Contents

Mihai I. Spariosu
Introduction ........................................ 7

**Part One: Reopening the Door on Humanism**

Jörn Rüsen
Temporalizing Humanity: Towards a Universal History of Humanism . . 29

Roger Griffin
Homo Humanistus? Towards an Inventory of Transcultural Humanism . 45

Kirill Thompson
Lessons from Early Chinese Humanist Impulses ....................... 65

Sayyed Mohsen Fatemi
Islam, Secular Modernity and Intercultural Humanism ............... 85

Mihai I. Spariosu
Intercultural Humanism and Global Intelligence: Definition, Principles, Practice ........................................... 101

**Part Two: The Treasures of Humankind**

Hubert Cancik
The Awareness of Cultural Diversity in Ancient Greece and Rome . . . 123

Robert Evans
European Humanism: East and West .................................. 145

Chen Chao-ying 陳昭瑛
Human Being as Species Being: A Reconsideration on Xunzi’s Humanism 153
Contents

M. Satish Kumar
Buddhism and Intercultural Humanism: An Exploration in Context . . . 167

Ming Xie
Harmony in Difference: Tension and Complementarity . . . . . . . . . . 181

Part Three: Challenging Humanity: The Multiple Dimensions
Mikhail Epstein
Humanology: The Fate of the Human in the “Posthuman” Age . . . . . . 199

Gheorghe Ştefan
Integral Humanism and Its Challenges . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 217

Erhard Reckwitz
Otherness? Towards an Intercultural Literary Anthropology . . . . . . 227

Michael Onyebuchi Eze
Ubuntu / Botho: Ideology or Promise? . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 247

Virgil Nemoianu
Tradition, the Beautiful, and the Uncertainties of Global Humanism . . . 261

List of Contributors . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 271

Bibliography . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 277

Index of Names . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . . 293
Sayyed Mohsen Fatemi

Islam, Secular Modernity and Intercultural Humanism

In several contributions to the present volume and in many other places, scholars have extensively discussed Western humanism as a complex historical, socio-political, philosophical and religious phenomenon; whereby, the sovereignty and centrality of human values in producing methods, practices, and policies in a specific society were given prominence over any other worldview. They have explored and revealed the sundry historical manifestations of humanism in different literary, philosophical, and cultural contexts, and in different parts of the world, although particularly in Europe. Renaissance humanism and Italian humanism have been explored in the body of such historical excavation, while the Greek, the British, and the German forms have been discussed in line with an interest in the periodic emergence of humanism in different eras. One has also seen different forms of emphasis in each of these historic manifestations: for instance, German humanism tended toward ethnocentrism, while another notable humanist trend sought to dissociate itself from the Church.

The political, social, and philosophical facets of humanism have also been understood in terms of the antecedent, precipitating factors that gave rise to their emergence, with the intention of challenging the social status quo. In this regard, one has come across pedagogical humanistic trends that both deconstructed traditional layers of education and attempted to reconstruct new lines of thinking and learning. The deepening semiotics of humanism has also challenged a number of traditional religious ideas, values and doctrines and has resorted, instead, to secular avenues of social or intellectual engagements and involvements that it often offered as a panacea for lost and confused human beings. To certain types of humanism, detachment from heavenly discourses and the adoption of secular modes of thinking appeared to promise the happiness and welfare that seemed to burgeon in the ideal illustration of humanism’s values. Overall, many humanistic trends advanced sweeping claims for man’s liberation and emancipation from everything, including God. They shifted the focus from man’s ascension to heaven to his establishment on earth, away from any dependency on transcendental sources.
This paper will present humanism from an Islamic perspective and will show how such a perspective may facilitate a constructive dialogue regarding the development of a genuine and viable intercultural humanism, which would temper the sweeping claims I have referred to in the preceding paragraph. Before focusing on the distinguishing features of intercultural humanism from an Islamic perspective, however, a few clarifications may be necessary as to the methodology often employed in evaluating such a perspective.

As is often also the case with Western humanism vis-à-vis Christian dogma and the life and teachings of Jesus Christ, discussions of various Islamic perspectives on humanistic issues, including philosophical and religious ones, may concentrate on texts and documents that, albeit Islamic, reflect the ideas, doctrines, and viewpoints of individual Muslim scholars, and not necessarily what is inherited from Prophet Mohammad, his manners, his Household, Hadith, and Quran. While the ideas and perspectives of different Muslim scholars may provide information on the given topics, they may also be reflective and representative of the specific historical and cultural contexts that they have been exposed to. For example, the Muslim scholars who, through the translation of Greek peripatetic texts, were inspired to ponder the implications of these texts for the Islamic school of thought, were ultimately embedded within a domain that demonstrated their own intellectual creativity and not necessarily the Islamic viewpoints inherited from the Prophet Mohammad, Quran, or the Prophet’s Household.

This situation is even traceable in the citations of numerous Muslim scholars who have acknowledged the distinction between the creative discourses resulting from the interplay of their own cogitations and the pure Islam of Prophet Mohammad. To give just one example, one may cite the words from Ibn Sina, known as Avicenna (980 – 1037), when he questions the comprehensiveness and impeccability of the human-oriented intellect:

> It is not in the capacity of human beings to apprehend the truth of things. We merely apprehend the accidental features and the formal characteristics of things without apprehending the true nature of things and their real distinguishing features. Our understanding provides us with the discernment that there are things in the world with their characteristics and features. Nonetheless, the true nature of the primordial source, the intellect, the soul, the fire, the celestial bodies, the water and the earth are unknown to us. We cannot even grasp the accidental (A’raz) features of the things.

In other numerous works including the *Treatise on Definitions* (*Resalate Alhodood*) and in the *Book of Debates* (*Almobahesat*), Avicenna ascertains the limitations of the human-made intellect and its circumscribing implications. The same idea can be found in the works of other scholars such as Khaje Nassee-reddine Toosee who shows the inability and incompetency of human intellect in
apprehending the true nature of things, illustrating, at the same time, the urgent and striking need of the human intellect for divine revelation and revealed inspiration. He clearly indicates that, ‘intelect cannot lead to what the prophets instruct’.

Sheikh Alla Addin Toosée, in reiterating the feebleness of the human intellect, indicates that it alone ‘cannot grasp the truths behind the issues of theology, and the philosophical and intellectual ideas and doctrines cannot substantiate the consummate apprehension of these issues without the confirmation and support from the source of revelation namely God’. In line with this principle, Shahabeddin Sohrevardee (1355) also questions the possibility of providing a comprehensively impeccable definition for anything, as argued by the peripatetic philosophers. Sadrolmotaaleheen, the great philosopher of Islam, propounds that ‘even the gifted scholars fail to apprehend the heavenly and earthly truths’.

Such words and statements may vividly present the Muslim scholars’ confirmation of the inability of the human intellect and the dangers behind what Hakeemi calls the ‘overgeneralization of the domain of intellect’. This is not to deny, however, that the very Muslim scholars who have declared the incompetency of the intellect have also rendered huge services through their own contemplative efforts, by virtue of the self-same feeble instrument of their scholarly activities, namely their reasoning intellect. For example, in reiterating the significant share held by Muslim scholars in shaping the primordial pillars of modern science, Bernal indicates that, ‘it is difficult to estimate the value of the actual contributions to this fund of learning that were provided by Islamic scholars themselves’.

Explicating the impact of Islam in new inventions and the creation of new modes of knowledge, Bernal adds, that ‘Islam became the focal point of Asian and European knowledge. As a result there came into the common pool a new series of inventions quite unknown and inaccessible to Greek and Roman technology.’

The point I have been making here is that many prominent Muslim scholars have often drawn a distinction between the reasoning human intellect and the revelation-oriented (Vahy) intellect, considering the former to be inferior to the latter. Therefore, although Muslim scholars have contributed to the advance-

3 Asfar, Ch. 7, pp. 118 – 119, cited in Hakimi, Ejtehad, p. 20.
6 Ibid., p. 195.
ment of knowledge and technology, one needs to make a distinction between the notions, ideas, doctrines, and perspectives presented within the scope of Muslim erudition, on the one hand, and the direct words, instructions and Hadith of Prophet Mohammad, his Household, and Quran, on the other hand. Furthermore, Muslim scholars and philosophers themselves, including Mulla Sadra, Ibn Sina, Suhrawardi and Khajenassereddin Toosee, have frequently acknowledged the necessity of going beyond the human intellect and searching for answers within the sources of revelation, thus questioning the sovereignty of human knowledge in providing comprehensive responses to everything, including the questions of humanism. To exemplify, in his book, *The Secrets Behind the Verses (Seroll Aayyat)*, Mulla Sadra cites a Hadith from the Prophet Mohammad and pinpoints that ‘my friend, explore this Hadith in order to grasp the substance of the knowing about the soul’.7

I have insisted on the distinction between intellectual reasoning and revelation-based intellect, because it can help us excavate the ontological, epistemological, and etiological layers of Islamic humanism more clearly. Islam, etymologically speaking, comes from the word *Silm*, which means “peace”. Islamic “peace” entails diverse human domains, from the intrapersonal relationship to interpersonal communication, international relations and international negotiations. The root word of Islam also goes back to *Tasleem* which, literally, means “submission and resignation”. Imam Ali of Shiites indicates that Islam consists in submission to any form of truth, thus emphasizing the spirit of openness towards learning, listening and accepting any manifestation that unveils the complexion of truth in any aspect.

Islam-oriented peace begins with an in-depth understanding of the significance of its ontological perspective, as this ontological layer leads the discourse of human interaction on diverse points. At the core of the Islamic ontological perspective, prevailing interpretations of a human being as a biological animal are nullified. Man is not confined within biological and evolutionary boundaries: a physiological machine that operates at the mercy of purely physiological and biological stimuli. Rather, according to Islam, the underlying spiritual ontology of humankind engenders etiological scopes that can define values beyond the utilitarian hegemony of the biologically driven mandates.

Understanding the Islamic perspective on humanism requires a flight beyond prevailing materialist discourses on humanity, particularly those perspectives that summarize humans as conglomerates of material particles and proscribe any possible exploration outside the realm of the visible. The name of “science”, narrowly interpreted as a materialist and reductionist enterprise, has largely deprived many Western scholars, and others who subscribe to its tenets, of

---

examining the underlying components of cultural manifestations that do not correspond to the mainstream scientific dogma.

An Islamic perspective on humanism shows that the mainstream scientific discourse of modernization is embedded within the promotion of multiplicities, fragmentation, and absence: humans are multiplied through the interplay of technologically imposed relationships, precisely because they are divided in so many pieces and fragments. As they go about their multifarious tasks, they become so engaged in fragmentation and division that they can no longer experience unity and presence. From an Islamic perspective, humanism, inspired by a utilitarian vision, cannot herald the promise of establishing sustainable human ties, as it is intrinsically planted in a predilection that excludes a quintessential examination of human needs and demands beyond the utilitarian domain. An absence-centred philosophy cannot offer the panacea of presence, because it is paralyzed by elements and components that reduce the vitality of being to an indulgence in the frequency of multiplicities.

An Islamic intercultural perspective advocates the necessity of presence through revisiting the reference points that have validated our subscription to engaging utilitarian multiplicities. This would presuppose a shift, from a focus on possessiveness to one on *Tasleem*, to letting go or releasement: power, wealth, paraphernalia, political games, parochialism, egoism, egotism, hubris, arrogance and imperialism belong to the domain of possessiveness and ineluctably encourage and foster multiplicities. *Tasleem*, however, promotes the principle of being as the fountain through which togetherness and belonging unfold themselves. From a Quranic perspective, the sublimity of man is verified not through the possession of ephemeral belongings but by virtue of piety and righteousness, or to use the exact Quranic term, *Taqwa*.

*Taqwa* facilitates the process of becoming presence-oriented in that it allows one to comfortably and mindfully choose and disengage oneself from multiplicities. It serves as a preamble for going beyond time and place, breaking the boundaries of materialism and practicing the discipline of self, emotion, and relationship management. Piety, in the Islamic perspective, suggests that in order to transcend the constrictions of the body and supersede worldly longings, one must forsake the monolithic identification with materialism. This does not mean turning one’s back on worldly demands and desires, but rather, is a warning against a pure and a blind indulgence in body-oriented discourse. Imam Hassan Mojtaba, the third Imam of Shiites explains how attention should be directed toward both realms, as follows: ‘Act toward your world as if you would live forever, and act toward your hereafter as though you would die tomorrow.’

---

It is through the indiscriminate immersion in the world and its engaging multiplicities, Islam argues, that human beings experience subjugation and entanglement in shadows and fragmentation, thereby distancing themselves from presence. As people’s exposure to multiplicities increase, their degrees of absence multiply and, through the heightened form of absence, they seek their manifestation in the illusory sedimentations of possessiveness. Taqwa, however, gives rise to a progressive and proactive form of being and becoming, as it nullifies any form of superiority based on worldly possessiveness such as race, colour, and even knowledge. Knowing, if not connected to the fountain of presence, turns out to be a cause of absence; it contributes to the accumulation of masks, disguises and pretences. An absence-driven knowledge gives rise to slavery, control, manipulation, coercion, and aggressiveness. Islamic Hadith from the Prophet Mohammad and his Household frequently reprimand the formation of knowledge that is confined within the borders of egoism. An absence-driven knowledge cannot augur the possibility of a global intercultural perspective, as it is already enmeshed in the manacles of multiplicities that dictate fixation within the realm of materialism.

An intercultural perspective needs, therefore, to address the epistemological and ontological questions of humankind. The Islamic view goes beyond the animalistic interpretation of human beings. Highlighting the significance of such underlying questions, Nasr says:

The evolutionary view of man as animal, which even from the biological point of view is open to question, can tell us little as to the real nature of man; no more than can the theories of many anthropologists who discuss anthropology without even knowing who man, the anthropos, is and without realizing the complete states of universal existence which man carries with him here and now.9

The Islamic view of intercultural humanism departs from the utilitarian interpretation of humanity and critiques the approaches and policies that tend to keep humans within the confines of materialism. Deep within the Islamic ontological and epistemological perspective there lies an emphasis on the revelation-inspired intellect which is in pursuit of unity, togetherness, oneness, and presence. Conversely, utilitarian-driven rationalism has its quest for multiplicity, materialism, consumerism, subjugation, exploitation, and absence. The practical implications of each doctrine would engender diametrically different consequences. The former considers its mission to look for factors that liberate man from the quagmires of stagnation and slavery; it argues that slavery in our world today is not epitomized in the traditionally recognized modes and ap-

---

pearances. Modern slavery imposes diverse points of illusion and involves numerous forms of disguise. It is shrouded in the pretentious masks of progressiveness, development, and betterment, but etiologically looks for domination, mastery, and conquest. It monopolizes, through sundry psychological games, the avenues of understanding and knowing, and limits the possibility of going beyond the pre-established discourse of legitimacy as planted and prescribed by the hegemony of utilitarian rationalism.

The Islamic perspective on intercultural humanism challenges the confinement of human beings within the borders of egoism and the mundane discourse of consumerism. An Islamic view claims that the world is merely a bridge for growth and development; one cannot linger in a temporary abode, namely the bridge. Death is just the commencement of eternal life. One needs to be mindful of one’s intrapersonal and interpersonal transactions and interactions, as one dwells in the hospice of the world. It behoves man, according to the Islamic perspective, to be liberated from the prisons of predilections and suggestions that dictate multifarious forms of slavery and submission. In a Hadith, Imam Sadegh, the sixth Imam of Shiites, pinpoints that people, upon departing this world, may leave as slaves or as liberated beings (ahrar). The Persian poet, Rumi, in elucidating the lofty status of humans and their invaluable position in the world, says:

Wine in ferment is a beggar suing for our ferment;
Heaven in revolution is a beggar suing for our consciousness;
Wine was intoxicated with us, not we with it;
The body came into being from us, not we from it.10

The self, in the materialistic context, is subjugated to sporadic engagements with a monolithic concentration on nothing except the satiation of the ego. The inflation of the ego and its consummation through the hedonistic propensities of the material world will produce alienation, loneliness, separation, and bitterness. It can’t extend a genuine invitation for togetherness. It fails to mobilize the possibility of shared understanding, because the spirit of listening ceases to operate when the gates of egoism can only allow the entrance of propositions that comply with pre-established legitimate discourses. Respectful listening fades away when the tyranny of the utilitarian, competitive enterprise expands its ramifications; the possibility of sensibility of the other diminishes under the yoke of ego-driven rationalism.

An Islamic view of intercultural humanism propounds a salient role for consciousness, understanding, contemplation, awareness, and wisdom. A Hadith from Imam Sadegh indicates that anyone whose two days (in living and

10 Rumi, p.141.
understanding) are equal, he / she is at a loss. In another narrative, Imam Ali addresses Komyel, one of his companions, and says: ‘Beware that you are in dire need of contemplation in any move, albeit small or minor.’ Jafari demonstrates that there are at least forty verses in Quran that call for contemplation, thoughtfulness, and wisdom.

An Islamic view of intercultural humanism focuses on relationship awareness and management, and management of interdependencies as the pillars of interconnected networks of humanity. In a Hadith cited from Imam Reza, the eighth Imam of Shiites, half of wisdom is characterized through the practical demonstration of kindness and compassion toward people. In a series of similar Hadith from the Prophet and his Household, the key to societal management lies in relationship management and the accurate understanding of management interdependencies. A profound exploration of Quranic verses and Hadith along with the Sireh (behaviour and communication) of the Prophet shows Islam’s great emphasis on the significance of relationship, its management and its implications. Monotheism (Tawhid) as the first and foremost principle of Islam unfolds itself not only as a philosophical principle, but also as a source of inspiration for relationship management in diverse human transactions. Monotheism enriches one’s security as one’s fear and anxiety are left behind through a transcendental process of self-exploration and the attainment of faith in God’s oneness. This process may be clearly traceable in the spirit of the Muslims in the early years of Islam’s emergence as they pioneered the transmission of science and knowledge. For example, at the beginning of the third century (Hijri Calendar), there were eighty Muslim academic faculties and departments in Spain.

Through a shift from the external manifestations of security to the internal source of security, Muslims were inspired by the Prophet to overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties and challenges: monotheism became the panacea for managing both intrapersonal and interpersonal relationship. Prayer was considered as the elevation and the ascension of man as it opened up a new chapter for relationships between the self and the creator. Islamic relationship awareness may offer a turning point in understanding intercultural humanism,

14 See: Jafari, *Dar Mahzare Hakim*.
because it introduces the connectedness of all human beings in a large cosmological project where all are linked to the creator.

Prophet Mohammad introduces peace and mercy as the essence of relationship management. The Prophet is himself presented by the Quran and numerous Hadiths as the mercy for the world (Rahmaton lel alameen). The Quran describes the etiological mission of the Prophet and his ordainment as the completion and consummation of the best possible moral values. The emphasis on values within the context of the Islamic intercultural perspective suggests that there are unchangeable, universal, and unquestionably valid values that cannot be compromised. The problem in our world today, according to Islam, lies in the degeneration of values as a result of egoism and egotism. Values are no longer taken as ends but means, in a limited spectrum at that, with limited application. The Islamic perspective on intercultural humanism propounds that for as long as we don’t revive the shared human values, through which humanity gains its decency, we will be merely pretending to elaborate emancipative discourses for humanity, which are in fact disconnected from the living reality.

It is in line with this understanding of the role of values in our being and becoming that Islam considers the revitalization of one human being as the revitalization of all human beings, and the killing of one human being as the killing of all human beings. The Quran explicitly makes this point. Furthermore, Quranic verses along with a wide array of Hadith from the Prophet and his Household call for mindful and consistent implementation of these values in practice. Quran reprimands those who instruct others to follow virtue and piety, but who themselves do not practice what they preach. In a Hadith from Imam Sadegh of Shiites, he points out that Muslims need to show the path to monotheism and virtue through their deeds and actions, and not through their words.

Authentic human values, according to Islam, cannot be taken seriously and cannot be put into effect except through a quest for meaning and its connectedness to the Creator. If life is nothing except pleasure in the ephemeral earthly abode and its associated desires, then it cannot give rise to a genuine source of care for others. The “Other” is, in a materialist perspective, translated in the body of the earthly desires and its ramifications. “Others” make sense as long as they move in line with the manifestations of solipsism, egoism, egotism, and self-satisfying interests. Yes, attention to the “Others” can also be meaningful, if negligence towards them would hurt self-centred concentration. But, there is no sense of togetherness: no true care for others. An Islamic perspective moves in the completely opposite direction: any extension, manifestation, and crystallization of being is revered and respected as they all unveil their being signs from God. In an instruction to Maleke Ashtar, his newly appointed governor-general,

15 (5,32), Ch. Ma’edde, Verse 32, Holy Quran.
Imam Ali, the first Imam of Shiites, urges him to appreciate the subtlety of the rights of the people. He instructs that when being with people, you must make sure to share your eye contact with everyone present, and not only with the privileged. One should be mindful of other people’s rights and values, Imam Ali advises Maleke, even if one happens to encounter people who do not abide by one’s own values and viewpoints. You should not impose your views on them or act towards them differently, since they are, if nothing else, endowed with the gift of being from God: they are created by God, and they should be revered as his creations.16

Any sense of inferiority or superiority is dissipated in the context of Islam’s monotheistic perspective. Wealth, power, position, and possessions cannot offer a sense of true elevation; neither can they confer any social status. Thus, an Islamic perspective on intercultural humanism underlines the significance of social justice as a universal human value, because justice is considered, according to the Quran, one of the main missions of all the prophets. Without justice, there will be no living sense of values, because if justice perishes, it gives way to the growth of a wide variety of malaise: promoting hypocrisy, manipulation, exploitation, and abuse.17

Prophets were ordained to provide people with relationship management in four different spectrums: 1) Intrapersonal relationship; 2) Interpersonal relationship; 3) Relationship with nature; and, 4) Relationship with God. A self-entrapped in egoism, greed, and possessiveness is overwhelmed by an ever-increasing flux of attention toward material reality, the world as it appears in the physical objects and their earthly invitations. Such a tyranny fails to see the quintessential complexion of humanity, as it is blinded by a monolithic parochialism which merely prescribes the accumulation of self-inflated objectives.

Intrapersonal mismanagement, according to Islam, has largely contributed to the expansion of corruption and the devastation of human relationships in innumerable domains. The roots of severe pollution and malaise in our world today, from environmental pollution to the massacre of human beings, are found in misdirected self-management or lack of self-management. How can effective self-management operate in an interpersonal relationship when the self is already at the mercy of ruining forces that dictate sole obedience to the infinite waves of the inflation-seeking self? A self-inflated by hubris, superiority, and arrogance is too entrenched in the basin of self-centeredness to be able to look at the circumferences of the other.

Islamic intercultural humanism urges that self-management ought to have the

17 Hakimi, Ejtehad.
highest priority of any pedagogical agenda, as it is through the demolished sense of self-elevation that the agony of oppression, discrimination, injustice, poverty, and other human-made catastrophes transpire. The sense of elevation and transcendence cannot happen for the self within itself, because the self is, *ipso facto*, in dire need of connectedness, belonging, attachment, and dependencies. The self is, essentially, inadequate to engender the required efficacy of management as it is constantly threatened and deceived by the forces that maintain to support it, but are merely in pursuit of its interests within the scope of the body. Monotheism (*Tawhid*) begins with understanding the nothingness of anything except God. This nothingness acknowledges that anything in the realm of existence is nothing except a connection to God. Once the connectedness of things is negated, their being is negated. Analogically speaking, beings operate as prepositional modes: a preposition loses its sense of being, the moment it is placed outside a sentence. Ontologically, beings are beings as long as they are connected to God, or Allah, to borrow the Arabic word.

To address the arguments of those who might see the forgoing statements as contravening the notion of vice (*shar*), the Muslim scholars inspired by the Quran and the Hadith have argued that vice, or any of its manifestations, does not belong to the realm of *Wujud* (existence) as it fall into the category of non-existence: ignorance is nothing except the lack of knowledge, as oppression consists in nothing save the absence of justice. Vice does not fall into the category of *Wujud*, since existence as given by God is epitomized as good.

The monotheistic perspective of Islamic intercultural humanism, therefore, concentrates on togetherness, connectedness, and belonging to humanity. The Persian poet Sa’di illustrates this sense of belonging when he depicts the universality of pain that is human in nature: ‘My complexion did not turn pale because of my own destitution; the sorrow of the destitution of others brought the paleness to me.’

In elaborating the implications of Islamic monotheism for intercultural humanism, Nasr writes:

> It is this basic nature of man which makes a secular and agnostic humanism impossible. It is not metaphysically possible to kill the gods and seek to efface the imprint of the Divinity upon man without destroying man himself; the bitter experience of the modern world stands as overwhelming evidence to this truth. The face which God has turned toward the cosmos and man (the wajh Allah of the Quran) is none other than the face of man toward the Divinity and in fact the human face itself. One cannot “efface” the “face of God” without “effacing” man himself and reducing him to a faceless entity lost in an anthill. The cry of Nietzsche that “God is dead” could not but mean that “man is dead,” as the history of the twentieth century has succeeded in demonstrating in so

---

many ways. But in reality the response to Nietzsche was not the death of man as such but the Promethean man who had thought he could live on a circle without a centre. The other man, the pontifical man, although forgotten in the modern world, continues to live even within those human beings who pride themselves in having outgrown the models and modes of thought of their ancestors; he continues to live and will never die.\(^{19}\)

An Islamic perspective on intercultural humanism does not go with reductionist approaches towards culture and cultural understanding, such as is the case within the discourse of contemporary cultural psychology, which, albeit different from the mainstream positivist psychology on the surface, is yet embedded within the same methodological and paradigmatic hegemony.\(^{20}\) At the centre of the Islamic perspective on intercultural humanism, there lies the solution of love. There are tens of Hadith from the prophet and his Household that promote the expansion and the implementation of love in diverse points of human relationship. Love constitutes the essence of interaction and it is through love and its manifestations that human transformations occur. Rumi, the Persian poet, frequently discusses compassion, kindness and love towards others as the keys of development, change and transformation. He considers kindness towards others as the answer for human development when he indicates that ‘kindness changes thorns into flowers, kindness changes the prison into garden. Without kindness and love, garden changes into a place of thorn.’\(^{21}\)

Liveliness, according to Islam, is embedded in love and kindness towards others. In a famous Hadith, cited in Amali by Sadoogh, Imam Ali of Shiites reiterates to all Muslims, ‘let the practice of mercy, forgiveness and kindness towards others be well embedded in your heart’.\(^{22}\)

In his government policies, Imam Ali tells his governor-general, Malek Ashtar, he should ‘observe and practice kindness, mercy, compassion and respect to any one in the world, since people fall into two groups: they either belong to your Islamic viewpoint and thus they are your companions; or, even if not, they are equal to you in terms of being a human being.’\(^{23}\) Imam Reza the eighth Imam of Shiites also known as the Imam of Mercy (Al Iamam Ar Raoof) considers kindness toward others as half of wisdom. In a famous Haidth from Imam Hossein, the grandson of the Prophet Mohammad and the son of Imam Ali, namely the fourth Imam of Shiites, sins are melted and dissipated as one practices being kind toward others.

\(^{19}\) Nasr, *Essential*, p. 186.
\(^{22}\) See: Hakimi et al., *Alhayate*.
\(^{23}\) See: *Najolbalaghe of Imam Ali*, p. 427 – 45.
Referring to the ontological layers of the components of love, Nasr observes: ‘Hence, the love of God and by God permeates the whole universe, and many Islamic mystics or Sufis over the ages have spoken of that love to which Dante refers at the end of the Divine Comedy when he speaks of “the love that moves the sun and the stars”’. 24

One does not need to delve too deeply into the repertoire of Islamic perspectives to see the groundlessness of the accusations levelled against Islam in our world today. The misrepresentation of Islam by those who, wittingly or unwittingly, introduce it in the context of terror, aggression, war, bellicosity, and violence is in deep contradiction with the teachings of the Quran, the Prophet Mohammed and his Household.

Numerous verses in the Quran dignify the quintessential love for human beings apparent in Islam and strongly recommend practicing a loving and caring attitude toward others. This is also obvious in many Islamic prayers, where praying for your fellow worshippers and others are highly recommended. Imam Hassan, the son of Imam Ali and the third Imam of Shiites recalls his mother Hazrat Zahra, the daughter of Prophet Mohammad, in the time of her nocturnal praying:

I listened to my mother as she was praying in the middle of the night recounting the names of all neighbours and others in her prayer; and I listened closely and realized that all her prayers were brim with attention toward others and devoid of any concentration on her own person.25

Islam refutes the idea of a humanism based on egoism, disguised with pretentiously bombastic names and titles; it calls for an understanding of human bondage beyond race, colour, land, position, possessions or any material ties that may impede the process of implementing a genuine interconnectedness. Attention toward human bondage and connectedness does not come out of a sentimental predilection towards a people-pleasing attitude in the contexts of self-satiating needs, but it gains its sensibility and application in the body of the values within Islamic monotheism (Tawhid), where respect and attention towards others are presented as values that unfold their significance in the complexion of a monotheist (Movahhed).

One should point out that parallel, if not similar, assessments of materialist and reductionist science, as well as of the nature and higher purpose of humanity, are equally present in the tradition of Western humanism, albeit from different philosophical and religious standpoints. For example, Martin Heidegger, in his critique of the biologically determined self within the western

24 Nasr, Essential, p. 48.
discourse of modernism, discusses the pernicious factors that intensify the malaise of modern man and brings about destruction. Furthermore, Heidegger contends that the self is entangled within the manacles of material-oriented modernism and experiences emptiness as it goes through pseudo-identification with the illusory manifestations of the materialistic world. He argues that we become oblivious to our emptiness in the pervasive discourse of modernism which is rife with ‘massiveness, acceleration and calculation’. Our obliviousness engages us in identifying with things that provide us with a superficial sense of comfort and tranquillity, but soon they reveal their ostentatiously hollow complexion. Consumerism, competitiveness, emulation, and greed for power and wealth marshal their forces of attraction as the self endlessly follows the slope of emptiness; the abyss of emptiness.

From a different philosophical position, Jürgen Habermas, discerning the dangers of technological entrapment through submission to the manifold presentations of multiplicity, delineates the same ambiguous picture of mainstream scientific reductionism and its worrisome implications:

Yet even a civilization that has been rendered scientific is not granted dispensation from practical questions: therefore a peculiar danger arises when the process of scientification transgresses the limit of reflection of a rationality confined to the technological horizon. For then no attempt at all is made to attain a rational consensus on the part of citizens concerned with the practical control of their destiny. Its place is taken by the attempt to attain technical control over history by perfecting the administration of society, an attempt that is just as impractical as it is unhistorical.

From yet a different intellectual position, Roger Scruton also questions the sovereignty of modern bio-technological reductionism when he discusses the implications of Milton’s poetry:

Milton’s allegory is not just a portrait of our kind; it is an invitation to kindness. It shows us what we are, and what we must live up to. Take away religion, however; take away philosophy, take away the higher aims of art, and you deprive ordinary people of the ways in which they can represent their apartness. Human nature, once something to live up to, becomes something to live down to instead. Biological reductionism nurtures this “living down,” which is why people so readily fall for it. It makes cynicism respectable and degeneracy chic. It abolishes our kind; and with it our kindness.

28 Ibid., p. 83.
From a psychological standpoint, Philip Cushman describes the manifold dimensions of emptiness and absence in a materialistic society when he writes that the absent person:

seeks the experience of being continually filled up by consuming goods, calories, experiences, politicians, romantic partners, and empathic therapists in an attempt to combat the growing alienation and fragmentation of its era. [He] is dependent on the continual consumption of nonessential and quickly obsolete items or experiences [...] accomplished through the dual creation of easy credit and a gnawing sense of emptiness in the self.31

Cushman further comments on the emptiness caused by the illusion of abundance created by postmodern consumerism:

This is a powerful illusion. And what fuels the illusion, what impels the individual into this illusion, is the desperation to fill up the empty self [...] It must consume in order to be soothed and integrated; it must ‘take in’ and merge with a self-object celebrity, an ideology, or a drug, or it will be in danger of fragmenting into feelings of worthlessness and confusion.32

In turn, Mihai Spariosu, challenging E. O. Wilson’s position within the positivist discourse of reductionist science, argues that entrapment within a biological and psychological interpretation of humanity imposes a one-sided perspective that impedes the process of understanding any cultural view outside the Western, secular hegemonic discourse. He writes:

Most mainstream scientists are no more ready than Wilson to give up the ideology of evolutionary progress and success that has supposedly served them so well. Of course, in their rare self-reflective moments these scientists see themselves, at least in print, as disinterested, selfless seekers and servers of objective knowledge and truth. Indeed, they see themselves as worshippers in the “Temple of Science” as Albert Einstein very aptly (and with no trace of irony or self-irony) puts it. In practice, however, those claiming to be in possession of the truth, or at least of parts of it, are stern, Cerberian gatekeepers to this new temple, and will exact a high price to let noninitiates and neophytes in.33

In line with his critique of the utilitarian epistemology of Western mainstream scientific discourse, Spariosu highlights the significance of an open approach to the possibility of exploring non-Western intercultural perspectives:

Within the globality of our planet, there may be – or one may imagine – many different worlds that are not primarily driven by the utilitarian, free market logic described by

32 Cushman, ‘Why the self is empty’, p. 606.
Western-style, neoliberal, post-Marxist, and postmodernist theorists. Therefore, it is our task not only to identify or imagine such worlds, but also to work collectively toward their (re-) emergence as alternatives to the current ones, which have largely proven to be unsustainable.34

One final critique of the dominant Western scientific discourse can be found in the work of George Eman Vaillant. As a respected participant in this discourse, Vaillant utilizes a paradigmatic analysis of mainstream reductionist, scientific discourse to prove the very plausibility of faith and spirituality itself: a goal that has been long consigned to oblivion or pushed to the margins by the dominant discourse of what is considered legitimate understanding within western rationalism. As such, Vaillant states:

Sceptical academic minds have tended not to accept the universal importance of spirituality in human life. Too often the mere mention of spirituality leads academics to roll their eyes with the same disbelief – dare I say disgust – with which Skinner treated emotion. Academics have wished to keep scientific and spiritual truths separate, insisting that the scientific truth is truer than the spiritual. I believe that is a mistake.35

These and many other statements from contemporary Western humanists, including those who have contributed to the present volume, show that there is ample common ground for fruitful dialogue between Islamic humanism and its Western counterpart. Both forms seem to share a concern for the future development of humanity, which must be placed on much more solid foundations than those provided by mainstream scientific materialism and reductionism, or by the mentality of selfishness, greed, possessiveness, and violence that seems to be prevailing in many regions of the globe. A good start in this intercultural dialogic process would be for well-respected scholars, sages, educators, cultural figures, and global practitioners, from all the large and small civilizations of the world to get together and further explore and identify the intellectual and spiritual resources that all of us humans have in common, so that we can learn from each other and begin to correct the self-destructive course that humanity seems to be pursuing at the present time.

34 Spariosu, Global Intelligence, p. 45.