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DOI <https://doi.org/10.24195/spj1561-1264.2026.1.4>**Garayeva Gunel Aliniyaz**

PhD, Associate Professor,
Department of Philosophy and Social Sciences,
Azerbaijan University of Languages
134, Rashid Behbudov str., Baku, Azerbaijan
orcid.org/0000-0002-0861-634X

Khalilov Ruslan Niyaz

PhD Student,
Lecturer at the Department of Political Sciences and Philosophy
Khazar University
41, Mahsati str., Baku, Azerbaijan
orcid.org/0009-0007-5394-0740

SUFISM AND PERSONALISM: PHILOSOPHICAL AND ETHICAL CONCEPTIONS OF GOD AND THE PERSON

This article compares and analyzes Sufism and American personalism as two distinct intellectual traditions. Although they emerged in distinct historical and cultural contexts, but they conceptualized the human being as a holder of moral value, dignity, creative potential, spiritual embodiment. Tasavvuf expresses union with God and a spiritual journey to divine love, this path constitutes a profound ontological transformation of the Sufi practitioner. In the modern world a crisis of identity, cultural conflict, relativism in morality changed the value of humanity and for this reason the dialogue of sufi and personalist currents is a new highly valued philosophical approach. The coordination of the spiritual depth of Islamic-eastern philosophy and American-western ethics of responsibility as social issue opens new achievements in cultural dialogue and individual self-perfection. The synthesis of Sufism and American personalism creates a new model of “spiritual humanism”, here ethical and anthropological parallels are a new systematic analytical identification. Based on philosophical synthesis it formulates the idea of a “transcultural personalism embedded in spiritual responsibility”. The comparative philosophical ideas produce a spiritual-philosophical framework: from Sufism it adopts the ideas of love, mystical intuition, ontological unity, from Personalism it derives rational justification of responsibility, freedom, human dignity. Through this dialectical integration the human is accepted as a metaphysical reflection of the absolute essence and as an ethical-subjective actor in historical process. Both philosophical schools hold that the human being is responsible toward mankind and God. Sufism sees the implementation of these duties in spiritual perfection, in the same issue personalism realizes it by understanding the importance of social responsibility and ethical consciousness. As a final analysis, the sufi philosophy on “silent journey guiding the human existence toward the Divine” resonates with American personalism in its understanding of God’s manifestation with human being. Each philosophical study evaluates the human as a center of spiritual universe and claims that divine worth of person is the most significant philosophical truth.

Overall, this approach provides a productive conceptual foundation not only for interreligious encounter, but also for the evolution of humanism in global philosophical thought. Emerging from the dialogue of Islamic mysticism and American-western personalism in the twenty first



century the discussion offers a significant philosophical direction for reconsidering the concepts of the humanity, responsibility, spirituality.

Key words: *Sufism, Personalism, dignity, spirituality, ethical principles, personhood.*

Introduction. This article presents philosophical and ethical perspectives on the human personality and its relation to God through the lens of two complementary, but also very distinct intellectual studies: Sufism and American personalism. The significance of this topic is rooted in the erosion of spiritual responsibility, the crisis of identity, the transformation of human axiological status in contemporary society. Under the conditions of globalization, rapid technological changes and cultural conflicts the nature of the human being and its relation to the absolute-transcendental realm require special attention. Within this context, comparing the Sufi concept of inner transformation and ontological unity with the value-oriented system of personalism based on individual freedom and dignity yields original theoretical insights for current humanities research. The present study argues that “epistemology of love” in Sufi intellectual current and personalism’s “philosophy of moral will” when combined generates a new and integrative model explaining socio-axiological and transcendental worth of embodied existence. As A. Knysh remarks, “*Sufism is not an archaic relic, rather the expression of a dynamic mystical and religious tradition that continues to shape Muslim self-awareness in the contemporary world*” [23, p. 452]. This transcendental-philosophical heritage reaffirms the common philosophical vision to Azerbaijani philosophy and American movement, here the central role in the affirmation of the value of the self with relation to the Absolute. “*At the global level the Sufi worldview retains its vital role in relation to spiritual ecumenism, interreligious dialogue and the exploration of the human being’s transcendental potential*” [17, p. 221]. Within the perspective of this paradigm, a person is not merely an empirical being, but also a microcosmic reflection of divine truth and he overcomes egocentric limitations and the ascent toward inner perfection through discipline constitutes subjective existence’s fundamental mission.

American personalism was ethically articulated in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries by thinkers such as Borden P. Bowne, Albert K. Knudson, Edgar S. Brightman, Martin Luther King Jr. and underpinned the principles of freedom, virtuous accountability, creativity and emphasized the ontological indivisibility of humanity. From this standpoint, humans are understood not only as a biological and social construct, but also as a representative of axiological and subjective values, which grounds in responsibility and respect.

Historical development of sufi thought. The emergence of Sufism can be traced to the early centuries of Islam and through its historical evolution it generated a new understanding of the person’s relationship toward the Transcendent. “*The Sufi path situates spiritual development of individuality through love, inner discipline and existential awareness*” [26, p. 452]. In this historical context, ascetic devotees who adopted a solitary lifestyle abandoned worldly goods, embraced humility, modesty and pretended to purify their souls and achieve interior ascent. They defined the religiosity not by empirical rituals, but by inner authenticity inward reflection and pure intentions toward the Divine. Historically this internal orientation was grounded in ascetic practice and Qur’anic affirmations of sacred proximity. “*Qur’anic verses such as “Surely, in the remembrance of Allah hearts find rest” (13:28) and “We are closer to Him than his jugular vein” (50:16) affirm immanent presence of God in human existence and provide both the metaphysical and practical foundations of the Sufi experiential worldview*” [23, p. 45].

The foundational figures of Sufism Hasan al-Basri (642-728) and Rabi’a al-Adawiya (d.801) played a crucial role in shaping the theological and normative direction of this spiritual-intellectual current. Hasan al-Basri claimed that value-laden duty and inner purity identify true faith and argued that hypocrisy hides behind external religiosity. According his philosophical study, a balance of hope for divine mercy and fear of absolute justice should be the base of the covenantal tie between the person and God. Rabi’a al-Adawiya argued that “sole moment for worship is love for the Divine” transcended this dualistic model through the idea of love. The well-known declaration by her “*I worship You not for the desire for paradise or for fear of hell, but because I love You*” became a foundational axiom

of ethical-existential philosophy and morality in the seeker's worldview [30, p. 32; 16, p. 21]. This approach established the basis value-oriented structure where the fundamental goal of life is inner perfection and human is a manifestation of ultimate reality.

In the 9th–10th centuries, Sufi thought transcended moral agent experience and took the form of systematized philosophical and mystical teaching. In this period, Sufism advanced substantial philosophical reflections on the human existence's essence, by this way on the epistemological and gnoseological foundations of the relationship between the accidental and necessary being. Junayd al-Baghdadi (d. 910) offered the mystical path of spiritual discipline, sobriety and self-control by developing the terms of fana (the disappearance of the man in God) and baga (abiding in God). He illustrates the unity of metaphysical truth by the concept “water taking the shape of a vessel” and for him the Divine manifests in distinctive forms in the souls of people. It is not as a loss of individuality, but a process of the transformation of phenomena. This doctrinal deepening also produced daring mystical formulations that tested the boundaries of theological discourse. “*The mystical expression “Ana al-Haqq” by Husayn ibn Mansur al-Hallaj (d. 922) led to his execution and in the mystical tradition of Sufism his death is elucidated as a “martyrdom of love”*” [30, p. 57]. Philosopher's execution became a philosophical symbol of the sacrifice of the self for the sake of union with God. From this perspective fana is contemplative purification and baga is eternal participation in divine reality. They form an ontological essence parallel to the personalistic paradigm of the supreme phenomenal value of the human subject.

Another renowned sufi thinker, Al-Ghazali (1058–1111) synthesised Sunni orthodoxy and Sufism both from theological and philosophical standpoints. The combination of mystical experience and rational cognition demonstrated union with God covers intellectual and pneumatological phases. Ghazali in “Ihya Ulum ad-Din” stated “*Genuine knowledge elevates you closer to eternity and liberates from the mundane*”, thereby emphasized evaluative bond between action and understanding, highlighting that Sufism is grounded on value-laden responsibility and piety [10, p. 112]. This view interprets existential maturation in Sufism as a unification of intellectual refinement and mystical purification. Following this synthesis, Sufism increasingly institutionalized its ethical vision through organized orders and public service. The Sufi tariqas as Qadiriyya, Naqshbandiyya, Chishtiyya and Mevleviyya that emerged in the 12th–13 th centuries significantly broadened the institutional and public dimensions of Sufism. “*These orders functioned not only as centers of spiritual and ritual discipline, but also as leading centers of intellectual, social and cultural integration*” [17, p. 67]. They integrated the inward maturation of the person with the adab-based harmony of socium and the individual's moral accountability to God became a civic ideal. Thus, following al-Ghazali, Sufism represented a socio-cultural expression of the ontological rapport between human and God.

“*The historical development of Sufism had a profound influence on the formation of Islamic culture in its mystical, public and philosophical dimensions*” [16, p. 38]. The ethical and metaphysical principles of this tradition, compared with American personalism, reveal different but complementary aspects of the subject's relationship to God. In particular, Sufism foregrounds the immanence of the divine, love and inner transformation; the personhood is conceptualized as the bearer if divine revelation and normative formation is achieved through ritual practices and spiritual discipline. American personalism, in turn, emphasizes the moral autonomy of the human subject, their self dignity and social responsibility, substantiating the protection of the value-laden agent within the framework of ethics and law. The aim of this study is to determine the central place of the man in the conceptual scheme of contemplative values and to identify the philosophical and humanistic potential of Sufism.

Sufi metaphysics and philosophical anthropology

The Sufi doctrine of wahdat al-wujud (the unity of being), which forms the core of Sufi metaphysics, is the central thesis defining the ontological and epistemological foundations of Sufism. Muhyiddin Ibn Arabi systematized this teaching and expressed in this his trestise Fusus al-Hikam: “*There is nothing in being except God. Everything else is an illusion, a shadow of the Truth*” [15, p. 54]. The statement has rather than merely theological it further deeply ontological significance. Here, creation is understood not as an autonomous reality, but as a multi-level manifestation of Divine being.

Every creature, even an individual, appears as a specific form of universal being, a symbolic reflection of divine truth. *“Man as the most perfect manifestation of creation has the ability to reflect the names and attributes of God; “This capacity endows him with equally divine dignity and ethical responsibility”* [26, p. 48]. Thus, man in the ontological sense is conceived as a being created in the divine image, acting simultaneously as the center of creation and the bearer of the divine plan. *“For Ibn Arabi, man reflects the integrity of being and functions as the center in which the divine attributes are manifested”* [29, p. 36]. Within Sufi metaphysics, oneness does not dissolve personhood; rather it redefines the human subject as a distinctive mode of divine manifestation. At the same time, a number of Sufi thinkers, developed the concept of *wahdat al-shuhud* (unity of witnessing) as an alternative interpretation to *wahdat al-wuhud*. *“Ahmad Shirindi (d. 1624), in advancing this position, sought to preserve the distinction between Creator and creation”* [30, p. 112]. This approach, while preserving the autonomy of the human personality, places its relationship to divine reality within a more robust epistemological framework. Thus, Sufi metaphysics harmoniously combines unitive principle and moral selfhood: man is conceived simultaneously as an integral part of the cosmos and as a unique, unrepeatably being.

Despite certain parallels with Neoplatonism and the Aristotelian doctrinal legacy, The Quran and prophetic tradition remain the primary sources of Sufi metaphysics. The verse *“Wherever you turn, there is the Face of Allah”* (Quran 2:115) affirms the omnipresence of God, uniting the transcendent and immanent dimensions of existence. This understanding directly influences Sufi epistemology: knowledge is not only the result of rational analysis, but also the experiential apprehension of the divine presence. In other words, to know is to be; there is an inextricable link between the process of cognition and ontological transformation. Accordingly, epistemic insight becomes inseparable from moral-ontological transformation. Sufi ethics represents the practical embodiment of these metaphysical principles. Ethics here is not simply a set of virtue-based norms, but the fundamental map of a person’s inner spiritual journey. Al-Ghazali notes: *“Your greatest enemy is your own nafs; it lies between your two sides”* [26, p. 76]. This statement reveals the essence of the concept of *jihad al-hafs*: a person’s primary struggle is directed not against external forces, but against internal inclinations. The cultivation of the *nafs* and supramaterial discipline are the primary conditions for achieving immaterial perfection. This process is realized through *maqamat* (stages) – repentance, asceticism, patience, trust and contentment which represent the steps of non-material ascent. The *ahwal* (states), in turn, express the divine gifts received along the way; their unity ensures the existential maturity of the seeker. *“Sufi epistemology distinguishes between ‘ilm al-’aql (rational cognition) and kashf (divine revelation)”* [15, p. 102]. Knowledge acquired through love transforms the human nexus to existence, bringing it closer to divine reality. Rumi’s statement, *“Love is the astrolabe of the mysteries of God”* [28, p. 112], expresses the essence of this epistemology: love is a form of gnosis that transcends rational cognition, since it unites subject and object, eliminating the dualism between them. At once the personal and communal levels, this epistemology of love translates into concrete deontic practices. Sufi pedagogy represents the institutionalized form of these philosophical and axiological principles. Through teacher-student relationships, mediative contemplation, *dhikr* and social service, the moral and transcendental potential of the self is developed. *“On the public level, Sufism embodies the principles of solidarity, mercy and justice, ensuring the transfer of spiritual ideals into the public sphere”* [30, p. 158].

The establishment of soup kitchens and aid centers for the poor by the Chishtiyya order is a striking example of Sufism’s socio-normative potential. Sufism can be characterized as a multidimensional, integrative-discursive formation. It unites mystical, philosophical, ethical, aesthetic and civic aspects, promoting both individual and collective development. *“Human dignity, in Sufi tradition, is formed on the basis of divine truth and is realized through the purification of the nafs and such deontic virtues as mercy, patience and trust”* [15, p. 215]. The notion of the perfect man (*insan al-kamil*) connects Sufi philosophical anthropology with modern personalism. She emphasizes that humans are not only social and biological beings, but also manifestations of divine attributes. At the same time, the epistemology of love presents human knowledge and experience as a transformative course in which subjective experience and divinely oriented apprehension resonate with phenomenology and existentialism.

Sufism in Azerbaijani tradition

Sufism began to develop in Azerbaijan in the 12th century and played a significant role in the cultural, religious and societal life of the region. *“During this period, The Naqshbandiyya, Khalwatiyya and Bektashiyya orders gained influence in the region, establishing dergakhs and educational centers and promoting the dissemination of Sufi teachings”* [4, p. 45]. These orders far from being limited to organized contemplative life it extends to functional centers of communal responsibility and virtue formation. *“Research shows that Azerbaijani dergakhs (priests) and Sufi organizations played an active role in maintaining associative harmony, charitable activities and educational outreach”* [2, p. 102]. In Azerbaijan these institutional forms became closely intertwined with cultural production and moral education. In classical Azerbaijani literature, Sufi symbolism and ideas played a key role in shaping the national worldview.

This impact was not only limited to poetic forms but also gave rise to profound philosophical understandings of the human being's place in existence, spiritual perfection and union with God. In the literature and philosophical milieu of the 12th–15th centuries, Sufi ideas were reflected in the works of Azerbaijani thinkers on the ethical, ontological and anthropological levels. Classical literature thus became a philosophical medium through which Sufi anthropology and ethics were articulated. Nizami Ganjavi (1149–1209), one of the most prominent representatives of this tradition, artistically depicted the process of human inward ascent, the cultivation of the nafs and the attainment of perfection through divine love. His Khamsa works, especially “Leyli and Majnun” and “İskandarname”, symbolically express key principles of Sufi thought, highlighting the ascent to God, the unity of knowledge and love and the principle of the perfect human being (insan al-kamil).

“Nizami's axiological concept is aimed at restoring human harmony with existence and realizing the idea of moral responsibility and inner order” [6, p. 210]. In this sense, Nizami acts not only as a writer but also as one of the founders of spiritual anthropology. Imameddin Nasimi (1369–1417) created a more radical and philosophical expression of the Sufi legacy. Influenced by Khurifism, his poetry places central importance on the idea of the divine essence of man. The verse, “Only God is in my skin” expresses the ontological identity of man and God, the idea of man's inner divinity and his oneness with divine being. This position, although controversial in Islamic theology and metaphysics, represents an extremely profound philosophical perspective. *“For Nasimi, man is rather than merely an image of God it furthers His living embodiment. Therefore, his poetry is based not on theocentrism, but on theandrisim-the idea of the coexistence of God and man. This view axiologically elevates the answerability and metaphysical value of man, since he is obliged to act as a bearer of divine being”* [4, p. 53].

Contemporary research shows that Nasimi's poetic and philosophical legacy is significant not only for the mystical but also for the ethical and societal aspects of Sufism. *“His humanism is not limited to self-spiritual ascent but also aims at the idea of the normative renewal of society”* [3, p. 77]. Thus Nasimi's work can be understood as a philosophical system advocating the unfolding of human potential, a return to the divine source and the creative freedom of the individual. In the context, Sufi thought in the Azerbaijani literary and philosophical tradition has shaped a unique model for understanding the essence of the personhood and its relationship to God. In the works of both Nizami and Nasimi, the bond between man and God is built on axiological and ontological parallels: human value stems from its divine origin and moral responsibility.

These ideas create meaningful parallels with American personalism. The two studies affirm the subject it exceeds as a rational and social being and encompasses as a bearer of transcendental and subjective value. However, while in Sufism this value is associated with divine theophany, in personalism it is grounded in the theological and humanistic terms. This legacy played an important role in building intellectual bridges between Eastern and Western humanism in subsequent centuries.

This holistic combination of spirituality and public ethics culminates in figures who unite poetic symbolism with political duty. The Sufi poet and major political figure Shah Ismail Khatai (1487–1524), the founder of the Safavid state, also stands as one of the most important figures in Azerbaijani literary and philosophical heritage. His work encompasses a synthesis of political, religious

and mystical ideas. “*Khatai’s Divan, a poetic expression of the Sufi worldview, presents at a high aesthetic level the process of human mystical growth, approaching God, submission and the idea of martyrdom*” [7, p. 88].

Here, the concept of “divine love” appears not as a simple emotional attachment, but as a meta-physical symbol of the unity of being with God. For the poet, love is the path to knowledge and while submission is the path to perfection. Researchers rightly note that “*Khatai’s poetic legacy reflects the profound integration of Sufism into Azerbaijani culture*” [7, p. 54]. The ethical motifs of his poems – justice, mercy, self-sacrifice, spiritual purity are presented as individual values and normative principles of socio-immaterial life. In this sense, Khatai’s poetry can be assessed as both an axiological doctrine and normative manifesto. He combines Sufi higher-order reality with the ethics of political power, emphasizing that the value-theoretical foundations of the state must be built on the inner purification of the virtuous agent. At the same time, the motif of martyrdom in Khatai’s works is not only a religious symbol but also an expression of transcendental integrity. This idea is closely linked to Sufi ethics: martyrdom here signifies not external death, but the defeat of the nafs, the elimination of the ego and complete submission to the will of God.

This position evokes interesting parallels with the idea of moral integrity through distancing oneself from egocentrism and connecting with a higher value. “*Dergakhs (communities) operated in various regions of Azerbaijan, especially in Baku, Shamakhi and Ganja and acted as bearers of the transcendental environment of Khatai’s era. This dergakhs were not just places of worship, but also centers of public education, science and humanitarian service*” [8, p. 121]. The spiritual culture formed in these spaces integrated the ethical foundations of Sufi teachings – tolerance, mercy and value-laden responsibility – into the shared structures of society. Thus, Sufism in the Azerbaijani context is far from being limited to a mystical experience, it extends to a philosophical movement.

In Azerbaijan, Sufism developed as a religious, mystical teaching and equally as a philosophical and deontic pillar of national and cultural identity. Beginning in the Middle Ages, Sufi thought had a profound influence on the virtue-oriented structures of Azerbaijani society, literature, music and the system of collective values. Classic scholars such as Nizami Ganjavi, Imadeddin Nasimi and Shah Ismail Khatai revealed not only the religious and mystical but also the anthropological and aesthetic potential of Sufi teaching. Nizami’s *Khamsa* symbolically expresses the inner world of man and his harmony with God; this reveals both the subjective and cosmic dimensions of super-sensible perfection. Nasimi, advancing the idea of man’s inner divinity and inner freedom, defended the absolute value of the personhood. Khatai, by combining Sufi ideas of love and self-sacrifice with the principles of statehood and social justice, created a unique synthesis of the Azerbaijani spiritual world.

Over time, this tradition played the role of a primary philosophical source, guiding ethical behavior patterns, tolerance and artistic sensibility. Consequently, the manifestation of Sufi ideas in classical Azerbaijani literature can be assessed not as a religious and mystical movement and as a universal epistemological framework for understanding the normative and philosophical essence of the human personality.

The community-based function of Sufism is not limited to individual spiritual development; it also forms the philosophical foundations of social solidarity and cultural tolerance. *Dergakhs*, shrines and Sufi communities were not only centers of religious learning but also centers of science, art and collective cooperation. This played a decisive role in the formation of the humanistic school in Azerbaijani culture.

Hisrotical and philosophical development of American personalism. American personalism emerged in the 19th century as a specific school and a leading mode of thought capable of influencing various spheres of life. It found its place in the somewhat fragmented and still-developing theocentric worldview of 19th century America. While American relational anthropology drew heavily on European philosophical traditions, particularly German theological intellectual currents rooted in classical German philosophy, native intellectual developments in the United States also facilitated the emergence of personalism. American individualism was one of the most influential of these movements.

“The self-determination of one of the leading exponents of American individualist philosophy, Ralph Waldo Emerson (1803–1882), found its succinct expression in his ‘concept of self-reliance’” [5, p. 104]. Reliance on individual capabilities and inner qualities of the Self, is one of the key slogans of relational ethics. For Emerson, this emphasis on moral subjectivity became foundational for his metaphysical vision. Although European self-responsibility ethics conflicts with personalism, American individualism (as understood by American thinkers) significantly influenced American mode of philosophical inquiry. In this regard, unlike in Europe, in America these two ideological currents were not in a state of confrontation: they organically complemented each other. Within this cultural milieu, this perspective absorbed the ethical energy of agent-centered ethics while resisting its atomistic extremes. This complementarity was not accidental; in fact, it expressed an important dialectic in shaping the anthropological and axiological orientation of American philosophical thought. American personalism, like Sufism, developed under the formative role of theism; however, this influence became especially noticeable in the 20th century, when the widespread secularization of thought in the United States intensified.

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, personalism gained a foothold in American philosophical thought not as an accidental phenomenon alongside pragmatism and other intellectual currents, but as a result of historical, social and cultural processes. It is important to emphasize that ontological framework provided the opportunity to reconcile subjective experience with objective ethics and metaphysical structures. Thus, bearer of dignity development is presented not only as an individual psychological dynamic, but also as a holistic humanistic model, revealed through theological and ethical dimensions. As a theistic philosophy, personalism grounded freedom and value in the reality of an Absolute Person. Albert K. Knudson (1873–1953), a prominent representative of the Boston school of personalism, viewed movement as a continuation of Christian theology and theism. In his view, this account cannot exist in the full sense of the word without the idea of an Absolute person – God. American school of thought is closely linked to Protestant theology and acts an epistemological and ontological element ensuring the unity of religion and philosophy. Knudson also emphasized relevant theory differs from rationalistic teachings: it prioritizes will over intellect; that is human life and subjective experience are not exhausted by the framework of logic, but are also shaped by the free choice and moral stance of man. From this perspective, personalism presents the human covenantal tie to God far from being limited to an act of cognition it further an ethos-forming experience.

Consequently, contextual interpretation of reality moved beyond abstract metaphysics into education, public ethics and doctrines of social justice. Thus, the American school, through the interrelationship of epistemology, ethics and ontology connects the subject both with God and with the socio-cultural environment. Humanity is presented not only as a subject of cognition but also as an personhood engaged in dialogue with God, bearing axiological responsibility and comprehending the world through their will. This approach reveals parallels with the principles of Sufism, which unite experience and knowledge, morality and spiritual formation. In each tradition, the self realizes its perfection and accountability through their ontological rapport to God, however the American movement formulates this within a more systematized theological-humanistic perspective.

Ethical and epistemological foundations of personalism. American personalist philosophy has exerted significant influence not only on the philosophical and religious levels, but also in the public cultural spheres. From the 19th century to the early 20th century, personalism, emerged as a guiding idea of American public life and permeated politics, sociology, education, religion and other group-oriented institutions. This integrative impact is linked to its ethical and epistemological principles, which focus on the development of individual and collective identity. In American society, account was perceived as an abstract philosophical category but also as the foundation of everyday collective relations, community life, and normative decision-making processes. William Hordern (1920–2014) particularly emphasized the religious dimension of personalism and noted that understanding of God is possible through subjective and self experience. The view of Hordern maintains that, a person comprehends God through speculative assumptions, ‘personal encounter with God and subjective

religious experience. This orientation forms the epistemological foundation of personalism: the subject's direct connection with God becomes the basis of both knowledge and teleological duty.

Thus, American interpretation creates an active dialogue between the individual's inner world and the civic environment, presenting the person as a dynamic, contextual and societally interconnected trajectory. John J. McDermott (1932–2018) expaformulates this within a more systemanded on this perspective, interpreting *“American personalism as the inextricable interface of the self and collective subjectivity with religious, virtue-based and social contexts”* [18, p. 139]. Within the frameworks of Mc.Dermott's analysis, personality is a constantly changing, flexible process shaped by public articulations. In this sense, relevant American thought is not limited to human subject lived experience but ensures human maturation through interaction with community, religion and social institutions. Essentially, this approach places subjective normative responsibility within a socio-religious context and advances the transformative function of the moral agent.

Another aspect of personalism's associative applications is evident in its axiologically oriented teachings. American theory, like Sufism, emphasizes not only self-improvement but also collective spiritual formation. Schools, universities and religious communities became the primary venues for applying the personalist model in self-development, ethical decision-making and the promotion communal answerability. Personalism's cooperative practice also influenced the spheres of politics and law: the protection of individual rights, public figure and the construct of interpersonal justice were consistent with the philosophical foundations of personalist teachings.

Comparative philosophical dialogue between sufism and personalism

Despite terminological differences, both systems' normative orders converge on a relational ontology of the person. Sufism, a mystical tradition that arose in the Islamic world, draws on the existential depth of the Quran, prophetic teachings and a metaphysical vision of Divine unity (tawhid). American personalism, on the other hand, emerged in the 19th century in the United States as a modern philosophical movement emphasizing the dignity, freedom and metaphysical connectedness of the human person. However, each of the two moral philosophies affirm the centrality of the human person – not simply as an personal being, but as a being that reveals its essence in relationship with the Divine and with others. Sufism arose as a response to formalism and materialism, calling for inner sincerity and purification of the spirit. American movement, in turn, developed as a reaction to the explotative nature of capitalism, determinism and mechansitic understanding of man.

Doctrines affirm the human being as the bearer of supreme value, since the human being possesses a transcendental dimension that goes beyond pure rational knowledge. There is a semantic correspondence between the Sufi notions of fana and baqa and the personalistic idea of “self-realization”. The two systems substantiate the human transition from egocentrism to responsibility, from individualism to spiritual integrity. This forms the basis of a new conceptual lens, which can be described as the “principled-transcendental model”. In both frameworks, knowing is ethically consequential: cognition unfolds as participation in a moral oreder. In Sufi anthropology, man is formed from the Divine spirit. Ibn Arabi describes man as the “Perfect Man” (al-insan al kamil), reflecting the Divine names and attributes in creation. Rumi, meanwhile characterizes man with the words: *“You are not a drop in the ocean – you are an ocean in a drop”* [28, 573].

Contemporary research connects this model with phenomenological and hermeneutic interpretations of the human subject, analyzing the principle of al-insan al-kamil in dialogue with contemporary theories of the self and personality. In Sufism, the human path is a process of polishing the heart (qalb), transforming it into a mirror of divine beauty. Here, human dignity is based not only on autonomy but also on the ability to reflect the infinite. Borden Parker Bowne and Edgar Sheffield Brightman reject a biological and mechanistic understanding of the mankind, emphasizing it as the center of freedom, experience and value. Brightman views the human subject as a “purposeful agent”, while Bowne asserts that “truth is essentially personal”. This pint demonstrates profound parallels between the two traditions. Sufism privileges the immediate, subjective tie of the person to God – the path of inner closeness and unity (tawhid). Personalism, within an alternative framework, conceives of God and the individual in an ontological relationship: the responsible actor acquires meaning only in

the context of the existence of the Divine Person. In other words, in each doctrine the person is not “autonomous” in the absolute sense, but is a relational being that realizes its essence in dialogue with God and with others.

From a Sufi perspective, human approach to Divine truth is impossible either through intellect alone or through formal experience; it is result of a spiritual state, love and submission. In this regard, Rumi’s “philosophy of love” resonates with Bone’s “philosophy of moral agent”: in both systems, the central principle of being is not reason, but love and will. For sufism mahabba (love) and for personalism good will are the foundations of man’s connection with God. At the same time, these experiential epistemologies see the source of ethical responsibility precisely in this regard. For the Sufi, faith-guided perfection means the embodiment of Divine attributes; for the personalist, it means reproducing the model of the Divine figure in social relations. Thus, while in Sufism human perfection is manifested in the stages of fana and baqa, in personalism this process is expressed in the forms of “self-knowledge” and “activity directed toward an axiological goal”. Despite terminological differences, Sufism and American school affirm man as a microcosm of the transcendental order. Sufism expresses this through mystical and symbolic language (“the Perfect man”), while personalism uses philosophical and rational categories (“freedom, “moral activity”). Both traditions reject the material-mechanical reduction of man and affirm human existence as participation in the transcendent. Inner perfection serves as a common foundation for them, since in each system man is the spiritual center of existence and the bearer of divine meaning.

For Sufists, learning is simultaneously rational and experiential (ma`rifa). Abu Hamid al-Ghazali (1058–1111), having achieved a classical synthesis of Sufism, reconciled it with Sunni orthodoxy. His formula from Ihya` Ulum al-Din – “*the truth of knowledge is that it brings you closer to the hereafter and distances you from the world*” emphasizes the transcendental and theological foundations of Sufism [10, p. 112]. Rumi likens intellectual cognition to a lamp and mystical experience to the rising Sun. Sufism develops a multi-layered epistemology: `ilm – discursive information, ma`rifa – gnostic, experiential understanding, haqiqa – the union of the metaphysically perfected person with God. This hierarchical construct of epistemic content identifies the spiritual transformation of man with the act of cognition: knowing, loving and being here are interpenetrating categories.

Gazali’s views maintain that, true awareness frees man from worldly illusion and directs him toward eternal truth; thus, understanding has ethical consequences. The same principle is found in American thought. For Bowne and Brightman, learning is not simply an intellectual category but the expression of a moral attitude; man perceives God not as “object”, but as a “person”. In this sense, the personalist understanding of information parallels the Sufi doctrine of ma`rifa: in both systems, knowing is conceived as a phenomenon of relation and participation. To know God, the individual enters into a relationship with Him; therefore, information is not only a cognitive but also an ontological event.

Thus, Sufism and American personalism view knowing as a contemplative event: the attainment of truth is possibly going beyond through the mind by also through the participation of the heart, will and the man as a whole. This reveals the axiological and ontological value of awareness in man’s nexus to God and defines the active participation of the individual in the divine order as a necessary condition. For Bowne and Brightman, the concept of familiarity is not only an act of cognition but also an ontological rapport; to know means to enter into a living, ethical and personally-centered relationship with reality. In their view, information is not simply the cognitive assimilation of objective reality, but also the subject’s recognition of their own inner structure and through it, the establishment of a dialogue with reality. In this sense, personalist epistemology moves in a direction similar to the Sufi thesis of ma`rifa: truth is attained not through rational analysis, but through a spiritual-subjective encounter.

Howison’s idea of the “eternal brotherhood of persons” creates certain parallels with the Sufi principle of wahdat al-shuhud: in tandem, God is simultaneously the source of the relation and its goal. Truth here is not the product of impersonal principles, but the result of mutual interior participation. The Sufi category of kashf (unveiling, revelation) and the personalist construct of “intuitive moral consciousness” share the same epistemological essence: a person can know God only through the comprehension of their

own inner depth. Consequently, each tradition – Sufism and American theory define the comprehension of truth not just on a conceptual level but in the context of the spiritual transformation of the self. In this regard, knowledge is simultaneously a normative and ontological event: as a person enters into a relationship with God, they reshape both their being and their understanding.

The Sufi path is distinctly ethical, centered on love and mercy. Rumi asserts that through love all things become beautiful. The Azerbaijani Sufi poets Nizami and Nasimi emphasized human dignity, tolerance and universal brotherhood. Personalists believe that freedom is an inseparable value-laden principle of responsibility. According to Bowne, freedom is not arbitrary, a cognition for rational and moral self-realization; therefore, human value is not relative and cannot be measured by social or instrumental categories. Each individual is the “bearer of absolute value” and therefore exists not only as a means but also as an end. Although this approach is reminiscent of Kant’s notion of the righteous subject, American school transfers it to a more relational and theocentric plane.

The ideas of the Boston Personalist school, particularly Brightman and Bowne’s “philosophy of subjective existence” subsequently became the philosophical underpinning of public and deontological movements, including Martin Luther King Jr.’s struggle for civil rights. King’s principle of “justice on love” draws profound metaphysical parallels with the Sufi category of mahabbatullah (divine love). The doctrine of love in Sufism and the idea of freedom in personalism effectively express two complementary aspects of the spiritual and ontological status of man. In Sufi teaching, love is the connecting force between man and God, while in American movement, freedom is the expression of the person’s inner potential. Both schools define man not as a purely biological or social being, but as a spiritual-subjective being of divine origin.

The dialogue between Sufism and American personalism, despite their development in different cultural, religious and metaphysical contexts, reveals profound parallels in their understanding of the value of the individual, their dignity and their unitive potential. Each tradition values the human subject not as a product of purely biological and cooperative determinations, but as a being of divine origin, called to non-material dimension of life. In this sense, the responsible actor is understood as an ontological and ethical center: the meaning and direction of existence are revealed in their moral freedom, self-realization before God and in their relationship with others.

Sufism interprets the human journey toward spiritual perfection as a transformation based on love and fana (fana fi`Llah). This signifies the liberation of the personhood from the ego and the attainment of oneness with the divine will. In American thought, the linkage between the man and God is the fundamental ontological condition for self-knowledge and the realization of freedom conscience. For Bowne and Brightman, freedom is the manifestation of the creative and responsible potential bestowed by God upon the self. Equally, relevant systems of thought view love and freedom as different expressions of the same metaphysical principle: while Sufism accentuates the unifying and transcendent nature of love in the realm of being, personalism presents freedom as the dynamic of the subject’s moral self-realization.

As James notes, man’s connection with God is not only a religious experience but also a fundamental ethical and existential event. Consequently, both traditions view man as a being directed toward divine unity through love and at the same time, responsible through free will. This synthesis provides a rich theoretical framework for rethinking contemporary philosophical humanism, interreligious dialogue and interior exocentrism. *“Furthermore, in Sufism, knowledge is formed not only individually but also through collective experience. Awareness gained through love influences the axiological and social behavior of the individual, deepens inner spirituality and develops capacity to create harmony with society. In this process, understanding attained through kashf (revelation) and divine grace complements scientific and rational cognition but ultimately transcends them, as it aims at the inner transformation and development of the individual and the ideal of the Perfect man (al-insan al-kamil)”* [26, p. 92]. Sufi epistemology, thus, by uniting understanding and love, offers a path that ensures in equal measure intellectual and inward maturity.

Sufi epistemology (ma`rifa), without completely rejecting rationality, combines intellectual cognition with contemplative openness in the research for information and truth. This methodological

stance views human interior experience as an active component of meaning formation; that is, the path of cognition is simultaneously a cognitive and ethical-spiritual experience. For al-Ghazali and Ibn Arabi, knowledge is not only “to know” but also “to be”: as one comprehends truth, one realizes it in one’s own being. This forms the basis of axiological transformation: the distinction between the being who cognizes and the being who realizes moral values disappears. In Sufism, the deontological system is based on mercy, humility and ontological integration with all that exists. In relation to others, one acts as a bearer of divine mercy.

This imbues the social being of the individual with metaphysical meaning: mercy directed toward another is an outward manifestation of love directed toward God. The metaphysical foundation here rests on the principle of the Unity of Being (*wahdat al-wujud*), which asserts that all creation is a manifestation of the names and attributes of God. *“Sufi ethics emphasizes the refinement of the nafs through responsibility, compassion and spiritual awakening and situates virtue-based behavior within the broader metaphysical unity of creation”* [19, p. 246]. Ultimately, Sufi ethics, on both the philosophical and experiential levels, unites the inner development of the moral agent with the process of realizing the godlike qualities of compassion and wisdom – that is, connects “mystical ontology” with practice. American personalism, although rooted in a different philosophical transcultural theistic humanism, develops a number of these ideas in a parallel direction.

For American thought reality “entirely personal”; humans are free, purposeful and value-driven beings. Essentially, this approach represents a metaphysical humanism that affirms the axiological subjectivity of man and his ontological connection with God. American school, rejecting impersonal materialism and determinism, defines man as the virtuous subject of his own destiny. Here, liberty articulates freedom of choice together with the fundamental structure of duty. *“Responsibility is the cornerstone of subjective ethics; it transforms the individual from a passive observer into a morally active participant”* [24, p. 294].

For Bowne and Brightman, freedom is a person’s ability to consciously create and realize values; therefore, the essence of the value-laden act lies in the harmonization of will, consciousness and value. God is conceived of as the Personal Absolute – the supreme Person who provides the foundation of normative order and freedom and is the source of values. This understanding demonstrates that human value is based not on relativity, but on absoluteness, rooted in the personality of God. Subjective morality, in this sense, is a theonomous ethical framework: human freedom is not limited by the existence of God; on the contrary, it gains meaning in covenantal tie with Him. *“The transcendental self is revealed not in solitude, but within a network of relationships that reflects and responds to the divine source of value”* [24, p. 301]. The protection of the dignity of each person, the priority of social justice and the ideal of brotherhood are the fundamental principles of this ethical system; this is especially evident in the humanistic philosophical views of Martin Luther King, Jr.

Methods. The research methods utilize comparative philosophical, hermeneutic and phenomenological approaches. Through these methods, the Sufi concept of knowledge is interpreted in dialogue with modern personalist epistemology, resulting in the proposal of a new principle – the “epistemology of ethical engagement”. Classic Sufi texts (Ibn Arabi, Rumi, al-Ghazali and others) are analyzed in conjunction with contemporary philosophical categories of spiritual experience, being and knowing. The originality of the study lies in the fact that these two schools of thought are systematically analyzed within the context of an axiological-philosophical dialogue.

Results. Thus, the dialogue between Sufism and American personalism demonstrates that the phenomenon of the human being must be studied in local or religious contexts, in addition to in a global philosophical dimension. Both traditions strive to affirm human spiritual freedom, restore meaning and rethink values. A new perspective emerging from their synthesis is capable of promoting equally individual meaning-oriented formation and rebuilding society on evaluative foundations. They seek to answer fundamental questions about the origins of human ontological value, freedom and responsibility. In modern conditions of technological development, environmental crisis and collective fragmentation, there is an urgent need to develop new frameworks for understanding the essence of man.

Discussion. Comparing Sufism and personalism, we see that both traditions reject reductionism and utilitarian thinking, opposing the explanation of man solely in public or economic categories. Their shared value-laden position affirms the inseparability of moral freedom and human accountability. For each model, the individual, as they turn to God, recognizes their inner essence and answerability to others. However, differences are also evident: Sufism relies more heavily on mystical union and symbolic-poetic expression, while American theory remains within the framework of a rational-theistic perspective, emphasizing aspects of a civic justice and public axiological order. These differences are not contradictory; on the contrary, they form a relationship of complementarity: Sufism strives for self-perfection through inner purification and an ethic of divine love, while personalism strives for public harmony through an ethic of freedom and communal responsibility. In this sense, each system constitutes the fundamental pillars of an integral anthropology that understands man in interface with God jointly in metaphysical and group-oriented dimensions. In the Azerbaijani context, this dialogue is particularly relevant, as the classical stage of Azerbaijani Sufism – in the legacy of thinkers such as Nizami, Nasimi and Fuzuli is distinguished by the richness of both universal humanism and spiritual aesthetics.

In their works, the ideas of man's divine origins and his ascent to perfection through love and freedom of spirit reflect the fundamental principles of Sufism. Nizami's ideal of the "perfect man" and Fuzuli's philosophy of "love" present man as a living bearer of divine harmony. In contemporary philosophical discourse, rethinking these ideas and comparing them with Western trends, such as American interpretation of reality, can give new impetus to the global philosophical integration of Azerbaijani philosophical thought. Azerbaijan's multicultural and religiously tolerant environment has created fertile ground for the preservation and development of the philosophy of love, mercy and harmony inherent in Sufism. When this mystical and cultural wealth is combined with personalistic notions of human dignity, freedom and social duty, a model of intercultural dialogue and ethical synthesis is formed. Such a synthesis can point to new ways of preserving the subject and his immaterial integrity in the era of globalization, technological alienation and the decline of virtuous values.

Azerbaijani Sufism understands man not only as a spiritual being but also as the center of ontological connections. Ibn Arabi's notion of *wahdatal-shujud* in this regard describes man as a bridge between God and the cosmos, as a conscious embodiment of divine truth. In American theory, man is also valued as an individual created in the image of God; this serves as the fundamental philosophical foundation substantiating man's inner freedom and moral obligation.

As noted in H. Jonas's "The principle of Responsibility" (1984), personality is defined by freedom as well as by ethical answerability toward existence and future generations. In this sense, parallels exist between the unitive self-awareness of Azerbaijan philosophy, Sufism and the theocentric humanism of personalism: in all mentioned systems, man is conceptualized as a simultaneously creative and responsible. A profound spiritual analogy can be traced between Levinas's (1998) idea of "responsibility to the Other" and the principles of "love and self-sacrifice" in Sufism: the devotee can realize their orientation toward God only through compassion toward the Other. In this regard, the Azerbaijani philosophical milieu, particularly the legacy of Fuzuli and Nasimi resonates deeply with the normative categories of personalism. The similarity between Ricker's (1992) ethic of "self-understanding" and the Sufi idea of "purification of the nafs" also points to the theocentric, rather than anthropocentric nature of this dialogue. In the intellectual heritage of Azerbaijan, the synthesis of these two trends demonstrates the depth of national philosophical thought and its universal openness. Such a dialogue represents not just a comparison but also a process of mutual enrichment, paving the way for the formation of a new ethical and philosophical model for understanding the essence of the human person. *"Contemporary Sufi thinkers are rethinking the classical categories of purification, sincerity and interior struggle in accordance with the ethical challenges of the 21st century"* [19, p. 234]. There are significant parallels between Jonas's "principle of responsiveness" and Levinas's "ethics of responsibility to the Other" on the one hand and the Sufi ethics of "love and mercy" on the other. Each dimension of thought evaluates the human relation to existence not only at the level of knowledge

and will, but also through the prism of moral duty and love. *“Both personalism and the Islamic mystical tradition assume that the individual is formed through a relationship with the Divine”* [11, p. 209].

Conclusion. There are ontological and ethical parallels between the Sufi category of al-insan al-kamil (the perfect man) and the American notion of the “mystical personality”. Proper conceptual lens view humans not simply as biological or social beings, but as transcendental and subjective entities, in an ontological rapport with God. *“In each discursive formation, the spiritual self is formed through self-discovery, love, and active participation in the divine purpose”* [11, p. 215]. In Sufism, this process unfolds through spiritual proximity to God, cultivated by humility, love and existential self-sacrifice; in personalism, through free will and responsible choices directed toward the honorable ideals of the Absolute being – God. The point of contact between these two methodological stances is the understanding of the human non-material essence as a process of internal transformation and communal accountability. In contemporary philosophical discourse, these ideas possess metaphysical as well as with anthropological and sociological significance. In the context of self-isolation, the commercialization of sacred values and the growing role of the “digital self”, Sufism and personalism offer a philosophical alternative that returns the self to the position of “unitive center”. American theory forms an integrative approach to epistemology, ethics and societal practice. The self is viewed as an individual subject combined with as a member of a community, a social participant and a bearer of transcendental responsibility. This is one of the key points of parallelism with Sufism: in both traditions, the man achieves equally inner and civic perfection through relationship with God. American account systematizes this in a contemporary socio-pragmatic context, transforming these propositions into a holistic model uniting axiological, epistemological and public function. However, this synthesis is not limited to simple comparison; it can lay the foundations for a new philosophical synthetic orientation – “ethical theocentrism”. This framework articulates humanity not within the narrow confines of Western rationalism or Eastern mysticism, but as a subject simultaneously oriented toward God and responsible in the world. This perspective conceives of humanity as the bearer of cosmic unity and value-oriented society. In contrast to the rigid intellectualism of European rationalism, the American intellectual milieu emphasized the subject’s inner experience, creative selfhood and mystical freedom. Thus, American interpretation, synthesizing the virtuous potential of individualism with moral obligation, community-based solidarity and transcendental purpose, formed a new model of personalistic humanism. Within this model, the person is understood not only as a social being or an abstract metaphysical category, but as an active subject in a spiritual bond with God.

In the history of American philosophical thought, the process of cognition takes on particular significance with personalism. Here, cognition, is not realized solely on a general and abstract level; it is formed through concrete fragments, events and objects. In this sense, understanding the world is impossible without rational thought. Rational thinking becomes effective only when it is directed at a specific event, movement or object; only then is a dialogue between subject and object initiated and knowledge is fully realized. The objective existence of time and space also plays an important role in the process of cognition: they become means of cognition only when, in individual experience, they are directed toward a specific problem and function distinctly. This perspective emphasizes the subject’s active self-understanding of the world through experience. From Bowne’s perspective, personalism precisely expresses this path of cognitive transformation; namely, the world, time and space can be fully and meaningfully understood only to the extent that they are personalized. It follows that for American thought, cognition unites an epistemological act and an ethical-ontological process: the acquisition of knowledge by a subject is inextricably linked with his understanding of existence and his moral position.

Sufi metaphysics and ethics form a comprehensive structure aimed at human transformation on both the personal and collective levels. Within this framework, the individual, as the bearer of divine being, simultaneously becomes the subject of value-oriented responsibility. Thus, Sufism represents a spiritual teaching as well as a philosophical and axiological integrity that harmonizes

the ontological, epistemological and social development of the moral agent. Its comparison with American account allows for a richer and more open understanding of the subjective-mystical experience of the personhood and their socio-ethical obligations. This comparative analysis explores the philosophical foundations of Sufism not only within a historical and religious context but also in relation to contemporary philosophical anthropology and duty-based discourse.

Ultimately, the philosophical dialogue between Sufism and American personalism promotes the return of the human subject to the center of the value system, the restoration of inner existential dimension and reconciliation of freedom with responsibility. This approach can serve as a key direction in contemporary philosophical anthropology, axiological theology and global spiritual thinking.

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Гарасєва Гюнель Алініяз
доктор філософії, доцент,
кафедра філософії та соціальних наук
Азербайджанський університет мов
вул. Рашида Бейбутова, 134, Баку, Азербайджан
orcid.org/0000-0002-0861-634X

Халілов Руслан Ніяз
аспірант,
викладач кафедри політичних наук та філософії
Хазарський університет
вул. Мехсеті, 41, Баку, Азербайджан
orcid.org/0009-0007-5394-0740

СУФІЗМ ТА ПЕРСОНАЛІЗМ: ФІЛОСОФСЬКІ ТА ЕТИЧНІ КОНЦЕПЦІЇ БОГА ТА ОСОБИСТОСТІ

У цій статті порівнюється та аналізується суфізм та американський персоналізм як дві різні інтелектуальні традиції. Хоча вони виникли в різних історичних та культурних контекстах, вони концептуалізували людину як носія моральних цінностей, гідності, творчого потенціалу, духовного втілення. Тасаввуф виражає єднання з Богом та духовну подорож до божественної любові, цей шлях являє собою глибоку онтологічну трансформацію суфійського практикуючого. У сучасному світі криза ідентичності, культурний конфлікт, релятивізм у моралі змінили цінність людства, і з цієї причини діалог суфійських та персоналістських течій є новим високоцінним філософським підходом. Координація духовної глибини ісламсько-східної філософії та американо-західної етики відповідальності як соціальної проблеми відкриває нові досягнення в культурному діалозі та індивідуальному самовдосконаленні. Синтез суфізму та американського персоналізму створює нову модель «духовного гуманізму», де етичні та антропологічні паралелі є новою систематичною аналітичною ідентифікацією. На основі філософського синтезу формулюється ідея «транскультурного персоналізму, вбудованого в духовну відповідальність». Порівняльні філософські ідеї створюють духовно-філософську основу: від суфізму вона запозичує ідеї любові, містичної інтуїції, онтологічної єдності, від персоналізму виводить раціональне обґрунтування відповідальності, свободи, людської гідності. Через цю діалектичну інтеграцію людина сприймається як метафізичне відображення абсолютної сутності та як етико-суб'єктивний актор в історичному процесі. Обидві філософські школи стверджують, що людина несе відповідальність перед людством та Богом. Суфізм бачить виконання цих обов'язків у духовній досконалості, в тому ж питанні персоналізм реалізує це, розуміючи важливість соціальної відповідальності та етичної свідомості. Зрештою, суфійська філософія про «мовчазну подорож, що веде людське існування до Божественного» резонує з американським персоналізмом у його розумінні прояву Бога в людині. Кожне філософське дослідження оцінює людину як центр духовного всесвіту та стверджує, що божественна цінність людини є найважливішою філософською істиною. Загалом, цей підхід забезпечує продуктивну концептуальну основу не лише для міжрелігійної зустрічі, але й для еволюції гуманізму в глобальній філософській думці. Виходячи з діалогу ісламського містицизму та американо-західного персоналізму у XXI столітті, дискусія пропонує значний філософський напрямок для переосмислення концепцій людяності, відповідальності, духовності.

Ключові слова: суфізм, персоналізм, гідність, духовність, етичні принципи, особистість.

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