

THE THERAPEUTIC ROLE OF THE EXTERNAL SENSES IN *MUFARRIH AL-NAFS*

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Abstract

The external senses—sight, audition, olfaction, gustation, and tactility—have long been recognized as vital mechanisms for engaging with the world, facilitating cognitive development, and contributing to overall wellbeing. In Mufarriḥ al-Nafs, a 13th-century Arabic medical treatise presumably authored by Ibn Qāḍī Ba‘albak, the senses are presented as integral to the holistic understanding of health in the Islamic medical and philosophical tradition. This study investigates how Mufarriḥ al-Nafs conceptualizes sensory perception not only as a physiological process but also as an essential component of psychological balance, offering a nuanced model for integrating sensory health into broader frameworks of wellbeing. Emerging from the recognition of the limitations inherent in modern psychological paradigms, which often emphasize materialistic and reductionist views of psychological health while neglecting spiritual dimensions, this study seeks to uncover a comprehensive yet under-explored manuscript on psychospiritual wellbeing from the Islamic civilization. Employing textological and thematic analyses, the findings reveal an integrative approach to cultivating delight (farḥ) through prescriptions for sensory and physiological modalities such as music, fragrance, diet, and physical exercises. Central to these prescriptions is the alignment of sensory experiences with the soul’s natural inclinations to restore balance and achieve psychological harmony, underscoring the interconnectedness of the internal and external dimensions of health as essential components of holistic wellbeing. By advancing the understanding of psychospiritual wellbeing, this study aspires to inspire further research and practical application in the fields of psychology, medicine, and spiritual care.

Keywords: manuscript studies, Islamic psychology, medieval medicine, human soul, wellbeing

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INTRODUCTION

The Islamic tradition has long approached health as a multiplex system, encompassing not only

physical health but also psychological and spiritual wellbeing. This holistic perspective, rooted in the The Holy *Qur'ān*, Islamic Prophetic tradition, and subsequent philosophical and medical scholarship, recognizes the interconnectedness of body (*jasad*), mind (*'aql*), soul (*nafs*), and spirit (*rūh*). In addition to advanced medical practices, classical Islamic scholarship produced a vast and complex body of literature addressing the mental, emotional, and spiritual dimensions of human experience, known as *'ilm al-nafs* (psychology or the science of the soul). As a multiplex system, Islamic disciplines are, by definition, not monolithic; rather, they span a range of perspectives, which is especially true for the Islamic approach to well-being. Thus, the Islamic approach to the study of psychology comprises a mosaic of medical, philosophical, theological, and spiritual bases—each tradition reflecting distinct epistemological frameworks, objectives, and methodologies.

The clinical approach to psychology was advanced by physician-scholars, who utilized empirical observation and scientific methods to understand the physiological dimensions of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional health. For example, the writings of Abū-ʿAlī al-Ḥusayn ibn-ʿAbdallāh Ibn-Sīnā [Avicenna] (970–1037) explored the impact of medications, movement and diet on mental health, illustrating the relationship between the physical body and emotional well-being. Similarly, the ninth century scholar Abū Zayd Aḥmed ibn Sahl al-Balkhī (850-934) introduced techniques reminiscent of modern cognitive-behavioral therapy, emphasizing the regulation of thoughts and emotions to achieve mental stability. The philosophical and spiritual approach to psychology addressed self-management by integrating rational discourse with practical ethics. Scholars such as Abū Naṣr Muḥammad al-Fārābī (870-950) emphasized the importance of ethical reflection and intentional action to achieve inner harmony. This tradition sought to align human behavior with both rational thought and divine purpose. The spiritual approach to psychology among the Sufīs (*hikamā'*) focused on the purification of the heart and the cultivation of inner faculties that reflect the internal dimensions of the soul. This process involved spiritual practices such as remembrance of God (*dhikr*), seclusion (*khalwah*), and asceticism (*zuhd*), with the ultimate goal being to align emotions with ethical behavior. Sufīs held that virtuous behavior flows naturally from a purified heart.

The external senses have historically been central to discussions of human health, perception, and cognition. Within the Islamic intellectual tradition, the senses are not merely physical mechanisms but are imbued with profound philosophical, ethical, and spiritual significance. This dual role has positioned them as pivotal in understanding the relationship between the body, the mind, and the soul. The senses are seen as bridges that connect the material and immaterial aspects of human existence. Philosophers and scholars, including Abu Hamed al-Ghazali and Ibn Sina, emphasized that sensory perception is integral not only to acquiring knowledge of the external world but also to the refinement of moral and spiritual qualities. By engaging with the senses ethically and mindfully, one's physical actions can be aligned with higher spiritual objectives.

The senses were also interpreted as instruments of divine insight, as reflected in Qur'anic teachings that emphasize their role in fostering gratitude, comprehension, and moral accountability. The Qur'ānic verse in the chapter on “The bee” (*surah al-naḥl*, verse 78), for example, highlights the interconnectedness of sensory faculties—hearing, sight, and the heart—in guiding human awareness and acknowledgment of divine favor. This sacred perspective

endowed the senses with a responsibility that extended beyond their biological functions, positioning them as tools for achieving both worldly understanding and spiritual elevation.

Classical Islamic medicine embodied this dual focus of the senses to maintain physiological health and potential to influence internal states. Medical texts often prescribed specific dietary regimens, environmental adjustments, and therapeutic modalities to ensure the optimal functioning of sensory organs. In this context, the external senses were not isolated in their significance but were understood as part of an interconnected system that bridged the body, mind, and soul. This multidimensional view of the senses situates them as critical elements in the Islamic model of holistic health, where physical wellbeing is deeply entwined with ethical and spiritual pursuits.

This research aims to contribute to this discourse by studying an unexamined manuscript copy of the 13th century Arabic medical treatise *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* to understand how it conceptualizes the external senses and their implications for psychological wellbeing. Through a detailed examination of the text's therapeutic strategies, this study aims to demonstrate how the attainment of sensory delight functions as an essential element of holistic psychospiritual wellbeing.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The Islamic tradition's approach to emotional regulation is grounded in a holistic understanding of the soul (*nafs*), where emotions are connected to both the body and spiritual health. Unlike contemporary psychology, which often treats joy as a transient affective state, Islamic thought frames emotions within ethical and spiritual frameworks that emphasize their role in maintaining inner harmony and moral behavior. Scholars such as Ibn Sīnā and al-Ghazālī have emphasized the importance of regulating emotions to promote spiritual growth and ethical action.¹ Islamic hospitals, or *bīmāristāns*, institutionalized many of the non-pharmacological interventions that these early thinkers proposed. The inclusion of aromatherapy, sound healing, and social interaction as therapeutic tools reflects the comprehensive nature of care in these facilities. In Dr. Sami Khalaf Hamarneh's book "Background of Yunani (Unani) Arabic and Islamic Medicine and Pharmacy," studies of these hospitals highlight their innovative integration of environmental and sensory therapies. These therapeutic practices underscore the recognition that well-being requires engagement not only with physical treatments but also with sensory experiences, a theme the manuscript elaborates upon by categorizing joy across multiple sensory dimensions.

Several foundational works from the Islamic tradition provide valuable insights into the psychological and medical understanding of well-being and emotional regulation. These sources serve as essential references for comparative analysis within this study. Ibn Sīnā's *Canon of Medicine (al-Qānūn fī al-Ṭibb)*, translated into English by Laleh Bakhtiar, published by Great Books of the Islamic World (2014), offers a comprehensive translation and faithful rendition of Ibn Sīnā's seminal medical encyclopedia. It remains a critical primary source for comparative studies, particularly regarding its exploration of joy and the psychological effects of treatments, making it invaluable for contextualizing *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* within the broader Islamic medical tradition.

Imam al-Ghazālī's *The Revival of the Religious Sciences (Iḥyā' 'Ulūm al-Dīn)* is a cornerstone of Islamic spirituality and has been translated into English and published with Fazlul

Karim's comprehensive version providing an in-depth exploration of al-Ghazālī's approach to wellbeing and ethical conduct. Al-Ghazālī's insights into the purification of the heart, managing human emotions, and cultivating a virtuous life offer a complementary framework for understanding psychospiritual wellbeing. Although this translation is focused on accessibility and readability, rather than analytical commentary, it serves as a vital comparative source for understanding the holistic view of wellbeing within the Islamic intellectual tradition.

Building upon the work of Ibn Sīnā, later scholars such as Abū Zayd al-Balkhī extended the understanding of mental health by developing cognitive behavioral strategies. His *Masālik al-Abdan wa-Mamālik al-Anfūs (Sustenance of the Soul)* was recently translated into English with commentary by Malik Badri (2014). This uniqueness of this text is that it is one of the earliest Islamic treatises explicitly addressing psychological health. Al-Balkhī's focuses on cognitive-behavioral approaches to managing emotions, such as grief and anger, and offers practical strategies for emotional resilience. Its emphasis on the soul's role in health and happiness provides a complementary framework for analyzing the psychospiritual dimensions.

Recent scholarship, such as the work of Haque (2004) and Rassool and Luqman (2023), continues to explore the relevance of Islamic psychological frameworks in modern therapeutic settings. These scholars highlight how classical concepts—such as the interplay between spiritual alignment and emotional regulation—inform contemporary mental health practices. Their research draws connections between early Islamic theories and modern disciplines.

Professor Syed Muhammad Naquib al-Attas has made significant contributions to the understanding of psychological well-being within the framework of Islamic metaphysics and epistemology. His work emphasizes the integrated nature of man, rooted in the ontological harmony of body, soul (*nafs*), heart (*qalb*) and spirit (*rūh*), and the centrality of knowledge and ethical conduct in achieving holistic well-being. In *The Nature of Man and the Psychology of the Human Soul* (1993), he highlights the concept of *adab*—the disciplined alignment of the soul with its divine purpose—as essential for achieving holistic well-being; and consequently, psychological disturbances often arise from a disconnection between the soul and its higher purpose. By bridging classical Islamic metaphysics with contemporary discussions on psychospiritual health, al-Attas' work enriches this study's exploration of holistic wellbeing within the broader Islamic intellectual tradition.

In Western psychological thought, William James' *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) is a foundational text that established psychology as a scientific discipline while integrating philosophical inquiry. Central to the work is the concept of the "stream of consciousness," which emphasizes the interplay of cognitive, emotional, and physiological processes, aligning closely with holistic models of well-being. James' focus on the mind-body connection is particularly relevant, exemplified by the James-Lange Theory of Emotion, which posits that emotional experiences arise from bodily responses to stimuli. This integration of mental and physical dimensions offers valuable insights for understanding psycho-spiritual balance.

The significance of the external senses in Islamic thought has been well-documented across disciplines, ranging from medicine and philosophy to theology and ethics. Scholars such as al-Ghazali and Ibn Sīnā devoted considerable attention to the role of the senses, positioning them as foundational to human perception and moral development. Al-Ghazali described the senses as "gateways to knowledge" and emphasized their moral and spiritual dimensions. For him, the proper use of the senses was essential not only for acquiring worldly knowledge but also for achieving spiritual refinement.

Ibn Sīnā, in his *Canon of Medicine*, offered a more detailed physiological account of the

senses, describing their anatomical structure, functions, and methods for maintaining their health. His emphasis on sensory balance and moderation reflects a broader Islamic medical tradition that views health as the harmonious interplay between the body, mind, and soul. This tradition was deeply influenced by classical Greek theories, particularly those of Galen and Aristotle, which were reinterpreted within an Islamic framework to align with the principles of holistic health.

These resources allow for a comparative study of concepts of wellbeing in the broader Islamic medical and psychological tradition. While they differ in their primary focus—ranging from pharmacological remedies to spiritual and cognitive strategies—they collectively illuminate the multidimensional understanding of human wellbeing during this period.

In examining the text of *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* itself, nearly the only scholarly work published on it is a critical edition produced in Arabic by Syrian clinician-researchers Ḥannūn and Šabbagh in 2011. Their work surveys ten manuscript copies, and raises essential questions such as regarding the authorship of the text, providing arguments and evidence that suggest a possible attribution. Despite the text's significance in addressing the integration of medical and spiritual perspectives on holistic wellbeing, to our knowledge, no other scientific research has been conducted on this work or its attributed author. This lack of scholarly engagement underscores the need for deeper study and analysis of this text as a source of rich, interdisciplinary knowledge.

The primary source for this study is *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs*, a 13th-century Arabic medical treatise distinguished within the corpus of the Islamic scientific heritage for its comprehensive examination of wellbeing through the lens of delight (*farḥ*). Through the course of its ten chapters, this text explores various sources of joy from both spiritual and medical dimensions. The opening chapter introduces the soul (*nafs*) and its various states, followed by five chapters, each devoted to examining a single external sense. The text further explores the psychological effects of medicines and foods, and concludes with chapters dedicated to physical movement and joy as a result of through spiritual and social states, offering a holistic understanding of emotional regulation through sensory and social experiences.

Despite this treatise's significance, it has remained largely unpublished and understudied, though over a dozen extant copies exist in libraries worldwide. Some of these manuscripts are incomplete while others are well-preserved. The particular manuscript copy examined in this study¹ was of interest as it is not listed as one of the available copies of this work nor was it examined in Ḥannūn and Šabbagh's Arabic critical edition, thereby offering a novel contribution to the body of research on this subject. The manuscript copy examined measures 21 cm (14.1 x 19.6 cm), with 32 folios arranged in a single column of 22 lines per page, with text written on both the recto and verso sides of each folio. Titles and headings are written in red ink, with black ink used for the primary text, reflecting contemporary conventions in Islamic manuscript production. The ownership note from David G. Lyon, dated December 1911, further indicates the manuscript's origin.

While the study of Islamic psychology is gaining momentum, there remain significant gaps in the exploration of non-canonical texts. Much of the existing scholarship continues to focus on canonical figures and well-known works, leaving treatises such as *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* underexplored. This research addresses these gaps by engaging directly with its content and demonstrating its relevance for modern mental health discourses. The study also contributes to bridging the disconnect between classical Islamic approaches to emotional regulation and contemporary clinical practices. While non-pharmacological therapies are becoming more widely

recognized, the insights offered by Islamic manuscripts have yet to be fully integrated into modern therapeutic models. By recovering and analyzing neglected texts, this dissertation aims to enrich both academic discourse and practical frameworks for mental health care.

METHODS

This study adopts a multi-disciplinary research methodology including collection of data as well as historical review and textological analysis. The textual component involves producing an Arabic textual version of the specific manuscript copy of *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* selected for this study, which involves transcribing the original medieval handwriting into contemporary Arabic script, employing codicological and paleographical approaches to achieve the highest degree of accuracy to the original script. This transcription was then digitalized, rendering it accessible for translation into English and subsequent scholarly engagement. The thematic and content analysis component will entail classification and systemization of data by engaging with the manuscript's content and context, analyzing its approach to psychological wellness through an engagement with its focus on sensory engagement, emotional states and spiritual wellbeing. This study will also employ comparative analysis to deepen understanding of holistic psycho-spiritual wellbeing within the broader intellectual and historical tradition.

This study employed library research to obtain a comprehensive set of sources related to *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs*, its authorship, and the broader historical and intellectual context in which it was produced. The library research involved accessing primary and secondary sources, including existing scholarly analyses, critical editions, and catalogues of Islamic manuscripts. This process was instrumental in gathering previous research efforts, identifying gaps in the literature, and contextualizing the manuscript within the larger corpus of Islamic psychological and medical works. The collected materials provided a foundation for situating *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* within the broader scholarly discourse and framing its unique contributions to the study of psycho-spiritual well-being.

The translation process involved consulting a range of authoritative lexicons to ensure both accuracy and contextual appropriateness. These include *Lisān al-‘Arab* (Ibn Manẓūr), Lane's *Lexicon* (Edward William Lane), and Hans Wehr's *Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*. For specialized terminology, the *APA Dictionary of Psychology* and *Steadman's Medical Dictionary* were employed to align the translation with modern psychological and medical discourse, while ensuring that terms were contextualized within classical Islamic epistemologies.

The textological internal criticism focuses on thematic analysis of how *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* conceptualizes psychological well-being through the interplay between sensory engagement of the external and internal senses, bodily movement, and spiritual balance. By examining the impact of delight-inducing elements on the soul, this text is able to delineate a holistic psychological framework of wellbeing.

Thematic analysis will address the research questions and objectives outlined in this study

to explore how *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* contributes to the fields of Islamic psychology and holistic health by illuminating the therapeutic role of sensory pleasure and its relation to spiritual, emotional, and physical well-being. This study aims to contribute to the nascent field of Islamic psychology by bridging critical gaps in classical scholarship and modern therapeutic practice. It also seeks to broaden access to lesser-known Islamic texts while advancing holistic care models rooted in Islamic metaphysical concepts.

RESULTS/AND DISCUSSION

Mufarriḥ al-Nafs engages in a rich discourse on the nature of psychospiritual well-being, firmly rooted in an Islamic epistemological framework and emphasizing the interconnection between the soul and bodily senses. Through a systematic exploration of the external faculties and their engagement with the soul, this work underscores the necessity of balancing sensorial experiences as a gateway to holistic health, culminating in psychological delight. The results of this study will examine the discussion of the five external senses in this text. Each sensory faculty—audition, vision, olfaction, gustation, and tactility—is examined not only in terms of its physiological mechanism but also in relation to its effect on psychospiritual states and equilibrium.

Audition

Mufarriḥ al-Nafs explores the role of auditory perception in the soul's experience of well-being through a dynamic discourse embedded in a philosophical and technical understanding of sense perception, humoral theory and music theory. This work categorizes sound as either melodic (*naghm*) or non-melodic (*aqra'*), and outlines the conditions under which certain melodic forms elicit delight of the soul. While non-melodic sound is perceived, it does not necessarily induce an aesthetic or psychospiritual response; in contrast to melodic sounds, which engage the soul in delight, tranquility and alertness, under the appropriate environmental circumstances. The text states: "*These melodies excite the faculties and prevent them from remaining dormant;*" and goes on to elaborate on these nuances through a delineation of twelve distinct musical modes, which are each correlated with specific temperaments, circadian properties, and psychological states. The text further speaks to the compounded effect of multifaceted sensorial stimulation on the delight of the soul, such as in the following passage: "*This effect is even greater when the melodies are accompanied by poetry that expresses the desires of the listening soul, for then the soul rejoices in it to the highest degree and experiences pleasure to the fullest extent possible.*"

The author elaborates further on specifications regarding how temporal context and environmental conditions contribute to psychological equilibrium. It is advocated that stimulating melodies should be played at night, when the body's energies are withdrawn inward due to cold and stillness, while calming melodies are best suited for daytime, when the body is externally engaged and requires harmonization. For example, melodic modes associated with tranquility, such as *Rāst* and *ʿIrāq*, are linked to a colder, more balanced temperament.

Conversely, those which induce alertness and excitement, such as *Zīr Afkand Buzurg* and *Ḥusayni*, are described as having a hot and sharp temperament, indicating their ability to activate

and intensify perceptive faculties. All the while, acknowledging a subjective variance in sensorial experience of auditory stimuli, saying: “*Since souls have different desires, what brings joy to one person may not do so for another,*” further solidifying the recognition that melodic tones do not merely act on the ears, rather they penetrate the soul—the locus of emotion and cognitive states.

This multimodal approach to auditory stimulation underscores the integrative nature of sensory perception, wherein the sense of hearing operates at the intersection of physiological characteristics and environmental factors, eliciting dynamic emotions and psychological states which contribute to the potential for the soul to experience delight as a measure of its holistic wellbeing.

Vision

The sense of sight is accorded profound significance in *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs*, both as a gateway to the external world and as a mediator of psychospiritual well-being. The discussion extends beyond a mere physiological understanding of vision, offering an integrated perspective that encompasses philosophy, aesthetics, psychology, and spirituality.

The author begins by challenging the prevalent simplistic belief of his time that the sight is limited to color perception, asserting instead that vision is capable of apprehending twenty- seven distinct characteristics including: light, darkness, motion, stillness, proximity, distance, and shape. This enumeration underscores the multidimensional nature of vision, elevating it above other senses in terms of its complexity and breadth.

A central theme in this section is the connection between visual stimuli and their impact on the soul. One passage states: “*As the saying goes, ‘The eyes are the windows to the soul,’ and it is incumbent upon the wise to ensure that their gaze is directed towards what benefits rather than harms the soul.*”. Vision here is presented not merely as a means of perceiving the external world, rather a tool for enriching the soul, fostering intellectual stimulation, and achieving spiritual harmony. The text warns against the dangers of excessive or harmful visual stimuli, which may disturb mental equilibrium and potentially lead to moral or psychological imbalance.

The text highlights how colors influence emotional and psychological states, with luminous and vibrant hues such as red, green, yellow, and white fostering joy, mental clarity, and vitality. Conversely, dark and somber shades like black and dull blue are described as detrimental as they may induce melancholy, negative thoughts, and spiritual heaviness. Beyond color, the text explores how spatial organization contributes to well-being. The benefits of gazing upon natural landscapes, geometric harmony, and artistic compositions are highlighted due to their potential to promote tranquility and intellectual clarity, as stated in the text: “*For the weary heart, gazing upon flowing water or the expanse of the sky refreshes the soul and restores clarity to thought.*”

The discourse on vision is embedded in the broader aesthetic and philosophical worldview of medieval Islamic thought, where beauty (*ḥusn*) and light (*nūr*) are seen as reflections of divine attributes. The soul, described as inherently luminous, inclines toward beauty and harmony in the external world. This metaphysical perspective underscores the intrinsic connection between external beauty and internal purification, framing vision as a means of spiritual ascent.

A particular emphasis is placed on the concept of visual purity (*hifẓ al-baṣar*), advising individuals to be selective in what they observe. The text aligns with Qur'anic teachings that emphasize modesty in vision and the avoidance of morally corrupting imagery. Moreover, it recognizes sight as a gateway to knowledge, stressing that observation leads to deeper understanding and wisdom. Through its rich exploration of vision, *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* delineates a sophisticated understanding of the external senses, positioning sight as a key instrument in the pursuit of intellectual, emotional, and spiritual well-being.

Olfaction

Mufarriḥ al-Nafs examines olfaction through a detailed discussion on the nature of smell and its role in psychospiritual wellbeing. Much like the discussion of vision, *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* suggests that pleasant odors uplift the spirit and reinforce noble qualities, whereas foul smells contribute to a corrupt disposition. The text divides pleasant scents into two categories: warm and cool, stating that “*the scents of these two categories are delightful and bring joy to noble souls that are free from evil dispositions and base qualities.*”

Warm scents which elicit joy within the soul include: musk, agarwood, ambergris and various aromatic plants. These scents are associated with warmth, vitality and joy, suggesting they have a stimulating and invigorating effect on the soul. The warmth of these scents is believed to align with the body's natural warmth, promoting a sense of well-being.

Cool scents that induce joy in the soul include: camphor, sandalwood and rose, among others. These scents are described as cooling and refreshing, as they calm and soothe the soul. This categorization reflects the influence of humoral theory, which was prevalent in medieval Islamic medicine. According to this theory, health and temperament are influenced by a balance of the four humors (blood, phlegm, black bile, and yellow bile), and everything in nature, including scents, can be classified according to their effects on this balance. According to this framework, cooling substances are often prescribed to balance excessive heat in the body, and these scents may have been thought to provide similar benefits on a psychological level.

The author proposes that noble and pure souls are naturally drawn to pleasant scents and repelled by foul odors. This reflects a moral and spiritual dimension to the perception of smell. The idea is that a person's character, or the condition of their soul, can influence their sensory preferences; suggesting that moral and spiritual purity are reflected in one's sensory inclinations, reinforcing the idea that the physical and the spiritual are deeply intertwined. The text states that an individual's preference for and enjoyment of foul odors is abnormal and reflects a corrupted nature that may have been inherited. The text states: “*I specified this condition to avoid the objection that you might claim that pleasant scents are universally delightful, which is contradicted by stories of some well-known individuals who preferred foul odors over pleasant ones.*”

The text describes numerous recipes provided for various perfumes and incenses, highlighting that in medieval Islamic medicine, scent was not only a matter of pleasure but also of therapy. The preparation of *ghaliyah*, states as “...the best and most beneficial of the

compounded perfumes,” is a luxurious perfume, and other aromatic mixtures was seen as a way to influence one’s mood and spiritual state. The detailed methods of preparing these scents indicate a sophisticated understanding of how different ingredients interact to create complex fragrances that could stimulate, calm, or otherwise affect the soul. The use of specific oils, waters, and other substances in these preparations suggests an advanced knowledge of chemistry and pharmacology. The fact that these recipes were attributed to important figures also indicates the cultural and social significance of these practices.

The final section of the passage addresses the moral and spiritual implications of scent preferences, linking them to the nature of the soul. The idea that some individuals might have inherited animalistic traits suggests a belief in the profound influence of physical and spiritual inheritance. This aligns with the broader Islamic worldview, where the mind, body, and soul are seen as interconnected, and moral and spiritual purity is reflected in all aspects of life, including sensory preferences.

Gustation

The fifth chapter of *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* explores the pleasure derived from taste, offering a nuanced understanding of gustatory perception in relation to the human soul and its well-being. Unlike modern physiological approaches that emphasize the biochemical and neural processes behind taste perception, this medieval text presents taste as a conduit for both physical nourishment and psychospiritual balance. The chapter’s emphasis on the sensory experience of taste, particularly the innate preference for sweetness (*ḥalāwah*), reveals a sophisticated model of holistic well-being rooted in the classical Islamic medicine and philosophical tradition, which viewed sense gustation as not only a physical process, but also a spiritual one that reflected the balance of humors, the purity of the soul, and the refinement of human faculties.

The text classifies tastes into eight fundamental categories: astringent (*‘afūṣa*), bitter (*murāra*), pungent (*ḥarāfa*), sour (*ḥumūḍa*), acrid (*qabḍ*), salty (*malūḥa*), fatty (*dasūma*), and sweet (*ḥalāwah*). It asserts that sweetness is the only taste that intrinsically elicits pleasure, as it replenishes lost bodily humors and aligns with the body’s natural desire for equilibrium. The author states: “Among these, there is one type that inherently brings joy and happiness, which is sweetness. This is because sweetness replenishes what is lost from the blood, which is the source of the soul’s composition and provides its subtle nourishment.”

This reflects a fundamental understanding in Classical Islamic medicine, that linked sense preception to one’s temperamental constitution (*mizāj*), particularly through its ability to moderate imbalance. In the case of gustation, the four primary humors—blood (*dam*), yellow bile (*ṣafrā’*), black bile (*sawdā’*), and phlegm (*balgham*)—were each associated with specific flavors. Sweetness, in particular, was correlated with an optimal balance of blood and a refined nature of the soul and the vital spirit that animates the body. The author claims that children and those untainted by corrupt bodily humors naturally gravitate toward sweet flavors further reinforces this idea, suggesting that taste preference can serve as a diagnostic tool for determining one’s physiological and psychological state, as it commonly is in other traditional medical transitions, such as the Chinese, Greek and others.

The discussion of delight induced through gustatory sensation in *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* transcends the mere gastronomical dimension, integrating psychospiritual well-being. The preference for sweetness is not arbitrary but signifies an alignment with the natural order and the body's equilibrium. Conversely, the aversion to bitterness and acidity—unless necessitated by medicinal needs—suggests that the soul naturally inclines toward harmony and balance. The text states that: *"one should not abstain from a flavor that naturally brings them pleasure, as the body nourishes itself with it. However, in spite of this, there are connections between the soul, flavors, and food colors that one cannot fully comprehend alone."*

This medieval understanding of sense perception embodied in *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* resonates with broader Islamic and philosophical traditions, where the senses serve as conduits between the body and the soul; hereby presenting gustation as an essential mechanism for maintaining not only physical health but also psychological and spiritual equilibrium.

Tactility

Mufarriḥ al-Nafs explores the sensation of touch (*ḥāssat al-lams*) as a fundamental conduit for human perception and well-being. The text describes touch as a divinely bestowed faculty that serves as an intermediary between the external world and the soul, allowing the human being to discern what is beneficial and harmful. This section begins by emphasizing the divine wisdom behind the creation of touch: *"Know that the Almighty Creator has endowed the sense of touch with profound wisdom, as if it were a guide for the soul, informing it of the tangible objects it encounters."* The text conceptualizes touch not merely as a physiological function but as a faculty imbued with wisdom, designed to guide the soul in navigating its physical environment.

This statement situates touch within a teleological framework, suggesting that the faculty serves an essential function in human life beyond mere sensation. The idea that touch "guides the soul" implies that it is a crucial intermediary between the physical and the metaphysical, helping the soul discern and interact with the material world. Rooted in elemental and humoral principals, tactile perception is conceptualized as a reflection of bodily equilibrium, whereby pleasure is derived from balanced and harmonious stimuli, and discomfort arises from inconsistent or disruptive experiences. The role of touch, then, is to detect what is compatible with this balance: *"Anything that is befitting/correspondent and suitable to this composition induces pleasure and joy, and the soul finds comfort in its presence. Conversely, anything that is contrary to this balance causes discomfort and aversion."*

While both medieval and modern frameworks acknowledge that pleasure in touch is linked to balance and well-being, medieval medicine conceptualized this through a metaphysical and philosophical lens of moderation in sensory stimuli rather than through an anatomical framework of neural mechanisms, reinforcing the idea that touch is central to both physical and emotional well-being. *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* therefore enumerates fourteen perceivable objects of touch, offering an intricate classification that reflects an advanced phenomenological understanding of tactile perception. This approach emphasizes the qualitative experiences of touch, therefore including intermediate states such as the balance between heat and cold or the intermediary state between moisture and dryness. This is particularly significant, as it suggests that moderation—not merely

the extremes—plays a role in sensory pleasure. Moreover, the categorization of pain (“*the separation of connected parts*”) and pleasure (“*the restoration of connected parts*”) within the domain of touch demonstrates an awareness of the relational and holistic nature of the body’s experience.

The text further expands on the relationship between touch and pleasure, emphasizing that sensory enjoyment is maximized when the stimulus remains within a moderate range: “*The closer these sensations are to balance, the greater the pleasure experienced through it, such as the touch of moderate water.*” Just as exposure to excessive heat or cold can cause physiological discomfort, an extreme in any tactile sensation is said to disrupt the natural harmony of the body and soul—therefore, the tactile sensation of “moderate water” is discussed as it neither shocks the being with excessive heat nor chills it with extreme cold, thus maintaining a state of equilibrium. The text affirms this concept in stating: “*The soul inclines to and takes pleasure in anything that does not alter the sense by deviating from balance/moderation, and is repelled by anything that deviates from this balance.*”

This reinforces the idea that pleasure, whether derived from touch or any other sensory experience, is a result of harmonious sensorial engagement rather than intensity. Excessive stimulation—whether too rough, too hot, too cold, or too intense—disturbs the soul’s natural inclination toward balance. Thus, moderation is the key to both physical and spiritual well-being.

CONCLUSION

The results of this study reveal that *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* presents a comprehensive and highly integrative model of sensory perception that extends beyond the mere physiological to encompass the psychological and spiritual dimensions of well-being. A fundamental premise of the text is that sensorial engagement is imbued with the capacity to alter the soul’s equilibrium— either toward balance and therefore, psychological delight; or away from it. The discourse on audition underscores the relationship between melodic harmony, temperament, and emotional regulation, positioning sound as a catalyst for states of spiritual cognition. Similarly, the examination of vision reveals a moral and intellectual function of sight, whereby the gaze is both a means of acquiring insight and a pathway to psychological comfort tranquility. The text’s exploration of olfaction introduces a moral dimension to scent, wherein olfactory preferences reflect the purity of the soul and its inclinations toward noble or base dispositions. Gustation, in turn, is presented as a measure of the soul’s inherent balance, with an affinity to sweetness serving as an indicator of harmonious nourishment. Tactility is presented as a dynamic senses in its mediation between external stimuli and internal equilibrium.

A recurring theme across these discussions is the centrality of balance and moderation. The text emphasizes that sensory pleasure is not derived from intensity of perception, rather from harmony with the body’s natural state and the soul’s inclinations toward beauty, order, and refinement. This perspective aligns with the broader Islamic philosophical and medical traditions, which view well-being as contingent upon the preservation of equilibrium in all aspects of life—

whether physiological, psychological, or spiritual, offering insights that remain relevant for contemporary discussions on holistic health.

Ultimately, this study of *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* enriches our understanding of medieval Islamic conceptions of man as an integrated being, whereby the faculties of the soul and body are integrated and interdependent. The text's emphasis on sensory perception as a vehicle for achieving well-being through the gateway of psychospiritual delight challenges materialistic reductions of sense experience, instead advocating for a comprehensive view that acknowledges the ways in which sensory engagement shapes our inner and outer worlds. As contemporary science increasingly acknowledges the psychosomatic dimensions of sensory perception, *Mufarriḥ al-Nafs* stands as a testament to the enduring relevance of medieval Islamic thought in contemporary discourses on human well-being.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

The authors declare that they have no conflicts of interest to this work.

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