> *Reason is never so versatile as when*
> *it puts itself in question*
> Emmanuel Levinas**

MODERNITY, RISK AND SOCIETY AN INTRODUCTION WITH SOME REFLECTIONS

ABSTRACT
Risk is a concept that has key position in the attempt of understanding and theorising contemporary societies. Among others U. Beck and A. Giddens especially have deployed the concept effectually in an effort in understanding contemporary society. Risk substantially represents a comprehension giving weight to a technical reading of the systemic crisis. This essay insists on the possible ethic and politic implications of the case of the risk characterising contemporary societies.
Keywords: Risk, Modernity, Rationality, Reflexivity, Ethic

MODERNİTE, RİSK VE TOPLUM BIR GIRIŞ VE BAZI YORUMLAR

ÖZET
Risk, çağdaş toplumları anlama ve teorileştirme girişiminde anahtar konuma sahip bir kavramdır. Diğerleri arasında özellikle U. Beck ve A. Giddens, çağdaş toplumu anlama çabasında risk kavramını etkili bir biçimde seferber etmektedir. Risk, özünde, ağırlığı sistemsel krizin teknik okumasına kaydıran bir kavrayışı temsil eder. Bu makale, çağdaş toplumları karakterize eden risk durumunun olası etik ve politik içerimleri üzerinde durmaktadır.
Anahtar Kelimeler: Risk, Modernite, Rasyonalite, Düşünümsellik,
                                     Etik

** Quoted from *Facing Modernity: Ambivalence, Reflexivity and Morality* by Barry SMART, 1999, London: Sage Publications

1. INTRODUCTION (GIRIŞ)

The Enlightenment was a massive project through which humanity would get rid of its 'dark side' by establishing sovereignty of Reason over all aspects of life and therefore would get hold of control over nature. The vital notion of that idea, Reason with capital 'R' was, as pointed out by I. Kant in his answer to the question of 'What is the Enlightenment?', loaded the mission of emancipating humanity from not being adult, a case to which it falls down because of its own fault.[1] Some authors might argue that Reason has emancipated humanity from its 'dark side' and make it more free than even before; if so, it is certain that this has been succeeded at the expense of bigger cost.

2. RESEARCH SIGNIFICANCE (ÇALIŞMANIN ÖNEMİ)

In this phase of modernity humanity confronts such a condition that the arguments of Enlightenment seem to represent only a deep disappointment. Some of the words that best describe the conditions humanity experiences in the threshold of the twenty-first century are alienation, war, chaos, fear, danger, risk, etc.

3. RISK AND MODERNITY (RISK VE MODERNITE)

Modern civilization appearing now global in scale and scope is increasingly recognized to be a source of costs as well as benefits, risks as well as securities, and there is broad agreement that all is not as well as it might, should, or perhaps could be. However, diagnoses of the state and fate of the modern condition vary enormously and whereas for some analysts evidence of limitations testifies to the possible limits of the modern project itself, perhaps to a crisis of modernity, possibly the advent of a new condition of 'postmodernity', for others current problems do not evidence of an insuperable crisis of modernity, rather they indicate the need to modernize modernity itself (Smart, 1999: 67), a view exemplified well in the position of J. Habermas. Among those who could be regarded in the latter camp Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens are also prominent figures and they do not seem to represent ideas on modernity as conservative as that of Habermas. They refer a concept of 'risk' to explain conditions of modernity we all experience and to deal with questions posed by and/or relating to it. In this context they put in the central of their argument the notion of 'reflexive modernity' to which we look over briefly and on which we try to develop some reflections in this text.

'Reflexivity' itself is essentially contained all of the insight relating to modernity. In his analyse Smart (1999: 68-70) points out this crucial aspect of modernity when he says 'In so far as modernity constitutes a form of life in which a questioning reason is central, then it might be argued that from its inception modernity has tended to be reflexive'. So 'What we experience and know as modernity is formed through endless processes of reflexive structuring, de-structuring and restructuring in which forms of knowledge are generated and adopted or applied', Smart adds, 'and as they contribute thereby to the complex unintended as well as intended transformation of the processes and practices which have constituted the focus or object of inquiry, they are simultaneously exposed through reflexivity

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[1] See KANT, Immanuel, '"Aydınlanma Nedir?" Sorusuna Yanıt' (1784), in *Seçilmiş Yazılar*, 1984, collected and translated in Turkish by Nejat Bozkurt, İstanbul: Remzi Kitabevi Yayınları. This idea imply that human mind would emancipated from all of the chains by daring to use her/his own reason without appealing to the guidance of someone else. Yet, in the process at issue the 'necessity of guidance' and therefore the role of legislator also did not delay to arise.. See BAUMAN, Zygmunt, 1996, *Yasa Koyucular İle Yorumcular*, translation in Turkish by Kemal Atakay, İstanbul: Metis Yayınları

to the necessity of revision'. In other words, the reflexive character of modernity involves the actual or potential modification of processes and practices in the light of new knowledge, as well as the continually necessary revision of forms of knowledge in the light of transformed processes and practices.[2] So reflexivity itself have already been a principal characteristic of modernity from the beginning but in the 'late-modernity' conditions, on which different reflections have been developed by various analysts and commentators through variety of ways or paradigms, 'reflexivity' has gained great importance as a central notion. It constitutes a common theme to which turned by almost all of those social theorists reflect on the current condition of modernity. In Smart's words,

> 'While there may be differences between analysts in their respective conceptualizations and diagnoses of the current condition of modernity there does appear to be a considerable degree of agreement that reflexivity constitutes a distinctive and significant feature. (…) (That is) whether prevailing conditions are considered to be more appropriately wrapped up by a notion of the "modern", qualified in different ways as radical, risk-ridden, hyper, or disorganized, or the "postmodern", with whatever qualifications, reflexivity is now widely acknowledged to be a significant feature of present conditions' (Smart, 1999: 8).

However 'reflexivity' has become the focus of a more specific theoretical undertaking on late-modern condition. As noted earlier, in such an effort Ulrich Beck and Anthony Giddens put forward reflexivity as a paradigm through which late-modern condition is comprehensively dealt with. According to them the present conditions of modernity can be read as a process of 'reflexive modernization' leading to the development of a 'risk society'.

To Giddens, risk society is built on two complementary processes that both engender more reflexivity than even before and make it unavoidable: the 'end of nature' and the 'end of tradition'. The first means that the environment in which we live has become gradually something that formed by what we *do* make rather than certain boundaries of what we *can* make (O'Brien, 2001: xxxi). For Giddens, it indicates the 'end of nature' that the anxiety of what nature can make to humanity leaves its place to the anxiety of what human can make to the nature (Giddens, 2001: 221). In this point there is a very dilemma: humanity has both got hold of the forces of nature and lost the control over it *simultaneously*. Losing of control over nature essentially arises from direct consequences of the request of control itself as an idea and a practice. The 'end of nature' is accompanied by the 'end of tradition', the second, which means that tradition as a source of meaning have lost its power to determine human life in a world which bases on permanent change and controversy (Giddens, 1998, 2001: 126-129). When tradition dominates, individuals rarely have cause to analyse their own actions because choices are already

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[2] Meanwhile Smart calls attention to the role of social and human sciences in running that reflexivity. As he puts it, 'The social and human sciences (…) play a basic role in the reflexivity of modernity, challenging existing forms of knowledge and associated understandings of social conditions and processes by providing new knowledge, which itself is continually vulnerable to doubt and exposed to revision'. See SMART, Barry, 1999, *Facing Modernity: Ambivalence, Reflexivity and Morality*, London: Sage Publications, p.69-70. For Bauman this 'reflexivity', which reflects the irreducible nature of modern ambivalence, can be read as the collapse of intervening modern project which have revealed itself in (and been practised through) the social and human sciences. See BAUMAN, Zygmunt, *Modernlik ve Müphemlik*, 2003, translated in Turkish by İsmail Türkmen, İstanbul: Ayrıntı Yayınları, especially p.295-346

prescribed by their taken-for-granted world. Under *post-traditional* condition, however, traditions become revealed *as tradition*, and lose much of their power. Society becomes much more *reflexive* and aware of itself (Warf, 2004: 131). Alongside the perception that anything in the world can be changed through reflexive processes there comes a view of oneself and one's identity as something that involves choices, decisions, and creation. In other words the way we experience the world, as individuals, undergoes profound changes toward what Giddens calls 'self-identity' as a 'reflexively organized endeavour'. Therefore the loss of tradition means that people have to decide on their lifestyle, their relationships with people, and the sort of person they are going to be (Wallace & Wolf, 1999: 186). In conclude, both of these processes – 'end of nature' and 'end of tradition' – characterize and constitute a risk world in which all of the stabilities 'melt into air' and mor(t)al uncertainties insist themselves as existential obligations.

Like Giddens, U. Beck is also broadly concerned with how human social experience is changing as modern industrial societies face periods of uncertainty and restructuring brought about by problems inherent to their constitution. Beck's notion of the 'risk society' refers to a sense in which there has been a transition from an industrial society (in which 'natural hazards' could be regarded as fate and 'human-made hazards' could be understood within a frame of calculability that rendered them insurable and thus manageable), to a late-modern society where the hazards produced by the way society operates are incalculable, perhaps unknowable. Risk society is thus still an industrial society, yet the hazards produced by that society take on a heightened importance in human consciousness (Holloway, 2004: 40). Beck draws the line between industrial society and risk society analytically in a manner that the risk society would begin where the systems of security norms become non-operating against the dangers which come into existence as a result of taken decisions. Therefore the historical a priori of the risk society is that it has the possibility of constituting a self-threat, a self-demolition dependent on decisions. This situation indicates the fact that an era's claim of rationality and control is refuted by the consequences which are created and legitimatized through its authority (Beck, 1999: 38-40).

For Beck scientific and economic 'progress' is overshadowed by forms of risk produced by the very processes involved in such progress (Lash & Wynne, 1992; Holloway, 2004:41); as he puts it, the 'production of *wealth* is systematically accompanied by the social production of risks' (Beck, 1992: 19; Holloway, 2004: 41). These new risks (e.g. pollution, climate change) can be thought about in three ways. First, they result from science and technology, rather than being just something to which science can be applied as a solution. Second, the risks produced may have impacts over greater spatial and temporal scales than was the case in earlier industrial society – these forms of risk may affect people and places not directly involved in their causes. Third, they are often not immediately sensible to individuals; in order to become visible or interpretable as hazards they require the sensory organs of science – theories, experiments, measuring instruments. In the case of risks like climate change, however, science can be limited in predicting effects and proposing solutions. To Beck, late-modern, techno-scientific, industrial capitalist society is systematically affected by the fundamental conditions of its establishment (Holloway, 2004:41).

Beck conceptualizes this distinction between industrial society and risk society as that of 'first modernity' and 'second modernity' or 'reflexive modernization'. In his words,

'(…) The collective patterns of life, progress and controllability, full employment and exploitation of nature that were typical of this first modernity have now been undermined by five interlinked processes: globalization, individualization, gender revolution, under-employment and global risks (as ecological crisis and the crash of global financial markets). (…) If the five processes are considered more closely, it becomes clear what they have in common: namely, they are all unforeseen consequences of the victory of the first, simple, linear, industrial modernization based on the national state (the focus of classical sociology from Durkheim, Weber and Marx to Parsons and Luhmann). This is what I mean by talking of "reflexive modernization". Radicalized modernization undermines the foundations of the first modernity and changes its frame of reference, often in a way that is neither desired nor anticipated. (…) In fact, the very idea of controllability, certainty or security – which is so fundamental in the first modernity – collapses. A new kind of capitalism, a new kind of economy, a new kind of global order, a new kind of society and a new kind of personal life are coming into being, all of which differ from earlier phases of social development' (Beck, 2003: 1-2).

4. A CHANCE FOR POLITICS (SIYASET IÇIN BIR ŞANS)
The social and economic stabilities people learned to expect under conditions of 'first modernity' have been challenged by new instabilities associated with various processes of change. In part these processes are driven by the constant production of highly specialized knowledge by scientific, technical and expert organizations. In turn, this information reflects the ambiguities and complexities surrounding the types of risk that are being dealt with; that is, it is often unclear what exact casual links are responsible for ecological degradation or financial meltdown, and if this is unclear, then it is also unclear who or what is accountable. In fact, this requirement to deal with late-modern instabilities has produced a crisis in many conventional institutions (e.g. national governments) responsible for their management. This crisis is related to two characteristics of contemporary risk: first, as mentioned earlier, many of the new risks are unpredictable, perhaps unknowable, and have incalculable long-term and geographically widespread consequences; second, new risks are transnational – they have effects that extend beyond the remit of those institutions conventionally bound by national frontiers (Holloway, 2004: 41-43). Thus, while this situation might produce defensive or paralysing reactions, as Beck terms it 'counter-modernization' (Beck, 1999: 67-97), it has the capacity to produce new forms of ethical and political engagement with the world. This might include new forms of ethical and political community connecting people in geographically disparate places, and be centred on, for example, ecological issues (Holloway, 2004: 43). So this new modernity that uncertain how it will be depends upon decisions which will be taken about it. In this respect, second/reflexive modernity is essentially a 'political modernity'; a modernity which invites the 'reinvention of politics' (Beck, 1999):

'Thus, sociologically and politically, we need a paradigm-shift, a new frame of reference. This is not "postmodernity" but a second modernity, and the task that faces us is to reform

sociology so that it can provide a new framework for the reinvention of society and politics' (Beck, 2003: 2). [3]

Beck proposes the notion of 'subpolitics' to deal with politics in the context of risk society. Subpolitics take place in 'sites which were previously considered unpolitical' (Beck, 2003: 93), and implicate individuals and a range of non-governmental institutions in new forms of political practice (Holloway, 2004: 43). According to Beck, 'subpolitics' broadly refers to politics outside and beyond the representative institutions of the political system of nation-states. Thus subpolitics means *direct* politics – that is, *ad hoc* individual participation in political decisions, bypassing the institutions of representative opinion-formation (political parties, parliaments) and often even lacking the protection of the law. In other words, subpolitics means the shaping of society from below. For Beck economy, science, everyday existence, private life, all become caught up in the storms of political debate; but these do not fit into the traditional spectrum of party-political differences. Subpolitics sets politics free by changing the rules and boundaries of the political so that it becomes more open and susceptible to new linkages – as well as capable of being negotiated and reshaped (Beck, 2003: 39-40). For Beck, subpolitics which 'sets politics free by changing the rules and boundaries of the political' is exemplified by the globalized 'risk communities'. According to him 'Models of post-national risk communities may be found, for example, in the regional ecological treaties (…) in transnational communities, non-governmental organizations, or global movements, such as ecological or feminist networks' (Beck, 2003: 16).

Beck and Giddens attempt to give a detailed description of contemporary situation and to construct a comprehensive theoretical framework of it. However both of them and the theory of reflexive modernization as a whole are criticized from various points of view. According to B. Turner (1996: 152-160), who develops an influential criticism of the theory, the evaluation of risk society by Beck and Giddens depend greatly upon a special view of modern self developed by them, namely self as a project. From this point of view, in the phase of late-modernity 'reflexive self' is a fundamental characteristic of the process of withdrawal of tradition. Turner, however, asserts that what called by Beck and Giddens as reflexive self is not so much peculiar to late-modern phase. To Turner, the analysis of reflexive self in the context of risk society do not necessarily make a contribution to sociology; for there have already been in classical sociology a lot of traditions (Weber, Simmel, Nelson, Dumont and Elias) dealing with self in modernity as a reflexive project. So Turner claims that historical studies on the development of the self provide a strong criticism of the idea of 'periodization of reflexive self' upon which Giddens's view of modernization based.

5. CONCLUSIONS (SONUÇ)

Reflexive modernization as a theoretical approach carries an optimism due to its confidence in rationality. According to Beck, for

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[3] As could be seen, the conceptualization of 'second modernity' or 'reflexive modernization' can essentially be read as an alternative comment against various postmodern theses on contemporary world. In relation to this point Bryan Turner indicates that what is explicitly or implicitly tried to be done in the theory of reflexive modernization is to reject postmodernism as a reasonable alternative in social sciences and especially to render theories of postmodernization of society ineffective. See, Bryan S. TURNER, 1996, 'Benlik ve Düşünümsel Modernlik', translated in Turkish by Y. Aktay, in *Postmodernizm ve İslam Küreselleşme ve Oryantalizm*, collected by Yasin AKTAY, Abdullah TOPÇUOĞLU, Ankara: Vadi Yayınları, p. 154

example, the unforeseeable effects of modernization, the unpredictability of the consequences of techno-scientific development, may be alleviated through the cultivation of an alternative post-industrial techno-scientific practice oriented towards self-control and self-limitation (Smart, 1999: 72-73). Beck is accused of uncritically supporting a progressive, Enlightenment view of a move towards a situation of rational consensus, where reflexive modernization produces effective responses to global risks (Holloway, 2004: 45). But as Smart puts, Beck's powerful depiction of the ways in which modernization is inclined to create unanticipated new risks and threats, gives no cause for confidence that a modernization of modernity, or a rationalization of rationality, in short the emergence of a reflexive modernization, will lead to a reduction in our exposure to risk and an exponential qualitative improvement in conditions of existence (Smart, 1999: 73). Moreover, for Beck, possible responses to the ethical issues which insist themselves as existential obligations in contemporary world of ambivalence reside in such a 'rationalization of rationality' or 'modernization of modernity'. But as Levinas puts it in the quote above, it fundamentally seems that Reason can never talk about itself from an ethical viewpoint. From the angle of crisis of modernity that means to say that the question we all face in the experience of modernity is not a technical but an ethical one – as it has already been from the beginning.

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