

**THE FORMATION OF ANTHROPOCENTRISM AND HUMANISM:  
LESSONS FROM THE DIALOGUE OF CULTURES**

A defining feature of the modern era is the intensification of value convergence across cultures and the accelerated formation of a global culture. This process reflects a growing sense of human unity, made increasingly visible through the unprecedented development of communication technologies and the expanding processes of globalization. At the core of this evolution lies the formation of value systems rooted in humanistic ideals and the preservation of a sustainable natural environment. World culture, as the quintessence of national cultural values, is tasked with uniting humanity and overcoming the spatial and temporal fragmentation of the human condition.

Modern intercultural interaction is grounded in a profound historical legacy of spiritual and intellectual exchange. The German philosopher Karl Jaspers identified the origins of this phenomenon in what he termed the “Axial Age” – a period marked by the emergence of foundational philosophical and religious thought. The significance of intercultural dialogue became even more apparent following the groundbreaking work of thinkers such as Nikolay Danilevsky and Oswald Spengler, who emphasized the plurality of civilizations and the corresponding diversity in human lifestyles and societal organization.

These insights sparked a complex debate around the concepts of “culture” and “civilization”, including the ambiguity and asymmetry that can characterize their interactions. A particularly radical perspective was articulated by the Georgian philosopher Merab Mamardashvili. In one of his final interviews, he asserted: “I believe that contact between cultures is impossible. What I refer to as ‘contact’ is more accurately described as civilization – not in a pejorative sense, but as a unifying structure. I believe there are many cultures, but only one civilization. Civilization is contact. Strictly speaking, cultures do not engage

directly with one another – especially those that did not emerge along the axis of world religions” [2].

Mamardashvili saw culture as a fundamental, original phenomenon rooted in the nature of the ethnos, in archetypal memory, and in ties to the surrounding environment. Civilization, by contrast, is a later product of cultural evolution, shaped by specific socio-political and economic conditions. The concept of “culture” can be applied to both highly developed and less developed societies. “Civilization”, however, typically refers to an advanced stage of development – for example, urbanized societies possessing writing systems and legal institutions. As Russian philosopher Nelly Motroshilova has clarified, “only a society that values human life and respects human rights can truly be called civilized today” [6].

American political scientist Samuel Huntington is well known for his thesis on the inevitability of clashes between cultures and civilizations, as presented in his book *The Clash of Civilizations* [15]. However, in later writings, Huntington revised his position, emphasizing the urgent need for intercultural and intercivilizational dialogue: “The development of dialogue among cultures and civilizations is of paramount importance, as I see no alternative for their peaceful coexistence... Since I first introduced the idea of a ‘clash of civilizations’, the reactions it has provoked demonstrate growing concern among global leaders over such a possibility. As a result – and I highly welcome this development – a worldwide movement has emerged in favor of promoting dialogue among cultures” [14].

It is increasingly clear that the only viable alternative to civilizational fragmentation is the model of intercultural, interreligious, and intercivilizational dialogue as proposed by UNESCO. Such dialogue is a socio-political prerequisite for the transition to sustainable development.

Culture has developed numerous mechanisms for dialogue with the past, including ways of transmitting historical experience. In European culture,

reverence for antiquity as an exemplar first emerged during the Renaissance. Thinkers of the Renaissance transformed classical antiquity into an object of nostalgia; for the first time, the past was viewed not merely as a record but as a model to emulate.

The rise of the Renaissance worldview – particularly anthropocentrism and the ideology of humanism – has been widely studied in historical, philosophical, and cultural literature. Of enduring importance is the experience of shifting from theocentric to anthropocentric worldviews under the oppressive conditions of the Inquisition. This intellectual transition was supported by various factors, including the rapid development of social, economic, and geographical relationships, as well as the dissemination of new ideas through the literary works of poets and writers such as Dante Alighieri (1265–1321), Francesco Petrarca (1304–1374), Lorenzo Valla (1407–1457) and others.

However, the decisive factor in this intellectual revolution was the cultural dialogue with antiquity, mediated above all by the Arab-Muslim world – a uniquely rich layer of spiritual heritage in world history. The flow of classical ideas into the Arab-Muslim intellectual space sustained an atmosphere of learning shaped by Arabs, Jews, Persians, Turks, and others. Azerbaijani culture was also actively present within this broader cultural matrix, particularly through the works of Azerbaijani scientists, philosophers, and poets.

A groundbreaking contribution came from Ibn Rushd (known in Europe as Averroes), whose doctrine of the “double truth” gained wide recognition in the Arab-Muslim world from the 12th century onward. This doctrine resolved the tension between faith and reason, theology and philosophy by distinguishing between philosophical and religious truths, thereby liberating philosophical inquiry from theological constraints.

As a result, classical philosophical texts were not only preserved but further developed in the Arab-Muslim world in the medieval period. As church authority

began to weaken, these ideas returned to Europe, fueling intellectual movements such as the Renaissance and the development of anthropocentrism and humanism.

Humanism is one of the great intellectual traditions that has enabled a coherent understanding of historical progress. Without humanistic ideas, humanity would not have progressed from the Stone Age and the horrors of cannibalism to modern civilized society. Humanism posits “the necessity of a society grounded in high moral standards, harmonious interpersonal relationships, and respect for nature” [4].

The works of Élisée Reclus, Watt Montgomery, Lev Gumilev, Nikolay Trubetskoy, and others have highlighted the role of Islamic and Turkic ideas in shaping Renaissance values. These ideas entered Europe through complex cultural interactions, ultimately laying the groundwork for anthropocentric and humanistic worldviews – perspectives that regard the world as something that can and should be changed for the benefit of humanity.

Two towering figures of Azerbaijani culture – Nizami Ganjavi (1141–1209) and Imadaddin Nasimi (1369–1417) – exemplify this intellectual trajectory.

Nizami Ganjavi is recognized as a seminal figure in world literature. For centuries, his work has influenced thinkers and poets across the Near East and Middle East. His poetry synthesizes Greco-Roman and Islamic values and is often seen as a precursor to the European Renaissance. Numerous literary works are devoted to this issue [1, 5]. Here, we will focus only on some of Nizami’s key ideas related to humanism, social development, and governance. It is important to keep in mind that Nizami formulated these ideas in the 12th century – three to four centuries before the Renaissance.

Christianity and Islam declared all people equal before God. Nizami extended this idea by emphasizing justice as a necessary corollary. In Europe of the 15th century, justice would become a central value of the Renaissance and the foundation of humanist thought. According to Nizami, humanism entails the rejection of violence against both people and nature. In his poem Layla and

Majnun, he calls for greatness through self-knowledge and scientific inquiry, while also urging compassion and ethical restraint: “Do not overstep the line,” he advises, “Honor humanity and the laws of nature” [8].

Nizami Ganjavi valued cultural diversity and warned against the dangers of rejecting intercultural dialogue, which he saw as a source of ethnic strife and war. In his poem “Seven Beauties”, he presents the women of seven nations as vivid embodiments of cultural richness and mutual respect [10].

Love is a central theme in Nizami’s humanism. He considered love to be the greatest treasure of humanity – something that, alongside reason, elevates the human being above all other divine creations. For Nizami, love was a mysterious, transcendent force that enabled individuals to overcome life’s obstacles. This is how Nizami Ganjavi characterizes love [11, p. 379]:

*“No, without love, no one's seeds germinate,  
Only in the house of those who love it is calm and spacious.  
Without the flame of love that all living people honor,  
clouds do not cry and roses do not bloom”*

In Nizami’s interpretation, the lover is not a person who has lost his mind, but someone oriented toward noble achievements. He was convinced that harmony between reason and the feeling of love is both possible and necessary, and that it can define the horizons of chastity and the measure of moral purity.

Four centuries before Thomas More, Tommaso Campanella, or Francis Bacon (Europe of 16–17th centuries) imagined their utopian societies, Nizami had already envisioned a harmonious community in “Iskandarnameh”, where hunger and poverty are eradicated, justice prevails, and rulers are bound by the same laws as their subjects.

In “Iskandarnameh”, particular emphasis is placed on the role of human qualities in governance. Nizami explains that the administration of a state requires high moral integrity, skillful foreign policy that allows one to avoid

war, and prudent economic management that eliminates poverty and destitution. According to Nizami, the ideal state is a classless society where people are free and equal.

The inhabitants of the utopian state artistically created by the poet, when addressing Iskandar, say the following [9, p. 648]:

*“We share our wealth equally,  
We are all equally important in this life.  
No one laughs at another’s pain,  
And the heavens watch over each of our children”*

Of particular interest is the poet-thinker’s exploration of the link between the level of trust in society and the quality of governance in the poem “The Treasury of Mysteries”. Nizami highlights that when trust among people in a society declines, the cause lies in poor governance [12]:

*“Where now is humanity? Has it vanished forevermore?  
Each man fears every other,  
Where is the knowledge that once in human hearts would shine?  
Human virtues in man are no longer to be found...  
Yet everyone in life will need a companion –  
So do not drive away the one who comes to be your friend”.*

Two centuries after Nizami, the poet-philosopher Imadaddin Nasimi carried forward this idea. His work represents a profound inquiry into the essential question: What is the human being? Though mystical in form, his poetry articulates a deeply philosophical anthropology.

Nasimi emphasized the unity of humanity and the divine – a form of radical anthropotheism that echoes the ideas of the ancient Greek sophist Protagoras (5th century BC) and the Christian theologian Pelagius (5th century AD). His thought likely influenced the emergence of anthropocentrism in European philosophy.

Nasimi lived an intense creative life, which was tragically cut short. He was broadly educated, and his works frequently reference the classics of both ancient and Arab-Muslim cultures. He lived and created at the end of the Middle Ages, just before the dawn of the Renaissance in Italy.

This was a time when Sufism – a mystical doctrine advocating asceticism and heightened spirituality – was a key element of the spiritual life in Shiite Muslim society. Sufism played a significant role in the development of ethical and aesthetic thought in medieval Azerbaijan.

Nasimi adhered to Sufi views. Particularly meaningful, therefore, is his concept of beauty as an objective phenomenon, and the ontological significance he ascribed to the beauty of nature and the human being. This is how Nasimi presents it [7]:

“If you wish to uncover hidden mysteries,  
 If you long to peer into the void,  
 Let the fragrance of flowers tell you  
 Of the origins of worlds and things.  
 If you wish, O listener, for all to be revealed to you now –  
 Take up the melody, and in its depths  
 Seek out all the laws of motion within it”.

In contemporary aesthetics, a debate continues between the so-called “naturalists” and “social constructivists” regarding the interpretation of the category of beauty. The naturalists argue that the foundation of beauty lies in nature itself, and that human consciousness merely reflects this inherent quality. In contrast, the constructivists assert that features such as harmony and symmetry are not beauty in and of themselves, but rather its carriers; it is the human imagination that transforms them into beauty.

It is noteworthy that Leo Tolstoy attributed profound meaning to the beauty of nature. In his diary, he wrote: “I gazed at a delightful sunset. Through a break in the dense clouds, the sun appeared like a crimson, irregular coal.

All this hovered above a forest and fields of rye. It filled me with joy. And I thought: no, this world is not a joke, not merely a vale of trials and a passage to a better, eternal realm. It is itself one of the eternal worlds – beautiful, joyful – and we must strive to make it even more beautiful and more joyful for those who live with us now, and for those who will come after us” [13, p. 25].

Medieval thinkers generally held that God manifests Himself in two ways: through the human being, created in His own image, and through His divine speech – Koran. Nasimi advanced a more radical view, asserting that the human being is not merely a reflection of God or His creation, but is, in fact, God Himself in all His majesty and mystery. He expressed this idea poetically [7]:

“Both worlds can fit within me, yet I do not fit into this world.

I am the essence – I have no place; I cannot be confined within existence.

All that was, is, and will be is embodied in me.

Do not ask. Just follow me. I cannot be contained in explanation...”

Nasimi’s teachings could not be justified through the conventional doctrine of “double truth”. His ideas transcended the boundaries of philosophy, challenging the foundations of religion, questioning the essence of God, and bringing the divine from the realm of the infinite and unknowable into the reality of the human being. For these beliefs, Nasimi was persecuted and met a brutal death.

Like Nizami Ganjavi, Imadaddin Nasimi achieved immortality through his ideas and entered history as a great thinker who exalted the human being and the values of humanism.

Thus, the humanity’s movement towards humanism and philanthropy, towards the cornerstone values that are significant for all cultures, has many sources of origin, which merge into a single cultural stream. The axiological foundation of world culture has been enriched in various ways and in different

forms. Arts, myths, religions, and secular texts written in different languages revealed and perfected the sacred meaning of human life. Many cultures took part in this process, perfecting and passing on the accumulated spiritual wealth to their descendants, like a baton. The thinkers of Azerbaijani culture, who are open to dialogue, mutual exchange and international cooperation, have made a worthy contribution to this treasury.

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