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The issue of Rejection of Positivist and Materialist Reflections in Turkish Thought

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The movement of westernization, which started with *Tanzimat* (re-organization of the Ottoman Empire), cannot be ignored while evaluating the reflections of positivist and materialist philosophies on our tradition of thought. It is also the factor which has determined our modernization adventure. As a reflection of the general character of the period, the classic education provided in madrasas was abandoned, and Western-style educational institutions became widespread, starting with military schools. The first confrontation with the Western thought was through the intelligentsia going to France and foreign teachers lecturing in educational institutions. Furthermore, the rich copyrighted and translated works about natural sciences representing materialist and positivist thoughts found in the libraries of newly opened schools made a considerable contribution to the process. The liberty introduced through the First Constitutional Era and the Second Constitutional Era accelerated the dissemination and development of new ideas. The central influence of especially French scientific and philosophical circles on our culture manifested itself through copyrighted and translated works. German philosophy was also introduced through what Ottoman intelligentsia read in French. Men of literature and the Committee of Union and Progress had the biggest influence on the introduction of positivism to Turkey. Among them, Beşir Fuat personally exerted a big effort for positivism to be known in Turkey. His effort to introduce Emile Zola

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and literary naturalism is an example of this. The positivist movement also made an attempt to reach the masses through *Servet-i Fünûn* and *Ulûm-u İktisadiye ve İçtimaiye* magazines (Korlaelçi, 1986: 377–378). We have a lot of philosophers under the influence of positivism. Among them, Ahmet Rıza adopted A. Comte and Pierre Lofffite as a master; Hüseyin Cahit adopted Hippolyte Taine as a master; Ahmet Şuayp adopted H. Taine and Gustave Flaubert as a master; and Ziya Gökalp adopted Emele Durkheim as a master. We see the reflections of A. Comte on our world of thought as a philosopher whom all of these thinkers saw as a master (1986: 380).

Another idea movement entering the country together with positivism in that period was materialism. Translations from the Western literature played the biggest part in the introduction of materialism to Turkey. Various magazines also had an important role in that process. The disordered and unmethodical works of Hoca Tahsin, Beşir Fuat, and Ahmet Mithat paved the required way for materialism to enter Turkey. However, the main conscious and systematic activity started with *İçtihad Mecmuası* issued by Dr. Abdullah Cevdet in 1904 and *Piyano, Yirminci Asırda Zekâ*, and *Felsefe Mecmuası* issued by Baha Tevfik and his friends after the beginning of the Second Constitutional Era in 1908. This movement also involved Subhi Edhem, Memduh Süleyman, Dr. Edhem Necdet, Celal Nuri, and Dr. Abdullah Cevdet besides Baha Tevfik. Attitudes towards Islam got obvious as Abdullah Cevdet translated and published Reinhard Dozy's book entitled "The History of Islam" (Toku; 1995: 74). Gaining strength in the West as of the 19th century, positivism and materialism turned to be the central point of religious, philosophical, and political debates under the influence of naturalism, Marxism, and Darwinism. Positivist and materialist influences mostly manifested themselves as opposition to tradition and religion under the name of Westernization. This opposition instigated progressivism vs. reactionism debates in social life. Apart from these activities about classical materialism, materialism influenced social life in political terms for the most part. Thus, especially after 1919, dialectical materialism was defended by İştirakçi Hüseyin Hilmi, Dr. Tevfik Nevzat, Mustafa Subhi, and Dr. Şefik Hüsnü. They expressed their ideas in *İnsaniyet*, *İştirak*, *Sosyalist*, and *İdrak* newspapers and *Kurtuluş* magazine

(Akgün, 1988:495–4969). Among our intellectuals under the influence of materialism, Baha Tevfik was influenced by Büchner and Haeckel; Subhi Ethem was influenced by Lamarck, Darwin, A. Comte, and Büchner; Dr. Ethem Necdet was influenced by Lamarck and Darwin; Celal Nuri was influenced by Büchner; and Dr. Abdullah Cevdet was influenced by Cabanis, Karl Vogt, and Büchner. The master influential on all these intellectuals was Büchner (1988:498).

Vulgar materialism identified with Ludwig (Louis) Büchner’s (1824–1899) “Matter and Force” had a cogent and tempting quality in the Ottoman-Islamic world of thought through a clear and understandable presentation of materialism. Büchner attributed the materialist belief of his generation to the inseparability of matter and force and argued that matter and force are immortal. He accepts matter and force as things that are eternal and impossible to destruct and eliminate (Büchner, 2012: 378). This idea of Büchner was used by those who tried to show, with the following slogan, that matter and force are indestructible and are in continuous circulation through an endless cycling: “There is neither force without matter nor matter without force”. From this aspect, the above-mentioned work led to a lot of debates in the Turkish thought that supported or opposed it.

A lot of critical works were written to criticize the materialist ideas and views in Büchner’s work entitled *Matter and Force*. Among these works, a remarkable one was put forward by İsmail Ferid under the title of *İbtâl-i Mezheb-i Maddiyun*. This work attracts attention with its controversial and critical approach whereby he deals with the results of modern science at the level of speculative arguments of metaphysics while trying to rebut, with a dialectical manner, the meta-scientific and metaphysical arguments of Büchner that overstep the limits of scientific research though they are based on the findings of natural sciences (Utku-Sepenhri, 2012:7). In his criticisms on the basis of the difference between truth and falsehood, he opines that what is truth has to be taken, and Islam is the truth itself (İsmail Ferid, 2012: 326). That shows that that in the issue of rejection, religious and sufistic traditions were brought to the forefront by him rather than a philosophical opposition. However, although the oppositions derived from a religious motive,

they were identified with the field of philosophy by many. An example is the tendency of Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi for philosophical thoughts in his work entitled “Huzur-ı Akl’ü Fende Maddiyyun Meslek-i Dalaleti” (Toku, 1995: 74). Though he had an Islamic mentality, he tried to have a scientifically objective and logically consistent attitude towards materialism (Uludağ, 2012: 19).

Another criticism to the reflections of positivist philosophy and materialist philosophy on Turkish life of thought came from Ahmed Midhat. Based on the existence of human beings themselves against the attempt of materialism to deny Allah, he objected to the insistence of materialists on denying the creator with his following words: “you see, we’ve already proved our own body and our own existence? My existence is the evidence of the existence of the creator” (Ahmed Mithad, 2012:116). Emin Feyzi expressed his rejection in his work entitled *İlim ve İrade*. His criticisms were not only to the monistic materialism of Büchner but also to Marx, Engels, and evolutionism. With the statement, “Nobody can deny the existence of a creative power of the universe. However, such power has to incorporate characters such as competence, wisdom, and will. When this is proved, other characters such as hearing and seeing also come out by their very nature, and materialism is condemned to downfall (Emin Feyzi, 2012:107)”, Emin Feyzi indicates that his aim is to ensure that nobody can deny the existence of the creative power. Emin Feyzi’s rejection is based on the doctrine of unity of existence which he refers to as sufistic truth. From the same perspective, in his criticisms to materialist philosophy, İsmail Fenni (Ertuğrul) used Ghazali’s *Tehafutu’l-Felasife* (İsmail Fenni, 2014: 21, 22) as an example of the fact that they accepted those things which Islamic scholars acting reasonably approved, but rejected those things which they disapproved. In addition, the research of Ş.Ahmet Hilmi and İsmail Fenni on the Western thought reflects a synthesizing perspective on the points on which Eastern and Western thinkers agree, including studies in the field of science.

M. Ali Ayni was another philosopher focusing on the issue of rejection. He compiled his criticisms on thinkers and concepts in his work entitled *İntikad ve Mülahazalar*. In the articles which he compiled in this

work, he criticized especially Baha Tevfik, Memduh Süleyman, and Suphi Ethem for the mistakes they made in the translations from French that were aimed at disseminating materialist thought. In addition, in his book entitled *Reybiilik, bedbinlik, La-ilâhîlik nedir?* Which he wrote as a rebuttal to the book of Tevfik Fikret entitled *Tarih-i Kadim*, he argued that Tevfik Fikret poisoned the youth with this rebellious attitude and promoted suspicion and rebellion (Akdemir, 1998:17, 26).

Another rejectionist group was Islamists who had stronger religious feelings. Among the representatives of these ideas expressed in *Sirat-ı Müstakim* and *Sebilürreşad* magazines were Babanzade Naim, İsmail Hakkı İzmirli, Şemseddin Günaltay, Musa Kazım, C. Efgani, M. Abduh, M. İkbâl, Sait Halim Paşa, Mehmed Akif, and M. Hamdi Yazır. The circle of N. Fazıl who was influenced by Bergson's intuitionism and preserved the mystical and metaphysical tension, Sezai Karakoç who tried to develop an Islamic existence by taking inspiration from Christian existentialists and his friends, and N. Topçu, the representative of M. Blondel's "action" philosophy, can also be included in this group (Bolay, 1979: 23-24).

When we make a general evaluation of the rejections developed against the influences of positivist and materialist currents on the Turkish thought, we can see the following issues: The ontological and epistemological criticisms put forward involve certain conflicts within themselves. The reason is the point of origin of knowledge and existence in positivism and materialism. While these philosophical currents reach the true knowledge on the basis of sensation, experiment, and phenomenon, rejectionists object to them based on intuitive, rational, and revealed knowledge. That makes us confront with the conflict of reducing the concepts of knowledge coming from different sources to one another. When we look at the concepts of existence from the same perspective, we see that it is acknowledged that the perception of positivists and materialists regarding real existence is based on matter (e.g. atom, object, force). According to rejectionists, however, real existence is non-material (e.g. spirit, mind, the unseen) and metaphysical. That, on the other hand, paves the way for us to fall into the mistake of accepting two separate areas of reality that never overlap as differences in a single area.

Another problem is that positivist and materialist influences created an environment of polarization where the supporters of traditionalism faced off against those of modernity at the triangle of religion, science, and philosophy. Based on their positivist and materialist thoughts, philosophers such as Beşir Fuat, Abdullah Cevdet, Celal Nuri, Baha Tevfik, and Ahmed Nebil, who were the supporters of the tradition of modernization, grounded their arguments on religion, science, and philosophy, the achilles' heel of traditionalists. It can be argued that the source of the oppositions of those who object positivist and materialist influences is the fact that these ideas reduce the entire natural order, the mental processes of human being, society, ethics, and what is political to mechanical determinist principles. This is because; rejectionists are of the opinion that these ideas render philosophy and religion unnecessary. Against them stood rejectionists such as Fatma Aliye, İsmail Ferit, Harputizade Hacı Mustafa, Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi, Emin Feyzi, Mehmet Ali Ayni, and İsmail Fenni with spiritualist philosophy, idealist philosophy, Bergson's philosophy, and action philosophy. Ghazali and İbn Arabi are among the most important references of the rejectionists. Especially the rejectionists such as İsmail Fenni, Ferit Kam, Mehmet Ali Ayni, and Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi focused on the concept of unity of existence, which constitutes the ontological basis of Sufism.

Our concluding evaluation is as follows: Rejections put forward against the positivist and materialist reflections on Turkish thought did not have much influence. Though the above-mentioned problems are the main reasons for this, there are also other non-ignorable ones. The primary one is the success of the Western modernism, which emerged as of the Renaissance and the Reformation, in science and technology. The regression undergone by the Islamic world contrary to such success of the West both increased intellectuals' admiration for the West and transformed Westernization into a goal to achieve. The fear of losing partial freedom and independence in the Islamic world was added to it. That caused the rejectionist thinkers to keep on defending rather than putting forward new things. Moreover, they failed to produce a new philosophical language against positivist and materialist influences. It can be said that in the issue of rejection, religious and sufistic traditions came to the forefront rather than a philosophical opposition though they had a common discourse with Western scientists in matters related to natural science.

Abstract

The issue of Rejection of Positivist and Materialist Reflections in Turkish Thought

The influence of the adventure of modernization on the reflections of positivist philosophy and materialist philosophy on our tradition of thought cannot be ignored. In this process, French scientific and philosophical circles had a central influence on our culture through copyrighted and translated works. In addition, German philosophy was introduced through what the Ottoman intelligentsia read in French. Especially the positivist, materialist, and naturalistic influences created an environment of polarization where the supporters of traditionalism faced off against those of modernity at the triangle of religion, science, and philosophy. Based on their positivist and materialist thoughts, thinkers such as Beşir Fuat, Abdullah Cevdet, Celal Nuri, Baha Tevfik, and Ahmed Nebil, who were the supporters of the tradition of modernization, grounded their arguments on religion, science, and philosophy, the achilles' heel of traditionalists. Against them stood rejectionists such as Fatma Aliye, İsmail Ferit, Harputizade Hacı Mustafa, Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi, Emin Feyzi, Mehmet Ali Ayni, and İsmail Fenni, who were against the positivist and materialist influences and grounded their arguments on spiritualist philosophy, idealist philosophy, Bergson's philosophy, and action philosophy. However, it can be said that in the issue of rejection, religious and sufistic traditions came to the forefront rather than a philosophical opposition.

Keywords: Positivism, materialism, idealism, spiritualism, rejection, Turkish thought

Öz

Türk Düşüncesinde Pozitivist ve Materyalist Yansımaların Reddiyesi Sorunu

Düşünce geleneğimizde pozitivist ve materyalist felsefenin yansımalarını modernleşme serüveninden bağımsız düşünmek mümkün değildir. Bu süreçte Fransız bilim ve felsefe çevrelerinin kültürümüz üzerindeki merkezi etkisi telif ve tercüme eserler aracılığı ile gerçekleşmiştir. Ayrıca Alman Felsefesi de Osmanlı aydınlarının Fransızca okumaları üzerinden aktarılmıştır. Özellikle pozitivist, materyalist ve natüralist etki din, bilim ve felsefe üçgeninde gelenek-modernite tartışmalarıyla taraf olanlarla karşı olanların kutuplaştığı bir soruna dönüşmüştür. Modernleşme geleneğinin taraftarları olan Beşir Fuat, Abdullah Cevdet, Celal Nuri, Baha Tevfik ve Ahmed Nebil gibi düşünürler pozitivist ve materyalist düşüncelerden hareketle gelenekçilerin yumuşak karnı olan din, bilim ve felsefe üzerinden tartışmaları yürütmüşlerdir. Bunun karşısında pozitivist ve materyalist etkiye karşı Fatma Aliye, İsmail Ferit, Harputizade Hacı Mustafa, Filibeli Ahmet Hilmi, Emin Feyzi, Mehmet Ali Ayni ve İsmail Fenni gibi reddiyeci düşünürler ise spiritüalist, idealist, Bergsoncu ve aksiyon felsefesi ile karşı duruş sergilemişlerdir. Ancak reddiye sorununda felsefi karşı duruştan daha çok dini ve tasavvufi geleneklerin daha çok öne çıktığını söyleyebiliriz.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Pozitivizm, materyalizm, idealizm, spiritüalizm, reddiye, Türk düşüncesi

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