of seagulls is to live like other birds, namely to fly and swim. He also asserted that fish live in water, and humans cannot survive if they are in water. Birds, animals, and fish will move away when they hear human music, while humans are attracted to approach if a song is played. This is the form of life according to the innate natural ability of every creature, both as an individual and as a species. When a living being activates its natural abilities, it feels the happiness that comes from the experience. For Chuang Tzu, this happiness depended on the things that were inherent in himself and his environment. The activation of natural abilities is still influenced by the surrounding environment. Cognitive recognition and human experience depend on perception and interaction with objects around them. Human life is inseparable from interaction in a network of relationships with others, so humans still need a "name" or "concept", including a perspective to recognize something, achievement of what is desired, and ownership as an indicator of success and a means to enjoy life.²¹

For Chuang Tzu, a perfect life means walking an infinite path, where one is no longer burdened by the differences and differences that exist around him. He uses the paradoxical term *wu wei*, or "refraining from acting", to describe the process of walking the *Taoist* path. True happiness is achieved when one has merged with *the Tao* through *wu wei*. According to Chuang Tzu's teachings, something short or limited is his nature and should not be changed, because trying to change it will cause unwanted problems. To go against nature is to violate the laws of nature and the rules that have been established by *the Tao*. He gave the example that a duck has short legs, and if we try to extend it, it will suffer; Therefore, do not change something that is naturally long or prolong something short.²²

In Chapter 19, Chuang Tzu states: "If you have understood the purpose of your life, there is no point in trying to make life something that is not or impossible. If you have understood the purpose of destiny, there is no point in trying to change it through knowledge." Since a person has a life, the first thing to do is to take care of it by not ignoring the condition of his body.

²⁰ Chuang Tzu, *Chuang Tzu*, Terj. Fung Yu Lan, hlm. 65.

²¹ Zhuangzi, *Zhuangzi*, Terj. Wang Rongpei, (Beijing: Foreign Language Press, 1999), hlm. 80.

²² M Ikhsan Tanggok, *Getting to Know the Taoist Religion Closely*, p. 126.

4.4 Ibn Miskawaih

Ibn Miskawaih, whose full name is Abu Ali Ahmad bin Muhammad bin Ya'qub bin Miskawaih, came from the city of Ray and later settled in Isfahan.²³ The exact time of his birth is unknown, but according to Margoliouth's opinion, he is estimated to have been born around 330 AH or 941 AD. Ibn Miskawaih died on 9 Safar 421 AH, coinciding with 16 February 1030 AD.²⁴ The surname Miskawaih was taken from his grandfather, who originally adhered to the Magi religion, then converted to Islam. Ibn Miskawaih earned the title Abu Ali, which was inspired by the name of Ali's companion, a figure who, in the Shi'a view, was considered the legitimate successor of the Prophet's leadership. This title makes many people consider him to be a Shi'a. Meanwhile, the title al-Khazim, which means treasurer, was given to him because he was believed to have served as treasurer during the reign of Adid al-Daulah of the Buwih dynasty.²⁵ Ibn Miskawaih was a Muslim philosopher whose main focus was on Islamic ethics. In addition, he is also known as a historian, physician, scientist, and writer. After pursuing various branches of science, he finally focused his attention on the study of history and ethics. In the field of history, his teacher was Abu Bakr Ahmad Ibn Kamil al-Qadhi, while in philosophy, he learned from Ibn al-Khammar.

He is suspected of following the Shia school because most of his life was spent serving the government of the Buwaihi Dynasty. In his youth, he worked under Al-Muhallabi, the vizier of the Buwaihi prince named Muiz al-Daulah in Baghdad. After Al-Muhallabi died in 352 AH or 963 AD, he tried and was finally accepted by Ibn Al-Amid, the vizier of Muiz al-Daulah's brother named Rukn al-Daulah and based in Rayy.²⁶

In his childhood, Ibn Miskawaih spent time in the city of Rayy. He later worked as a librarian at a public library in Baghdad during the Buwaihiyah dynasty and survived there despite several changes of power. For Miskawaih, the library is a place of learning that allows him to interact with various fields of knowledge. On his journey to study, he was guided by several teachers, including studying history through *Tarikh al-Thabari* with Abu Bakr Ahmad Ibn Kamil al-Qadhi, philosophy with Ibn al-Khammar, and chemistry with Abu al-Thayyib al-Razi.²⁷

After growing up, Ibn Miskawaih decided to settle in Baghdad, leave his hometown, and pursue various fields of knowledge such as philosophy, history, languages, medicine, and even chemistry. Although he studied many fields, his main focus was on Greek philosophy and history, which later shaped him into a renowned intellectual. For Miskawaih, philosophy and history are not just knowledge to be learned, but also a means to understand the truth. He specifically emphasizes the philosophy of ethics, seeking to formulate ways to build good morals, as well as

²³ Nizar, Barsihannor, and Muhammad Amri, "Ibn Miskawaih's Ethical Thoughts," *Curiosity: Scientific Journal of Alauddin State Islamic University Makassar*, Vol. 11, No. 1, (June 2017), p. 50.

²⁴ Rohmatul Izad, *Ibn Miskawaih's Biography Series: Initiator of Islamic Ethical Philosophy*, (Yogyakarta: Qudsi Media, 2021), p. 13.

²⁵ Maftuhin, *Islamic Philosophy*, (Yogyakarta: Teras, 2012), p. 117.

²⁶ Hasyimsyah Nasution, *Islamic Philosophy*, (Jakarta: Gaya Media Pratama, 2013), p. 56.

²⁷ Sirajuddin Zar, *Islamic Philosophy: Philosophy and Its Philosophy*, (Jakarta: Rajagrafindo Persada, 2004), p. 127.

providing guidelines for fostering the soul to achieve harmony and balance in human life.

4.5 Happiness According to Ibn Miskawaih

Ibn Miskawaih, an ethicist who wrote the work *Tahdzib al-Akhlak* (Towards Perfection), had a special view of happiness. In his philosophy, true happiness or *al-sa'adah al-awwal* is considered the main goal of human life. This happiness is understood as the success of humans in using their ability to understand, analyze, think, and know truth and knowledge.

Ibn Miskawaih stated that a person who has achieved happiness will not need anything else.²⁸ According to him, every act of kindness is part of the process towards happiness. However, he believed that perfect happiness is difficult for humans to feel as long as the soul is still attached to the body and worldly interests. Therefore, for Ibn Miskawaih, true happiness can only be felt when the soul has been detached from the body and worldly affairs.

According to Ibn Miskawaih, happiness is a good that relates to oneself or another; happiness is relative, and its essence is not fixed. Happiness can be different for each person who experiences it, while kindness is absolute and unchanging.²⁹ He states that happiness is perfection and the ultimate goal of goodness. Something can be said to be perfect if it is successfully obtained so that there are no other needs that come with it. Therefore, happiness is the most important good compared to all other goods. However, in order to attain this perfection, man's ultimate goal requires other happinesses, some of which are related to the body and some of which are external.³⁰

The concept of happiness according to Ibn Miskawaih is a combination of the views of Plato and Aristotle. In the face of these differences of opinion, Ibn Miskawaih offered a middle way. Since man is made up of two elements, namely spirit and body, happiness includes spiritual happiness and physical happiness. Thus, happiness is divided into two levels. First, a person who is deeply attached to material things and feels happiness from them, but still longs for spiritual things and earnestly strives to achieve them. Second, a person who is deeply attached to spiritual or spiritual things and feels happiness from them, but still desires material things as a sign of God's power and proof of His wisdom.

The second level of happiness is the highest happiness because at this level one has let go of attachment to worldly things, so that one no longer feels pain or regret.³¹ Ibn Miskawaih wanted to convey that by practicing the concept of happiness, humans can become spiritual humans; that is, worldly things do not interfere with their mind or concentration in remembering and getting closer to Allah.

²⁸ Ibn Miskawaih, *towards moral perfection*. Terj. Helmi Hidayat. (Bandung: MIZAN. 1994), p. 90.

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 89

³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 91

³¹ Ahmad Daudy, *Islamic Philosophy*, (Jakarta, Bulan Bintang 1986), p. 65.

Ibn Miskawaih stated that happiness is the highest peak and perfection of goodness.³² He believes that human beings are inseparable from two things, namely material happiness that is earthly and immaterial happiness or soul happiness. These two elements are interrelated, because one needs material happiness to obtain it, as well as one needs spiritual or spiritual happiness, which is often accompanied by anxiety and distress, and vice versa. To achieve happiness, one needs material happiness as a means to the happiness of the soul, but only sees it as a sign of God's power. Nevertheless, there are people who can achieve spiritual happiness without or even negating material happiness. Only special and perfect people can attain it, so the blessings felt will be eternal.

Ibn Miskawaih divided happiness into five levels. First, happiness arises when the body is healthy, and the senses function properly, the personality is awakened, and hearing, sight, smell, feeling, and touch are working optimally. Second, happiness is obtained from the possession of wealth and luck in friendships or social relationships, so that a person can use his wealth to shop, do good deeds, help people in need, and carry out activities that add to his glory. Third, happiness because you have a good name and are famous among powerful people, thanks to the attitude of always doing good, so as to gain praise and recognition. Fourth, the happiness that comes from perfect success in everything that is a dream. Fifth, happiness is only achieved by people who are careful in thinking, have the right mindset, have firm and unwavering beliefs, both in religious and worldly affairs, rarely make mistakes or omissions, and can give proper direction and guidance.³³

Ibn Miskawaih quotes the views of earlier philosophers, such as Pythagoras, Socrates, Plato, and others, who argued that virtue and happiness are possessed only by the soul. These virtues are considered sufficient to achieve happiness.³⁴ The virtues in question include wisdom, courage, simplicity, and justice. When a person has acquired these virtues, he does not need anything else. Man's happiness will not diminish even if he suffers from physical illness. Moreover, falling into poverty, being ostracized, ridiculed, degraded, or experiencing shortcomings outside of oneself will not ruin happiness, because happiness will only be disturbed if the human mind itself is weak.

4 Discussion

Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih's thoughts on true happiness represented two different metaphysical horizons: Taoism and classical Islamic philosophy. Both seek to answer the fundamental question of the meaning of life and the nature of human happiness, but with different epistemological starting points. Chuang Tzu, as the successor of Lao Tzu's teachings, interpreted happiness as a state of mind that is in harmony with nature and *the Tao*, the universal principle that is the source and purpose

³² Ernita Dewi, "The Morals and Happiness of Ibn Miskawaih's Life," *Substantia Journal*, Vol. 13, No. 2 (2011), pp. 360-362).

³³ Ibn Miskawaih, *Towards the Perfection of Morals. The First Daras Book on Ethical Philosophy*, (Bandung: Mizan, 1998), p. 92.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

of all existence.³⁵ In his view, human beings who live in harmony with their natural nature will attain true happiness without having to pursue worldly pleasures. On the contrary, Ibn Miskawaih, through his work *Tahdzīb al-Akhlāq wa Taṭhīr al-A'rāq*, affirms that true happiness (*al-sa'ādah al-ḥaqīqiyyah*) is the result of the purification of the soul and the mastery of the intellect over the passions, which leads man to moral perfection and closeness to God.³⁶

Both Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih rejected the hedonistic view that equated happiness with sensory pleasure. For Chuang Tzu, material pleasures are mortal and cause suffering because they make humans dependent on things that are outside of them. He wrote that man will be happy when he stops fighting against the currents of life and allows himself to flow with *the Tao*, just as a fish is happy because he swims in water.³⁷ Ibn Miskawaih also argues similarly: happiness cannot be obtained through wealth, position, or power, because they are only temporary. For him, true happiness is born when the human soul has achieved a balance between rational, irrational, and lustful powers, so that all human potential is organized in ethical harmony.³⁸ Thus, both are based on the view that happiness is an inner experience that comes from moral order and existential harmony.

However, the fundamental differences between the two arise in the metaphysical and theological aspects. Taoism is non-theistic: *The Tao* is not a personal God who created and governs nature, but rather a nameless and formless cosmic principle, the source of all change.³⁹ Happiness for Chuang Tzu was achieved through union with *the Tao*, not through personal worship of God. In contrast, in Ibn Miskawaih's philosophy, happiness has a strong theological foundation. He views that the highest happiness can only be achieved through closeness to Allah SWT, because He is the source of true goodness and perfection.⁴⁰ Thus, the orientation of happiness in Taoism is cosmological, while in Islam it is theocentric.

Another difference is seen in their epistemological approach to happiness. Chuang Tzu emphasized the role of intuition and direct experience as a means of understanding the reality of life. He rejected formal rationality that was too analytical, because according to him true knowledge could only be obtained through *spontaneous* mental enlightenment (*ziran*).⁴¹ Ibn Miskawaih, on the other hand, places reason as the main instrument in guiding the soul towards virtue. He views rational knowledge as

³⁵ Chuang Tzu, *The Book of Chuang Tzu*, trans. Martin Palmer, (London: Penguin Books, 1996), hlm. 45.

³⁶ Ibn Miskawaih, *Tahdzīb al-Akhlāq wa Taṭhīr al-A'rāq*, (Beirut: Dār al-Kutub al-'Ilmiyyah, 1985), p. 78.

³⁷ Lao Tzu, *Tao Te Ching*, trans. D. C. Lau, (London: Penguin Classics, 1963), hlm. 16–17.

³⁸ A. Nasr, *Three Muslim Sages: Avicenna, Suhrawardi, and Ibn Miskawaih*, (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1964), hlm. 103.

³⁹ Eva Wong, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, (Boston: Shambhala, 1996), hlm. 24.

⁴⁰ Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004), hlm. 141.

⁴¹ Wing-Tsit Chan, *A Source Book in Chinese Philosophy*, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1963), hlm. 205.

necessary to distinguish between good and evil, and to organize moral action.⁴² Thus, if Chuang Tzu saw happiness as a spontaneous birth of natural consciousness, Ibn Miskawaih saw it as the result of intellectual discipline and moral practice.

The concept of *wu wei* in Taoism, "not acting excessively", is at the heart of Chuang Tzu's teachings on happiness. This principle does not mean being passive, but it contains the meaning of living in harmony with the laws of nature without imposing personal will.⁴³ He rejects all forms of coercion, ambition, and manipulation of reality. On the contrary, Ibn Miskawaih prioritizes active action controlled by reason. In his view, humans must hone virtues such as justice, moderation, wisdom, and courage through the repetition of good deeds so that they become moral habits.⁴⁴ This comparison shows that Chuang Tzu emphasized the aspect of surrender to cosmic currents, while Ibn Miskawaih emphasized the conscious will of man to achieve ethical perfection.

The end goal in these two philosophical systems also points in different directions. Chuang Tzu directed man to achieve absolute freedom from all forms of duality between life and death, happiness and misery, self and nature until he attained existential unity with *the Tao*.⁴⁵ Meanwhile, Ibn Miskawaih places the purpose of human life in the framework of *sa'ādah*, which is eternal spiritual happiness by the side of God. He said that the soul that has been purified will reach the degree of angels, free from material influences and low passions.⁴⁶ Despite their different orientations, they both agree that true happiness can only be achieved by subduing the ego and returning man to his true source.

In the context of epistemology and moral education, Ibn Miskawaih emphasized the importance of science as a path to happiness. Reason, for him, is a divine gift that enables man to know the truth and regulate behavior according to moral law.⁴⁷ On the other hand, Chuang Tzu considered that formal knowledge often obscures the human view because it limits experience in artificial concepts. He wrote that "as knowledge increases, simplicity is lost", so man should return to the *natural wisdom* that grows from spontaneous life experiences.⁴⁸ Thus, this epistemological difference shows that Taoism is more intuitive and contemplative, while Islamic ethics is rational and teleological.

Social ethics is also an important distinguishing point. Chuang Tzu's thought emphasized the inner perfection of the individual; He considers that social involvement often ensnares people in ambition and conflict. In his view, true happiness can only be

⁴² M. M. Sharif (ed.), *A History of Muslim Philosophy*, (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1963), hlm. 457.

⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 214.

⁴⁴ Ibn Miskawaih, *Tahdzīb al-Akhlāq*, pp. 110–112.

⁴⁵ Fung Yu-Lan, *A History of Chinese Philosophy*, Vol. I, (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1952), hlm. 262.

⁴⁶ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Ethico-Religious Concepts in the Qur'an*, (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1966), hlm. 39.

⁴⁷ Majid Fakhry, *A History of Islamic Philosophy*, hlm. 142.

⁴⁸ Chuang Tzu, *The Book of Chuang Tzu*, hlm. 87.

obtained when one frees oneself from the hustle and bustle of the social world and lives simply in harmony with nature.⁴⁹ Meanwhile, Ibn Miskawaih saw that happiness cannot be separated from social life. He stated that human beings are *madani bi al-ṭab'* (social beings by nature), so personal happiness must be realized in the harmony of a just society.⁵⁰ So, if Chuang Tzu taught happiness through personal contemplation, Ibn Miskawaih affirmed it through social and moral responsibility.

Although they differ in many ways, the thinking of the two can be synthesized in a broader view of the balance of human life. Chuang Tzu emphasized simplicity and ego release as the key to happiness, while Ibn Miskawaih emphasized rationality and moral restraint. Both teach that humans must establish harmony between the inner and innate dimensions, between spirituality and real action. In the contemporary context, Chuang Tzu's thought is relevant to remind modern humans of the importance of ecological awareness and living in harmony with nature, while Ibn Miskawaih's teachings remind us of the need for ethical and spiritual foundations in building a civilized society.

Thus, this comparative study shows that both Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih rejected materialistic views of happiness and offered different but complementary spiritual visions. Chuang Tzu presents happiness as freedom from worldly attachments through cosmic harmony, while Ibn Miskawaih sees it as the result of the purification of the soul towards human perfection before God. The synthesis between the two provides an understanding that true happiness is not just a personal achievement, but a process of liberation from all forms of attachment towards moral and spiritual perfection.

4. Conclusion

From the description and analysis that has been carried out, it can be concluded that the concept of true happiness according to Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih departs from two different philosophical horizons, but they meet at the same point, namely that true happiness is not the result of outward attainment, but the fruit of inner harmony, wisdom, and purification of the soul.

For Chuang Tzu, true happiness is the condition when people live in harmony with the Tao, following nature and the laws of nature without imposing personal will. The principle of *wu wei*, or not acting excessively, is the path to inner peace and absolute freedom from all dualities of life. Happiness arises spontaneously as a natural consequence of living a simple, natural and harmonious life with the universe. Thus, Chuang Tzu placed happiness in the cosmological dimension as a union of the self with the universal principle of formlessness, namelessness and eternity.

Meanwhile, according to Ibn Miskawaih, true happiness or *al sa'adah al haqiqiyyah* lies in the perfection of the soul through noble intellect and morals. He emphasized that happiness is not just worldly pleasures, but the result of controlling lust, moral development, and mastery of science that brings humans to closeness to

⁴⁹. Eva Wong, *Zhuangzi: The Essential Writings*, hlm. 48–49.

⁵⁰ Ibn Miskawaih, *Tahdzīb al-Akhlāq*, pp. 94–96.

Allah SWT. The soul that has been purified will attain the degree of an angel and feel eternal happiness in the presence of God. Thus, happiness in Ibn Miskawaih's view is theocentric, oriented towards the spiritual union between man and the Creator.

A comparison between the two shows that Chuang Tzu emphasized the aspects of intuition, simplicity, and harmony with nature, while Ibn Miskawaih emphasized rationality, moral discipline, and man's relationship with God. Taoism teaches happiness through liberation from the ego and worldly attachments, while Islamic philosophy leads man to purify the soul and organize the mind as the path to spiritual perfection.

Thus, it can be concluded that both Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih rejected the hedonistic view that centered happiness on material pleasures. Both agree that true happiness comes from within as a result of the balance of serenity and union with the highest principles of life, be it the Tao as a cosmic principle or Allah SWT as the source of all goodness and perfection.

This comparative study shows that a cross-tradition understanding between Eastern philosophy and Islam can enrich the discourse on the happiness of modern humans. In a materialistic and competitive world, the thoughts of Chuang Tzu and Ibn Miskawaih present a profound reflection that true happiness can only be achieved when man returns to simplicity, virtue, and balance between intellect, soul, and the universe.

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