

Science versus Religion: The Influence of European Materialism on Turkish Thought,
1860-1960

Dissertation

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Abstract

My dissertation, entitled “Science versus Religion: The Influence of European Materialism on Turkish Thought, 1860-1960,” is a radical re-evaluation of the history of secularization in the Ottoman Empire and Turkey. I argue that European vulgar materialist ideas put forward by nineteenth-century intellectuals and scientists such as Ludwig Büchner (1824-1899), Karl Vogt (1817-1895) and Jacob Moleschott (1822-1893) affected how Ottoman and Turkish intellectuals thought about religion and society, ultimately paving the way for the radical reforms of Kemal Atatürk and the strict secularism of the early Turkish Republic in the 1930s. In my dissertation, I challenge traditional scholarly accounts of Turkish modernization, notably those of Bernard Lewis and Niyazi Berkes, which portray the process as a Manichean struggle between modernity and tradition resulting in a linear process of secularization. On the basis of extensive research in modern Turkish, Ottoman Turkish and Persian sources, I demonstrate that the ideas of such leading westernizing and secularizing thinkers as Münif Pasha (1830-1910), Beşir Fuad (1852-1887) and Baha Tevfik (1884-1914) who were inspired by European materialism provoked spirited religious, philosophical and literary responses from such conservative anti-materialist thinkers as Şehbenderzade

Ahmed Hilmi (1865-1914), Said Nursi (1873-1960) and Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962).

Whereas the westernizers argued for the adoption of western modernity *in toto*, their critics made a crucial distinction between the “material” and “spiritual” sides of western modernity. Although the critics were eager to adopt the material side of western modernity, including not only the military and economic structures but also the political structures of Europe, they had serious reservations when it came to adopting European ethics and secular European attitudes toward religion. The result was two different and competing approaches to modernity in Turkish intellectual history, accompanied by great social tension, which continues to this day, between those who want to Europeanize entirely and those who want to modernize while preserving what they perceive as the “culturally authentic” spiritual core of their society.

Dedication

Dedicated to the memories of my father and my father-in-law.

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Serdar Poyraz, "Oyun Üzerine Can Sıkıcı Birkaç Söz" ("A Few Boring Words on the Game"), *Birikimler* 4 (2000): 86-92.

Fields of Study

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Chapter 1: General Introduction

Then the doctors will tell us that not only Moses, Mahomet, Christ, Luther, Bunyan and others were mad, but also Frans Hals, Rembrandt, Delacroix, and also all the dear narrow old women like our mother. Ah - that's a serious matter - one might ask these doctors, where then are the sane people?

Letter from Vincent Van Gogh to Theo Van Gogh Arles 6 August 1888

At least since the publication of Bernard Lewis' *The Emergence of Modern Turkey*, Ottoman and Turkish studies have been obsessed with the idea of an almost Manichean struggle between “modernity” and “tradition”. According to Lewis, “The growth of the sentiment of Turkish identity was connected with the movement away from Islamic practice and tradition, and towards Europe. This began with purely practical short-term measures of reform, intended to accomplish a limited purpose; it developed into a large-scale, deliberate attempt to take a whole nation across the frontier from one civilization to another.”¹

One may find the traces of this general idea of a clash between modernity and tradition, to varying degrees, in the works of such luminaries of the field of Turkish and

¹ Bernard Lewis, *The Emergence of Modern Turkey* (London: Oxford University Press, 1968), 3.

Ottoman studies as Niyazi Berkes and Şerif Mardin as well.² Needless to say, this assumption of a clash between modernity and tradition was also the backbone of “modernization theory,” which dominated the fields of sociology and political science in the 1960s and, without a doubt, influenced the works of Lewis,³ Berkes and Mardin.

Sociologists, such as S.N. Eisenstadt, have argued that the classical theories of modernization linking structural economic variables such as the advent of consumer capitalism and industrialization to a host of socio-political variables (like the advent of democracy, the decline of traditional beliefs and increasing secularization) are exhausted.⁴ In order to drive his point home, Eisenstadt gives references to the theories of *the end of history*⁵ and *the clash of civilizations*⁶ in which “western civilization-the seeming epitome of modernity- is confronted by a world in which traditional, fundamentalist, anti-modern, and anti-western civilizations-some (most notably, the Islamic) viewing the West with animus or disdain- are predominant.”⁷

² See, for example, Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964).

³ Honestly speaking, I do not think that Lewis shows any kind of theoretical awareness in his works at all, but there is no doubt that his works should be located within the *Zeitgeist* provided by modernization theory.

⁴ S.N. Eisenstadt, “Multiple Modernities,” *Daedalus* 129, No.1 (2000): 3.

⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

⁶ Samuel P. Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996).

⁷ Eisenstadt, 3.

Although I agree with Eisenstadt on the general point of the exhaustion of modernization theory, I do not believe that the alternatives to this theory should be sought among the Huntington-style doomsday scenarios. In fact, my study of the ideas of such so-called “conservative” and “traditional” thinkers as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi (1865-1914) and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi⁸ (1873-1960) and the responses they gave to the overtly “westernist” ideas proposed by a generation of Ottoman materialists who were under the spell of German vulgar materialism of the nineteenth century convinced me that we, the scholars of Ottoman and Turkish history, need to replace the earlier theoretical framework of modernization theory with a novel theoretical approach emphasizing the radically different ways in which the ideas of a western culture and modernity were perceived and appropriated by different segments of the Ottoman and Turkish intelligentsia.

My theoretical approach in this dissertation deliberately downplays the struggle of “modernity” and “tradition” as well as the struggle of the “West” and the “East”. These reified concepts have run their course and, I think, are no longer useful tools for understanding Ottoman and Turkish history. In my opinion, the discussion among the intellectuals of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods was *not* about “modernity” on the one hand versus “tradition” on the other. It was about the *proper strategy* for the *appropriation* of modernity in a non-European setting.

⁸ The ideas of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi are the subject of the sixth chapter. See also my “Reflections on Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: Reinterpreting the Sacred Texts in a Modern World,” paper presented at GLOW (Great Lakes Ottomanists Workshop), Notre Dame University, April 12, 2008.

So I argue that in their own ways, both the so-called “Westernists” (*Batıcılar*), such as Münif Pasha (1830-1910), Beşir Fuad (1852-1887), and Baha Tevfik (1884-1914), whose ideas I examine in the first three chapters of my dissertation, as well as their conservative critics (such as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, Mehmed Akif Ersoy (1873-1936) and Said Halim Pasha (1865-1921))⁹ were, to a large extent “modern” and even “pro-western”. The difference among people such as Abdullah Cevdet (1869-1932) and Baha Tevfik, on the one hand, and Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962),¹⁰ on the other hand, was that whereas Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik argued for the adoption of western modernity *in toto*, the second group of intellectuals made a crucial distinction between the “material” and “spiritual” sides of western modernity. Whereas this second group of intellectuals were eager to adopt the material side of western modernity (including not only the military and economic structures but also the political and governmental structures of the West), they had serious reservations when it came to adopting European modes of interpersonal behavior, morality (*ahlak*) and modern European attitudes concerning religion. It may be argued that this second group of intellectuals was trying to create a language of “cultural authenticity” in the face of an apparent need for change and modernization. In other words, although they wanted to

⁹ The ideas of Ahmed Hilmi and Said Nursi will be examined in the fifth and sixth chapters. For the ideas of Mehmet Akif Ersoy and Said Halim Pasha, see Hasan Kayalı, “Islam in the Thought and Politics of Two Late Ottoman Intellectuals: Mehmed Akif and Said Halim,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* No.19 (2001): 307-333.

¹⁰ The ideas of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar are the subject of the seventh chapter.

modernize, they wanted to modernize on their own terms. There are, of course, important differences among the arguments of Nursi, Ahmed Hilmi and Tanpınar, and I deal with these differences in the appropriate chapters of my dissertation. But the fact remains that all of these thinkers were concerned with preserving a spiritual and cultural core of Turkish culture in the face of rapid change and westernization. This obsession with an “alternative modernity” which created a common thread among the ideas of these diverse thinkers, I will argue in the conclusion of this dissertation, is *not*, politically speaking, neutral, and comes with an implicit political baggage which may be problematic.

The modern triumph of Europe, Nursi and Hilmi argued, was a strictly material affair, having almost nothing to do with any European moral or ethical superiority. In the moral, religious and spiritual realm, they continued to believe in the value of their own culture. Such intellectuals as Baha Tevfik, Ahmed Nebil and Abdullah Cevdet, on the other hand, interpreted the apparent triumph of Europe over the Ottomans (and the rest of the world, for that matter) rather differently and argued for the necessity of a radical change in the moral realm as well.

Whereas it was possible for Nursi, Hilmi and Ersoy to *selectively adopt* the material advancements associated with Europe, and utilize, if that is the correct term, these material factors in their society, such a selective cultural adoption was impossible for Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik. According to Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik, the European triumph was not only a political, economic and material affair; it was, at least partly, a *moral* affair as well. That is one of the reasons why Abdullah Cevdet and

Baha Tevfik were much more radical in their programs of modernity (and argued for a comprehensive cultural and social change) than Hilmi and Nursi, whose visions of modernity remained, in many important respects, Islamic.

I need to emphasize here, however, that all of these intellectuals shared a common language which may be described as “defensive developmentalism,” described by James L. Gelvin, among others, as a process through which these intellectuals aimed “to strengthen their states in the face of internal and external threat and to make their governments more proficient in managing their populations and their resources.”¹¹ In other words, regardless of their level of yearning for cultural authenticity, all of these intellectuals, westernist or not, were operating under the constraints of nineteenth-century European imperialism, and thus, in their emphasis on the need for “defense” and “development,” were susceptible, to various degrees, to the spell of nationalist ideas.

Although there were competing visions of modernization under the general rubric of “defensive developmentalism” in Turkey and the Middle East, it should be clear to the reader that it was the modernist vision of people such as Beşir Fuad, Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik which provided the blueprints for the social and religious policies of the early Turkish Republic.¹² The equally modernist projects of Ahmed Hilmi, Mehmed Akif

¹¹ James L. Gelvin, *The Modern Middle East: A History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 73-87.

¹² See Şükrü Hanioglu, “Blueprints for a Future Society: Late Ottoman Materialists on Science, Religion, and Art,” in Elisabeth Ozdalga, ed., *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London: RoutledgeCurzon, 2005), 28-116.

Ersoy and Said Nursi were more or less forgotten and written off in the margins of nationalist history by mainstream Kemalist authors as instances of mindless conservatism and backward thinking (*irtica-gericilik*). It is certainly ironic that these last three authors are now bestsellers in contemporary Turkey while the likes of Münif Pasha, Beşir Fuad, Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik have long since lost their positions in the public imagination.

In the context of India, Partha Chatterjee has made the important theoretical argument that anti-colonial nationalism created its domain of sovereignty in the imaginative realm, well before it began its political battle with the imperial power in the material realm:

It does this by dividing the world of social institutions and practices into two domains—the material and the spiritual. The material is the domain of the “outside,” of the economy and of statecraft, of science and technology, a domain where the West had proved its superiority and the East had succumbed. In this domain, then, Western superiority had to be acknowledged and its accomplishments carefully studied and replicated. The spiritual, on the other hand, is an “inner” domain bearing the “essential” marks of cultural identity. The greater one’s success in imitating Western skills in the material domain, therefore, the greater the need to preserve the distinctness of one’s spiritual culture. This formula is,

I think, a fundamental feature of anti-colonial nationalisms in Asia and Africa.¹³

Chatterjee, of course, writes about the colonial context of Bengal and it might be argued that the Ottoman Empire was not a colony. However, although nationalist Turkish historians might not be inclined to remember it, it is certainly true that the Ottoman Empire was a semi-colony, at least, after the foundation of the Public Debt Administration (*Caisse de la Dette Publique Ottomane/ Duyun-u Umumiye*) in 1881. Some of the state's finances were effectively under the control of a foreign body that ruled with its own bureaucracy, which would eventually have more than 5000 employees "through which it directly managed a number of revenue sources such as the tribute of some provinces, the salt and tobacco monopolies and taxes on things as diverse as silk, spirits and fisheries. After deduction of costs, these revenues were used for the servicing of the public debt."¹⁴

Of course, the establishment of the Public Debt Administration was merely the conclusion of a very complex politico-economical process, namely the vortex of global capitalism and imperialism, which affected the Ottoman Empire throughout the nineteenth century. My point is that "Europe" and "West" were not abstract ideas for Ottoman intellectuals by the late nineteenth century; these words rather referred to a concrete semi-colonial reality, the effects of which were visible in daily life. Modernity

¹³ Partha Chatterjee, *The Nation and Its Fragments* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993), 6.

¹⁴ Erik J. Zürcher, *Turkey: A Modern History* (London: I.B. Tauris, 1997), 88.

was not an “idea” to be thought about and perhaps contrasted with an imaginary “tradition,” whatever the meaning of that nebulous term might be. European modernity was a concrete experience for the intellectuals of the late Ottoman period, a reality that was becoming ever more palpable either through the “reforms” of the state, which were almost entirely defensive in nature, or through the brute presence of the Europeans in the form of economic interventions, notably the Public Debt Administration, or political/military intrusions, notably the Russo-Turkish War of 1876-1877, the Italian invasion of Libya in 1911-1912 and the Balkan Wars of 1912-1913.

The Ottoman state and intellectuals, of course, were not simply passive recipients of a modern onslaught by Europe. Nevertheless, as Müge Göçek has forcefully argued, it was the effects of war, commerce, and the Enlightenment concept of “civilization,” which shaped the parameters of Ottoman social change.¹⁵ In a nutshell, Göçek argues that the sultans introduced western-style education in the early nineteenth century to train a new social group loyal to them in those chaotic times. Yet, these “actions produced the unintended consequence of transforming three Ottoman social groups- merchants, officials, and intellectuals- into an emergent bourgeoisie segmented along religious and ethnic lines.”¹⁶ In time, Göçek continues to argue, the bureaucratic (mainly Muslim) element of this segmented bourgeoisie obliterated the commercial (mainly Christian) minority bourgeoisie, leading to the formation of the nation-state. She concludes that “as

¹⁵ Fatma Müge Göçek, *Rise of the Bourgeoisie, Demise of Empire: Ottoman Westernization and Social Change* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1996).

¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 3.

the Turkish nation-state consolidated itself at the expense of the commercial minority bourgeoisie, Turkey was relegated to the margins of the world economic and political order.”¹⁷

According to Göçek, “Westernization” in this context often alluded to an imagined transformation and had, at best, as empirical evidence, the adoption of the physical attributes of the West, namely, its mode of dress, aesthetics, and material culture. What was westernized was simply what appeared western; what appeared western in turn was a measure of social change. From a slightly different point, one may argue that westernization of consumption was easier to accomplish than westernization of production. I want to argue, however, that even this superficial change in manners and appearance was enough to worry such culturally-aware Ottoman intellectuals as Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912), who thought about cultural loss and decadence in the face of rapid modernization.¹⁸ Ahmed Midhat was not alone in his concern about “cultural authenticity” and preserving a cultural and spiritual core in the face of breakneck modernization and Westernization.

There is, in fact, a whole tradition of thinking in Ottoman and Turkish intellectual history, which, although sympathetic to political and economic liberalization and modernization, always made an exception when it came to rapid cultural and religious

¹⁷ Ibid., 3.

¹⁸ On Ahmed Midhat Efendi, see Carter V. Findley “An Ottoman Occidental in Europe: Ahmed Midhat meets Madame Gülzar, 1889,” *The American Historical Review* 103, No.1 (1998): 15-49. Also see the third chapter on Beşir Fuad.

change. The examples include the already mentioned Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Mehmed Akif Ersoy¹⁹ and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi as well as Namık Kemal (1840-1888), Said Halim Pasha (1865-1921), Nurettin Topçu (1909-1975), Cemil Meriç²⁰ (1916-1987), to a lesser extent Taha Akyol (b. 1946) and many others.²¹ It is a sad commentary on the current state of Ottoman and Turkish intellectual history that these authors remain so obscure and understudied, and that the distinctions these authors made between the “material” and “spiritual” components of western modernity remain largely unnoticed.²² This study will try to partially address this problem by studying the works

¹⁹ To his credit, in his excellent article on Said Halim Paşa and Mehmed Akif Ersoy, Hasan Kayalı argues that Mehmed Akif “agreed with Said Halim that European values, material achievements, and institutions should not be adopted wholesale to the exclusion of their indigenous counterparts and in violation of the spirit of Islamic teachings and traditions. However, Akif unmistakably urged a selective but pro-active adoption of aspects of Western civilization in order to impart vitality to existing institutions. At the same time, Mehmed Akif was much more vehemently critical of Europe for its imperialist ambition to dominate the rest of the world.... Thus, resistance to European imperialist incursions and missionary zeal had to go in tandem with embracing Europe’s science and art”: Kayalı, 314. According to Kayalı, Mehmed Akif “chastised the Westernized intellectuals for their conviction that Islam impeded progress.... he urged the intellectuals to familiarize themselves with the material achievements of Europe and condoned Western (though not missionary) education, including the dispatch of students to Europe”: Kayalı, 317.

²⁰ On Cemil Meriç, see my “Thinking about Turkish Modernization: Cemil Meriç on Turkish Language, Culture and Intellectuals,” *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 26, No. 3 (2006): 434-445.

²¹ There are some complex cases such as Celal Nuri İleri (1881-1938) who combined philosophical materialism and an appreciation of Western democratic ideals with strong anti-imperialism in foreign policy as well. I will provide more information on İleri in the fifth chapter.

²² The only examples of scholarship in Ottoman and Turkish history which deals systematically with the issue of this crucial distinction made by certain Ottoman and Turkish intellectuals between the “material” and “spiritual” sides of western modernity, as far as I know, are the recently published excellent work of Cemil Aydın and Carter V. Findley’s earlier work on Ahmed Midhat. See Cemil Aydın, *The Politics of Anti-Westernism in Asia: Visions of World Order in Pan-Islamic and Pan-Asian Thought* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007) and Carter V. Findley “An Ottoman Occidentalism in Europe: Ahmed Midhat meets Madame Gülnar, 1889,” *The American Historical Review* 103, No.1 (1998): 15-49. Also the third chapter on Beşir Fuad.

and ideas of what I consider to be the historically most significant of those authors (respectively from a philosophical, religious and literary point of view), namely Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar.

In short, a theoretically well-informed approach to the study of the Ottoman and Turkish intellectual history should be willing finally to forget about Bernard Lewis, together with all of his modernist baggage,²³ and concentrate more on theoreticians such as Partha Chatterjee instead. Let me now briefly explain the empirical content of my dissertation.

Writing about the intellectual foundations of the Committee of Union and Progress, the secret organization and later the political party of the Young Turks responsible for the 1908 Constitutional Revolution in Ottoman Turkey, Şerif Mardin noted some time ago that the members of the Committee were influenced by the biological materialism of the nineteenth century:

Regarding Ahmed Hilmi, for example, Aydın writes that “Ahmed Hilmi’s work...is particularly interesting in its affirmation of the universality and desirability of European civilization in material, economic and social progress. Yet he found contemporary European politics to be the worst in human history in terms of immorality and inhumanity....Hilmi predicted that the relativism and moral apathy of materialism would spur a crisis in European civilization and connected the fear of the awakening of Asia and Africa in the speeches of European leaders, who increasingly talked about yellow and black perils, to their recognition of Europe’s moral decline”: Aydın, 98.

²³ It is interesting to note that Bernard Lewis was the first non-Turkish scholar who was allowed by the Republican authorities to work in the Ottoman archives, and his fantastic depiction of a triumphant “modern” Turkish Republic emerging out of the “traditional” ashes of the Ottoman Empire was in complete accord with how the early Republican elite wanted to imagine history. Needless to say, this image had little to do with the intellectual realities of the late Ottoman Empire.

When we search for the intellectual roots of the Committee, we see the influence of nineteenth-century biological materialism in the Military Medical School (*Askeri Tıbbiye*). The students of the Military Medical School, as a consequence of the courses they studied, saw life as a result of biological and physiological processes....It is probable that this materialist intellectual foundation influenced the founders of the committee and that they believed that [by following materialist ideas] they would attain some sort of a “secret of the universe” (*kainat sırrı*) which would give them a power that the previous generations did not have.²⁴

More recently, Şükrü Hanioglu has argued in an excellent article that the impact of European materialism was not confined to the Committee of Union and Progress and remarked that the salient characteristic of late Ottoman materialism is “the belief in science as the exclusive foundation of a new Ottoman society....In the Ottoman context, the conception of a new society strictly regulated by scientific truth logically led to the rejection of the old basis of society-the revealed truth of Islam.”²⁵ Examining the works of Beşir Fuad, Abdullah Cevdet and Baha Tevfik, Hanioglu proposes that German vulgar materialism represented by such authors as Ludwig Büchner (1824-1899), Karl Vogt

²⁴ Şerif Mardin, “19. Yüzyılda Düşünce Akımları ve Osmanlı Devleti,” in Şerif Mardin, *Türk Modernleşmesi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1991), 98-99. (All of the translations from Ottoman Turkish, Modern Turkish and Persian in this work, unless otherwise noted, are mine.)

²⁵ Şükrü Hanioglu, “Blueprints...,” 28.

(1817-1895) and Jacob Moleschott (1822-1893)²⁶ in the nineteenth century “instantly lost its vulgarity” in the Ottoman context and became “the *Weltanschauung* of an entire educated class.”²⁷

This vulgar-materialist world-view, argues Gregory Moore in another context, conflated scientific ideas with religion by presenting the scientific arguments as if they constituted a new religion to be followed and, hence, implicitly smuggled “theistic ideas back across the frontiers of science, secreting them...in a disguised form.”²⁸ These ideas later became a versatile tool in the hands of the pragmatic politicians of early Republican Turkey for building a modern state dedicated to scientific progress.

If there is any meaning to the often used, not to say abused, term “Kemalism” at all, then this meaning should be located in the rather peculiar combination of a state-centric view favoring “Import Substitution Industrialization” in economics and a crude nationalism in politics, along with a vulgar-materialist view of science. The founder of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk (1881-1938), was himself an avid consumer of vulgar-materialist literature on science, especially biology, and religion.²⁹ When a leading

²⁶ On these figures, see Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1977). For a discussion of Ludwig Büchner, see the second chapter of this dissertation.

²⁷ Hanioglu, “Blueprints...” 83.

²⁸ Gregory Moore, *Nietzsche, Biology and Metaphor* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 7.

²⁹ Gürbüz Tüfekçi (ed.), *Atatürk'ün Okuduğu Kitaplar: Özel İşaretleri ve Düştüğü Notlar İle* (Ankara: Türkiye İş Bankası Kültür Yayınları, 1983). For the passages Atatürk carefully marked on his

Ottoman materialist, Abdullah Cevdet, visited Mustafa Kemal after the foundation of the Republic, Mustafa Kemal said to him, “Doctor, up to now you have written about many things. Now we may bring them to realization.”³⁰ Although Mustafa Kemal found it politically expedient to adopt a façade of Islamic piety from time to time, such as when he prayed together with other members of the parliament during the opening ceremonies of the Turkish parliament in 1920, he was rather straightforward in his denial of religious beliefs in private. In a book published in 1928, an English author, Grace Ellison, who traveled extensively in Turkey at that time, quotes him as saying to her around 1926-1927:

I have no religion, and at times I wish all religions at the bottom of the sea. He is a weak ruler who needs religion to uphold his government; it is as if he would catch his people in a trap. My people are going to learn the principles of democracy, the dictates of truth and the teachings of science. Superstition must go.³¹

As Andrew Mango argues, Mustafa Kemal was a “rationalist, and at least after 1924, the books he sponsored promoted a materialist and determinist ideology. An

copy of Abdullah Cevdet's *partial translation* of Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*, published as Abdullah Cevdet, trans. *Fenn-i Ruh* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i İċtihad, 1911), see pp. 200-201 of Tüfekçi's work.

³⁰ Abdullah Cevdet's letter from 1925 to his wife Fatma Hanım, quoted in Haniog̃lu, “Blueprints...,” 86.

³¹ Grace Ellison, *Turkey Today* (London: Hutchinson, 1928), 24, quoted in Andrew Mango, *Atatürk* (New York: Overlook Press, 2000), 463.

attempt to reform Islam was quickly abandoned in 1928. The view prevailing in Atatürk's circle was that a reform of Islam would be as useless as a graft on dead wood.”³²

My argument here is that this whole early Republican attitude towards science and religion cannot be understood without examining the early history of vulgar-materialism in the Ottoman context. My dissertation not only examines the historical evolution of the discourse on western science among the Turkish intellectuals influenced by German materialism but also the philosophical, religious and literary responses given to them from 1860 to 1960.

Following this general introduction, in the second chapter, I deal with the genesis of the idea of the western science in the discourse of the Ottoman intellectuals of the nineteenth century by examining the life and works of Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha (1830-1910).

In the third chapter, I deal with the ideas of Beşir Fuad (1852-1887), who should be considered the first pure materialist writing in Turkish. After giving some brief information on Fuad's life, I concentrate on the primary sources written by him, which show the unmistakable influence of the German *Vulgärmaterialismus* in general, and of Ludwig Büchner in particular, on Beşir Fuad's understanding of reality (and literary realism), which in the end led him to conclude that the artistic and literary works

³² Mango, 535.

published in the Ottoman language over the past centuries, which he deemed *unrealistic*, were now entirely useless.

Condemning an approach to art in the name of science may seem somewhat surreal, but once Beşir Fuad has defined reality, as a totality, as a “scientific” domain, it is easy for him to take the next step and condemn any other sort of approach to understanding reality, whether it is religious or artistic, as “unscientific,” hence “untrue.” In a nutshell, Beşir Fuad, in a rather crude materialistic fashion, gives almost a metaphysical meaning to the concept of the “truth,” which he argues could only be attained by science. This metaphysical concept rendered any unscientific approach to understanding reality, by definition, meaningless.

In the fourth chapter, I examine the works of Baha Tevfik, which may be considered as examples of the final *mature form* of materialist thought in the Ottoman Empire. In fact, I argue that around the time of the second constitutional revolution in the Ottoman Empire, there were two distinct branches of materialism in the empire. The first one, represented by the works of such authors as Abdullah Cevdet³³ and Celal Nuri İleri, was careful in presenting its materialist content in Islamic garb whereas the second one, represented by the works published by Tevfik and his ambitious publishing house, *Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi* (“The Library of Scientific and Philosophical Renovation”) did not use any Islamic arguments at all to present its case for materialism.

³³ On Abdullah Cevdet, see Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Bir Siyasal Düşünür olarak Dr. Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: Üçdal Neşriyat, 1981).

I deal with the first branch by examining the philosophical ideas of Celal Nuri İleri in conjunction with the works of Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi in the fifth chapter of my dissertation, and in the fourth chapter I concentrate on the second branch by analyzing the works of Baha Tevfik and his colleague Ahmed Nebil.³⁴

I argue that the theoretical vision of a future society that depends entirely on science becomes complete in the works of Baha Tevfik, who is also known for his translation of Ludwig Büchner's main philosophical work into Ottoman Turkish.³⁵ Baha Tevfik not only relegates religion to the dustbin of history, but also attempts to create a new morality (*Yeni Ahlak*),³⁶ which supposedly depends only on *individuals*³⁷ living and organizing their lives according to the dictates of empirical science. Philosophy, in his vision, is also non-existent and defined simply as the "science of the future". In other words, for Tevfik, the entire body of philosophical speculation is reduced to a vague "philosophy of science," which supposedly would enlighten the future course of science proper.³⁸

³⁴ In conjunction with Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil's works, see also Subhi Edhem's works especially Subhi Edhem, *Darvenizm* (Manastır: Ulum-i Tabiiye ve İctimaiye Kütüphanesi, 1327 [1910]) and Subhi Edhem, *Hayat ve Mevt* (Istanbul: Halk Kütüphanesi, 1329 [1912]).

³⁵ Ludwig Büchner, *Madde ve Kuvvet*, (tr.) Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, 1911).

³⁶ See Baha Tevfik, *Hassasiyet Bahsi ve Yeni Ahlak* (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, no publication date).

³⁷ Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd* (Istanbul: İlm ve Felsefe Kütüphanesi, 1332 [1914]).

³⁸ For Tevfik's understanding of philosophy, see Baha Tevfik, *Muhtasar Felsefe* (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, 1331 [1913]).

I begin the fifth chapter of my dissertation, which primarily deals with the ideas and works of Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi (1865-1914), with a close reading and analysis of the first volume of Celal Nuri Ileri's *Tarih-i Istikbal* ("The History of the Future").³⁹ This book is very important not only because it is a good example of the type of materialist thought that presented materialism in Islamic garb, but also because it provoked an ingenious philosophical reply by Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, who wrote an important work to criticize Celal Nuri.⁴⁰ It is important to realize that Ahmed Hilmi's response was written *not* from a traditional Islamic point of view, but from a philosophical point of view which was, in fact, much more informed and advanced than the philosophical viewpoints of the vulgar materialists.

I argue that Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi was deeply aware of the changes that had taken place in nineteenth-century physics, which were described by Ulfers and Cohen in another context as a shift from a materialist to an "energeticist" point of view.⁴¹ Şehbenderzade's constant references to such figures as Sadi Carnot (1796-1832) and Rudolf Clausius (1822-1888), who were responsible for the revolution in thermodynamics and heat theory (which laid the ground for the later Einsteinian

³⁹ Celal Nuri, *Tarih-i İstikbal, Volume I: Mesail-i Fikriye* (Istanbul: Yeni Osmanlı Matbaa ve Kitabhanesi, 1331 [1913]).

⁴⁰ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Huzur-ı Akl-u Fen'de Maddiyyun Meslek-i Delaleti* (Istanbul: Hikmet Matbaa-i İslamiyesi, 1332 [1914]).

⁴¹ See Friedrich Ulfers and Mark Daniel Cohen, "The Energeticist Model of the Universe as *Perpetuum Mobile* and Nietzsche's Notion of the Eternal Recurrence of the Same," paper presented at the Friedrich Nietzsche Society's 11th annual conference, "Nietzsche and Science," Cambridge University, Cambridge, England, September 2001.

revolution in physics in the early 20th century), make it clear that he was philosophically far ahead of the Ottoman materialists, whom he criticized for their crude understanding of the nature of physics and science. In fact, his main reference, in terms of philosophy of science, was Henri Poincaré (1854-1912), the famous French mathematician and philosopher of science whose ideas about the nature of science were a precursor to the later treatments of the subject by Karl Popper (1902-1994).

Although there are a few treatments of Şehbenderzade's political ideas about Islam in the English-language scholarly literature,⁴² there is as yet no satisfactory analysis of his philosophical/religious views anywhere. That is what I hope to provide here. In addition, I analyze Şehbenderzade's understanding of religion in general and Islam in particular and argue that Şehbenderzade offers a unique interpretation of Islam based on his views on Islamic mysticism (*tasavvuf*) and science.

In his mystical view of the universe, Ahmed Hilmi saw modern science not as a threat to religion but as just another human tool that should be utilized wisely to increase human knowledge of the totality of existence, which he believed would remain dark and ultimately clouded in mystery even after the best human attempts to reveal it. His position is totally different from such Islamist modernists as Muhammad Abduh (1849-1905) and Rashid Rida (1865-1935) in that Ahmed Hilmi did *not* try to reconcile religion and modern science. Religion, properly understood, Ahmed Hilmi argued in a way

⁴² See, for example, Kemal Karpat, *The Politicization of Islam : Reconstructing Identity, State, Faith, and Community in the Late Ottoman State* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001).

vaguely reminiscent of Immanuel Kant, is transcendent, and therefore exists on a level that cannot be refuted (or corroborated, for that matter) by scientific knowledge.

The sixth chapter of my dissertation deals with the ideas of Said Nursi. I make two major arguments in this chapter. The first is that a sufficient understanding of nineteenth-century materialism, especially the German materialism of mid-century, is a *sine qua non* for an appreciation of Nursi's works, collectively known as *Risale-i Nur* (*The Epistle of Light*). There are two key reasons for this. First of all, Said Nursi clearly demonstrates a familiarity with the works of the Ottoman materialists (together with a shrewd understanding of the essence of these materialist ideas, I should add) in his writings. And secondly, he consciously builds his own position in *direct opposition* to that Ottoman materialist tradition.

While reading the defense that Said Nursi presented to the court in the city of Eskişehir in 1935 against the charges that he was a *tarikât* shaykh, and that he was trying to undermine the secular Republic, I was struck by a passage that had an unmistakable comical effect. While the prosecutors were trying to prove that his writings were anti-republican, Said Nursi completely ignored their claims and argued that the principal group of people that the *Risale-i Nur* addressed (and attacked) was the "European philosophers."⁴³ In a 1943 defense in a court in Denizli, he went so far as to dismiss the "council of experts" which the court had convened to subject his writings to expert analysis to decide whether they were political attacks on the secular Republic or not.

⁴³ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Tarihçe-i Hayat* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Nesriyat, Istanbul, 2002), 204.

What he wanted from the court instead, remarkably, was a “council of European philosophers” to be formed in order to make an examination of his writings.⁴⁴

The second, and perhaps more important, argument I will make in this chapter is that Said Nursi's oeuvre, the *Risale-i Nur*, has a unique “structure” to it, which is absolutely essential for an understanding of its contents. I demonstrate, for the first time in the English literature as far as I know, that *Risale-i Nur* does have an interesting *box-within-box structure* that places some of the books of the collection at the center of its arguments. This structure reveals itself only when all of the collection is taken into consideration. It certainly does not have a “helter-skelter, relatively unsystematic structure,” as Şerif Mardin has claimed.⁴⁵

In fact, the very elaborate and well-thought-out structure of the collection deliberately places particular books such as *Sözler* (“The Words”),⁴⁶ *Mektubat* (“The Letters”),⁴⁷ *Lem’alar* (“The Flashes”)⁴⁸ and *Şualar* (“The Rays”)⁴⁹ at the very center of the collection. Interestingly, these are the very same books in which he presents his main arguments against the materialist philosophers’

⁴⁴ Ibid., 349.

⁴⁵ Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi*, (Albany, New York: SUNY Press, 1989).

⁴⁶ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Sozler*, (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Nesriyat, 2002).

⁴⁷ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Mektubat* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Nesriyat, 2002).

⁴⁸ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Lem’alar* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Nesriyat, 2002).

⁴⁹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Şualar* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Nesriyat, 2002).

attacks on religion and faith. Needless to say, in order to present my case, I need to examine the *Risale-i Nur* collection in its entirety. And that is what I try do in this chapter of my dissertation.

In the seventh chapter, I examine the ideas of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, arguably the greatest Turkish novelist of the twentieth century, as they relate to the issues of science, cultural continuity and change. In his masterpiece, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü* (“The Clock-Setting Institute”),⁵⁰ Ahmet Hamdi writes about an absurd Chronometric Institute set up by the state to synchronize all the clocks and watches in Turkey in order to make the society more efficient and scientific. His thinly veiled criticisms of an over-regulating and controlling state that insists on changing society at all costs are rather obvious. However, in order to highlight Tanpınar’s complex stance on the necessity of gradual cultural change, as well as his ideas about the preservation of traditional culture in a modern and rapidly changing environment, I go beyond his masterpiece and include his other novels such as *Huzur*,⁵¹ *Mahur Beste*⁵² and *Sahnenin Dışındakiler*⁵³ in my analysis, as well.

Finally, the eighth chapter is a general conclusion. There is no work in English-speaking academia that deals with the influence of European science and materialism on

⁵⁰ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1999).

⁵¹ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Huzur* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005).

⁵² Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005).

⁵³ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005).

Turkish intellectuals *as well as* the authentic responses to these ideas given by the Turkish authors during the period that I will examine in my dissertation.⁵⁴ Thus, I hope that this dissertation will make a modest contribution to the study of Turkish social and intellectual history.

⁵⁴ I consider Mehmet Aygün's *Materyalizmin Türkiye'ye Girişi* (Ankara: Elis Yayınları, 2005) a nice introduction to the subject. But it is almost entirely descriptive and does not go into the details of the responses given to the Ottoman materialists .

Chapter 2: Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha (1830-1910) and the Introduction of European Materialism into the Ottoman Empire

I: INTRODUCTION

Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha, without a doubt, is one of the key figures in the history of the introduction of European ideas about science and education into the Ottoman Empire. During his long and industrious bureaucratic career, crowned by his appointments to the post of the Minister of Education on three different occasions during the reign of Abdülhamid II, Münif Pasha himself introduced or actively took part in the introduction of a number of significant cultural and educational reforms which altered the intellectual landscape of the empire. His published works and articles contributed significantly to a fundamental shift of *Weltanschauung* among Ottoman intellectuals, ultimately leading to a re-evaluation of European culture and civilization in general and European science and its relation to social “progress” in particular. This gradual change in the intellectual landscape of the empire accompanied such immense social changes as the transformation of the old scribal class of the empire into a modern bureaucracy, first

examined by Carter Findley in his important Weberian study of the Ottoman bureaucracy.⁵⁵

As the following biographical section of the chapter demonstrates, Münif Pasha's life-story is a fascinating example showing how the combination of a seemingly disjointed series of historical accidents (namely the military campaigns into Anatolia of Ibrahim Pasha (1789-1848), the son of Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt), together with the overarching social transformations affecting the bureaucratic structure of the empire at the time, especially the creation of the "Translation Bureau" (*Tercüme Odası*), could dramatically alter the life of the son of a member of the local *ulama* in southeastern Anatolia. Seemingly destined for service in the regional religious bureaucracy, Münif Pasha was provided with completely new opportunities by the unique historical circumstances of his time, propelling him first to a life in foreign service and ultimately to the post of a minister of the empire.

After giving some brief biographical information about him in the next section, I will focus on Münif Pasha's immediate impact on Ottoman intellectual circles in the following section of the chapter. This impact, I will argue, was largely due to the fact that Münif Pasha was one of the founders of the Ottoman Scientific Society (*Cemiyet-i İlmiye-i Osmaniye*), and that, in conjunction with his role in the Society, he wrote a

⁵⁵ See Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Port, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

number of theoretically important articles for the society's official publication, *Mecmua-i Fünun* (“The Journal of Sciences”).

Although there had been a few official and unofficial attempts at founding a scientific society in Ottoman Empire such as the establishment of the *Encümen-i Daniş* in 1851 with the intention of publishing textbooks for the *Darulfünun* (literally, “House of Sciences,” later Istanbul University) and the short-lived *Beşiktaş Ulema Heyeti* (“The Committee of the Learned Men of Beşiktaş”), the first properly organized scientific society in the Ottoman Empire was the Ottoman Scientific Society, founded in 1861.⁵⁶ One year after its foundation, the society began to publish the first Turkish scientific journal in the Ottoman Empire, *The Journal of Sciences*. Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha, who was the official vice-president of the Ottoman Scientific Society, was also the main editor of and contributor to *The Journal of Sciences*. He wrote forty-seven articles for the journal in total, which were published in ninety-one separate pieces, making him responsible (together with the editorial pieces he wrote for the journal without using his name) for nearly half of all the pieces published in the journal. The journal was published monthly for five years from 1862 to 1867 (it was not published for nearly one year between 1865 and 1866 because of the financial problems of the society) for forty-seven issues.

⁵⁶ See Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu, *Cemiyet-i İlmiye-i Osmaniye'nin Kuruluş ve Faaliyetleri* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu Basımevi, 1994), 2172.

There are two major reasons for the significance of Münif Pasha's articles published in *The Journal of Sciences* for Ottoman intellectual history. Firstly, Münif Pasha was one of the first Ottoman intellectuals to consciously advocate a *linear view of history* in strict opposition to cyclical interpretations of history widely known in Ottoman intellectual circles as a result of the influence of the historical theories of the great Arab historian Ibn Khaldun (1332-1406). Secondly, Münif Pasha, in addition to advocating a linear view of history emphasizing the historical “progress” which supposedly gave meaning to the unidirectional flow of history, also consciously conceptualized *science as the engine of progress* in history.

The European nations' superiority to the non-European nations throughout the world, Münif Pasha argued, stemmed ultimately from their mastery of the new modern mathematical science. Identifying the modern European science as something essentially different from the traditional Islamic conceptualization of *'ilm* (science, knowledge), Münif Pasha became an ardent supporter of the adoption and propagation of this new science in the Ottoman lands. As I will argue below, his earlier experiences in traditional educational institutions, coupled with his later educational experiences at the University of Berlin (*Universität zu Berlin*, later *Humboldt-Universität zu Berlin*) during his work at the Ottoman Embassy in Berlin early in his bureaucratic career probably put him in a unique position to compare and contrast the nature of the nineteenth-century European understanding of science with science as it was then understood in the Ottoman Empire.

As the following chapters demonstrate, the general idea of the need to borrow European ideas for the improvement of the empire became more or less the common wisdom in Ottoman intellectual circles in the generation following Münif Pasha. In other words, *both* the straightforward westernizers in the empire and their more Islamic-oriented cultural critics essentially agreed on the necessity of adopting western science and technology in the decades following the publication of *The Journal of Sciences*. The later disagreement among them was mainly over whether the adoption of western science and technology was possible *without* adopting western morality, ethics, and secular attitudes towards religion.

What makes Münif Pasha so fascinating in this context is that he conceptualized the apparent “European superiority” not only as a technical matter, but also as a deeply *spiritual and moral superiority*, and this earlier than anybody else in Ottoman intellectual history. In other words, the new “advanced” societies of Europe created by the rigorous application of science were *not* simply technically superior entities to be emulated in a restricted manner, otherwise lacking the moral qualities of the Ottoman society, argued Münif Pasha. These modern societies were also morally exemplary. This is why it is important to study Münif Pasha as a precursor of later figures such as Beşir Fuad (1852-1887) and Baha Tevfik (1884-1914), who shared this general vision with him.

However, it needs to be pointed out that despite his wholehearted embrace of European civilization, Münif Pasha chose to maintain a rather ambivalent attitude towards religion in general and Islam in particular in public, and unlike the

straightforward Ottoman materialists of the following generations examined in the following chapters, never took a directly anti-religious stance in his articles published in *The Journal of Sciences*. If one of the reasons for this ambivalence was the fact that the official regulations of the Ottoman Scientific Society did not allow the publication of articles that might be religiously or politically controversial in its journal,⁵⁷ the other reason was his deep familiarity with the old culture of *madrasa* education. In strict contrast to such figures as, say, Beşir Fuad or Baha Tevfik, who were the products of the new Ottoman educational institutions (for the foundation of which Münif Pasha was partly responsible) and lacked any meaningful experience in the educational practices of the traditional Ottoman educational system, Münif Pasha would never go so far to label the entire literary and cultural output of the Ottomans in the past as “poetical dreams” (*şairane hayaller*)⁵⁸ lacking any meaning in the modern world. He was generally too cautious--- and too knowledgeable, I should add--- compared to the succeeding generations of Ottoman materialists when it came to making such sweeping generalizations about the past culture. In addition, as a supremely pragmatic and reform-minded statesman, he found it expedient to avoid any unnecessary political friction that an overtly critical position against religion might cause and, in general, was much more sensitive than the Ottoman materialists of the following generations to the necessity of

⁵⁷ For the regulations of the Ottoman Scientific Society published in *The Journal of Sciences*, see “Cemiyet-i İlmiye-yi Osmaniye Nizamnamesidir,” *Mecmua-i Fünun* 1, No.1 (1279 [1862]): 2-17. The third article of the regulation specifically states that the society will consciously avoid publishing articles pertaining to religious and contemporary political matters: “Üçüncü Madde: Cemiyet mesail-i diniye ve zaman-ı hal politikası mebahisinden ihtiraz edüb....” *Ibid.*, 2.

⁵⁸ See especially Chapter Three.

preserving the literary, religious and cultural output of the Ottoman past, emphasizing the continuities between the past and the present.

In that regard, it is certainly noteworthy that although Mūnif Pasha was one of the first statesmen in the Ottoman Empire to come up with the idea of an “alphabet reform,” with the argument that a reformed Arabic alphabet better suited to the phonetic needs of the Turkish language would probably facilitate primary education and literacy in the Empire, he had serious doubts about the implicit negative cultural effects of such a sweeping change on society. In conjunction with this point, at the end of this chapter, I will discuss Mūnif Pasha's invitation to the Iranian intellectual Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh (also known as Mirza Fatali Akhundov, 1812-1878) to travel from Tbilisi to Istanbul in 1863 to give a talk to the Ottoman Scientific Society with a set of proposals for alphabet reform.⁵⁹

Understanding the reasons why, in the end, Mūnif Pasha and the Ottoman Scientific Society, after carefully considering Akhundzadeh's ideas, actually rejected the radical Iranian intellectual's proposals for an alphabet reform might tell us a great deal about the complex personality of Mūnif Pasha, not to mention the cultural ambiguities inherent in the Ottoman reform project in the nineteenth century. To reiterate, even for the periods during which it seems that there was a straightforward linear movement from a “traditional” to a “modern” order in the Ottoman Empire, this movement was wildly

⁵⁹ For Akhundzadeh's ideas of the necessity of an alphabet reform in the Islamic world, see Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh, *Alefba-ye Jaded va Maktubat* (Tabriz: Ehya, 1357[1978]).

contested and deemed culturally problematic by some of the Ottoman intellectuals who were at the forefront of the modernizing *Zeitgeist*.

II: MÜNİF PASHA: A SHORT BIOGRAPHY

Mehmed Tahir Münif Pasha was born in Ayntab (today's Gaziantep) in southeastern Anatolia in 1830.⁶⁰ His father, Abdünnafi Efendi, was a member of the *ulama* in Ayntab, locally known for his excellent command of Arabic and Persian.⁶¹ Münif Pasha received his primary education in one of the local *madrasas*, the *Nur-u Osmaniye*, and most likely would have joined the ranks of the *ulama* like his father had the tranquil life of his family not been interrupted by the military incursions of Ibrahim Pasha (son of Muhammad Ali Pasha of Egypt) into Anatolia.

After defeating the Ottoman army in the Battle of Nisibis (*Nizip*) in June 1839, Ibrahim Pasha brought Abdünnafi Efendi to Cairo to tutor his sons in Persian. Münif Pasha followed his father to Egypt and continued his education in the *madrasa* of *Kasr'ul Ali* in Cairo and, after 1849, in the Umayyad *madrasa* in Damascus,⁶² studying logic, Arabic, Persian and Islamic history and literature. This classical *madrasa* background

⁶⁰ For detailed biographical information on Münif Pasha, see İbnülemin Mahmut Kemal İnal, *Son Asır Türk Şairleri*, Volume II (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1969), 997-1013. See also, Ali Budak, *Münif Paşa: Batılılaşma Sürecinde Çok Yönlü Bir Osmanlı Aydını* (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 2004). For a good monograph on Münif Pasha and his place in Turkish cultural history, see Adem Akın, *Münif Paşa ve Türk Kültür Tarihindeki Yeri* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Yayınları, 1999).

⁶¹ Budak, 7.

⁶² Adem Akın, 2.

continued to exert some influence on Münif Pasha throughout his life, and as I argue in the next section of this chapter, gave him a unique perspective for a meaningful comparison between the conception of “science” in the traditional educational system and that of the nineteenth-century European one.⁶³

In addition to acquiring an excellent command of Arabic and Persian, Budak notes, Münif Pasha also began to study French, presumably under the tutelage of experts brought by Muhammad Ali Pasha from Europe to Cairo.⁶⁴ His study of French suggests that the young Münif already understood that the traditional languages of Arabic and Persian would not be sufficient in helping him fulfill his intellectual and political ambitions for the future. French was already replacing these languages as the languages of the intellectual elite in the empire.

Münif Pasha and his family had to leave Egypt in 1849 when Abbas I became the new ruler, and although his father and the rest of his family returned to Ayntab, Münif Pasha chose to stay in Damascus to continue his *madrassa* education until 1850. After staying for a couple of years in Damascus working in the local bureaucracy, he went to Istanbul in 1853 and entered the *Babiali Tercüme Odası* (The Imperial/Prime Ministry Translation Bureau), which at the time served as the primary training ground for reform-minded future statesmen of the Ottoman Empire. When his mentor at the time, the

⁶³ See, for example, Münif [Efendi], “Mahiyet ve Aksam-ı Ulum,” *Mecmua-i Fünun*, 2, No.13 (1280 [1863]): 2-10.

⁶⁴ Budak, 17.

superintendent of schools (*Mektepler Nazırı*) Kemal Efendi (later Ahmed Kemal Pasha (1808-1886)) was appointed ambassador to Berlin, Münif Pasha went to Berlin with him as the second secretary of the embassy (*Sefaret İkinci Katibi*) in 1855.

During his three-year stay in Berlin, in addition to attending to his responsibilities in the Ottoman embassy, Münif Pasha learned German and attended courses at the University of Berlin in philosophy, international law, natural philosophy and political economy. He also carefully studied the works of the French enlightenment philosophers, especially Voltaire (1694-1778), Jean-Jacques Rousseau (1712-1778) and Bernard le Bovier de Fontenelle (1657-1757).⁶⁵

In 1857 he returned to the Translation Bureau in Istanbul and two years later he published the first philosophical translations from a European language (French) into Ottoman Turkish, namely *Muhaverat-ı Hikemiye* (“Philosophical Dialogues”), which consisted of a number of dialogues by Voltaire, Francois Fénelon (1651-1715) and Fontenelle.⁶⁶ Some of the dialogues in this publication seem to me to be selected rather haphazardly, such as a dialogue by Fénelon covering an imaginary conversation between pre-Socratic Greek philosophers Heraclitus and Democritus on whether it is wiser to be

⁶⁵ Orhan Köprülü, “Münif Paşa'nın Hayatı ve Sefirlikleri Münasebetiyle İran Hakkında Bazı Vesikalar” in *İran Şehinşahlığının 2500. Kuruluş Yıldönümüne Armağan* (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1971), 277 quoted in Budak, 23.

⁶⁶ See, Münif Efendi Ez Hulefa-yı Oda-yı Tercüme-i Bab-ı Ali, (tr.) Fransa hükema-yı benamından Voltaire ve Fénelon ve Fontenelle'in telifatından: *Muhaverat-ı Hikemiye* (İstanbul: Ceridehane Matbaası, 1276 [1859]).

optimistic and happy as opposed to pessimistic and sad in this world.⁶⁷ However, some of the dialogues, such as the third and the seventh dialogues by Voltaire⁶⁸ emphasize such themes as the importance of education for society and why industry and trade are requisites for national development in the modern world, which of course would be expounded in some of Münif Pasha's later articles in *The Journal of Sciences*.

It is certainly noteworthy that neither in his early life nor during the period in which he wrote for *The Journal of Sciences*, did the German vulgar materialism of the mid-nineteenth century appear to be a significant source of influence on Münif Pasha. This might partially explain why his criticism of the traditional institutions, as well as of Islam, was never as radical as that of the following generations of Ottoman materialists, on whom German biological vulgar materialism was a major influence. Of course, that is not to say that religion was not criticized in the French enlightenment intellectual tradition represented by Voltaire, Rousseau and others. These thinkers were indeed highly critical of organized religion. However, their mode of criticism was much more subtle and philosophically sophisticated compared to the German vulgar materialists. But, of course, this difference in levels of philosophical sophistication was *exactly* the reason why the vulgar German materialists later became more influential in the Ottoman Empire: They were simply much easier to understand.

⁶⁷ Ibid., 3-6.

⁶⁸ See “Keşmir Şehrinin Tanzimine Dair Bir Feylesof ile Bir Bostancı'nın Muhaveresi” in Ibid., 11-18. See also “Bir Filozof İle bir Maliye Nazırı'nın Muhaveresi” in Ibid., 47-55.

For a brief time between 1860 and 1862, Münif Pasha wrote for the first private newspaper in the empire, *Ceride-i Havadis* (“Register of Events”). In April 1861, he was appointed vice-president of the newly established *Cemiyet-i İlmiyye-i Osmaniye* (Ottoman Scientific Society). In July 1862 he was appointed First Translator of the Translation Bureau and from 1862 to 1867 he also wrote articles for *The Journal of Sciences*. From 1867 onwards he was appointed to increasingly higher posts in Ottoman bureaucracy. He became the head of the Higher Educational Council (*Meclis-i Kebir-i Maarif Reisi*) in 1869 and gave a speech at the opening ceremony of Istanbul University (*Darülfunun*) in 1870.⁶⁹ In 1872 he was appointed ambassador to Tehran, where he worked for five years, and after that he became the Minister of Education.

According to Budak, his first accomplishment in the ministry was the re-opening of the School of Political Science (*Mülkiye Mektebi*) with a new building and curriculum in 1877.⁷⁰ Although he was appointed to the Ministry of Trade (*Ticaret Nazırlığı*) for a brief time in late 1877, he was re-appointed to the Ministry of Education in 1878 and opened the Istanbul School of Law (*Mekteb-i Hukuk*), where he gave lectures on literature, law, and political economy from a nineteenth-century liberal *laissez-faire* perspective.⁷¹ He was also influential in the decision to open, for the first time, a state-

⁶⁹ İnal, 817.

⁷⁰ Budak, 35-36.

⁷¹ For his lectures in Istanbul University on law and economy, later published from the notes of his student Sabit Efendi, see Münif Pasha, *Hikmet-i Hukuk* (Istanbul: İdare-i Şirket-i Mürettebiye, 1302 [1885]).

sponsored high school for girls in Istanbul in March 1880.⁷² It seems that in 1880, Münif Pasha even pushed for the establishment of a dance school in Istanbul, a proposal that elicited a rather humorous reply from the then Şeyhü'l-Islam Esad Efendi: “The minister is tricky indeed (“*Nazırın bunda da bir oyunu var*”). Establishment of such things in a country which does not even have roads for walking straight [let alone dancing] would [make us] a laughing stock for the countries we try hard to imitate.”⁷³

Münif Pasha was dismissed from his position in 1880, apparently because of his loud objections to the palace officials that he was not given enough opportunities to meet and talk to the sultan, Abdülhamid II, about his educational reform plans. He made a brief visit to Europe in 1883, after his dismissal, and was yet again, in 1885, appointed to the post of minister of education. He remained in this position until 1891 and worked especially hard for the establishment of state controlled high schools (*İdadis*) in the rural areas of Anatolia as well as the Arab provinces of the empire. He also introduced new language requirements (both Turkish and French) at the *Mekteb-i Sultani* (later Galatasaray Lycée).⁷⁴ Later in his career, around 1897, he was once again appointed ambassador to Tehran, a sign that he was slightly losing the favor of the sultan. He had to return to Istanbul one year later after one of his daughters died, and for the rest of his life he lived a rather tranquil private life in his palace. He died in February 1910 in Istanbul.

⁷² Ibid., 40.

⁷³ Osman Ergin, *Türk Maarif Tarihi*, Vol. I-II (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Bakanlığı, 1977), 675-676 quoted in Budak, 43. (Translation from Ottoman Turkish is mine).

⁷⁴ Budak, 49.

III: THE OTTOMAN SCIENTIFIC SOCIETY AND *THE JOURNAL OF SCIENCES* IN THE CONTEXT OF OTTOMAN POLITICAL AND INTELLECTUAL HISTORY

In his monumental history of Turkish literature in the nineteenth century, Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar wrote that “*The Journal of Sciences*...played [in Turkish intellectual history] the role of the great French encyclopedia of the eighteenth century. By means of it, not only various pieces of knowledge but also the results of modern and positive views, as well as the *language of science and philosophy* entered into the arena of intellectual discussion. From the very start there appeared articles and serials on history, cosmology, geology and economy.”⁷⁵ Tanpınar also argued that despite the obvious importance of *The Journal of Sciences* in Ottoman intellectual history, Münif Pasha was often neglected, even by his contemporaries, because of his reluctance to play an activist role, unlike, say, Namık Kemal (1840-1888) or İbrahim Şinasi (1826-1871), within the liberal oppositional politics of the times against the sultan.⁷⁶

Referring to the quality of the articles published in *The Journal of Sciences*, Münif Pasha's contemporary Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912) wrote in his memoirs of

⁷⁵ “Mecmua-i Fünun....bizde....büyük Fransız ansiklopedisinin XVIII. asırdaki rolünü oynar. Sadece muhtelif bilgiler değil, onların muhassalası olan muasır ve müspet görüş ve ayrıca *ilim ve felsefe dili*, onun vasıtasıyla münakaşa sahasına girer. Daha başından itibaren tarih, kozmografya, coğrafya, jeoloji ve iktisada dair kimisi tefrika, kimisi tek makale yazılar görülür.”: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2006 [1949]), 172. Italics are mine.

⁷⁶ Ibid., 171.

exile that although he enjoyed reading a volume of *The Journal of Sciences* that he had borrowed from his friend Ebuuziya Tevfik Bey (1848-1913), the journal was a bit too advanced and serious for the casual reader of the day, and that it would have served a better purpose had the scientific matters been put forward in a more entertaining and amusing format.⁷⁷ Ahmed Midhat Efendi, who should be considered one of the true pioneers of “print capitalism” in the Ottoman Empire, surely knew a thing or two about how to make a publication appealing to the general reader. Nevertheless, the actual scientific quality of the articles in *The Journal of Sciences* should not be exaggerated. A great majority of the articles were rather unsophisticated works of translation from popular European scientific magazines giving pretty basic information to the readers about philosophy, history, and geography, as well as the practical applications of the hard sciences.

This should come as no surprise to anybody having even a cursory look at the actual members list of the Ottoman Scientific Society. Out of the thirty-three permanent members who founded the society in 1861, twenty-seven were bureaucrats (sixteen of whom were translators or officials working at the Translation Bureau). Three members were military officers and only three were scientists or academicians teaching at the imperial engineering schools, namely Said Efendi (later İngiliz Said Pasha, 1830-1895), Hafız Efendi and a certain Necib Bey.⁷⁸ It is certainly ironic that the first scientific society

⁷⁷ “...halkı mevad-ı fenniyeye alıştırmamanın yolu bu değil idi. Mebahis-i fünunu eğlence tarzına koymak lazım gelir idi.”: Ahmed Midhat Efendi, *Menfa* (Istanbul: Arma Yayınları, 2002 [1876]), 62.

⁷⁸ For the list of the founding members of the Ottoman Scientific Society, see İhsanoğlu, 2176-2177.

of the empire was founded almost without any scientists. The bureaucrats of the Translation Bureaus were heavily represented in the society simply because of their knowledge of the European languages, not because they necessarily knew much about science at all. Moreover, contrary to Tanpınar's claims, the journal published by the society did *not* resemble an encyclopedia in the least. It was not a systematic work and it did not have any structure to it that could justify a comparison to an encyclopedia.

However, it is important to remember that the journal was published more or less at the beginning of the intellectually transformational period of print capitalism in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire. This transformational period, as I argue in the following chapters, gradually created a new discourse on science, religion and identity in the minds of Ottoman intellectuals. As in every intellectual beginning, *The Journal of Sciences* was rather clumsy and amateurish in some respects, but nevertheless, as Tanpınar correctly argued, it managed to create a new *shared language of science* for the Ottoman intellectuals.

Regarding the importance of the articles published in the *Journal of Sciences* for the intellectual history of the Ottoman Empire, Ekmeleddin İhsanoğlu remarks that: “Unlike İbrahim Hakkı of Erzurum, who, a century earlier had established contact with the western science in a more detailed and technical manner in his *Marifetname*, there is no question of reconciling the western science with Islam for Münif Paşa and his cadre. Münif Paşa, by opposing certain people whom he calls ‘some ignoramuses’ (*bazı cühela*) and ‘irrational friends of religion’ (*dinin akılsız dostları*), gives the first messages of the

conflict between religion and science in the *Tanzimat* era.”⁷⁹ My reading of Münif Pasha’s articles in the *Journal of Sciences*, however, suggests that Münif Pasha’s significance for the intellectual history of the Ottoman Empire was much broader than that of a simple messenger of “conflict between religion and science”. In fact, the terms *bazı cühela* (“some ignoramuses”) and *dinin akılsız dostları* (“irrational friends of religion”) were used by Münif Pasha in his important article titled *Muvazene-i İlm-ü Cehl* (“The Comparison of Science and Ignorance”) in the following context:

It is especially erroneous for certain ignoramuses to say that science corrupts faith. Only irrational friends of religion dare to make such insults....Some simple-minded people, just because of this perverse idea...prefer to remain in ignorance and, always having a distrustful view towards science, disapprove those attempting to study science. Atheism is imputed to Socrates and Hippocrates, who were known among the ancient philosophers for their excessive intelligence and sagacity. *Since they were, much more than anybody else, cognizant of the perfection of the power and majesty of the exalted Creator, and of his wisdom and mystery revealed in every minute particle of the universe, it cannot be doubted that they were more complete in their faith than their contemporaries.*⁸⁰

Notice that it is not the religious man per se who is being attacked by Münif Pasha, but a particular brand of “irrational friend” of religion who turns his back on science and prefers to stay in a condition of ignorance. In conceptualizing the universe as

⁷⁹ İhsanoğlu, 2188-2189.

⁸⁰ “Hele bazı cühelanın ilm fesad-ı i’tikadı münticidir demeleri hatadır. Ancak dinin akılsız dostları bu makule tefevvühata tasaddi ederler.... Bazı sadedilan mücerred şu fikr-i faside mebni...hal-i cehlde kalmayı tercih ve daima ilme emniyetsizlik nazariyle bakıp taleb-u- tahsiline say edenleri dahi takbih ederler.Hükema-i mutekaddiminden fart-ı zeka ve dirayetle şöhet-şiar olan Sokrat ve Bokrat’a dinsizlik isnad olunur. *Bunlar cümleden ziyade Halik-ı Teala hazretlerinin kemal-i kudret ve azametini ve kainatın her bir zerresinde nice bin sır ve hikmetine vakıf olduklarından behemahal muasırlarından ziyade tamm’ul itikad olduklarında şüphe olunamaz.*”: Münif (Pasha), “Muvazene-i İlm-u Cehl”, *Mecmua-i Fünun* 1, No. 1 (1279 [1862]): 25-26. Italics mine.

a place in which the creator shows his wisdom and mysteries to such philosophers as Socrates (*Sokrat*) and Hippocrates (*Bokrat*), Münif Pasha was, in fact, much closer in spirit to the deists of the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries than to the later European materialists of the nineteenth century.

In fact, largely due to the semi-official status of the journal, the articles published in it consciously refrained from taking controversial positions regarding religion or politics and downplayed any perceived conflict between religion and science. For a more direct confrontation between religion and science we need to look at the works of the two generations of Ottoman intellectuals following the publication of *The Journal of Sciences* in the 1860s, represented in this dissertation by Beşir Fuad (1852-1887) and Baha Tevfik (1884-1914) in the third and fourth chapters.

I want to put forward the argument that the real intellectual significance of Münif Pasha's work in the *Journal of Sciences* is located in his ideas about the relations among history, progress and science. Münif Pasha begins the article cited above by arguing that the humans' study of arts and sciences (aiming at human perfection, according to him) distinguishes the humans from the animals, and therefore is one of the “divine intentions of God”.⁸¹ After this traditional explanation, firmly grounded in Islamic theology, however, he immediately adds that some people in this world have chosen a simple state of life (“*sadelik hali*”) and/or nomadic existence over this study of sciences and arts

⁸¹ “...insanın hal-i cehl ü nadanide kalmayıp tahsil-i ilm ü sanat ile mahlukat-ı saireden kesb-i temeyyüz eylemesi *makasid-i ilahiyeden* olduğu...”: Münif (Pasha), “Muvazene-i İlm-u Cehl,” *Mecmua-i Fünun* 1, No. 1 (1279 [1862]): 22. Italics mine.

which creates “civilization,” (i.e., sedentary civilization) and therefore remain in either a state of complete savagery or nomadism. Accordingly, he argues that the peoples living on earth can be classified into three groups: those living in a state of nature by means of hunting and gathering,⁸² those living a nomadic lifestyle (in Münif Pasha's words, people like “Arabs, Kurds and Turcoman tribes”),⁸³ and finally the civilized people. Whereas Münif Pasha does not see a substantial difference between the first two groups,⁸⁴ he lavishly praises the third group for their successful mastery over nature.

Of course the “civilized countries” (*memalik-i mütemeddine*) in Münif Pasha's argument correspond, in essence, to the great historian Ibn Khaldun's conception of *umran hadari* (“sedentary civilization,” as opposed to the “nomadic civilization,” *umran badawi*) and, so far, his entire argument seems to be following Ibn Khaldun's fourteenth-century analysis of human civilizations. This is not surprising since, as Cornell Fleischer argued, from the eighteenth century onwards “Ibn Khaldun, either directly, or through his admirers, was well entrenched in Ottoman intellectual circles.”⁸⁵

⁸² “Ve mesken ü me'vası olmadıđından gündüzleri sahrada ve ormanda serseri dolaşıp her nerede akşam olur ise orasını mesken ittihaz ve daima hayvanat-ı müezziye şerrinden emin olmayıp kah kuşlar gibi ağaçlar üzerinde ve kah hayvanlar gibi mağara deliklerinde beytutet eder.”: *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸³ “İkinci mertebesi bedeviyet halidir ki.... Arab ve Kürt ve Türkmen kabileleri ol suretle ta`ayyüş ederler.”: *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁴ “İkisi beyninde olan fark pek büyük değildir.”: *Ibid.*, 23.

⁸⁵ Cornell Fleischer, “Royal Authority, Dynastic Cyclism, and 'Ibn Khaldunism' in Sixteenth Century Ottoman Letters,” *Journal of Asian and African Studies* 18, No. 3-4, 1983): 200.

However, Münif Pasha's argument, which seems Ibn Khaldunian on the surface, comes with a crucial, almost diabolical, twist to Ibn Khaldun's idea. In Ibn Khaldun's analysis of nomadic and sedentary civilizations, as a society goes from a nomadic to sedentary lifestyle, the “group feeling” (*ʿasabiyya*) of its members actually declines and it is this decline in the group feeling of the society which makes it vulnerable to outside attacks from other nomadic groups. Of course, as the new nomadic attackers take over the sedentary civilization, they in turn get assimilated into the sedentary civilization and gradually lose their “group feeling” as well, leading to further cycles of dynastic rises and falls as the basic schema of the military defeat and takeover of the sedentary civilizations by the nomadic ones is repeated. So, it is not surprising that Ibn Khaldun always emphasizes that the “moral qualities” of the nomadic societies (creating stronger social bonds and causing higher levels of group feeling as a result) are more pronounced and higher than those of the sedentary societies:

Sedentary people are much concerned with all kinds of pleasures. They are accustomed to luxury and success in worldly occupations and to indulgence in worldly desires. Therefore, their souls are coloured with all kinds of blameworthy and evil qualities....Eventually they lose all sense of restraint....Bedouins may be as concerned with worldly affairs [as sedentary people are]. However, such concern would touch only the necessities of life and not luxuries or anything causing, or calling for, desires and pleasures....They are closer to the first natural state and more remote from the evil habits that have been impressed upon the souls [of sedentary people] through numerous and ugly, blameworthy customs....*It will later become clear that sedentary life constitutes the last stage of civilization and the point where it begins to decay.*⁸⁶

⁸⁶ Ibn Khaldun, *The Muqaddimah: And Introduction to History* trans. Franz Rosenthal (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989), 94.

Münif Pasha, however, turns the entire moral argument of Ibn Khaldun on its head and argues that modern sedentary civilization is in fact *morally superior* to nomadic civilization. He argues that although the Bedouins seemingly have such superior moral characteristics as hospitality, kindness towards strangers, etc., the social effects of these moral qualities are negated by the relative lack of personal “safety” and rule of law in such societies. He adds that although one may not encounter high levels of hospitality and personal kindness in the formal settings of a sedentary civilization, at least one will have safety and liberty of action.⁸⁷ Moreover, in civilized societies such as the European societies, he argues, people may improve even their physical qualities and become superior to the nomadic people in this regard too by the application of modern athletics and bodily exercises, not to mention the military superiority that the sedentary civilizations now enjoy over the nomadic ones due to their mastery of military technologies.⁸⁸

⁸⁷ “Eğerçi bazı bedeviler ecanib ve misafirine riayet ve ikramda mübalağa edip şu faziletleri inkar olunamaz ise de misafir yola çıktıktan sonra belki misafir olduğu hane sahibi yolunu kat ederek üzerinde her nesi var ise gasp ve muhalefet olunduğu takdirde katline dahi ictisar eder. Güruh-u guraba memalik-i mütemeddinede ol kadar hürmet ve ikrama nail olamazlar ise de bir güne gadr u zulm dahi görmeyerek....seyr u seyahat ederler.”: Münif (Pasha), “Muvazene-i....., 24.

⁸⁸ As Carter Findley argued before, Münif Pasha was not the only Ottoman statesman who turned Ibn Khaldun's arguments upside down for his own purposes. Azmî Efendi, who was sent ambassador to Berlin in 1790 and wrote a detailed report about the Prussian state system as a model for Ottoman reform, borrowed Ibn Khaldun's idea that states, like individuals, pass through a three-stage life cycle, “in the last stage of which the populace inclines to magnificence and luxury and weakens in martial *esprit* (*'asabiye*). Applying this thought with a twist that might have startled Ibn Khaldun, Azmî goes on that because the European societies are very old and the spirit of the people has shifted from *bedeviyet* to *hadariyet*, if by some mistake one state were to take land from another, it would shortly be forced to give it back. Knowing that such an adventure would only result in loss of men and treasure, the Christian states of Europe will not wage war against one another simply to expand their territories, but rather seek by trade and other means to gain every possible civil advantage (*menafi'* ve *fevaid-i mülkiyeleri*) and to make their lands flourish. As they do so, they maintain their military forces, ready and trained, to protect them in their peaceful pursuits.”

Incidentally, although Münif Pasha does not dwell on this point, the actual historical end of Ibn Khaldun's cycle of the rise and fall of the nomadic steppe empires in world history was of course deeply related to the changes in military technology in the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries, especially the increasing use of gunpowder. More importantly, Münif Pasha implies that even sedentary civilizations should be ranked according to their levels of use and application of modern science and technology. The only reason why China is being militarily humiliated by a few Europeans (*Yirmi otuz bin kadar Avrupalı*), he enthusiastically argues, is Chinese insistence on the preservation of their “old methods and *imperfect civilization*.”⁸⁹ Münif Pasha's use of the Chinese example is a clever tactic to point to the Ottoman case at hand, of course, and his implied conclusion seems to be clear: The imperfection of the old civilizations, such as the Chinese or the Islamic one, comes from the imperfection in their understanding of science and technology. How then are the modern European sciences different from the traditional ones?

At the beginning of another important article, Münif Pasha argues that, according to the *ulama*, the sciences are traditionally classified into two main groups: the rational sciences (*ulum-ı akliye*) and the religious sciences (*ulum-ı nakliye*).⁹⁰ Remarkably, in the remainder of the article he does not say anything about the religious sciences at all. Of

See Carter. V. Findley, “Osmanlı Siyasal Düşüncesinde Devlet ve Hukuk: İnsan Hakları mı, Hukuk Devleti mi?” published in *XII.TürkTarih Kongresi, Bildiriler* (Ankara: Türk Tarih Kurumu, 2000), 1195-1202.

⁸⁹ “Eğer Çinliler usul-i kadime ve medeniyet-i gayr-i mükemmelere muhafazasında ısrar etmemiş olsalar idi birkaç bin ecanibin şu hakaretine düşer olurlar mıydı?” *Ibid.*, 28. Italics mine.

⁹⁰ Münif [Efendi], “Mahiyet ve Aksam-ı Ulum,” *Mecmua-i Fünun*, 2, No.13 (1280 [1863]): 2.

course, *ulum-ı nakliye*, the traditional, scriptural sciences which depended on a belief in inspired authority, do not necessarily interest Münif Pasha. The rational sciences, writes Münif Pasha, following the classical Islamic schema of classification which goes back ultimately to Aristotle's classification of the sciences, consist of four branches according to the *ulama*: logic (*mantık*), which prevents the mind from making errors; physical sciences (*ulum-ı tabiiye*), mathematical sciences (*riyaziyat*), which consist of arithmetic, geometry, music and astronomy; and metaphysics. However, Münif Pasha remarks, this ancient classification is no longer sufficient since “in modern times” (*ezmine-i cedidede*) not only have the ancient sciences undergone much correction; but also completely “new sciences” have been established (*bazı ulum-ı cedide dahi tehaddüs etmiştir*).⁹¹ In his list of new sciences, he enumerates, among others, chemistry (*kimya*), dynamics (*cerr-i eskal*), political economy (*ilm-i servet-i milel*), archeology (*ilm-i asar-ı kadime*) and history and geography. In order to adapt to the modern world and prevent the tragedy that has fallen on the Chinese, he implies, the Ottomans should learn these new sciences and enter the brave new world of the European civilization.

Despite his apparent ideological enthusiasm for all things European, Münif Pasha is rather cautious and conservative when it comes to the implementation of cultural reforms. His reaction to Iranian intellectual Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh's proposals for an alphabet reform is illustrative of his general cultural caution.

⁹¹ Ibid., 5.

Akhundzadeh, one of the founders of modern Iranian literature, was born in 1812 into a wealthy landowning family in Nukha (present-day Shaki) Azerbaijan, when it was still a part of Iran. After getting his primary education there, he moved in 1834 to Tbilisi (*Tiflis*), where he eventually worked as a translator of the Oriental languages for the imperial Russian administration. From his post in present-day Georgia, Akhundzadeh launched an impressive literary and philosophical career, criticizing what he perceived as the backward social conventions of Iranian society. He is well-known for writing the first modern plays in a Turkic language (*Azeri*) in the 1850s⁹² in which he criticized the conservative social customs of Iranian society. He was a strict materialist when it came to philosophy and was rather straightforward in his rejection of organized religion.

Arguing in his famous *Maktubat-i Kamal ud-Daula* that the universe “is one force, in unity, perfect, powerful and dominant, namely it is one existence, perfect, which has emerged in countless multitudes...not of free will, but of its natural laws...under its own conditions,”⁹³ Akhundzadeh saw the education of the general public as the only means of rescuing them from what he perceived as the shackles of religious ignorance, and leading them to the “materialist/scientific truth” about the universe. A staunch positivist, he argued that this truth “is independent of customs and traditions, and in fact...can be discovered if through criticism mankind is saved from the tyranny of dogma

⁹² See Fathali Akhundzade, *Komediler: Temsilat* (Izmir: Ege Üniversitesi, 1988)

⁹³ Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh, *Maktubat-i Kamal ud-Daula*, Manuscript (Tehran: National Library of Iran, 1280[1863]), 118 quoted in Iraj Parsinejad, *Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh and Literary Criticism* (Tokyo: Tokyo University of Foreign Studies, 1988), 61.

and tradition.”⁹⁴ As Farzin Vahdat notes, Akhundzadeh based his anti-religious ideas on a profound and radical notion of subjectivity “which he, more than any other Iranian thinker then or since, articulated in terms of a confrontation between human subject and monotheistic deity. He questioned what he viewed as the master-slave relationship in monotheism as antithetical to any notion of justice and equality, he considered the concepts of heaven and hell oppressive and wrathful and therefore unbecoming human nature.”⁹⁵

Arguing that the Arabic alphabet actually hindered the education of the Turkish- and Persian-speaking public, Akhundzadeh saw alphabet reform as a step toward getting rid of “religious superstition”. Replying to his critics, who pointed out that such a reform would make the books written in the past inaccessible to the people, Akhundzadeh famously argued that the “books of the European and American nations are on the grounds of medicine, philosophy, mathematics, geography, military techniques, navigation, engineering, natural sciences, astronomy, chemistry and other books related to industry. Instead, most of our books are works such as *Chihil Tuti (Forty Parrots)*⁹⁶ and other unimportant things....Let such works which indicate our ignorance and show

⁹⁴ Cyrus Masroori, “European Thought in Nineteenth-Century Iran: David Hume and Others,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 61, No.4 (2000): 667-668.

⁹⁵ Farzin Vahdat, *God and Juggernaut: Iran's Intellectual Encounter with Modernity* (Syracuse: Syracuse University Press, 2002), 45.

⁹⁶ *Chihil Tuti (Forty Parrots)* is a collection of entertaining stories about a promiscuous wife of a merchant and a pair of parrots told from the perspective of one of the parrots. It was widely read during the Qajar period as entertainment on winter evenings. See Shireen Mahdavi, “Amusements in Qajar Iran,” *Iranian Studies* 40, No.4 (2007): 490.

our retardation compared to Europeans get lost altogether.”⁹⁷ Akhundzadeh was invited to Istanbul by Münif Pasha in 1863 to explain his proposals for alphabet reform before a commission that included Münif Pasha. The proposed reforms emphasized the use of different letters for each phonetic sound in Turkish to avoid mistakes in reading and also writing these letters separately.⁹⁸ The commission ultimately decided to reject these proposals.

Scholars of Iran who have previously written about Akhundzadeh and his ideas about the alphabet reform have depended almost exclusively on Fereydun Adamiyat’s earlier work⁹⁹ on the ideas of Akhundzadeh, and agree with Adamiyat on the crucial point that Akhundzadeh “came to believe that the failure of Islamic nations in their efforts to modernize was due to their privileging of technical and practical elements of European progress over theoretical aspects of progress....He argued that ‘people must be prepared for the acceptance of European thoughts [which must occur] prior to trade with Europe and [accepting] its products.’”¹⁰⁰

⁹⁷ Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh, *Alefba*...., 162 quoted in Parsinejad, 23-24.

⁹⁸ For the evolution of Akhundzadeh's ideas on alphabet reform and the different shapes of the letters he proposed, see Akhundzadeh, *Alefba*...., 11-53. It is important to note that towards the end of his life, Akhundzadeh changed his ideas of alphabet reform and began to advocate the adoption of a modified Latin script instead of a modified Arabic script for writing in Turkish. The Latin script that is currently used in Azerbaijan is in fact based on Akhundzadeh's modified Latin alphabet.

⁹⁹ Fereydun Adamiyat, *Andesheha-ye Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh* (Tehran: Kharazmi, 1349 [1970]).

¹⁰⁰ Adamiyat, 165 quoted in Vahdat, 43-44.

Adamiyat, although he wrote a few inaccurate lines about the personal beliefs of Münif Pasha in his book on Akhundzadeh,¹⁰¹ is in general an extremely accurate source. However when it comes to the issue of the Turkish rejection of Akhundzadeh's reform proposals, Adamiyat's only source is Niyazi Berkes, who in fact does not say much about the issue.¹⁰² Regarding the Ottoman commission's rejection of his proposals, Akhundzadeh himself put forward a conspiracy theory, arguing that the Ottoman statesmen were misled by the Iranian ambassador to Istanbul, Mirza Husain Khan Mushir al-Daula, who had a personal grudge against him and secretly presented him to the Ottoman viziers as an "enemy of religion and state,"¹⁰³ an allegation that further muddied the waters.

This allegation by Akhundzadeh of a conservative conspiracy against him does not make much sense. Mirza Husain Khan, who would later become the prime minister of Iran between 1871 and 1873,¹⁰⁴ was a reformist himself. As Nikkie Keddie argues, already predisposed to reform and modernization as a result of his previous diplomatic

¹⁰¹ Such as the following where he claimed that Münif Pasha was a Shi'i, "Five years after the publication of the *Alefba* of Mirza Fathali and after he [Mirza Fathali] sent copies of that book to Iran, the Ottoman State and a few European states, Tahir Münif Pasha propounded this issue in the Ottoman State. Münif Pasha was a Shi'i: "Pas az panj sal ke az enteshar-e Alefba-ye Mirza Fathali gozasht ve noskheha-ye an ra ba Iran va Usmani va chand kashvar-e Urupa-ye forustad- Taher Munif Pasha heman mas'ala ra dar Usmani matrah kard. Munif Pasha Shi'i bud.": Adamiyat, 75.

¹⁰² See Adamiyat, 77 where he refers to Berkes, *The Development of...*, 196.

¹⁰³ "Nazd-e vaziran-e Usmani ma ra badhah-e din-u-davlat-e Islam neshan dad.": Mirza Fathali Akhundzadeh, *Alefba...*, 353.

¹⁰⁴ Cyrus Masroori, "Mitza Ya`qub Khan's Call for Representative Government: Toleration and Islamic Reform in Nineteenth-Century Iran," *Middle Eastern Studies* 37, No.1 (2001): 90-91.

assignments in India and Russia, “Mirza Husain Khan became an even more eager partisan of reform as a result of what he saw in the Ottoman Empire. He seems to have been influenced by at least two identifiable reformist thinkers- Fath Ali Akhundzadeh, whom he got to know well in Tiflis, and the Iranian Armenian, Malkum Khan, whom he met in Istanbul.”¹⁰⁵ To his credit, Adamiyat rejects Akhundzadeh's claims about Mirza Husain Khan.¹⁰⁶ However, since he apparently did not have access to the articles published in *Mecmua-i Fünun*, he could not explain the reasons for the Turkish side's rejection of Akhundzadeh's proposals.

The Ottoman commission declined Akhundzadeh's proposals because the Ottoman statesmen, including Münif Pasha, actually worried about the perceived dangers of the proposed alphabet reform for the preservation of the existing culture, making the earlier books written in the traditional alphabet inaccessible to the future generations. Specifically, Münif Pasha wrote in an article about the issue that “since such a reform would make the existing Islamic books obsolete, it is clear that such a great danger would hinder [its] application.”¹⁰⁷ Akhundzadeh, writing from the relative safety of his position in Georgia, was absolutely free in speculating wildly about making far-reaching cultural reforms in the Islamic lands from afar, but Münif Pasha, the responsible statesman, was

¹⁰⁵ Nikkie Keddie, “Iran under the later Qajars: 1848-1922,” in Peter Avery et. al (ed.) *The Cambridge History of Iran* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 184.

¹⁰⁶ See Adamiyat, 90.

¹⁰⁷ Münif Efendi, “Islah-ı Resm-i Hatta Dair Bazı Tasavvurat,” *Mecmua-i Fünun* 2, No.14, (1280 [1863]): 69.

bound to the cultural realities of his country and had to think twice about the possible negative effects of such sweeping changes.

It is remarkable that approximately sixty years later, in 1928, an even more radical change in alphabet, namely the establishment of the Latin alphabet for writing the Turkish language in lieu of the Arabic alphabet, would become law without any such concern about the “existing Islamic books” in Turkey. As I will demonstrate in the following two chapters, by then the mainstream Ottoman intellectuals, who increasingly defined “the truth” in terms of a scientific/materialist ideology, were convinced that these “existing Islamic books” did not contain any significant knowledge in them to justify worrying about their loss.

Chapter 3: Beşir Fuad (1852-1887): Scientific Truth and Poetic Dreams

On 5 February 1887, around nine o'clock at night, Beşir Fuad, a former officer in the Ottoman army and an important intellectual who had contributed significantly to the debates about science and literature in the late Ottoman period, committed suicide in the private study of his house near the Sublime Porte in Istanbul. Before committing suicide, he wrote letters to his friends, including Ahmed Midhat Efendi (1844-1912), explaining the reasons for his action, as well as a brief note to the police, informing them that his death was a well-planned suicide and that they should not further bother his wife or the other members of his family with a criminal investigation.¹⁰⁸ Moreover, he decided to turn his suicide into a scientific experiment, and after injecting cocaine into his left arm and carefully cutting his veins in four different places with a razor, he calmly wrote on a sheet of paper about the “effects of bleeding on the body and the feeling and sensation of death that it induced.” Thus we read:

¹⁰⁸ Beşir Fuad's suicide letters to the police and his friends, including Ahmed Midhat Efendi and his publisher Mihran Efendi, were reproduced in Ahmed Midhat's work on Beşir Fuad originally written in 1887. This work was recently republished as Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir Fuad* (Istanbul: Oğlak Yayınları, 1996). For the police report on Fuad's suicide as well as the letters, see pp. 27-45 of the recent publication. The following page numbers refer to the recent publication.

I conducted my operation and did not feel any pain. It aches a little as it bleeds. As I was bleeding, my sister-in-law came downstairs; I warded her off, telling her that the door was closed since I was studying and writing. Fortunately, she did not enter. I cannot imagine any death sweeter than this. I raised my arm abruptly to help the blood flow out. I began to lose consciousness....¹⁰⁹

The rather gruesome details of this bizarre suicide, as well as the serenity and the surprising objectivity with which Beşir Fuad explains the reasons for it in his letters to Ahmed Midhat Efendi, probably led Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar to argue some time ago that Beşir Fuad was a “mystic of science” (*ilim mistiği*) who did not hesitate “to record his feelings as he was dying and to offer his dead body as a present to the Imperial School of Medicine.”¹¹⁰

As I will argue below, there were some rather mundane reasons for Beşir Fuad's decision to commit suicide, and it might be misleading to argue, as Şükrü Hanioglu has done, that Beşir Fuad “cut his veins and took notes describing his deteriorating condition until he lost consciousness *in order to prove* that life was no more than a scientific phenomenon.”¹¹¹ It would be more accurate to say that Beşir Fuad had rather

¹⁰⁹ Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 32.

¹¹⁰ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2006), 275. In another place, Tanpınar simply notes that “realism” in Ottoman literature begins with Beşir Fuad: “Beşir Fuad'la başlayan realizm davası...”: Tanpınar, *Ondokuzuncu*, 534.

¹¹¹ Şükrü Hanioglu, “Blueprints...”, 39. Italics are mine.

uninteresting reasons for ending his life, and probably wished to make a final modest contribution to science by recording his final experiences. In any case, he definitely did not end his life to prove a scientific point.

Beşir Fuad's suicide may have contributed to the general lack of appreciation displayed towards his works and ideas after his death in the predominantly Muslim culture of the late Ottoman Empire, which considered committing suicide, for any reason, a grave sin. However, there is no similar explanation for the continuing neglect of his works and ideas in English-speaking academic circles. With the exception of Hanioglu's above-mentioned article, there is, as far as I know, no significant study on Beşir Fuad and his ideas in English. This is a pity since Beşir Fuad was the first example in the Ottoman Empire of a public intellectual who advocated a thoroughly scientific worldview in his writings.

Diverging significantly from the first generation of Tanzimat-era Ottoman intellectuals who also advocated the study of western science but justified their positions by explicitly or implicitly referring to the Islamic tradition, such as Münif Pasha (1828-1910) and his friends writing in the *Mecmua-i Fünun* (*The Journal of Sciences*), Beşir Fuad never used any religious arguments whatsoever to justify his position on science. In Beşir Fuad, we also see, for the first time, an Ottoman intellectual who consciously referred to the writings of German vulgar materialists, especially Ludwig Büchner (1824-1899), in order to elevate science to an almost metaphysical level, believing that science

was the ultimate arbiter of “truth” in human life. For this reason alone, his works are worth studying.

Moreover, Beşir Fuad wrote the first critical biographies in the Ottoman language of such important European thinkers and literary figures as Voltaire (1694-1778) and Victor Hugo (1802-1885). He used these publications as a springboard to further elaborate his ideas on science and literature. In literature he was an adamant supporter of realism, which he considered to be a natural extension of materialism in fine arts, and favored the realist literary works of Émile Zola (1840-1902) over the romanticism of Victor Hugo. His uncompromising defense of realism led to a number of heated literary arguments with other Ottoman intellectuals, which will be briefly explained in the following pages.

More importantly, Beşir Fuad represented perhaps the first specimen of a new type of Ottoman intellectual who would increasingly dominate discussions of politics, science and religion in the second half of the nineteenth century. He knew a number of European languages-- French, English and German to be exact-- but not the traditional Islamic languages. His education was almost completely secular in nature, and his intellectual and emotional links to Islamic culture were so weak that at one point he admitted to his friend Ahmed Midhat Efendi that he first read the Qur'an in a French translation.¹¹²

¹¹² “He never worked on such things as hadith, tafsir (*Qur'anic exegesis*), kalam (*Islamic theology*) or tasawwuf (*mysticism*) and, moreover, as he confessed to me, he read the Holy Qur'an in a French translation and saw critiques of the Qur'an in European languages.”: Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 22-23.

As Carter Findley argued some time ago, the gradual replacement of Arabic and Persian as the common foreign languages of the Ottoman intelligentsia by French and, to a lesser extent, German and English, is traceable to the foundation of the Translation Bureau (*Tercüme Odası*) in the early nineteenth century.¹¹³ Although Beşir Fuad did not work for the Translation Bureau and was not employed by the government during his literary career, he was educated in the new schools created in the wake of the *Tanzimat* reforms, and his secular education, both formal and informal, certainly had a significant effect on his general outlook and worldview.

In fact, Beşir Fuad was the true founder of Ottoman materialism, which would subsequently become the preferred philosophy of a significant number of influential Ottoman intellectuals and statesmen in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, not to mention the founders of the future Turkish Republic. Therefore, his works and ideas are crucial to understand not only the intellectual currents of the late Ottoman and early Republican periods but also the early Republicans' rather uncompromising political attitude against religion.

In the following section of this chapter, I provide a brief biography of Beşir Fuad and mention his major works. In the second section, I deal with Beşir Fuad's philosophical ideas and materialism and try to put them in the context of nineteenth-century Ottoman intellectual life. I emphasize the centrality of Ludwig Büchner's *Kraft*

¹¹³ Carter V. Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform in the Ottoman Empire: The Sublime Port, 1789-1922* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

und Stoff (*Force and Matter*, later translated by Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil, second-generation Ottoman materialists, into Ottoman Turkish as *Madde ve Kuvvet*)¹¹⁴ for an accurate understanding of Beşir Fuad's ideas about science. Finally, in the third section of the chapter, I expand on Beşir Fuad's literary ideas and his hard-headed defense of literary realism.

I: A BIOGRAPHY OF BEŞİR FUAD

Beşir Fuad, whose ideas, according to Mehmet Kaplan, “closed an era in the history of Turkish literature and opened a new one,”¹¹⁵ was born in Istanbul in 1852. After attending the Fatih elementary and secondary schools in Istanbul (1856-1861), he continued his secondary education in Adana and then in the Jesuit Missionary School in Aleppo, Syria, where his father, Hurşid Pasha, was the governor (1862-1867). Beşir Fuad learned French there, and after his family returned to Istanbul he attended the Istanbul Military High School (*Askeri İdadi*) and the Imperial War College (*Mekteb-i Harbiye*), from which he graduated in 1873.

Coming from a distinguished Ottoman family with an extensive military and administrative background, he was employed in the imperial palace as one of the imperial aides (*Yaveran-ı Hazret-i Şehriyari*) to Sultan Abdülaziz between 1873 and 1876.¹¹⁶ He

¹¹⁴ Ludwig, Büchner, *Madde ve Kuvvet*, Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil (tr.) (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İلمي ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, 1327[1910]).

¹¹⁵ See the introduction Mehmet Kaplan wrote for Orhan Okay's excellent study of Beşir Fuad in Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad: İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Natüralisti* (Istanbul, Hareket Yayınları, 1969), 8.

¹¹⁶ Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad*, 41.

saw military action in the Ottoman-Serbian War of 1875-76 and in the catastrophic Ottoman-Russian War of 1877-78 (known in Turkish as the 93 [*Doksan Üç*] *Harbi*, short for 1293, the Ottoman financial year when the war began). He volunteered to fight in Crete during the Cretan rebellion of 1878, as well, and remained there for almost five years, during which time he studied German and English intensively.¹¹⁷ In 1881, he was appointed as a member of the “Inspection Commission for the Office of General Supplies in the War Ministry” (*Harbiye Levazımat-ı Umumiye Dairesi Heyet-i Teftişiyesi Komisyonu*) with the rank of *kolağası* (an Ottoman army rank above a captain and below a major).

In 1883, Beşir Fuad began to publish articles in the journal *Envar-ı Zeka* (*Lights of Intelligence*), and in 1884 he resigned from his official military posts in order to spend more time on his literary studies.¹¹⁸ From 1884 until his suicide in 1887, he wrote intensively and published an impressive number of literary, scientific and philosophical articles for different periodicals and newspapers, including the already mentioned *Envar-ı Zeka*, as well as *Haver* (West), *Güneş* (Sun), *Saadet* (Happiness), *Ceride-i Havadis* (Register of Events) and *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (The Interpreter of Truth). In addition to

¹¹⁷ Cem Onur Yarar, *Ondokuzuncu Yüzyıl Osmanlı Düşüncesinde Beşir Fuad* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü, 2000), 4. Later Beşir Fuad would translate several linguistic primers by nineteenth-century German linguist Emil Otto on the French, German and English languages into Ottoman Turkish. For a contemporary English translation of Otto's primer on French, see Emil Otto, *Introductory French Reader*, Edward S. Joynes (tr.) (New York: Henry Holt and Company, 1877).

¹¹⁸ Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 19.

these articles and his translations of language primers on French, English and German, Beşir Fuad also translated a few plays from French into Ottoman Turkish.¹¹⁹

More importantly, he wrote the first critical biographies in Ottoman Turkish of Voltaire¹²⁰ and Victor Hugo.¹²¹ In addition, he published a work on human physiology in which the human body is likened to a well-working machine.¹²² Finally, Beşir Fuad wrote literary letters to Muallim Naci (1850-1893)¹²³ and Fazlı Necib (1863-1932)¹²⁴ in which he defended his literary realism, and these letters were later published in book form.

In his book on Beşir Fuad, Ahmet Midhat Efendi, who was himself one of the most important literary figures of the day, recounts how he got to know the young author when Beşir Fuad visited him one day, probably around 1883-1884, in his office at *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, one of the most influential newspapers in Istanbul in the late nineteenth century. Ahmet Midhat at that point knew Beşir Fuad only from the numerous articles he was sending periodically to *Tercüman-ı Hakikat*, as well as to other newspapers and journals, for publication. He had assumed before their meeting,

¹¹⁹ For a list of these plays, see Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad...*, 223.

¹²⁰ Beşir Fuad, *Voltaire* (Istanbul: Şirket-i Mürettibiye Matbaası, 1304[1887]).

¹²¹ Beşir Fuad, *Victor Hugo* (Istanbul: Mihran Matbaası, 1302[1885]).

¹²² Beşir Fuad, *Beşer* (Istanbul: Mihran Matbaası, 1303 [1886]).

¹²³ Beşir Fuad and Muallim Naci, *İntikad* (Istanbul: Mahmud Bey Matbaası [1304]1887). This book was recently republished in Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat*, Handan İnci (ed.) (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), 347-405.

¹²⁴ Beşir Fuad and Fazlı Necib, *Mektubat* (Istanbul: Kitapçı Aleksan, 1305/1889). This book was also republished in Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat*, Handan İnci (ed.) (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), 405-519.

interestingly, that Beşir Fuad was an Arab graduate of the Imperial Medical School (*Mekteb-i Tibbiye*).¹²⁵

The Imperial Medical School was, of course, a hotbed of materialistic ideas at the time, and Beşir Fuad's numerous articles on physiology, science and philosophy, as well as his name, Beşir, which was not common among the Turcophone population, probably led Ahmet Midhat to make this assumption. In any case, it became clear that Ahmed Midhat was not terribly off the mark, since Beşir Fuad was a young intellectual who had been educated, partly, in a Jesuit school in one of the Ottoman Empire's Arab provinces. At the meeting Beşir Fuad explained to Ahmed Midhat that his philosophical thoughts were entirely materialistic, which he explained as “not recognizing anything other than matter.”¹²⁶ Ahmed Midhat writes that he tried to convince Beşir Fuad to give up his materialistic ideas but felt that his arguments did not impress the young man much.¹²⁷ Ahmed Midhat apparently thought very highly of Beşir Fuad's linguistic and philosophical abilities and decided to support him in his literary endeavors.

Understandably, Ahmed Midhat was devastated when his young friend committed suicide a few years later. Throughout the work that Ahmed Midhat wrote on Beşir Fuad, there is a clear sense of surprise, sadness, loss and disbelief on the issue of Beşir Fuad's suicide. Apart from the philosophical disagreements on science and religion between

¹²⁵ Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 11.

¹²⁶ “...kendi efkar-i hikemiyesi 'materyalizm,' yani maddiyattan başka hiçbir şey tanımamaktan ibaret idiğini anlattı...”: Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 15.

¹²⁷ Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 15.

Ahmed Midhat and Beşir Fuad, which I will explain in the following section of the chapter, they were very good friends, and Ahmed Midhat, a self-made man in the publishing business who acted as a mentor to Beşir Fuad, simply could not understand how such a well-educated and knowledgeable man from a good family with considerable financial resources could decide to commit suicide.

The long letter that Beşir Fuad wrote to Ahmed Midhat before his suicide, which Ahmed Midhat decided to append to his book, provides some clues to his motivation. Beşir Fuad begins his letter, titled “A Voice from the Grave” (*Mezardan bir Sada*), by referring to Ahmed Midhat as “O, Philosopher!” (*Ey Hakim*),¹²⁸ and explaining that he has been contemplating suicide for more than two years. Then he abruptly changes the subject to the nature of science and argues that the “truths” established by science never change. He adds that since he has “served” science throughout his life, he wants to do the same at his death and make an experiment out of his planned suicide.

As for the actual reasons for his suicide, Beşir Fuad explains that his mother had suffered a mental breakdown a couple of years earlier, which the doctors identified as “delirium of persecution” (*delire de la persecution; hezeyan-ı tazallumi*). After sending her to a mental institution and learning from the doctors whom he consulted and the medical books that he read that this illness was thought to be hereditary, he began to

¹²⁸ Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 35.

worry that he would eventually suffer the same fate as his mother.¹²⁹ The doctors he consulted, in typical nineteenth-century fashion, suggested draining the excess blood in his brain by applying a leech and advised him to try to dispel his worries by seeking entertainment. It seems that Beşir Fuad carried the doctors' advice too far, since despite being married, he acquired two consecutive mistresses, on whom he spent considerable sums of money while wasting almost two years in debauchery (*sefahat*).

He mentions that he sent his second mistress to France, from where he apparently received a letter informing him that she was about to deliver his baby. He invited her back to Istanbul and rented a house in Kuzguncuk for her and the baby. Beşir Fuad had already spent the majority of his inheritance on these affairs, and his life turned into a hell, as both his wife and his mistress began to complain continually about the situation. Mired in financial and familial problems and convinced that he would succumb to a mental illness, he writes that he could not find any solution other than suicide.¹³⁰

In an additional note that he wrote before his suicide to the administration of the Imperial Medical School, Beşir Fuad bequeathed his body to the school for scientific research. Not surprisingly, his family did not fulfill his wish but decided to give him a proper Islamic burial.

¹²⁹ “I began to observe the first signs of mental problems in my case. Since, as a result of my command of medical books, I knew that madness was hereditary, my worries only increased...”: Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 41..

¹³⁰ “When I go home, my wife complains and cries, asking me, 'Why don't you come home?' If I spend a few days at home and go to Kuzguncuk, my mistress cries, saying, 'You got bored of me!'... In the past couple of weeks, this has been my situation and I could not find any solution better than suicide to get rid of my problems.” Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 43-44.

II: BEŞİR FUAD'S PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS

Beşir Fuad differs on a number of important points from the Young Ottomans who dominated the Ottoman intellectual climate in the second half of the nineteenth century. Unlike the Young Ottomans (and, later, most of the Young Turks), who defined their “westernism” mostly with their advocacy of parliamentary rule and constitutionalism,¹³¹ Beşir Fuad devotes almost no space in his numerous works to overt discussions of politics. This fact cannot be explained simply by the routine political censure of literature and the press during the reign of Abdülhamid II. The underlying reason is that Beşir Fuad was one of the first Ottoman thinkers to come up with the idea that a thorough and meaningful “westernization” of the Ottoman lands could not be realized by a simple adoption of western political institutions, but that such a transformation required a philosophical and ideological change, as well.

In fact, one may argue that Beşir Fuad, similarly to Münif Pasha, whose stance in *Mecmua-i Fünun* (*Journal of Sciences*) was consciously apolitical, decided to concentrate his efforts on the transfer into the Ottoman Empire of what he perceived as cutting-edge western ideas about science and philosophy, instead of advocating immediate political change. These “cutting- edge” western ideas meant, for him as for

¹³¹ Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri: 1895-1908* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1996), 222.

many later Ottoman thinkers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, the vulgar-materialist ideas of the German philosophers, especially Ludwig Büchner.¹³²

Following Büchner, Beşir Fuad rejected any sort of religious or philosophical speculation as meaningless drivel that should be replaced with scientific arguments.¹³³ So, when a young intellectual from Salonika with whom Beşir Fuad was corresponding, Fazlı Necib (1863-1932), asked in one of his letters whether the teaching of “morality” (*ahlak*) should not be considered anterior (and thus implicitly superior) to the teaching of science for the formation of the individual, and whether the ancients (*kudema*) were not correct in their emphasis on the teaching of literature and morals to the students, Beşir Fuad replied that although the teaching of morals was important, “monstrosities” (*garibeler*) were bound to result if any philosophical or moral viewpoints detached from science were taught to people.¹³⁴

Since these ideas are taken almost verbatim from Ludwig Büchner's influential work *Kraft und Stoff* (Force and Matter),¹³⁵ it is worthwhile to examine Büchner's thought more closely. As Frederick Gregory pointed out some time ago, Ludwig Büchner and the

¹³² Serol Teber, “Ludwig Büchner ve Osmanlı Düşünürleri Üstündeki Etkileri,” *Felsefe Dergisi* 2 (1986): 5.

¹³³ Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat*, 453-454.

¹³⁴ Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat*, 445.

¹³⁵ Ludwig Büchner's work was immensely popular in the nineteenth century and was translated into many languages, including Ottoman Turkish. The page numbers I use refer to Ludwig Büchner, *Force and Matter, or Principles of the Natural Order of the Universe with a System of Morality Based Thereon*, tr. from the fifteenth German edition (London: Asher and Company, 1884).

other vulgar materialists of the nineteenth century, their denials aside, were certainly metaphysicians by today's standards. Materialism of the nineteenth-century German vulgar-materialist variety often entailed the following tenets:

(1) that there is an independently existing world; (2) that human beings, like all other subjects, are material entities; (3) that the human mind does not exist as an entity distinct from the human body; (4) that there is no God...whose mode of existence is not that of material entities. These are metaphysical postulates which are not necessarily implied by mechanism or reductionism.¹³⁶

Following the earlier philosophical musings of Ludwig Andreas Feuerbach (1804-1872), who declared God a creation of man, more specifically the “projection of human needs into the heavens,”¹³⁷ Büchner, whom Gregory characterizes as the “summarizer and spokesman” of the German vulgar materialists, writes in his *magnum opus*, which was once regarded as the “Bible of materialism,”¹³⁸ that “every item of human knowledge, every page of practical experience, every conquest of science...makes the old theistic

¹³⁶ Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Dordrecht: D. Reidel, 1977), X-XI.

¹³⁷ Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism...*, 5.

¹³⁸ *Ibid.*, 105.

theory of the universe, which originated in the days when mankind was still in its first childhood, appear as a mere fable.”¹³⁹

Referring to the ideas of Carl Vogt (1817-1895), another vulgar-materialist, Büchner argues in his *Force and Matter*, in the chapter entitled “Personal Continuance,” on life after death and the human soul, that physiology “declares itself decidedly and categorically against individual immortality....The soul does not enter into the fetus...but is produced by the development of the brain, just the same as muscular activity is produced by the development of the muscles, or secretion is produced by a development of the glands.”¹⁴⁰

In view of Büchner's influence on him, it comes as no surprise that Beşir Fuad was fascinated with human physiology and published the first book on this subject for the general reader in the Ottoman language. In this book, Beşir Fuad criticizes the Ottoman educational system for not putting enough emphasis on teaching students about the human body and argues that “the creature named human is a mathematical equation with numerous unknowns, and there is nothing more important than the solving of this equation. The science which will actually solve this mathematical equation is the science of physiology.”¹⁴¹

¹³⁹ Ludwig Büchner, *Force and Matter...*, XXV.

¹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, 402.

¹⁴¹ Beşir Fuad, *Beşer..*,7.

In the chapter of his *Force and Matter* entitled “Morality,” Büchner argues that a new “moral law,” presumably replacing the old theistic morality, which would “pitch its tents...on the new territory of a natural order of the universe left open by science...rather than on the old one of religion and of belief in spirits,”¹⁴² would follow the results of scientific investigation. This, in a nutshell, summarizes Beşir Fuad's intellectual stance (and later that of many others, including Baha Tevfik, Abdullah Cevdet and Celal Nuri İleri) on the relationship among science, religion and morality. Following Büchner, these late Ottoman and early Republican authors believed that somehow, science would “discover” a new morality for human beings, making the moral fabric of old theistic ideas obsolete. Unfortunately for these authors, Büchner does not explain in his book how exactly this is supposed to happen. All he writes, at the end of his work, is that “science must take the place of religion; and belief in a natural... universal order must be substituted for a belief in spirits and ghosts, and the factitious morals of dogmas make room for a morality suited to Nature.”¹⁴³

But what does a morality “suited to Nature” mean? Even if we forget the highly relevant Nietzschean philosophical warning that “nature” seems completely indifferent to any moralistic interpretation imposed on it, Büchner's suggestion of a “natural morality” that is supposed to be discovered by science is deeply problematic for several reasons. First, it conflates fields which are not necessarily overlapping, such as science and

¹⁴² Ludwig Büchner, *Force and Matter...*, 479.

¹⁴³ Ludwig Büchner, *Force and Matter...*, 485.

religion, and thus makes a “category mistake” in analysis. Secondly, the suggestion of a “natural morality” opens dangerous doors to racist interpretations of morality, which were rather common in the nineteenth century, based on the assumed “natural” biological ranking of human beings.¹⁴⁴ In any case, there is no reason to assume that scientific discoveries, by themselves, will automatically lead to any moral system at all, let alone a superior morality to the existing ones. Any such moral system would necessarily be founded on either a secular philosophical or a religious ground, making the pretensions of a neutral science “discovering” this morality untenable. Science simply cannot function in a philosophical vacuum.

However, Beşir Fuad did not find anything terribly problematic in Büchner's work. In fact, he was so impressed with Büchner's work that he wrote in one of his letters to his friend Muallim Naci that “ [i]f we investigate any part of existence, in the first place, two things attract our attention: Matter and Force! In order to appreciate the importance of these two words, it is enough to say that a work named after these words created a renovation in the world of philosophy.”¹⁴⁵

The truth of the matter, however, is that Büchner, although he was widely popular in the nineteenth century, was, relatively speaking, a philosophical lightweight; his entire work ultimately rested on a peculiar misunderstanding of science, religion and morality.

¹⁴⁴ For a classic treatment of the links between nineteenth-century scientific ideas and racism, see Michael Adas, *Machines as the Measure of Men: Science, Technology and Ideologies of Western Dominance* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1989).

¹⁴⁵ Beşir Fuad and Muallim Naci, *İntikad* (Istanbul: Mahmud Bey Matbaası 1304/1887), 70.

It is important here to remember that it was Karl Marx, after all, who coined the term “vulgar materialist” in order to distinguish the naïve materialism of the German natural scientists following Ludwig Feuerbach, such as Ludwig Büchner, Carl Vogt and Jacob Moleschott (1822-1893), from his own “historical materialism”.¹⁴⁶

But, of course, what was philosophically vulgar and naïve in Germany appeared as a genuine philosophical revelation in the Ottoman Empire. It seems to me that the young Ottoman authors of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries were simply not philosophically sophisticated enough to appreciate the intricate moral arguments of the Neo-Kantians or Hegelians, let alone the sophisticated ideas of, say, a Nietzsche or Marx on science, society and religion, which represented the real philosophical discussion in Germany of the time.¹⁴⁷ It is important to bear in mind that there were simply no significant Ottoman Turkish “Hegelians” or “Kantians,” let alone “Marxists” or still less “Nietzscheans,” in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. But there were a lot of Ottoman followers of Büchner.

In that sense, one may prematurely conclude that the intellectual milieu of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic resembled a remake of a western film which had not attracted much of an audience in the first place, in a Third World setting, this time with local actors. However, as the following discussion of Ahmed Midhat

¹⁴⁶ For an early use of the term, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 231.

¹⁴⁷ One minor exception is Baha Tevfik, who wrote the first book on Friedrich Nietzsche in Ottoman Turkish.

Efendi, as well as later chapters on Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, demonstrate, the truth of the matter is much more complicated than that.

III. AHMED MİDHAT EFENDİ ON BÜCHNER:

It should be noted that not every intellectual in the Ottoman Empire was so impressed with Büchner's ideas on science, religion and morality. Ahmed Midhat Efendi writes in his book on Beşir Fuad that some materialists, “like Büchner, one of the notables of this school” (*Büchner gibi, bunların eazımından bulunan bazı zevat...*),¹⁴⁸ were making a philosophical mistake when they tried to reach conclusions about the non-existence of God from their observations about matter and force, which they deemed to be eternal. Their mistake, according to him, lay in the fact that they “subordinated the creative force and nature of God to the properties of matter.”¹⁴⁹ Indeed, if things like matter and force are as orderly as the materialists claim them to be, asks Ahmed Midhat, is it not at least possible that there is a higher power, namely God, who is responsible for this order?¹⁵⁰ Or, in other words, does not a mechanical universe, working like a well-wound watch, point to a watchmaker?

¹⁴⁸ Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 70.

¹⁴⁹ “...derhal kuvve-i halikiyet dahi işte bu madde ile havassına müntesip bir keyfiyet olduğunu hükmediverdikleri zaman...”: Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 70

¹⁵⁰ Ahmet Mithat Efendi, *Beşir...*, 70-71.

Of course, Ahmed Midhat's line of reasoning is also problematic from a philosophical point of view, because, first of all, it may be the case that the “order” we observe in the universe is only a local affair, confined to the particular part of the universe we are observing (and hence making our extrapolation to an “orderly universe” as a whole problematic). Secondly, and more importantly, even if the universe is orderly, these “laws” we observe may be the emergent properties of an evolving universe itself. In other words, it is very difficult, if not impossible, to go from the observation of an “apparent” order and design to a designer.¹⁵¹

The historical question is deeper than a simple disagreement on the finer points of religion or metaphysics between “progressive” Ottoman intellectuals like Beşir Fuad, on the one hand, and “conservative” ones like Ahmed Midhat Efendi, on the other. In his excellent article on Ahmed Midhat Efendi, Carter Findley argues that “Ahmed Midhat is easily branded a conservative, yet he had progressive traits. In contrast to the progressive ideologues who took constitutionalism as their 'symbol of western modernity,' he -while sharing some of their positivistic and Social Darwinist ideas- believed social, economic, and cultural change should come first.”¹⁵²

¹⁵¹ On these points, see the classic by Richard Dawkins, *The Blind Watchmaker: Why the Evidence of Evolution Reveals a Universe without Design* (New York: Norton, 1986). These ideas proposed by Ahmed Midhat Efendi, nevertheless, had a certain traction in the Ottoman intellectual life and should be regarded as precursors of the ideas of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, examined in the fifth chapter of this dissertation.

¹⁵² Carter V. Findley, “An Ottoman Occidental in Europe: Ahmed Midhat meets Madame Gülzar, 1889,” *The American Historical Review* 103, No.1 (1998): 21.

As Findley cogently implies, the crux of the disagreement between Ahmed Midhat and other Ottoman intellectuals, including Beşir Fuad, revolves around their differing conceptualizations of modernity. So, we read that towards the end of his book on the trip he made to Europe for the Congress of Orientalists in Stockholm in 1889,

Ahmed Midhat recounts a discussion in which the noted statesman and intellectual Sadullah Paşa, Ottoman ambassador in Vienna, proposed evaluating Europe's progress in terms of “material” and “moral.” Attribution to Sadullah gives this idea distinguished provenance. Yet Ahmed Midhat had already made it his leitmotif, developing it in much earlier discussions. One reason for this may have been that the moral-material duality paralleled Sultan Abdülhamid's view that Western civilization consisted of “technique” and “idea,” the former helpful to Ottomans, the latter dangerous for ill-educated peoples who still needed paternal guidance. But Ahmed Midhat's use of this dichotomy gave his work more than a kind of political correctness. Explicitly applying the moral-material dichotomy to the Other suggests applying it to the Self, implying an analytical framework that transcends simplistic binarism.¹⁵³

¹⁵³ Carter V. Findley, “An Ottoman Occidentalist...,” 23. Ahmed Midhat's book, to which Findley refers, is Ahmed Midhat, *Avrupa'da bir Cevelan* (Istanbul: Gayret Matbaası, 1307[1889-1890]).

This is an extremely important point since the moral-material dichotomy proposed by Ahmed Midhat was accepted almost verbatim by later conservative Ottoman and Turkish authors, such as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi and Said Nursi, in their assessments of western modernity and the proper strategies of modernization for the Ottoman lands.

In fact, if Beşir Fuad stands at the beginning of the Ottoman materialist tradition which explicitly refused to make such a distinction and argued for adopting European modernity wholesale, Ahmed Midhat should be regarded as the intellectual father of another line of Ottoman and Turkish authors who argued for some sort of “cultural authenticity” and believed that it was possible to modernize while preserving certain aspects of Islamic culture.¹⁵⁴

In both versions of modernization, though, modernization has been conceptualized as a defensive measure to protect the integrity of the empire (later the Republic) against the perceived imperialism of the West. Hence, not surprisingly, both the straightforward westernizers and the supporters of a culturally authentic modernization found it expedient, most of the time, to converge intellectually on a broadly conceived nationalist paradigm. The contours of this defensive ideology, of course, only gradually shifted from a vague Ottomanism (*Osmanlıcılık*) to Turkish nationalism.

¹⁵⁴ For a detailed discussion of Ahmed Midhat's ideas, see Orhan Okay, *Batı Medeniyeti Karşısında Ahmed Midhat Efendi* (Istanbul: Milli Eğitim Yayınları, 1991). I expand on the ideas of later Ottoman and Turkish authors on the question of moral-material dichotomy in the fourth, fifth and sixth chapters.

Whether non-western, multiple modernities, possibly with different historical trajectories from the western case, have been historically realized or not is an interesting theoretical question which has recently drawn the interest of some notable sociologists.¹⁵⁵ In my opinion, the idea that there is a distinctively Turkish modernity, while attractive to a lot of social scientists nowadays, is going to turn out to be a philosophical dead end. Modernity, as a process, is a *global* reality. Before 1945, it could be read as a Western threat. Ultimately, even then, it was an emergent global reality, transforming and intensifying as it evolved.

However, it seems to me that the possibility of a non-western modernization has been, simply put, *the question* for most Ottoman and Turkish intellectuals from roughly 1860 to the present. As I noted previously, different answers were given to this question. As one of the contending parties, namely the supporters of westernization *in toto*, emerged politically victorious with the foundation of the Turkish Republic and imposed their version of modernization as westernization (accompanied by Turkish nationalism) as a historical inevitability, the other group was left on the margins of nationalist historiography.

Although Beşir Fuad was crystal clear on his advocacy of a scientific worldview, he never attacked Islam directly. Whenever he wanted to criticize religion, he was careful to come up with an example from the history of Christianity in which the malevolent ideas and plans of the Christian clergy were resisted and bravely rejected by heroic

¹⁵⁵ See, for example, S.N. Eisenstadt, "Multiple Modernities," *Daedalus* 129, No.1 (2000): 3.

philosophers and scientists. Thus, we read in one of his earlier articles that Giordano Bruno (1548-1600), one of his heroes, worked “in order to tear apart the veil of ignorance that the priests put in front of people's eyes.”¹⁵⁶ Likewise, at the beginning of his work on Voltaire, he writes that it was a “party of rescuers” (*fırka-i münciye*) composed of “lovers of truth like Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton, Bacon, Descartes and Giordano Bruno,” who resisted the prisons, torturers and executioners of the priests with their own “weapons of investigation, experiment and science”.¹⁵⁷

In explaining the lack of direct opposition to Islam in Beşir Fuad's writings, Orhan Okay is basically right in arguing that “in the context of the Turkey of his age, we could not expect a direct anti-religious stance.”¹⁵⁸ The point here is that Beşir Fuad was one of the first Ottoman authors to put forward science *as an intellectual paradigm opposed to religion*, and as such he was necessarily cautious about not appearing anti-Islamic in his writings. But even a cursory glance at his rather Manichean view of the history of science and philosophy in Europe, portraying it essentially as a struggle to the death against religious zealotry and eulogizing the “party of rescuers” of science and philosophy, makes it clear that he used Christianity as a stand-in for what he wanted to say about Islam.

¹⁵⁶ Beşir Fuad, “Tarih-i Felsefe'den bir Katre”(“ A Drop from the History of Philosophy”), *Haver* No.1 (1883): 22-23.

¹⁵⁷ Beşir Fuad, *Voltaire...*,7-8.

¹⁵⁸ Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad...*, 178.

This political caution was not necessary when it came to opposing romanticism and the “dreams” it created in literature as against what he believed to be “scientific” realism. His writings are much more open and direct on this subject. His general position on literature, as well as the lengthy polemics he pursued in support of literary realism against the dreams and images (*hayal*) of romanticism will be the subject of the following part of this chapter.

IV: BEŞİR FUAD AND LITERARY REALISM

When Beşir Fuad published his critical study of Victor Hugo in 1885, there was already an ongoing discussion in Ottoman literature between the supporters of the old Ottoman tradition of poetry, largely led by Muallim Naci (1850-1893),¹⁵⁹ who were mostly sympathetic towards European romantic literature, and others, more open to new ideas related to literary realism coming from Europe, led by Recaizade Mahmud Ekrem (1847-1914). Interestingly, though, Beşir Fuad's critical attitude towards Victor Hugo sparked negative reactions from both sides. There was a particularly nasty and long exchange of polemics between Beşir Fuad and Menemenlizade Mehmed Tahir.¹⁶⁰

Beşir Fuad sent a copy of his work on Victor Hugo for review to Menemenlizade Mehmed Tahir, with whom he had published the journal *Haver* (West) some time

¹⁵⁹ On Muallim Naci, see Abdullah Uçman, *Muallım Naci* (Istanbul: Toker Yayınları, 1974).

¹⁶⁰ On Menemenlizade Mehmed Tahir, see Necat Birinci, *Menemenlizade Mehmet Tahir: Hayatı ve Eserleri* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1988).

previously.¹⁶¹ Mehmed Tahir responded by publishing a series of articles highly critical of the work in his new journal *Gayret* (Effort) from February to September 1886.¹⁶² Beşir Fuad, in turn, published retaliatory articles in *Saadet* (Happiness) and *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* (Interpreter of Truth), and the tone on both sides became increasingly condescending and cynical. Other intellectuals, such as Muallim Naci, Ahmed Midhat Efendi and Namık Kemal (1840-1888), as well as an author using the pseudonym Ali (most probably Menemenlizade Mehmed Tahir himself), also contributed to the debate. The result was one of the most peculiar, not to say surreal, polemics in the history of Turkish literature.¹⁶³

On the surface, the discussion seemed to revolve around the excessive use of literary modes of representation and figures of speech by romantic authors like Victor Hugo. The discussion began when Menemenlizade Mehmed Tahir argued that one should not analyze a poetic work as if it were a scientific one,¹⁶⁴ and that idealized figures such as Jean Valjean and Fantine of *Les Misérables*, who look a bit too perfect to exist in

¹⁶¹ Orhan Okay notes that *Haver* was closed because of intellectual disagreements between Beşir Fuad and Mememenlizade Mehmed Tahir: Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad...*, 51.

¹⁶² These articles, as well as Beşir Fuad's responses to them, were recently republished in Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat*, Handan İnci (ed.) (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 1999), 161-286.

¹⁶³ I would like to thank Carter V. Findley, who kindly pointed out that this polemic was also reflected in the novels of Ahmed Midhat and Fatma Aliye, which directly refer to Zola and the meaning of realism. Findley discusses this point in his recent book *Turkey, Islam, Nationalism and Modernity: A History, 1789-2007* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2010), 185. See also Carter Findley, "The Novel as Social Subversion: Ahmed Midhat and Fatma Aliye on Fantasy and Reality," unpublished manuscript.

¹⁶⁴ Menemenlizade Mehmed Tahir, "Biraderim Fuad Beyefendi," in Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat...*, 162.

reality, were created by Victor Hugo mainly for didactic purposes. The pen of Victor Hugo, Mehmed Tahir argued, is similar to the moonlight, showing the silhouettes in a lofty and sublime (*ulvi*) manner, making them didactically relevant for the moral education of people, whereas Émile Zola's worked like the light of a candle, merely showing things as they are.¹⁶⁵ He added that artists and poets were as useful for humanity as scientists, since all of them worked for people's benefit and happiness.

It is interesting to note that the discussion from the very start was primarily concerned with what is useful and beneficial for people in general and for the moral education of people in particular. In his initial reply, Beşir Fuad argued that the exaggerated use of figures of speech by the Romantics stemmed from their inability to portray reality as it is,¹⁶⁶ and that even for didactic purposes, the unrealistic portrayal of characters and situations is not suitable in this age of progress corresponding to the “mature age” (*sinn-i rüşd*) of humanity.¹⁶⁷ These poetic dreams (*hayalat-ı şairane*) and their creators simply cannot be compared to science and scientists in terms of the actual benefit they provide for society.

After Menemenlizade Mehmed Tahir wrote another reply, the polemic quickly degenerated into a meaningless comparison between poetry and science. Beşir Fuad accused not only the contemporary romantics but also most of the old Ottoman poets of

¹⁶⁵ Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat...*, 168-169.

¹⁶⁶ Ibid., 176.

¹⁶⁷ Ibid., 179.

being ignoramuses, knowing nothing about the truth (*hakikat*) and writing exaggerated nonsense.¹⁶⁸ If the aim of novels is to purify the morality of people (*tasfiye-i ahlak*), as Menemenlizade Mehmed Tahir argues, claimed Beşir Fuad, then the novelists, instead of imagining perfect role models, should take their example from the science of hygiene (*hifz-ı sıhha*), which examines the nature of the causes that lead to the loss of health in order to urge people to refrain from them, just as the realists do in their novels.¹⁶⁹

Once again, the use of the language of medicine is striking. Both sides in the discussion seem content to frame the debate in a radically pragmatic manner, reducing an essentially literary discussion to a technical argument about the best way to “help” people achieve cultural and moral progress. The question of whether the works of earlier Ottoman poets may have literary value in their own right due to their literary qualities is not even raised. The sole concern is helping people to make “progress” as quickly as possible.

In his valuable study of nationalism, Gregory Jusdanis argues that nationalism is “born out of a theory of progress and that...a significant impulse for the emergence of nationalism has been the discovery by intellectual and political elites of the tardiness of their societies. Nationalism therefore is in part a response to a condition of belatedness.¹⁷⁰ This sense of “belatedness” is likewise evident in the works of the Ottoman modernizers.

¹⁶⁸ Ibid., 214-215.

¹⁶⁹ “Bu ilm bilakis muhill-i sıhhat olan esbabı ta’dad ve tefsir edip onlardan tevakkıyi tavsiye ediyor; işte realistler de tasfiye-i ahlak için bu usulü ittihaz ediyorlar.” Ibid., 229.

¹⁷⁰ Gregory Jusdanis, *The Necessary Nation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2001), 7.

Thinking that they were late entrants in the global game of nationalist modernization, they were often more than willing to suggest all sorts of social engineering projects as long as they thought that these contributed to their nation's progress. It is thus not surprising that Beşir Fuad would frame even a literary disagreement in terms of progress. He, of course, thought that such progress would be possible only if Ottoman intellectuals abandoned the “poetic dreams” of earlier Ottoman writers for the “truth,” defined as exclusively scientific.

In this light, some of the later, more radical “social engineering” projects of the early Turkish Republic become easier to understand. Perhaps one of the most significant of these was the shift from the modified Arabic alphabet used in the Ottoman Empire to Latin script in 1928. As I argued in the first chapter, the arguments for such a change go back to the 1860s, when Münif Pasha and the Ottoman Scientific Society discussed the merits of changing the alphabet after the idea was suggested by the Iranian intellectual Mirza Fethali Akhundzadeh (1812-1878). The arguments supporting the change of alphabet throughout the nineteenth century and into the twentieth century revolved around the twin ideas of the difficulty of teaching the Arabic alphabet to children and the better fit between the phonetic properties of the Turkish language and the Latin alphabet. Whatever the linguistic benefits of such a drastic measure may have been, there is no question that the change in 1928 also entailed an enormous cultural loss, effectively cutting the links between the new generations educated in the Republic and the vast literary output of Ottoman times.

However, as I have argued in this chapter, beginning with the writings of Beşir Fuad, late Ottoman authors had already begun to argue against the “value” of this past literary heritage. And once they decided that it did not reflect the new overarching “truth” represented by science, and that it was not indispensable for the scientific and civilizational “progress” for which they yearned, it was only a matter of time before this past cultural output would be sacrificed on the altar of science, nationalism and progress.

Nonetheless, Beşir Fuad's condemnations of Ottoman literature, as well as Romanticism, were not left unanswered. Namık Kemal, one of the most important Ottoman authors of the nineteenth century and a romantic himself, wrote a very harsh letter against Beşir Fuad, accusing him of being a literary dilettante “unable to read a couplet properly in Ottoman Turkish, yet attempting to accuse not only the best past poets of the Ottomans but also those of the French of ignorance.”¹⁷¹ Beşir Fuad wrote a weak response in which he referred to the ideas of Ludwig Büchner to justify his position on truth and literature; this was published just a few days before his suicide.¹⁷² But it was already clear that the future of the Ottoman Empire would be shaped not by the culturally sophisticated opinions of the likes of Namık Kemal but by the “scientific” arguments of Beşir Fuad and his followers.

¹⁷¹ Namık Kemal, “Ebuzziya Tevfik Bey Biraderime,” *Mecmua-i Ebuzziya* No.52 (1887), in Beşir Fuad, *Şiir ve Hakikat...*,312.

¹⁷² Beşir Fuad, “Yine Şiir ve Hakikat Meselesi,” *Tercüman-ı Hakikat* No. 2592, 1 February 1887.

Chapter 4: Baha Tevfik (1884-1914): Materialism, Philosophy and Ethics

Baha Tevfik (1884-1914), from a philosophical point of view, is the most sophisticated representative of materialistic thinking in the late Ottoman Empire.¹⁷³

Largely as a result of his early death at the age of thirty and his decision not to associate with the ruling Committee of Union and Progress (CUP), Baha Tevfik remains a relatively obscure figure in the intellectual history of the Ottoman Empire. Thus, I think it is necessary, first, to place Baha Tevfik's writings within the context of late Ottoman materialism.

I: MATERIALISM SUPPORTED BY RELIGIOUS ARGUMENTS:

I argue that there were two distinct forms of materialism in the late Ottoman intellectual world. The first form of Ottoman materialism in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century is distinguished from the second form by its strategy of using religious arguments in order to further the materialist cause in society. This first form of

¹⁷³ Şükrü Hanioglu remarks that "there is no question that among the late Ottoman materialists, Baha Tevfik paid the closest attention to philosophy and to its role in shaping human society", Şükrü Hanioglu, "Blueprints...." 70.

materialism, to which Baha Tevfik did not adhere, is best represented by the writings of Abdullah Cevdet (1869-1932) and Celal Nuri (İleri) (1881-1938).

Celal Nuri, whose ideas were influenced by the arguments of such prominent German vulgar materialists as Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) and Ludwig Büchner (1824-1899), nevertheless believed in the social and political necessity of religion as an institution.¹⁷⁴ Hence, Celal Nuri, just like Abdullah Cevdet, who, despite being a strict materialist, “firmly and consistently believed that human society cannot live without religion,”¹⁷⁵ did not make a frontal attack on religion or Islam. Religion, according to Celal Nuri and Abdullah Cevdet, was, in the final analysis, a social tool to be utilized by the materialist philosophers in order to shepherd the masses towards a scientific society. Hence, as Şükrü Hanioglu demonstrates, such a clearly materialist figure as Abdullah Cevdet would have no problem wearing the mantle of a *mujtahid*¹⁷⁶ (a scholar able to offer a new interpretation of specific points of Islamic law based on independent reasoning) and “reconcile “the liberal principles of Islam,” with modern science.”¹⁷⁷

The whole idea of “appearing” as a religious reformer and arguing for the compatibility of materialist philosophy with Islam is related to Ottoman materialists’ obsession with educating and elevating the common people. Both Abdullah Cevdet and

¹⁷⁴ For further examination of Celal Nuri’s ideas, see Chapter Four.

¹⁷⁵ Hanioglu, “Blueprints...,” 43.

¹⁷⁶ The journal published by Abdullah Cevdet was named *İctihad*.

¹⁷⁷ Hanioglu, “Blueprints...,” 51.

Celal Nuri were acutely aware of the symbolic meaning of religion for the society at large; therefore, instead of confronting the religious beliefs of the masses directly, they chose to “educate” the masses by presenting their materialism in Islamic garb. Hanioglu believes that this attitude is largely a result of the influence of French sociologist Gustave Le Bon’s theory of *la psychologie des foules* on Ottoman intellectuals:

Under the influence of Le Bon, Abdullah Cevdet declared that the responsibility for teaching the “foules” fell on the elite. This was because “the soul of the masses has an important virtue: they accept the ideas and sentiments constantly repeated to them without any judgement or analysis.”...Thus his ambitious program...was not limited to influencing the elite...but extended to altering the *Weltanschauung* of the Muslim masses by propagating a new philosophy he deemed Islamic.¹⁷⁸

So, in this paradigm, the elite, although they are not religious at all, continue to provide the masses with such ideas as the essential compatibility of their religion with rationalism and science (provided, of course, that religion is “reformed” in the light of scientific developments). But the purpose here is not to strengthen the role of religion in society. On the contrary, the ultimate aim in this strategy is to educate the common people about the supremacy of science over religion in a language acceptable to them. The elite, in fact, is *defining* what religion is for the masses with an eye toward controlling religion

¹⁷⁸ Hanioglu, “Blueprints...,” 52.

in the future. Of course, it is, partly, the very act of “defining” which gives the elite the ability to control religion.

Interestingly, although Hanioglu notes that “the pragmatists of early Republican Turkey found in *Vulgärmaterialismus* a versatile tool for building a modern state dedicated to scientific progress,”¹⁷⁹ he does not adequately assess the effects of the materialistic discourse for the further development of *laicism* in Turkey. I intentionally use the word “laicism” instead of “secularism” here because I believe that the vulgar materialistic attitude of the early Republican leaders toward religion (that is, defining and controlling it) is one of the most important reasons why secularism, in the Anglo-Saxon sense of the separation of the political realm from the religious realm, was never actualized in Turkey.¹⁸⁰ French-speaking Ottoman intellectuals did not look at the Great Britain, still less, unsurprisingly, at the U.S, which was still a minor player at the time. They could and did look at France. What they imitated was what they saw: the French laicism of 1905, not the Anglo-American separation of church and state.

What happened on 3 March 1924, as a result of the abolition of the caliphate and the Ministry of Islamic Law and Foundations (*Şer 'iye ve Evkaf Vekâleti*) and the establishment of the Directorate of Religious Affairs (*Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı*) was not

¹⁷⁹ Hanioglu, “Blueprints...,” 85.

¹⁸⁰ For this important point, see Andrew Davison, “Turkey a ‘Secular’ State? The Challenge of Description,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, Nos. 2/3 (2003): 333-350. According to Davison, as a result of the early Republican legislation on religion, “Religion became a separate concern among other state concerns, not separate from politics or state” (341). On the Directorate of Religious Affairs, see Ufuk Ulutaş, “Religion and Secularism in Turkey: The Dilemma of the Directorate of Religious Affairs,” unpublished article.ms.

the creation of a political sphere separate from the religious, but the establishment of the “control” and “domination” of religion by the state. Ironically, the early Republican leaders who liked to present their reforms as radical breaks from the Ottoman past were, in fact, repeating the Ottoman state’s traditional system of control of religion (via the post of *Diyanet İşleri Başkanlığı* instead of *Şeyhülislamlık*) in a different context.¹⁸¹

Cognizant of the important point that the Kemalist regime did not try to “destroy” religion but instead tried to redefine and control it, Niyazi Berkes wrote some time ago that “far from launching a program of extermination, the Kemalist regime took measures to promote the finding of an outlook and founding of an organization within which religion would not be destroyed as a result of having been extricated from its old shell.”¹⁸² In my opinion, only in light of this Republican ideology of redefining (as an inherently *rational religion* which just needed a bit of reformation to regain its natural form) and controlling Islam do such early Republican acts as the attempts to translate the

¹⁸¹ Of course, the classical Ottoman governmental system which depended on a delicate balance of power among *ilmiye* (“men of knowledge,” religious scholars), *kalemiye* (“men of the pen,” scribes) and *seyfiye* (“men of the sword,” the army) had already ceased to exist by 1922 as a result of the reforms of the *Tanzimat* and the subsequent transformation of the small scribal class into a modern bureaucracy in the nineteenth century. See Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform...* One of the many important arguments advanced by Findley is that the overly innovative character of the *Tanzimat* reforms led to new socio-cultural configurations within the ruling bureaucracy; and whereas the traditionalist Muslim officials with no knowledge of western languages found it increasingly difficult to rise within the bureaucratic mechanism, a new group of bureaucrats (called “Modernist Muslim Officials” by Findley) emerged in this period.

¹⁸² Niyazi Berkes, *The Development of Secularism in Turkey* (Montreal: McGill University Press, 1964), 482.

Qur'an into Turkish or the delivery of the sermons and the call to prayer (*ezan*) in Turkish¹⁸³ become meaningful.

It seems clear to me that we, as historians of the late Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic, need a theoretical framework to understand the behavior of early Republican statesmen vis-à-vis religion. Michel Foucault made the crucial theoretical point some time ago that in order to understand history, one's point of reference

...should not be to the great model of language (*langue*) and signs, but to that of war and battle. The history which bears and determines us has the form of a war rather than that of a language: relations of power, not relations of meaning. History has no "meaning," though this is not to say that it is absurd or incoherent. On the contrary, it is intelligible and should be susceptible of analysis down to the smallest detail- but this in accordance with the intelligibility of struggles, of strategies, and tactics.¹⁸⁴

I argue that the early Republican policies regarding religion are best understood as a strategic battle against the traditional understanding of Islam in society. In this strategic struggle, the Republican discursive machine acquired its theoretical weaponry and armament from the storehouse of late Ottoman materialism. The Republican discourse and policies towards religion, I stress again, should not be understood as a simple attempt

¹⁸³ Ibid., 490.

¹⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, *Power/Knowledge: Selected Interviews and Other Writings, 1972-1977* (New York: Pantheon 1980), 114.

at repression of religion or a willingness to do away with Islam completely. State power was used to shape and create a “rational” Islam which could be easily controlled by the state. Foucault’s warnings against a purely negative definition of power are relevant here:

In defining the effects of power as repression, one adopts a purely juridical conception of such power, one identifies power with a law which says no, power is taken above all as carrying the force of a prohibition. Now I believe that this is a wholly negative, narrow, skeletal conception of power, one which has been curiously widespread. If power were never anything but repressive, if it never did anything but to say no, do you really think one would be brought to obey it? What makes power hold good, what makes it accepted, is simply the fact that it traverses and produces things, it induces pleasure, forms knowledge, produces discourse.¹⁸⁵

The relative success of the Kemalist reforms and laicism in Turkey, compared to the other secularizing attempts in the Middle East-- say, the attempts in Iran in the 1930s-- I believe, lies in the fact that the early Turkish reformers did not use their power simply to repress religion, but to reshape and redefine it. Their strategy was very similar to the strategy of the proponents of the first form of materialism in the Ottoman Empire, such as Celal Nuri and Abdullah Cevdet. However, as I argue in Chapter Six on Said Nursi, the Republican reformers ultimately failed to prevent the resistance and resurrection of non-official forms of Islam later. The main reason for their failure, in my opinion, is that the

¹⁸⁵ Ibid., 119.

official version of Islam in the Republic proved to be rather too dry, rational and devoid of symbolic meaning for the average citizen.

II: ANTI-RELIGIOUS MATERIALISM:

The first form of materialism, the contours of which are described above, I argue, should be contrasted with a second form of materialism in the late Ottoman Empire which did not have even a formal reverence for religion. Baha Tevfik and the philosophical collaborators associated with his publishing house, *Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Edebi Kütüphanesi* (The Library of Scientific and Literary Renovation), namely Subhi Edhem (1880-1923), Memduh Süleyman and Ahmed Nebil, were the major representatives of this second form of materialistic thought, which directly argued for the irrelevance of religion in an increasingly scientific world and explicitly pointed to the “moral deficiencies” of Islam in the modern world.

Whereas Celal Nuri and Abdullah Cevdet were always careful to present their materialistic arguments and ideas in Islamic garb, and had a calculated and strategic respect for religion in general and Islam in particular, Ottoman materialists such as Baha Tevfik and Subhi Edhem chose simply to oppose religious thinking in all of its manifestations. The whole program of reconciliation of materialism and Islam, which guided the arguments of Celal Nuri and Abdullah Cevdet, was abandoned by Baha Tevfik and the like-minded materialists who argued for a more straightforward materialism.

The difference between these two variants of Ottoman materialism is not philosophical but rather pedagogical. Celal Nuri and Abdullah Cevdet were writing for the education of the masses (with an eye toward converting them to the materialist viewpoint in the future), but Baha Tevfik and Subhi Edhem thought of themselves as “materialist theoreticians” writing for the elite, whom they assumed already to be followers of materialism. Therefore, they did not feel any necessity for utilizing or catering to religious arguments.

Baha Tevfik and his philosophical cohort not only refrained from using any Islamic arguments to sugarcoat their materialism; they also believed that the old “morality” associated with Islamic religion had become bankrupt in the modern world.¹⁸⁶ As opposed to such critics of materialism in the Ottoman Empire as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi and Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, who made a crucial distinction between the material and spiritual sides of western modernity and argued for adopting the material benefits of modern western society while preserving the spiritual core of Islam, Baha Tevfik and his philosophical collaborators vehemently argued for the adoption of western modernity *in toto*.

The important point here is that Baha Tevfik and like-minded materialists interpreted the triumph of western modernity as a *spiritual as well as a material* affair. If

¹⁸⁶ The only exception to Baha Tevfik’s general reluctance to use Islamic arguments to support his positions is his use of Islamic arguments in an editorial essay to justify his publication of the first book on feminism in Ottoman Turkish. This book was a translation of Odette Laguerre’s work on feminism in French. See Odette Laguerre, *Feminizm: Alem-i Nisvan*, trans. Baha Tevfik (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmî ve Edebi Kütüphanesi, 1328[1912]), 61-85.

Ottoman society remained “backwards” and “behind the West,” Baha Tevfik argued, this was not only because of the material deficiencies in education and technology in the Ottoman Empire but also because of the moral and spiritual deficiencies of the old morality associated with Islam. As a result, Baha Tevfik and his friends argued for the necessity of creating a *new morality (Yeni Ahlak)*¹⁸⁷ in Ottoman society which would be founded upon scientific principles and would, presumably, replace the old morality associated with religion and “unscientific” philosophies.

The following discussion of Baha Tevfik consists of three main parts. In the next section, which is the third section of this chapter, I will provide some brief biographical information about Baha Tevfik. Although Baha Tevfik died at the young age of thirty, he was a very prolific author who managed to create an impressive body of work dedicated to the dissemination of materialist ideas among the Ottoman reading public. In addition to being a prominent materialist philosophically, Baha Tevfik was a liberal and an individualist in his political thought. His philosophical and political ideas will be the subject of the fourth section. The interesting point here is that Baha Tevfik diverged from the vast majority of Ottoman materialists of his time in that he did not show overtly authoritarian tendencies in his political thought. Most importantly, he was not a nationalist at all and, in fact, ridiculed the nationalistic thinking associated with Ziya Gökalp who would later become one of the main ideologues of the Young Turks.¹⁸⁸

¹⁸⁷ See Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil, *Hassasiyet Bahsi ve Yeni Ahlak* (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, 1326 [1909]).

¹⁸⁸ See Baha Tevfik, “Millileşmek Emeli,” *Felsefe Mecmuası* 1, No.1 (1329 /1913): 3-5.

Moreover, Baha Tevfik was not a member of the Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) and had fierce arguments with some of the leading personalities associated with the CUP because of his reluctance to support the organization's increasingly authoritarian policies.¹⁸⁹ Partly as a result of his liberalism and opposition to nationalism, and partly because of his early death, Baha Tevfik was more or less forgotten by nationalist historiography after 1914.

In the fifth section, I will deal with Baha Tevfik's literary ideas. Following the earlier ideas of Beşir Fuad (1852-1887), Baha Tevfik defended "realism" in literature and created a discourse based on "science" and "reality" to attack the rich symbolism associated with classical Ottoman poetry. The issue here is, of course, deeper than a simple disagreement on literary style. By criticizing the earlier Ottoman literary productions as "unrealistic" and "unscientific," Beşir Fuad and Baha Tevfik were in fact questioning the value of a whole past culture. Literature, and particularly poetry, was a proxy used by Beşir Fuad and Baha Tevfik to demonstrate the irrelevance of the historical Ottoman culture in general in the modern world. Once Ottoman and Islamic culture was demoted to the status of "unscientific" and "unrealistic," it naturally became easier for Baha Tevfik and the like-minded materialists to argue for replacing this Islamic culture with the triumphant "scientific" modern culture associated in their minds with Europe.

¹⁸⁹ Tevfik Rüştü, "Sedat'a Dair," *İttihat* No.86, 15 Kanun-i Sani 1324 (28 January 1909).

III: BAHHA TEVFİK'S BIOGRAPHY:

Baha Tevfik was born on 13 April 1884 in the vibrant port city of Izmir in western Anatolia.¹⁹⁰ His father, Mehmed Tevfik Efendi, was a minor customs official. Baha Tevfik completed his secondary education at the *İzmir Rüşdiyesi* (The Secondary School of Izmir) and the *İzmir Mülki İdadisi* (Izmir Civil High School) and then enrolled in the School of Civil Administration at Istanbul University (*İstanbul Mülkiye Mektebi*) in 1904. While he was studying at Istanbul University, he began to publish articles in the local newspapers in Izmir, to which he returned after graduating from Istanbul University in 1907.

For a brief time in 1908, Baha Tevfik worked as the principal of a private high school, the *Menba-i Füyuzat* (“Source of Prosperity” School) and then had a minor position on the Provincial Administrative Staff in Izmir. After the Constitutional Revolution of 1908 and the deposition of Sultan Abdülhamid II in 1909, Baha Tevfik, together with his siblings and father, moved to Istanbul.

In Istanbul, Baha Tevfik quickly became one of the most prolific authors and publishers in the lively publishing business of the era. In August of 1910 he began to publish a newspaper called *Piyano*, in which such important authors of the period as Ömer Seyfettin (1884-1920), Abdullah Cevdet and Şahabettin Süleyman (1885-1921)

¹⁹⁰ For extensive biographical information on Baha Tevfik, see, Rıza Bağcı, *Baha Tevfik'in Hayatı, Edebi ve Felsefi Eserleri Üzerinde bir Araştırma* (Izmir: Kaynak Yayınları, 1996). See also Mehmet Akgün, *Materyalizmin Türkiye'ye Girişi* (Ankara: Elis Yayınları, 2005), 195-229.

published pieces. For a brief time between 1910 and 1911 he also published humor weeklies called *Eşek* (“Donkey”), *Kibar* (“High Class”) and *Malum* (“Known”), which were closed by the authorities because of Tevfik’s opposition to the C.U.P. He published the seventeenth and last issue of *Piyano* on 19 December 1910 but at the beginning of the following year launched a continuation of the publication under the name *Düşünüyorum* (“I am thinking”); this new journal, however, lasted less than a month.¹⁹¹

Also in 1910, together with his friend Ahmed Nebil, Baha Tevfik founded the publishing house *Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Edebi Kütüphanesi* (The Library of Scientific and Literary Renovation), which was dedicated to the publication of works on materialism in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹² Most famously, this publishing house published the first full translation of Ludwig Büchner’s *Kraft und Stoff*,¹⁹³ the effects of which on Ottoman intellectuals of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century cannot be exaggerated.

Roughly a year after *Düşünüyorum* was closed, Baha Tevfik took up the post of editor of the weekly *Yirminci Asırda Zeka* (“Intelligence in the Twentieth Century”).¹⁹⁴ During the Balkan Wars, he worked as a teacher of philosophy at the private *Rehber-i*

¹⁹¹ The final issue of *Düşünüyorum* was published on 23 January 1911 (10 Kanun-i Sani 1326).

¹⁹² I analyze the contents of some of the most important books published by this publishing house in the second part of this chapter.

¹⁹³ Ludwig Büchner, *Madde ve Kuvvet*, trans. Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, 1327 [1910]). This book was translated from the French translation of the original German, and the author’s name was given French-style as “Louis” Büchner.

¹⁹⁴ This journal continued to be published until 5 February 1914 and then changed its name to *Zeka* (“Intelligence”) in its seventeenth issue. The authors associated with *Yirminci Asırda Zeka* include Baha Tevfik, Abdullah Cevdet, Memduh Süleyman, Ahmed Nebil, Bezmi Nusret, Ömer Seyfettin and Celis. See Ümmühan Bilgin Topçu, *Baha Tevfik ve Edebi Görüşleri* (Ankara: Gazi Üniversitesi, 1993), 120.

İttihad-i Osmani Lisesi (“Guide of Ottoman Unity” High School) in Istanbul. On 8 May 1913 he began to publish *Felsefe Mecmuası* (“The Journal of Philosophy”), which was the most significant journal of philosophy published in the Ottoman Empire.¹⁹⁵ He was the main contributor to this journal, which ran for ten issues and featured many philosophical pieces on materialism, including translations from such prominent German materialists as Ernst Haeckel and Ludwig Büchner.

Yet only a year later on 19 May 1914, Baha Tevfik, then at the height of his intellectual powers and publishing prowess, suddenly died after an operation on his liver. He was only thirty years old. After Baha Tevfik’s death, his close friend Memduh Süleyman, with whom Baha Tevfik wrote the first book published on Friedrich Nietzsche in Ottoman Turkish,¹⁹⁶ wrote that Baha Tevfik, “who spent his life working on truth and science, *returned to nature*.”¹⁹⁷ This was an appropriate epitaph for someone who, in an introduction to his fellow materialist Subhi Edhem’s work on “Life and Death,” had expressed the opinion that “only those who imagine various kinds of lives after death would fear death.”¹⁹⁸ Such a person would, of course, not simply “reach the mercy of

¹⁹⁵ *Felsefe Mecmuası* was the second journal of philosophy published in the Ottoman Empire, [comma] and the ten published issues of this journal were later republished by Baha Tevfik as a single volume in 1913. The first journal of philosophy published in the Ottoman Empire was *Yeni Felsefe Mecmuası* (“The New Journal of Philosophy”), which was published in Salonica in 1911.

¹⁹⁶ Ahmed Nebil, Baha Tevfik and Memduh Süleyman, *Nietzsche, Hayatı ve Felsefesi* (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, 1328 [1912]).

¹⁹⁷ “Hayat-ı mesaisini hakikat ve ilim için sarf eden Baha Tevfik *tabiata inkılap etti*”: Memduh Süleyman, “Zeka’ya,” *Zeka* No.32 (22 May 1330/4 June 1914), 118. Italics are mine.

¹⁹⁸ “Ölümden korkmak öldükten sonra türlü türlü hayat tahayyül edenlere göredir.” See Baha Tevfik, “Hayat ve Mevt Hakkında,” in Subhi Edhem, *Hayat ve Mevt* (Istanbul: Nefaset Matbaası, 1329 [1913]), 6.

God” (*Hakk’ın rahmetine kavuşmak*), as an ordinary Ottoman subject would when he or she died, but rather would return to nature.

IV: BAHA TEVFİK'S PHILOSOPHICAL AND POLITICAL IDEAS

In an important article he published in *Felsefe Mecmuası* regarding the purpose and method of philosophy, Baha Tevfik argues that “the philosophy of yesterday is today’s science, and tomorrow’s science and technology are today’s philosophy.”¹⁹⁹ Essentially reducing the entire realm of philosophy to a “philosophy of science,” Baha Tevfik argues that the purpose of philosophy is to come up with “hypotheses and theories” (*faraziye ve nazariye*) which might be helpful to science. Moreover, Baha Tevfik insists that the method of philosophy cannot be different from the scientific method, which he claims is based on “materialism and positivism.”²⁰⁰ In the same article, Baha Tevfik goes on to argue that science and philosophy are so closely connected in the modern world that there is no chance for a philosopher to come up with a novel philosophical idea if he is not also a scientist and familiar with the scientific theories of the day.

Reducing the entire realm of philosophy to a dry philosophy of science was a rather common tactic of the Ottoman materialists of the early twentieth century; the same tactic appears in the writings of Celal Nuri, discussed in chapter five. Any philosophy

¹⁹⁹ “...şu halde her zaman dünün felsefesi bugünün ilim ve fenni, yarının ilm ve fenni bugünün felsefesidir”: Baha Tevfik, “Maksat ve Meslek,” *Felsefe Mecmuası* 1, No.1 (1329 [1913]): 1.

²⁰⁰ “Felsefede usül, ulum ve fünundaki usulün yani *maddiyet ve müsbetiyet usulünün ayıdır*”: Baha Tevfik, “Maksat ve Meslek,” *Felsefe Mecmuası* 1, No.1 ([1329]1913): 2. My italics.

which is not connected to the “scientific method” (read: positivism), they argued, is ultimately sophistry and a waste of time. What sets Baha Tevfik apart from some other materialists is that he carried this line of thought to its logical conclusion and argued that not only philosophy but any moral or ethical system which is not based on the findings of science should be viewed as useless and discarded.

In other words, the moral and ethical teachings of religions (and particularly Islam), Baha Tevfik implicitly argued, should not be seen as immune to the findings of modern science. What is needed in the moral realm, he argued, is a “new morality” (*Yeni Ahlak*) based on recent scientific findings on the human body and psychology. I analyze the contents of the work Baha Tevfik wrote together with his friend Ahmed Nebil²⁰¹ on this “new morality”²⁰² below.

It is certainly remarkable that Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil begin their work on the “new morality” with an introductory essay on the “new language.”²⁰³ After stating that “real freedom” (*hakiki hürriyet*) in Ottoman society would come into existence as a result of social change and not necessarily as a result of shallow political changes, the authors argue that the main obstacle facing Ottoman social reformers is their written language. After lamenting that the language the Ottomans use is not Turkish but merely a

²⁰¹ Ahmed Nebil, who was ethnically Albanian, went to Albania after the Balkan Wars and worked there as a journalist. He was killed in Tirana at the end of the Second World War. For more information on him, see Bağcı, 144-146.

²⁰² Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil, *Hassasiyet Bahsi ve Yeni Ahlak (The Issue of Sensibility and the New Morality)* (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmî ve Felsefî Kütüphanesi, 1326 [1910]).

²⁰³ “Yeni Lisan Meselesi” (“The Issue of the New Language”) in Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil, *Hassasiyet Bahsi ve...*, 3-11.

“hybrid” (*melez*) language consisting of Turkish, Persian and Arabic,²⁰⁴ Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil argue that the real problem facing the Ottoman language is not the use of Arabic and Persian *vocabulary* per se, but the use of Arabic and Persian *grammatical structures* in Ottoman Turkish. What is being taught to the children in the schools, they argue, is not the syntax and grammar of Turkish, but the unnecessary grammatical rules of Persian and Arabic.²⁰⁵ They then argue that the main reason why non-Muslims in the Ottoman Empire do not learn Turkish is this excessive complexity of the Turkish language. They go on to claim that the program of language reform proposed by the journal *Genç Kalemler* (“Young Pens”) in Salonica under the heading “New Language” (*Yeni Lisan*) offers a way out of the conundrum.²⁰⁶

This reform program, much less ambitious than the language “reforms”²⁰⁷ pursued in the Republican era during the 1930s, consists of the following major points: 1. The authors will refrain from using any Persian or Arabic plurals and consistently use Turkish plural forms. 2. Words such as *hurdebin* (“microscope”) and *bedbin* (“pessimistic”), which are compound words in their original Persian (or Arabic), will be treated as simple single nouns when they are written in Turkish. 3. Arabic and Persian loan words will be written as they are pronounced in Turkish (thus *merdiven* [“ladder”,

²⁰⁴ Ibid., 4-5.

²⁰⁵ “Mekteplerde çocuklarımıza okuttuğumuz şeyler Türkçe’nin sarf ve nahvi değil, Arapça’nın ve Acemce’nin bitmez tükenmez ve lüzumlu lüzumsuz kaideleridir”: Ibid., 5.

²⁰⁶ Baha Tevfik was close friends with some of the important literary figures associated with the journal *Genç Kalemler*, such as Ömer Seyfettin.

²⁰⁷ For the catastrophic “reforms” of the Turkish language in the Republican era, see Geoffrey Lewis, *The Turkish Language Reform: A Catastrophic Success* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1999).

“stairs”] instead of the Persian original *nardeban* for example). 4. Arabic and Persian suffixes will be replaced by Turkish ones (thus, for example, *tabiilik* (“naturalness”) instead of the original *tabiiyet*).²⁰⁸ Although the authors propose that all new publications in Turkish should be written following these rules, they make a note that the old books already written in the old language should be left alone and not “translated” into the new language.

After their introductory essay on language, Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil begin their main essay by arguing that the existing morality is essentially based on superstitions and fantasies.²⁰⁹ They claim that earlier philosophical attempts, such as Immanuel Kant’s, to base morality on human conscience do not work because they require a belief in an unchanging, almost divine, faculty or essence in human beings (by the name of conscience). They maintain that such an essence does not exist because, as Charles Darwin demonstrated, human beings are evolving animals, constantly in flux.²¹⁰ Trying

²⁰⁸ In another article, Baha Tevfik revises this point and argues that it may not be correct to get rid of all of the foreign suffixes and compound nouns in the Turkish language. See Baha Tevfik, “Lisan, İmla,” *Yirminci Asırda Zeka* No.1 (5 March 1328/18 March 1912): 9-10. (Baha Tevfik wrote this article under the pen name Celis. This should not be confused with his poet friend Bahri Bey, who also used the pen name Celis). Finally, in a later article, Baha Tevfik seems to have changed his mind on the necessity of a reform in language altogether, and argues that the purification of the language should be the result of a natural process. See Baha Tevfik, “Sadeleşelim,” *Zeka* No.17 (23 Kanun-i Sani 1329/5 February, 1914): 292.

²⁰⁹ Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil, *Hassasiyet Bahsi ve...*, 14.

²¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 16-17. Baha Tevfik is, in fact, opposed to any idea involving a non-material essence or substance accompanying the human body. In a textbook on philosophy he wrote for high schools, Baha Tevfik categorically denies the existence of a human soul as a metaphysical substance: “Ruh namıyla bir cevher-i mafevkattabia yoktur.” (“There is no metaphysical substance by the name of soul.”) and argues that it is a mistake to even think about a substance in nature other than matter. The soul, he insists, should be thought of merely as a function of matter. It is interesting to note that Baha Tevfik, together with Ahmed Nebil, translated the work of the famous German materialist Ernst Haeckel on “philosophical monism” (the

to base human morality on “interest,” as La Rochefoucauld and others tried to do in the past, is also wrong, they argue, not only because interest is such a vague concept but also because morality is more about deciding what is good and evil for human beings than deciding what is for their immediate interest. This raises the crucial question: How do we decide what is good and what is bad for human beings? Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil are crystal clear on this issue: Science can decide what is good and bad for human beings.²¹¹ Once the sciences of psychology and biology decide on the proper way of eating, exercising and living, then the only meaningful challenge for a particular human being will be to shape his choices according to the dictates of science and transform himself into a “machine” following scientific prescriptions.²¹²

But what if this person does not transform himself into a machine following the prescriptions of science? Should he be coerced into a transformation that would make him a rational machine? More importantly, should the power of the state be utilized in order to create rational citizens following the dictates of science? Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil did not deal with these types of “social engineering” questions for the obvious reason that they did not have any political power, but such questions of “social

idea that there is only one substance in the universe, namely matter) into Ottoman Turkish as well. See Ernst Haeckel, *Vahdet-i Mevcud: Bir Tabiat Aliminin Dini* (The Unity of the Existent: The Religion of a Natural Scientist) (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Kader, 1911).

²¹¹ “İyi ve kötünün ta’yinine gelince bu...tekmil ilimlerin ve fenlerin...esaslı bir vazifesidir...Beşerin bütün fiilleri psikoloji ile ölçülür”: Ibid., 18-19.

²¹² “Kendi kendimizi her istenilen tarafa olanca sürat ve çeviklikle hareket edebilen bir makine haline koymak lazımdır”: Ibid., 19-20. Şükrü Hanioglu notes that Baha Tevfik borrowed these ideas from Paul Dubois’ works on human physiology. See Şükrü Hanioglu, “Blueprints...,” 79. See also Paul Dubois, *De l’influence de l’esprit sur le corps* (Bern: A. Francke, 1910).

engineering” would prove important for the future rulers of the Turkish Republic. Transformation was, in fact, an obsession for Kemal Atatürk. In a speech commemorating the anniversary of the War of Independence, he said:

Surviving in the world of modern civilization depends upon changing ourselves. This is the sole law of any progress in the social, economic and scientific spheres of life. Changing the rules of life in accordance with the times is an absolute necessity. In an age when inventions and the wonders of science are bringing change after change in the conditions of life, nations cannot maintain their existence by age-old rotten mentalities and by tradition-worshipping....Superstitions and nonsense have to be thrown out of our heads.²¹³

Perhaps more importantly, Baha Tevfik and his philosophical cohort argued that this transformation could not be accomplished by merely adopting the “material” accomplishments and technology of the West while preserving the moral and spiritual core of Islam (as various thinkers, such as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Said Halim Pasha, Mehmed Akif Ersoy and Said Nursi believed). The change, they implied, should be a total transformation. The ideologues of the early Republic certainly agreed with them. Falih Rıfkı Atay, one of the most important ideologues of the early Turkish Republic (and one of the closest to Kemal Atatürk), wrote:

²¹³ *Gazi Mustafa Kemal Paşa İzmir Yollarında* (Ankara: No publisher, 1923), quoted in Berkes, *The Development of...*, 464.

We were not the victims of the material superiority of the West. We were the victims of that very moral superiority which had given material superiority to the West. The West is an institution- the institution of freedom of the mind. The failure of the reactionaries was due to their identification of the “moral” with religion and their fear of our losing religion or nationality when the question of separating the world and religion was faced.²¹⁴

In fact, the main point of argument between the vulgar materialistic prophets of change in the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic, and their cultural and religious critics, such as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Said Nursi and Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, was not about the necessity of westernization or modernization per se. It was about the *proper strategy* for the *appropriation* of modernity in a non-European setting. Whereas Abdullah Cevdet, Baha Tevfik and the early Republican reformers argued for the adoption of western modernity *in toto*, Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi and Said Nursi made a crucial distinction between the “material” and “spiritual” sides of western modernity.²¹⁵

Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil certainly did not believe in a distinction between the material and spiritual facets of western modernity. Just like the ideologues of the early Turkish Republic, such as Falih Rıfki Atay, Tevfik and Nebil interpreted western

²¹⁴ Falih Rıfki Atay, “Çankaya,” *Dünya* No.73 (1957), quoted in Berkes, *The Development of...*, 464.

²¹⁵ For further development of this idea, see Chapters Five and Six.

civilization as a complete organization which should be adopted in its entirety. And one of the components of this civilization, they believed, was the rise of a new modern *morality* based on the findings of science. In order to follow the new morality based on the prescriptions of science, Tefvik and Nebil argue, a human being must be “healthy” and “educated”. The common people generally persist in the old morality because of either “ignorance or psychological inertia,” which the authors, rather strangely, label *hassasiyet* (“sensitivity”). Education will supposedly eradicate their ignorance and psychological inertia, and healthy bodies will give them the opportunity to follow the bodily exercises prescribed by science.²¹⁶

Not surprisingly, one of the distinguishing traits of the Second Constitutional Period and the early Turkish Republic was the importance given to physical education and sports in schools.²¹⁷ Yiğit Akın argues that the ultimate aim of physical education and sports in the early Turkish Republic was to “ameliorate the average health levels of the students, increase their productive capacities and *establish certain social and moral norms.*”²¹⁸ The Republican reformers, in other words, were trying to actively create a “morality” for Turkish citizens (or a new type of “moral citizen,” if you like) without referencing religion.

²¹⁶ Baha Tefvik and Ahmed Nebil, *Hassasiyet Bahsi ve...*, 50-51.

²¹⁷ Yiğit Akın, *Gürbüz ve Yavuz Evlatlar: Erken Cumhuriyet'te Beden Terbiyesi ve Spor* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 2004).

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 221. My italics.

It is certainly interesting to note that throughout the book written by Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil on the new morality, the language used to describe the old morality and its followers, as well as the operation of the new morality on human beings, is the language of medicine. The ignorant followers of the old morality are “sick;” they are being “cured” by the new morality based on science.²¹⁹ The authors finish their work, with a typical pre-World War I optimism, by arguing that when ignorance is eradicated from the world, the new morality based on science will create a common happiness for all humanity.

Baha Tevfik’s preoccupation with morality in a scientific and modern world, I argue, was also the main reason why he was interested in the philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche (1844-1900). Together with Ahmed Nebil and Memduh Süleyman, Baha Tevfik wrote the first book in Turkish on Nietzsche in 1912.²²⁰ After noting that Baha Tevfik’s work on Nietzsche “was an informative essay that intentionally refrained from evaluating Nietzsche’s thought, leaving it to the reader to decide,” Şükrü Hanioglu argues that “it is likely that Baha Tevfik found irresistible Nietzsche’s sophisticated theory of

²¹⁹ “Tahsil sıhhati takip eder. Yeni ahlak cahil bir kimsenin...tedavisine cehaleti gidermek ameliyesinden başlar” (“Education follows upon health. The new morality begins the treatment of an ignorant person by curing his ignorance.”): Baha Tevfik and Ahmed Nebil, *Hassasiyet Bahsi ve...*, 51. The first sentence, “Tahsil sıhhati takip eder,” could be an allusion to the famous Latin motto *Mens sana in corpore sano*, “A sound mind in a sound body.” The classical aphorism does not specify which should come first; it asserts the need for both. The “takip eder” (“follows upon”) clause gives the idea a materialist twist.

²²⁰ Ahmed Nebil, Baha Tevfik and Memduh Süleyman, *Nietzsche, Hayatı ve Felsefesi* (Istanbul: Tecdüd-i İlmî ve Felsefî Kütüphanesi, 1328 [1912]).

atheism as expressed in *Die fröhliche Wissenschaft*, his immoralism and his tribute to Schopenhauer, who was highly regarded by the late Ottoman materialists.”²²¹

It is difficult to understand what Hanioglu means by “Nietzsche’s sophisticated theory of atheism” because although the German author of *The Gay Science* clearly and unequivocally stressed his atheism in many of his writings, he did not have any “theory” of atheism to speak of, let alone a sophisticated one. In fact, Nietzsche writes in *Ecce Homo*, his philosophical autobiography, that his atheism came from his *instincts*, meaning that for Nietzsche atheism was not an epistemological point of view to “theorize” about:

“God,” “immortality of the soul,” “redemption,” “beyond”— without exception, concepts to which I never devoted any attention, or time; not even as a child. Perhaps I have never been childlike enough for them? I do not by any means know atheism as a result; even less as an event: it is a matter of course with me, from instinct. I am too inquisitive, too questionable, too exuberant to stand for any gross answer. God is a gross answer, an indelicacy against us thinkers— at bottom merely a gross prohibition for us: you shall not think!”²²²

Nietzsche is not one of those coffee-house thinkers who simply argue that God does not exist. Nietzsche argues that God is “dead,” which means that the idea of a God

²²¹ Şükrü Hanioglu, “Blueprints...,” 70.

²²² See Friedrich Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morals and Ecce Homo* (New York: Vintage, 1989), 236-237.

simply does not function in our modern world. The section on the death of God in Nietzsche's *Gay Science* is called "The Madman;" it reads as follows:

The madman jumped into their midst and pierced them with his eyes. "Whither is God?" he cried; "I will tell you. *We have killed him---*you and I. All of us are his murderers. But how did we do this? How could we drink up the sea? Who gave us the sponge to wipe away the entire horizon? What were we doing when we unchained this earth from its sun? Whither is it moving now? Whither are we moving? Away from all suns? Are we not plunging continually? Backward, sideward, forward, in all directions? Is there still any up or down? Are we not straying, as through an infinite nothing? Do we not feel the breath of empty space? Has it not become colder? Is not night continually closing in on us? Do we not need to light lanterns in the morning? Do we hear nothing as yet of the noise of the gravediggers who are burying God? Do we smell nothing as yet of the divine decomposition? Gods, too, decompose. *God is dead. God remains dead. And we have killed him.*²²³

God, in other words, is a corpse, according to Nietzsche, lying in a grave and no longer providing meaning to humankind. Moreover, Nietzsche takes responsibility for his thoughts and examines the implications of his argument about the "dead God" for human beings who continue to live. In other words, arguing that "God is dead" almost forces

²²³ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage, 1974), 181-182.

Nietzsche to confront the resulting dark nihilism that naturally descends upon human beings who have to live in a cold, disenchanting world. And herein we discern the great task of Nietzsche's philosophy: How does one create meaning in a world where God is truly and utterly dead? In other words, how do we reconstruct a meaningful world where the ultimate provider of meaning to human beings throughout history, God, is no longer with us?

In fact, it was probably Nietzsche's monumental philosophical effort to provide *meaning in a post-theistic world*, a world that God had ceased to inhabit, that made him attractive to Baha Tevfik. Hanioglu misses this point when he emphasizes Nietzsche's "atheism" as the possible cause of Baha Tevfik's attraction to Nietzsche's philosophy. In fact, Baha Tevfik shared with Nietzsche an interest in the construction of a new type of morality in a world where the old sources of morality seem increasingly empty and meaningless; and it was this *preoccupation with morality and ethics* in a godless world, *rather than atheism per se*, which attracted him to Nietzsche.

V. THE EUROPEAN TRANSMITTERS OF NIETZSCHE:

The title page of the book on Nietzsche composed by Baha Tevfik and his collaborators²²⁴ mentions that the book is based on the secondary literature on Nietzsche

²²⁴ Ahmed Nebil, Baha Tevfik and Memduh Süleyman, *Nietzsche, Hayatı ve Felsefesi* (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmî ve Felsefî Kütüphanesi, 1328 [1912]).

by Emile Faguet, Henri Lichtenberger and Harald Höffding.²²⁵ Baha Tevfik's and his Turkish collaborators' interpretation of Nietzsche in fact followed these French and Danish interpretations of Nietzsche. Since these three thinkers were key figures in the introduction of Nietzsche's philosophy into not only late nineteenth-century French intellectual circles but also early twentieth-century Ottoman ones, it is appropriate here to provide some information on the reception of Nietzsche's philosophy in France in the late nineteenth century.

In his excellent article on the French philosophical discourse on Nietzsche in the late nineteenth century, Christopher Forth emphasizes the initial silence of French "academia" on Nietzsche and argues that the silence of the 1890s affords insight into the implicit classifications at work in the French cultural context. Nietzsche was initially seen by French academia not as a *philosopher* but as a *poet*; and French academic philosophers were initially unwilling to engage with his work. As Forth notes, "From 1891 through 1898 Nietzsche, having earned the laurels of many essayists and poets, seemed to be the expressed property of the avant-garde fraction of the literary world. For example, Henri Lichtenberger's *La Philosophie de Nietzsche*, which appeared in 1898 and was the first serious study of the philosopher to be published in France, was written by a professor of German literature, not by a philosopher."²²⁶

²²⁵ "Höffding, Emile Faguet ve Henri Lichtenberger gibi müellifin-i meşhurenin asar-ı tenkidiyelerinden...." ("From the critical works of such famous authors as Höffding, Emile Faguet and Henri Lichtenberger....").

²²⁶ Christopher E. Forth, "On the Prejudices of Philosophers: French Philosophical Discourse on Nietzsche, 1898-1908," *Theory and Society* 23, No.6 (1994), 854.

Baha Tevfik, it seems, made an intelligent choice when he relied on the works of Henri Lichtenberger, Emile Faguet and Harald Höffding for his publication on Nietzsche. Lichtenberger wrote his study of Nietzsche²²⁷ while he was a professor of German literature at the *Université de Nancy*²²⁸ and this study, together with the work of French critic Emile Faguet,²²⁹ established Nietzsche as a serious philosopher (and not just a poet) in the French intellectual world. Lichtenberger's work was based on a distinction he made between the "negative side" and the "positive side" of Nietzsche's philosophy. Whereas the negative side consisted of Nietzsche's critique of morality, religion and modernity, the positive side, Lichtenberger argued, should be based on Nietzsche's concept of the Overman (*Übermensch*).²³⁰ Emile Faguet's reading of Nietzsche,²³¹ on the other hand, presented Nietzsche's appreciation and promotion of ancient Greek morality, especially as put forward in his early works, *The Birth of Tragedy*²³² and *Philosophy in*

²²⁷ See Henri Lichtenberger, *La Philosophie de Nietzsche* (Paris: Alcan, 1898). For an English translation, see Henri Lichtenberger, *The Gospel of Superman: The Philosophy of Friedrich Nietzsche* (New York: Macmillan, 1926).

²²⁸ Lichtenberger later became a professor at the Sorbonne; for some time he was the "French Exchange Professor" at Harvard University. For biographical information about him, see "Editorial Notes and News," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 11, No. 24 (1914): 671-672.

²²⁹ Emile Faguet, *En lisant Nietzsche* (Paris: Société française d'imprimerie et de librairie, 1904). For an English translation, see Emile Faguet, *On Reading Nietzsche* (New York: Moffat, Yard and Company, 1918).

²³⁰ See Henri Lichtenberger, *The Gospel of Superman...*, Chapter IV: "Nietzsche's System-Negative Side: Man," 113, and Chapter V: "Nietzsche's System-Positive Side: Superman," 165.

²³¹ See Emile Faguet, *On Reading Nietzsche* Chapter V: "Criticizing the Obstacles: Religion," 50, Chapter VII: "Criticizing the Obstacles: Morality," 87 and Chapter VIII: "The Theory," 126.

²³² Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, eds. Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999).

the Tragic Age of the Greeks,²³³ as his positive and constructive philosophical side, a counterpoise to Nietzsche's negative philosophy, which consisted of a harsh and deadly accurate critique of Christian religion and morality.²³⁴ The third author on whom Baha Tevfik and his collaborators relied was Harald Höffding, the author of an extensive history of philosophy,²³⁵ who "became the leading personality in Danish philosophy from about 1890."²³⁶

Scholarship on Nietzsche is a huge field today, and in light of this growth, the decisions by Lichtenberger and Faguet to center the philosophy of Nietzsche exclusively on the concept of the Overman and on the pre-Socratic philosophers, respectively, may seem problematic,²³⁷ but there is no denying the fact that largely as a result of the influence of the interpretations of Lichtenberger and Faguet, Nietzsche became accepted as a serious "philosopher" in France. How, then, did Baha Tevfik and his friends choose to present Nietzsche to their Ottoman readers?

²³³ See Friedrich Nietzsche, *Philosophy in the Tragic Age of the Greeks* (Washington: Regnery Publishing, 1996).

²³⁴ In a book review of Faguet's work, M.L. Camus argues that "According to Faguet the genesis of the system of Nietzsche's philosophy begins with the discovery of the 'Greeks before Socrates.'" See M.L. Camus, "En Lisant Nietzsche by Emile Faguet," *The Journal of Philosophy, Psychology and Scientific Methods* 2, No. 5 (March 1905): 136.

²³⁵ Harald Höffding, *A History of Modern Philosophy: A Sketch of the History of Philosophy from the Close of the Renaissance to Our Own Day*, tr. B.E. Meyer (New York: Humanities Press, 1924). This book was originally published in German, but Baha Tevfik and his friends most probably read Höffding's works in French translation.

²³⁶ John Whitt-Hansen, "Some Remarks on Philosophy in Denmark," *Philosophy and Phenomenological Research* 12, No. 3 (March 1952): 383.

²³⁷ For an invaluable interpretation of Nietzsche that emphasizes Nietzsche's "Art of Writing", and highlights the centrality of the philosophical concept of the "Eternal Recurrence of the Same" for understanding Nietzsche's philosophy, see Laurence Lampert, *Nietzsche's Teaching: An Interpretation of Thus Spoke Zarathustra* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1986).

Baha Tevfik's and his friends' book on Nietzsche consists of six chapters. The authors begin their work by providing accurate information on Nietzsche's life. In this first chapter, we also learn that Nietzsche's philosophy is "individualistic," and that "the lack of natural equality among human beings" is Nietzsche's principal belief.²³⁸ In accordance with the general interpretation of Nietzsche in Europe at the time, the authors argue that Nietzsche had three major inspirations: Schopenhauer, Wagner and his own illness.²³⁹ Interestingly, the authors argue that Nietzsche's atheism came mostly from his instinct and that his logical judgment had very little to do with it. Confronted with the choice between truth and God, they argue, Nietzsche simply chose the truth.²⁴⁰

In their second chapter on "The Intellectual Development of Nietzsche,"²⁴¹ the authors focus on the meaning of "noble" and "base" in Nietzsche's philosophy, arguing that Nietzsche interprets the excessive dependence of the modern world on science and logic as a continuation of the influence of Socratic rational philosophy, which Nietzsche sees as a sign of the decadence of the times.²⁴² Interestingly, although Nietzsche's attack

²³⁸ "Felsefesi ferdiye (Individualisme) mesleğidir... Eşhas arasındaki adem-i müsavat-ı tabiiye Nietzsche'nin en esaslı itikadını teşkil eder." ("His philosophy is individualism. The most fundamental belief of Nietzsche is the natural lack of equality between individuals."): Ahmed Nebil, Baha Tevfik and Memduh Süleyman, *Nietzsche Hayatı ve Felsefesi* (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, 1328/1912), 10.

²³⁹ Ibid., *Nietzsche, Hayatı...*, 20.

²⁴⁰ "...muhakemesi bu sevk-i tabiisi üzerine bir tesir icra etmemiştir....Kendisine nazaran ma'bud ile hakikatten birisini tercih etmek zamanı gelince ma'budu terk etmekte tereddüd etmemiştir." ("His judgment did not play any role on his instinct. When it comes to preferring one or the other between the creator and the truth, he did not hesitate to leave the creator."): Ibid., 24.

²⁴¹ Ibid., 26-66.

²⁴² Ibid., 48.

on rationalism devastates the intellectual foundations of the German vulgar materialism on which Baha Tevfik and his friends rely, the authors refrain from replying to Nietzsche's criticisms; they are content merely to present Nietzsche's ideas to the readers.

In the fourth chapter, "Nietzsche's Method in Philosophy,"²⁴³ the authors present what they call the "negative" and the "positive" sides of Nietzsche's philosophy, following Henri Lichtenberger's and Emile Faguet's interpretations. The negative side consists of Nietzsche's attack on Christianity (Christianity is the principal example of "slave morality," according to Nietzsche) and so-called "modern values," which, according to Nietzsche, are just another name for the ultimate victory of slave morality today.²⁴⁴ Just like the Christian believer who argues for the absolute equality of human beings before an omnipotent God, Baha Tevfik and his collaborators assert, the modern democrat argues for the absolute equality of human beings before the law.²⁴⁵ The positive side, in this interpretation, refers to the concepts of "Overman" and the new morality represented by this archetypical new human being.

Baha Tevfik and his friends interpret the rise of feminism in Europe as a natural result of this modern belief in equality; and, interestingly, for the first time in this work,

²⁴³ "Nietzsche'nin Felsefedeki Usulü," in *Ibid.*, 84-108.

²⁴⁴ "Bugün Avrupa'nın vekai-yi mühimme-yi tarihiyesinden birisi ahlak-ı esaretin galebesidir." ("Today, one of the most important historical events in Europe is the victory of the slave morality."); *Ibid.*, 100.

²⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, 105.

they take issue with Nietzsche's emphasis on the differences between men and women.²⁴⁶ Nietzsche, it seems, was not feminist enough for the modern tastes of our authors.

Baha Tevfik and his friends finish their work by stating simply that Nietzsche may or may not be correct in his rather cruel and hard views on "life and truth," which put forward "power as a principal value".²⁴⁷ They choose to let the reader decide on this matter.

VI. BAHA TEVFIK'S LIBERALISM:

If materialism and a concern with the fate of morality in a materialistic world constitute one side of Baha Tevfik's thought, the other side is formed by his political liberalism and his opposition to nationalism. His political ideas are best expressed in a work he published in 1914 entitled *Felsefe-i Ferd* ("The Philosophy of the Individual"),²⁴⁸ which consists of fifteen separate articles. I provide an extensive examination of this work below.

Baha Tevfik begins his work by arguing that the "most important element (principle) in social life is the individual."²⁴⁹ This introduction is, appropriately, followed by an essay called "The Importance of the Individual" (*Ferdin Ehemmiyeti*) in which Baha Tevfik argues, in classic liberal fashion, that the differences among individuals are

²⁴⁶ Ibid., 106-107.

²⁴⁷ Ibid., 128.

²⁴⁸ Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd* (Istanbul: İlim ve Felsefe Kütüphanesi, 1332 [1914]).

²⁴⁹ "Hayat-ı İctimaiyede en mühim esas ferddir": Ibid., 3.

natural, and that the urge to eradicate these differences often leads to tyranny and despotism (*istibdat*).²⁵⁰ In the following essay, entitled “The Boundary of Freedom Is Commensurate with the Merit of the Individual” (*Hürriyetin hududu ferdin liyakatiyle mütenasiptir*), Baha Tevfik argues that the establishment of real freedom in a society is possible only through the education of the public; merely changing the political form of the government from monarchy to constitutional monarchy is not enough to bring freedom to society. The real problem in Ottoman society, Baha Tevfik argues, is that people rely too heavily on the government to solve social problems, and this excessive reliance on government stifles the development of individual enterprise.²⁵¹

In the next essay, “How Does the Influence of the Government Depend on the Individual?” (*Hükümetin nüfuzu ferde nasıl istinad olunur?*), Baha Tevfik argues that the very common demand in Turkish society for a “strong government” might be problematic if the resulting governmental power is later directed against the citizens of the state. The power of a strong government should be directed towards foreign enemies, he argues, and the citizens of the state should be given as much freedom as possible.²⁵²

In another essay, entitled “The Cultivation of the Individual: Youth and Pessimism,” Baha Tevfik argues that young people in the Ottoman lands are pessimistic about their future because all of them are educated with the expectation that they will

²⁵⁰ See *Ibid.*, 6-7.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

²⁵² *Ibid.*, 15-17.

become state officials. These hopeful graduates become depressed when they find that there are not enough bureaucratic positions for them. The medical school (*tıbbiye*), he writes ruefully, only creates “government doctors” (*hükümet doktorları*) while the engineering school (*mühendishane*) produces “government engineers.”²⁵³

In the following essay, “It is the Laws that Make Bureaucrats out of Individuals” (*Ferdi memur yapan kanundur*), Baha Tevfik examines the reasons for Ottoman subjects’ strange enthusiasm for bureaucratic careers and concludes that the main reason should be sought in the existing laws. The present laws, he argues, were established by the reforming grand vizier Midhat Pasha (1822-1883), who adopted French laws without thinking much about their compatibility with Ottoman society.²⁵⁴ The French tradition of lawmaking is excessively bureaucratic and state-centric; the adoption of this bureaucratic system in the Ottoman lands resulted in a “government machine” utilized by state officials to crush ordinary people in its cogwheels.²⁵⁵

It is remarkable that such a staunch secularist and westernist as Baha Tevfik could be so critical of the mindless adoption of western laws in the Ottoman Empire. Although Tevfik was a westernist, these adopted French laws which were in contradiction to his liberal beliefs irritated him. His willingness to adopt the social, cultural and political institutions of Europe did not blind Baha Tevfik to the differences that existed *within*

²⁵³ Ibid., 28.

²⁵⁴ “...hasılı, münasip gayr-i münasip, müfid muzır Fransızların nesi varsa alındı” (“...in summary; suitable or not, beneficial or harmful, everything French was adopted”): Ibid., 31.

²⁵⁵ Ibid., 33-34.

Europe regarding these institutions. And unlike the rulers of the Turkish Republic in the 1930s, who experimented with corporatist ideas and a state-controlled economy, Baha Tevfik preferred classical liberalism, meaning that in addition to maximizing freedom in politics and thought, the government should also not interfere much in society or in the market economy.

In one of the most important essays in the book, Baha Tevfik discusses the state of philosophy in the Ottoman Empire.²⁵⁶ He begins this essay by arguing that philosophy today should be understood essentially as a handmaiden to science, which is almost the exact opposite of the classical understanding of the relationship between philosophy and science. Philosophy, he argues, should come up with hypotheses and theories that can later be tested by the sciences. Accordingly, he writes, “today’s philosophy is tomorrow’s science and today’s science is tomorrow’s philosophy.”²⁵⁷ If this definition of philosophy as “tomorrow’s science” is correct, he argues, then one has to accept the fact that philosophy does not exist in the Ottoman Empire for want of any scientific endeavor worthy of the name. Only if one broadens the definition of philosophy to include “metaphysics,” he argues, does it become possible to talk about the history of philosophy in the Ottoman Empire.

²⁵⁶ See “Bizde Felsefe,” in *Ibid.*, 46-62.

²⁵⁷ Baha Tevfik uses this strange definition of philosophy as “tomorrow’s science” in other places as well. See, for example, Baha Tevfik, “Maksat ve Meslek”, *Felsefe Mecmuası* 1, No. 1 (1329 /1913): 1-3. See also Baha Tevfik, *Muhtasar Felsefe* (Istanbul: 1331/1913), 13.

Philosophy in the Ottoman Empire, Baha Tevfik claims, has consisted of a mishmash of Greek philosophy and mysticism (*tasavvuf*). After implying that the mystical writings of such past authors as Ibn `Arabi²⁵⁸ and Jalal al-Din Rumi do not mean much in an increasingly scientific world, Baha Tevfik argues that it is now the materialism of German authors that is increasingly influential and propagated around the world.²⁵⁹ The biological theories of Lamarck and Darwin have altered the old understandings regarding the creation of the world and living beings (ideas that go back to prophets such as Moses, according to Baha Tevfik);²⁶⁰ and as a result, materialistic ideas associated with such thinkers as Feuerbach, Büchner and Haeckel have come to prominence in the modern world.²⁶¹ Baha Tevfik claims that the only possible course of action for Ottoman thinkers is to accept these new scientific and philosophical theories entirely. Baha Tevfik then cites Rıza Tevfik Bey (later Rıza Tevfik Bölükbaşı, 1868-

²⁵⁸ For a discussion of Ibn `Arabi's philosophical ideas in conjunction with the ideas of Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, see Chapter Five below.

²⁵⁹ Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd*, 53.

²⁶⁰ Utilizing Charles Darwin's theory of evolution to "prove" the triumph of philosophical materialism was a common strategy for late Ottoman materialists. Baha Tevfik's friend Subhi Edhem, in fact, wrote an entire book on Darwinism in which he drew parallels between Darwinism and German materialistic thought. See Subhi Edhem, *Darvenizm*, (Manastır: Beynelmilel Ticaret Matbaası, 1327 [1912]). Subhi Edhem mentions that he wrote this book based on the lecture notes he used while teaching at the Military High School in Manastır (Bitola), Macedonia. In the introductory chapter to his book on Darwin's theory of evolution, he explicitly writes about the necessity of "breaking free from the harsh hands of tradition" (*an' anat-ı kadimiye'nin haşin ellerinden kurtulmak*) and joining the "world civilization" (*çihan medeniyetine katılmak*). See Subhi Edhem, *Darvenizm...*, 4-5. It is interesting to note that Mustafa Kemal Atatürk graduated from this same high school in 1899. The fact that Subhi Edhem was teaching about German materialism there in the 1910s is a good demonstration of the influence of materialist thought in Ottoman educational institutions. Although the hotbed of materialist thought in the empire was the Imperial Military Medical School in Istanbul, there is good reason to assume that this was not the only place in the Ottoman Empire for students to become acquainted with materialist thought. The same could be accomplished at the School of Civil Administration in Istanbul, of which Baha Tevfik was a graduate.

²⁶¹ Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd*, 54.

1949), Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Köprülüzade Mehmed Fuad Bey (1890-1966)²⁶² and Subhi Edhem as the most important figures currently “transferring” (*nakletmek*) European philosophy to the Ottoman lands. After arguing that, as a result of scientific developments, there are no more “philosophers” in the old sense in Europe but only “mathematicians” and “physicians,” Baha Tevfik harshly criticizes Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi for occasionally reverting to metaphysical arguments in his books and confusing the minds of the youth with “fairy tales.”²⁶³

One of the most important articles, *Millileşmek Emeli* (“The Goal of Becoming a Nation”),²⁶⁴ positioned towards the end of the book, addresses nationalism. In it, Baha Tevfik ridicules the people who equate the idea of nation-building with “changing our names from Ahmed to Bozalp and from Hasan to Karataş.”²⁶⁵ In other words, Tevfik finds the idea of reviving a supposedly glorious pre-Islamic Turkish past by using “pure” Turkish names preposterous and useless. He then argues that trying to protect a supposedly valuable “national character” in the name of nationalism is meaningless

²⁶² Fuat Köprülü, who was probably the most important Turkish cultural historian of the first half of the twentieth century, was also the foreign minister of Turkey between 1950 and 1955.

²⁶³ Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd*, 61. As the analysis of his thought in the next chapter will illustrate, Ahmed Hilmi was a much more sophisticated thinker than Baha Tevfik gives him credit for.

²⁶⁴ See *Ibid.*, 82-87. A slightly different version of this article was published in *Felsefe Mecmuası*: See Baha Tevfik, “Millileşmek Emeli,” *Felsefe Mecmuası* 1, No.1 (1329 [1913]): 3-5.

²⁶⁵ “İsmimizi Ahmed’den Bozalp’e, Hasan’dan Karataş’a tahvil etmekle millileştigimizi zannedenler...”: Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd*, 83. *Bozalp* (Grey Hero) and *Karataş* (Black Stone) are etymologically pure old Turkish names, as opposed to Ahmed and Hasan, which are Arabic and Islamic names. In the other version of this article published in the *Felsefe Mecmuası*, Baha Tevfik uses the name *Gökalp* (Blue Hero) instead of *Bozalp*. *Gökalp* was the pen name of Mehmed Ziya Bey (Ziya Gökalp, 1876-1924), who was the major theoretician of Turkish nationalism within the ranks of the ruling C.U.P. See Baha Tevfik, “Millileşmek Emeli,” 4.

because many traits of this Turkish “national character” which may have been useful in the past, such as “nomadism” (*göçebelik*), “raiding” (*akıncılık*) and shunning interest (*faizden kaçma*) have absolutely no utility in the modern world. Using a rather historicist argument, Baha Tevfik claims that the present sorry state of Ottoman society is a direct result of past historical mistakes, and it is therefore meaningless to idealize the past. After all, he writes, the Ottoman past is full of “fratricides, matricides, patricides, revolts, long Janissary troubles, mutinies and banditry.”²⁶⁶

Going farther back, to pre-Islamic Turkish history, and trying to construct a pure Turkish language in the name of Turkish nationalism is even more foolhardy, Baha Tevfik argues, because the “modern minds” of today cannot even think with the “coarse and incomprehensible language” of the Central Asian steppes. A progressive and modern mind, he argues, demands a modern and progressive language.²⁶⁷ What Turkish society needs, Baha Tevfik argues, is not nationalism, which he deems ultimately to be a source of social oppression against the individual, but the goal (*gaye-i hayal*) of “Europeanization,” “progress” and “civilization.”²⁶⁸

His aversion to Turkish nationalism is one of the main reasons why Baha Tevfik, despite his remarkable articles and books, was largely forgotten by Turkish intellectuals

²⁶⁶ Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Ferd*, 84-85.

²⁶⁷ “Dün Turan’ın o kaba ve şumulsüz kelimatıyla tefhim-i efkar edebilen dimağlar bugün aynı vasıta ile idare-i kelam edemezler. Müterakki dimağ müterakki lisan ister.” (“The intellects that communicated their thoughts by using the coarse and non-comprehensive vocabulary of Turan (Central Asia) yesterday, cannot converse by using the same instruments today.”): *Ibid.*, 85-86.

²⁶⁸ “Avrupalılaşmak, medeni ve müterakki olmak gaye-i hayali....” (“The ideal of Europeanization, being civilized and progressive....”): *Ibid.*, 87.

after his death. If vulgar materialism constituted one pillar of the ideology of the early Turkish Republic, the other pillar was Turkish nationalism. Baha Tevfik was simply too cosmopolitan (and too irreverent towards what he perceived as a parochial nationalism) to have any chance of being accepted into the pantheon of the early Republican ideologues.

In sum, Baha Tevfik presented a comprehensive world-view to his readers based on his understanding of the “latest philosophical developments” in Europe; and although he had some liberal reservations about borrowing excessively from European bureaucratic traditions, he pointed to European civilization as the ultimate standard of emulation for Ottoman society.

Ironically, though, as I show in Chapter Five, German vulgar materialism, which Baha Tevfik consistently presented to his readers as the most advanced European philosophical viewpoint, was already a dying philosophical breed in Europe by the end of the nineteenth century, largely as a result of the latest scientific developments in physics. However, this dying breed of materialism, which had become largely irrelevant in Europe by the 1920s, passed for cutting-edge philosophy during the early years of the Turkish Republic, providing the Turkish reformers with a semblance of ideology to transform their society in the name of science and truth.

VII: BAHA TEVFİK'S IDEAS ON LITERATURE

Baha Tevfik's ideas on literature are based on a dichotomy, advanced at numerous points in his writings, between "rational thoughts" and "emotions". In order to lead a happy life, Baha Tevfik remarked, one's thoughts should be victorious over one's emotions.²⁶⁹ Literature, according to Baha Tevfik, is ultimately an elaborate manipulation of human emotions and, as such, should be regarded as harmful. Baha Tevfik's views on literature are best expressed in an article titled *Edebiyat kat'iyen muzırdır* ("Literature is Absolutely Harmful"),²⁷⁰ which he published in his book *Scientific and Literary Renovation*. Baha Tevfik begins this article by arguing that pure literature is poetry and that there are essentially two types of poems: those that deal with happiness and those that deal with melancholy and sadness. These human emotions are part of human "sensitivity" (*hassasiyet*), which is non-rational.²⁷¹ Any poem which purports to convey a logical or rational "judgment" (*muhakeme*), according to Baha Tevfik, is not a poem but ultimately a piece of prose. Although one may write logical sentences or judgments in rhyme, the result would be not poetry but merely rhymed prose.²⁷²

²⁶⁹ "Mesud olmak için lazım olan şey fikrimizin hissimize galebesi(dir)... denebilir." ("It may be said that... what is required to be happy is the victory of thought over emotion."): Baha Tevfik, *Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Edebi* (Istanbul: Teceddüd-i İlmi ve Felsefi Kütüphanesi, 1327 [1911]), 24.

²⁷⁰ See "Edebiyat kat'iyen muzırdır," in *ibid.*, 112-133.

²⁷¹ *Ibid.*, 114-115.

²⁷² *Ibid.*, 116.

So, according to Baha Tevfik, what makes a piece of writing a poem is not necessarily its structure but its ability to deal with human emotions (which, according to him, should be regarded as variations of happiness and sadness). These emotions, Baha Tevfik argues, are, biologically speaking, results of the earlier phases of the evolution of the human brain and came into existence long before the biological formation of the ability to reason in humans. In fact, such emotions and “sensibility” may even be found in lesser life forms.²⁷³

Literature, in other words, depends on emotions which are controlled by the parts of the human brain that human beings share with lesser animals. Dealing with literature may improve the parts of the human brain that control “imagination” and emotions, but emphasizing these parts of the brain, as opposed to the parts of the brain that deal with logical and analytical reasoning, is meaningless in a materialistic and scientific world. In fact, from a completely utilitarian point of view, Baha Tevfik argues that a poet is less beneficial to society than a simple miner. He provocatively concludes that the inclination to literature in the modern world should be viewed as a sort of mental illness.

More interestingly, Baha Tevfik argues that the celebrated Ottoman poets of the past, such as Fuzuli (1483-1556) and Nef’i (1572-1635), led completely vacuous lives and did not contribute anything of value to society. He suggests that it would be better for the Turkish educational system to get rid of literature classes.²⁷⁴ Since he calculates the

²⁷³ Ibid., 120-121.

²⁷⁴ Ibid., 129-132

entire value of any human endeavor in terms of its contribution to “truth” and “science,” Baha Tevfik is naturally reluctant to give any credit to past poets for their artistic contributions or for understanding the human condition.

Although his views on the uselessness of literature in general and the past Ottoman poets in particular might seem a bit eccentric, Baha Tevfik’s ideas should, in fact, be viewed as a direct continuation of Beşir Fuad’s ideas on literature. Both of these intellectuals, under the influence of German materialistic ideas on science, saw science as the repository of a “truth” that could be reached only by empirical scientific methods. Literature, not a terribly scientific human endeavor, is ultimately deemed to be a waste of time by both authors unless it adheres to a strict “naturalism” under the guidance of science.

Although Baha Tevfik slightly altered his blanket statements about literature as a sort of mental illness and later, in 1914, published a book about a poet friend of his named “Celis,”²⁷⁵ he remained adamant in his condemnation of past Ottoman literature²⁷⁶ and in his preference for realism in literature to the very end.

In conclusion, Baha Tevfik’s ideas on literature seem to be a natural continuation of his philosophical views, which present empirical science as the criterion for the value

²⁷⁵ Baha Tevfik, *Felsefe-i Edebiyat ve Şair Celis* (Istanbul: Ma’rifet Kütüphanesi, 1330 [1914]). Celis was the pen name of Bahri Bey, who was formerly a captain in the Ottoman army. After being wounded in Albania, Bahri Bey left the army and published poems in various publications associated with Baha Tevfik. According to Baha Tevfik, Celis died in 1913 of tuberculosis. See *ibid.*, 13-14.

²⁷⁶ According to Baha Tevfik, traditional Ottoman literature was just an imitation of Persian and Arabic literature while modern Ottoman literature is an imitation of European literature. See *ibid.*, 10.

of any human production. The fact that he was much more straightforward in his defense and propagation of materialism and science in late Ottoman society than other Ottoman materialists, such as Abdullah Cevdet and Celal Nuri, makes Baha Tevfik's ideas on religion and literature very interesting and engaging. His writings are essential reading for any historian trying to understand the philosophical discussions regarding the nature and necessity of social change in late Ottoman society.

Chapter 5: Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi (1865-1914):

Responding to Materialism as a Philosopher and Mystic

Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi (1865-1914) is a highly sophisticated Ottoman intellectual whose complex ideas provide a key not only for understanding intellectual developments in the final years of the Ottoman Empire but also for understanding the later intellectual history of the Turkish Republic.

After briefly mentioning the major characteristics of the work of Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, I provide biographical information about him in the first part of the chapter. In the second part, I concentrate on his philosophical ideas and deal with the issue of his response to the German “vulgar materialism” (*Vulgärmaterialismus*), which had a profound philosophical influence on Ottoman intellectuals in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century. In this part of the chapter, I will examine one of the major works written by Celal Nuri İleri,²⁷⁷ advocating the materialist viewpoint, which

²⁷⁷ Celal Nuri, *Tarih-i İstikbal, Volume I: Mesail-i Fikriye* (Istanbul: Yeni Osmanlı Matbaa ve Kitabhanesi, 1331 [1913]).

elicited a complex, spirited and philosophically aware response from Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi.²⁷⁸

By comparing and contrasting the works of Celal Nuri İleri and Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, I will try to show that Hilmi had a much more sophisticated understanding of the latest developments in physics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth century than İleri (or other Ottoman materialists, for that matter). Consequently, whereas İleri equated the concept of “truth” with the empirical results of nineteenth-century science, Hilmi, largely as a result of his reading of such important scientists and philosophers as Rudolf Clausius, Sadi Carnot, Lord Kelvin and Henri Poincaré, saw the concept of an overarching scientific “truth” as meaningless. Whereas İleri and his materialist cohort were stuck in the mid-nineteenth-century understanding of a materialist science, Hilmi was very well aware of the scientific developments, especially in thermodynamics, which prepared the revolution of Albert Einstein and Hendrik Lorentz in physics in the early twentieth century.²⁷⁹

In the third part of the chapter, I will specifically deal with Hilmi’s rather peculiar conceptualization of “truth” (*hakikat*), which depended, for the most part, on his understanding of Islamic mysticism or Sufism (*tasavvuf*). This mystical understanding of

²⁷⁸ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Huzur-ı Akl-u Fen’de Maddiyun Meslek-i Delaleti* (Istanbul: Hikmet Matbaa-i İslamiyesi, 1332[1914]).

²⁷⁹ It is important to note here that Henri Poincaré, who was one of the major philosophical influences on Hilmi, is considered, together with Einstein and Lorentz, as the co-founder of the “Special Theory of Relativity”. On this point, See Elie Zahar, *Poincaré’s Philosophy: From Conventionalism to Phenomenology* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

truth helped Hilmi transcend the limitations of nineteenth-century materialist science and argue for a *multi-layered reality*, only parts of which, according to Hilmi, were suitable for empirical and scientific observation.²⁸⁰ The scientific reality, in other words, was only a part of a larger mystical reality for Hilmi. In this part of my chapter, I will concentrate on Hilmi's semi-autobiographical mystical novel *A'mak-ı Hayal* (The Depths of Imagination)²⁸¹ as well as his articles on mysticism published in his journal, *Hikmet* (Wisdom).

In the fourth and final part of the chapter, I will deal with the ideas of Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi regarding the issue of Islamic reform. In a nutshell, Hilmi argued that the traditional *ulama* (religious scholars, literally, "those who know") and their theological arguments had become bankrupt in the modern world, and he advocated the necessity of forming a new intellectual class which should be familiar with both theology and modern science in the Ottoman Empire. I will focus specifically on his two important works *Üss-i İslam* (The Base of Islam)²⁸² and *Tarih-i İslam* (History of Islam)²⁸³ in this part of the chapter.

²⁸⁰ I will try to demonstrate that Hilmi's mystical approach almost directly follows the ideas of the Andalusian mystic Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240).

²⁸¹ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *A'mak-ı Hayal: Raci'nin Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Necm-i İstikbal Matbaası, 1341 [1922]). For an English translation, see Ahmed Hilmi, *Awakened Dreams: Razi's Journey with the Mirror Dede* trans. Refik Algan and Camille Helminski (Putney: Threshold Books, 1993).

²⁸² See Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Üss-i İslam: Hakayık-i İslamiyeye Müstenid Yeni İlm-i Akaid* (Istanbul:Hikmet Matbaası, 1332 [1914]).

²⁸³ See Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Tarih-i İslam*, 2 vols. (Istanbul: Hikmet Matbaası, 1326 [1908]). This work is republished as Ahmed Hilmi, Şehbenderzade Filibeli, *İslam Tarihi*, 2 vols. (Istanbul:

I: ŞEBBENDERZADE AHMED HİLMİ: A BIOGRAPHY

Although I have some reservations about his article, I generally agree with Amit Bein, who in a recent article argued that “Ahmed Hilmi is a conspicuous example...of a form of Islamic modernism that combined Sufi piety with modernist inclinations and identity.”²⁸⁴ In order to understand how Ahmed Hilmi came to form his peculiar and highly interesting amalgam of ideas on Sufism, religion, science and modernity, it is imperative to examine his rather fascinating biography.

Ahmed Hilmi was born in 1865 in Plovdiv (*Filibe*) in present-day Bulgaria as the son of a consul (*Şehbender*) named Süleyman Bey; from the father’s occupation the son acquired the family name *Şehbenderzade*, literally the son (or offspring) of the consul.²⁸⁵ An adjective indicating his birthplace, *Filibe* (Plovdiv), is also sometimes attached to his name in the form of Şehbenderzade *Filibeli* Ahmed Hilmi.

After Plovdiv became part of the Bulgarian principality in 1885, Ahmed Hilmi’s family migrated to Edirne and Istanbul, finally settling in Izmir (Smyrna) on the Aegean coast of Anatolia. Ahmed Hilmi attended the Galatasaray Lycée (*Mekteb-i Sultani*) in

Üçdal Neşriyat, 1971). The quotations from this work in the following pages are taken from the 1971 edition.

²⁸⁴ See Amit Bein, “A ‘Young Turk’ Islamic Intellectual: Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi and the Diverse Intellectual Legacies of the Late Ottoman Empire”, *International Journal of Middle East Studies* No. 39 (2007): 607.

²⁸⁵ For extensive biographical information on Ahmed Hilmi, see the introductory chapter written by Ahmet Koçak, “Ahmed Hilmi’nin Hayatı, İlmi ve Edebi Hüviyeti,” published in *Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, Hikmet Yazıları* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2005), 39-61. See also İsmail Kara, *Türkiye’de İslamcılık Düşüncesi: Metinler, Kişiler, vol. 1* (Istanbul: Kitabevi Yayınları, 1997), 67-71.

Istanbul, which was the main site for educating the bureaucratic elite of the Ottoman Empire in the second part of the nineteenth century.²⁸⁶

After graduating from the Galatasaray Lycée, Ahmed Hilmi began to work in the post office, first in Istanbul and then in Izmir, where he became the director. Afterward, he was appointed to the postal office in Beirut (*Beyrut Vilayeti Telgraf ve Posta Merkezi Posta Müdürlüğü*), where he established contact with the Young Turks. After a brief stay in Egypt, he returned to Istanbul in 1901 and was arrested on charges of subversive political activities, as a result of which he was exiled to Fezzan (*Fizan*) in southern Libya the same year.

His life story until his exile to Libya is a typical one for a Young Turk: A Young Turk hailing from the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire²⁸⁷ gets a good education in the newly established modern schools of the empire and becomes a minor bureaucrat full of ambition and idealism. He then becomes disillusioned with the conservative nature of the empire, for which he blames the ruler, Abdülhamid II. The Young Turk begins to engage in political activities against the ruler until finally he is banished to a remote province, where he awaits the chance for a reconciliation with the paternalistic ruler. However, in the case of Ahmed Hilmi, something unusual happened during his exile in

²⁸⁶ On Galatasaray Lycée, see Benjamin Fortna, *Imperial Classroom: Islam, the State and Education in the Late Ottoman Empire* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 99-112.

²⁸⁷ It might be interesting to note here that Erik J. Zürcher has a remarkable short article in which he argues that “a disproportionately large number” of Young Turk leaders hailed from the Balkan provinces of the Ottoman Empire. See Erik, J. Zürcher, “The Young Turks: Children of the Borderlands?” *International Journal of Turkish Studies* No.9 (2003): 275-285.

Libya. He had a personal religious experience in the desert and became a Sufi. Ahmed Hilmi became a follower of the religious order of the 'Arusiyya,²⁸⁸ a minor North African order founded in Tunisia in the fifteenth century, and remained a Sufi for the rest of his life.

Ahmed Hilmi returned to Istanbul in 1908, after the Second Constitutional Revolution and the following general amnesty. He immediately became part of the lively publishing business in the Ottoman capital, but his first publishing endeavors, *İttihad-ı İslam* (*Unity of Islam*, a political weekly) and *Coşkun Kalender* (*The Jolly Dervish*, a weekly humor magazine) failed due to lack of readership. After publishing a number of articles in the leading newspapers and journals of the era, such as *Sırat-ı Müstakim*, *İkdam* and *Tasvir-i Efkar*, he began to publish a weekly journal named *Hikmet* (*Wisdom*), in mid-1910, followed by a daily newspaper with the same name.²⁸⁹ His weekly journal was an immediate financial success, which allowed him to found his own publishing house, *Hikmet Matbaa-yi İslamiyesi* (*Islamic Publishing House of Wisdom*) on 3 November 1910. By early 1911, he was definitely a well-known intellectual figure in Istanbul and was appointed professor of philosophy at Istanbul University (*Darülfunun*).

²⁸⁸ This is the reason why he published some of his articles on mysticism and religion under the *nom de plume* Mihridin Arusi.

²⁸⁹ The Daily *Hikmet* was published between 9 September and 23 September 1911 for fourteen issues, and again between 1 August 1912 and 23 January 1913 for 173 issues. His weekly journal *Hikmet* was published between 21 April 1910 and 21 September 1911 for 75 issues. The weekly was closed by the state authorities because of an open letter Ahmed Hilmi wrote to Sultan Mehmed V, urging him to take action against Italian imperialism in Libya. Later, after a long hiatus, two more issues of the weekly journal were published, and the journal closed with its 77th issue, which was published on 28 September 1912.

Although Ahmed Hilmi, being a Young Turk himself, supported the ruling Committee of Union and Progress (CUP) initially, he began to oppose the leadership following a schism within the CUP in 1911: “A serious internal rift developed as a result of a clash of personal ambitions and increasing suspicions that an antireligious cabal was coming to control the CUP. The crisis deepened in March and April, when dissenters organized themselves as the ‘New Faction’ (*Hizb-i Cedit*) and openly challenged the leadership’s control of the secret organization.”²⁹⁰ Ahmed Hilmi supported the challengers in his journal²⁹¹ and paid a serious price for this support when the Unionist leadership regained control of the situation by late 1911. His newspaper was suspended a few times and he was arrested in October 1911, following his open letter to the sultan about Italian imperialism in Libya,²⁹² which probably gave the CUP leaders a good pretext to get rid of an intelligent and increasingly annoying opponent. He was banished first to Kastamonu and then to Bursa. Although he returned to Istanbul in 1912, he was able to publish his journal for only a couple more issues. He was again briefly arrested after the Unionist coup d’état of January 1913 because of his earlier opposition to the

²⁹⁰ See Bein, 617. On the “New Faction,” see Zürcher, *Modern Turkey*, 106. The New Faction was founded by Colonel Sadık Bey who argued that military officers should refrain from interfering in politics and that the CUP should cease to be a secret society.

²⁹¹ See, for example, Ahmed Hilmi, “Yaşasın Hürriyet,” *Hikmet*, 27 April 1911, 1-2.

²⁹² See Ahmed Hilmi, “Enzar-ı Millete: Halife ve Padişahımız Hazretlerine, Hey’et-i Teşri’iye ve Heyet-i İcraiyyeye Açık Arzuhal,” *Hikmet*, 14 September 1911, 1. The open letter, obviously written by Ahmed Hilmi, is signed “Heyet-i Hikmet”. In this open letter, Ahmed Hilmi advised the sultan to send one of his sons to Libya and appoint him governor. He hoped that such a measure would slow down the Italians and give a moral boost to the local population.

increasingly dictatorial leadership of the CUP.²⁹³ For the remainder of his short life, he continued to publish philosophical and literary works and generally kept a low public profile. He died of copper poisoning under suspicious circumstances in October 1914.²⁹⁴

II: AHMED HİLMİ'S PHILOSOPHICAL IDEAS

In 1913 (h. 1331), one year before the death of Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Celal Nuri (later Celal Nuri İleri) published the first volume of a very interesting book entitled *Tarih-i İstikbal* (History of the Future).²⁹⁵ This book is important for a couple of reasons. First, it is an excellent example of the type of late Ottoman materialist writing that preferred to present its arguments in Islamic garb. Second, it provoked an elegant philosophical response by Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi,²⁹⁶ the intellectual sophistication and depth of which simply dwarfed any works published by the Ottoman materialists of the era.

In one of the numerous footnotes of his otherwise excellent paper on late Ottoman materialism, Hanioglu makes a slightly misleading reference to Ahmed Hilmi's work and argues that Baha Tevfik and his associates "simply did not find Islamist criticism worthy

²⁹³ Amit Bein suggests that Hilmi was probably excused because of his publication of a booklet criticizing the opponents of CUP in 1913. See Bein, 619. The booklet is Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, *Muhalefetin İflası* (Istanbul: Hikmet Matbaa-i İslamiyesi, 1331 [1913]).

²⁹⁴ For the controversies regarding his "poisoning," see Kara, *Türkiye'de İslamcılık Düşüncesi: Metinler, Kişiler, Vol. 1*, 70; See also Bein, 619.

²⁹⁵ Celal Nuri, *Tarih-i İstikbal, vol. 1: Mesail-i Fikriye* (Istanbul: Yeni Osmanlı Matbaa ve Kitabhanesi, 1331 [1913]). The second volume entitled *Mesail-i Siyasiye* was also published in the same year. The third volume entitled *Mesail-i İctimaiye* was published in the following year.

²⁹⁶ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Huzur-ı Akl-u Fen'de Maddiyun....*

of response. Other, more sophisticated Islamic critiques of scientific materialism²⁹⁷ made use of *spiritualist and idealist European works*. As these too went unanswered by Ottoman and European materialists of Baha Tevfik's generation, the debate tended to become somewhat one-sided."²⁹⁸ Ahmed Hilmi's work on materialism, which was written as a response to Celal Nuri's book, has very little to do with "spiritualist and idealist European works."²⁹⁹ In fact, Ahmed Hilmi's entire argument against materialism depends on his reading of the works of leading scientists and philosophers of science of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century such as Rudolf Clausius, a leading German scientist and mathematician and one of the founders of the discipline of thermodynamics, and Henri Poincaré, a French mathematician, scientist, philosopher of science and the co-founder of the Special Theory of Relativity. There is no question that Baha Tevfik felt disdain for the Islamic critiques of his work.³⁰⁰ However, if Baha Tevfik did not respond to Ahmed Hilmi, it is, most probably, because he did not adequately understand Hilmi.

In order to clarify the philosophical arguments of Ahmed Hilmi, I will provide a "close reading" of Celal Nuri's and Ahmed Hilmi's books below. Before doing so,

²⁹⁷ Here Hanioglu refers to Ahmed Hilmi's work in footnote 393.

²⁹⁸ Hanioglu, "Blueprints....," 70 (my italics).

²⁹⁹ Ahmed Hilmi's book on psychology, which was written as a response to Baha Tevfik and his advocacy of mechanistic materialism as the key to human psychology, has references to European idealism, but Hilmi's major criticisms, made in his works cited by Hanioglu, are not spiritualist or idealist. They depend, as I demonstrate in the following pages, on a sophisticated understanding of the latest developments in physics that occurred in the early twentieth century. For Hilmi's work on psychology, see Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, *İlm-i Ahval-i Ruh* (Istanbul: Hikmet Matbaa-i İslamiyesi, 1911).

³⁰⁰ As shown in Chapter Three, Tevfik made a few disparaging remarks about Ahmed Hilmi in his books. But these were rather haphazard *ad hominem* attacks, which, in my opinion, are further proof that he simply did not penetrate the depth of Hilmi's arguments.

however, I would like to emphasize that Celal Nuri İleri, whose work provoked Hilmi's response, was not an obscure Ottoman intellectual who happened to write a book about materialism. In fact, Celal Nuri, who was educated at the School of Law (*Mekteb-i Hukuk*) and worked as a journalist afterward, was a prominent and politically active intellectual in the late Ottoman era. He became a member of the newly formed Turkish parliament on 30 November 1921 (representing Gelibolu) and then was selected as the president of the Constitutional Commission (*Kanun-i Esasi Encümeni Reisliği*), which largely determined the legal and constitutional framework of the future Turkish Republic, on 10 February 1922.³⁰¹ He remained a member of the parliament for its first four terms. In brief, he was a major intellectual figure in the late Ottoman and early Republican eras.³⁰²

So, what were the contents of the materialist arguments of Celal Nuri and how did Ahmed Hilmi respond to them? Celal Nuri begins his book by arguing, in the chapter entitled "Philosophy and the Future" (*Felsefe ve İstikbal*), that there is only one way of

³⁰¹ See Celal Nuri İleri, *Türk İnkılabı* (Ankara: Atatürk Kültür Merkezi Başkanlığı Yayınları, 2000), VI-VII.

³⁰² On the strange amalgam of Celal Nuri's ideas, which blended materialism, Islamic domestic reform and anti-imperialism, Cemil Aydın wrote that "An Islamic renaissance and revival were still the essential components in Celal Nuri's vision of Muslims taking their rightful role in the international community and in that sense he was ironically internalizing some of the Orientalist arguments that sustained the European discourse of civilization....Nevertheless, Nuri also *made a distinction between the industrial-technical civilization and the spiritual civilization of Europe* to emphasize that, *while Muslims were behind in the first arena, they were superior to Europe when it came to spiritual and moral issues.*" Aydın, *The Politics of...*, 102-103. (Italics are mine). Although Aydın's point about Celal Nuri's relationship to European civilization is in general correct, Celal Nuri was less categorical about not borrowing the spiritual civilization of Europe. As I will demonstrate below, he was much more open to taking the European art forms (European fine arts, music, etc.), as examples than were people like Ahmed Hilmi or Said Nursi. He was also much more aware than Hilmi or Nursi that the so-called material side of European civilization is a historical phenomenon which may not be separated from the spiritual side of western civilization as easily as Hilmi or Nursi would like to believe.

reaching the “truth,” and that is science.³⁰³ He then goes on to argue that any philosophy that does not rely on scientific experience is pure rational speculation and is essentially meaningless.³⁰⁴ Directly echoing the arguments of the German materialists, Nuri argues that metaphysics as a discipline cannot exist because there is no reality other than the universe experienced by the senses.³⁰⁵ Just like Baha Tevfik, who reduced the entire realm of philosophical thinking to a simple handmaiden for empirical science, Nuri argues that the speculations of philosophy are helpful only if they serve the findings of empirical science.³⁰⁶

The next chapter of the book, which is entitled “The Schools of Spiritualism, Materialism and Monism” (*Meslek-i Ruhiyun, Maddiyun, Vahidiyun*) is composed of, basically, one big quotation from a lecture given by Ludwig Büchner³⁰⁷ on materialism, after which Nuri desperately tries to demonstrate that the materialist philosophy of Büchner is compatible with the spirit of Islam.³⁰⁸ For understandable reasons, this effort requires a considerable amount of mental acrobatics on the part of Nuri. So, for example, on page 31, we learn that the Quranic stories about the miracles of the prophets are just

³⁰³ Celal Nuri, *Tarih-i İstikbal*, 17.

³⁰⁴ “Tecrübe haricinde yapılacak akli spekülasyonlar pek vahidir, abuk sabuktur.”: *Ibid.*, 17.

³⁰⁵ “‘Metafizik’ denilen mavera-i tabiat ilmi yoktur, çünkü tabiatın öbür tarafı gayr-i mevcuttur.” (“There is no science called Metaphysics which studies that which is beyond nature because the other side of nature is nonexistent.”): *Ibid.*, 18.

³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 25-54.

³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 25-26.

tales or fiction *-bunlar kıssa yani masaldır-*, and that supposedly there is nothing in the Quran or the hadith that contradicts the basic tenets of materialist philosophy.

Later, in a chapter named “Religion and Its Future” (*Din ve İstikbali*), Nuri asserts that any religion that is a hindrance to “progress” should be removed.³⁰⁹ It is certainly important to realize that the terms “science” and “progress” are at the heart of Nuri’s discourse about religion. Religion, almost by definition, cannot have any claim to truth, Nuri argues, and should be transformed according to the dictates of science. If religion is not rejected outright by Nuri, it is because of its perceived benefit as a social institution and not because of any intrinsic truth to it. However, as science continues its triumphant progress in the future, religion will lose its social functions and be confined to the consciences of the believers.³¹⁰ If the believers want the religion of Islam to remain relevant in the future, argues Nuri, then they should be open to the idea of changing and updating the religion constantly according to the dictates of science.³¹¹

Nuri’s arguments about religion reach their climax in the chapter called *Yeni Akaid* (“New Tenets of Belief”), where Nuri essentially reduces the entire edifice of Islamic belief to the findings of positivistic science.³¹² As a result of his dogmatic

³⁰⁹ “Bugün terakkiye mani bir din varsa vacib-ül izaledir.” (“If there is a religion today hindering progress, then it should be removed.”): Ibid., 63.

³¹⁰ Ibid., 65.

³¹¹ Ibid., 68.

³¹² “Her ne ki fennen doğru ve müsbettir, işte o din-i İslamdır. Zira Hazret-i Muhammed’in tebliğ ettiği diyanet, hakaik-i maddiye ve müsbete haricinde birşey ihtiva edemez.” (“Whatever is true and positive according to science, is also the religion of Islam. The religion delivered by the Prophet Muhammed cannot contain anything other than material and positive truths.”):Ibid., 107.

conceptualization of science as a repository of “truth,” Nuri simply did not understand that science works with hypotheses and that the very concept of an unchanging “truth” is ultimately meaningless in science.

I want to argue that Nuri was simply making a religious reading of science, transferring the concept of “truth” from the realm of religion (which seemed more and more unbelievable to him) to the realm of science. This intellectual mistake of making a religion out of science was common in the thought of the late Ottoman materialists; the echo of this mistake may be seen in the Kemalist dictum *Hayatta En Hakiki Mürşid İlimdir* (“The most truthful 'guide' in life is science”). Note that Atatürk uses the term *mürşid*, which has overwhelmingly religious and mystical connotations, to describe what science is. Science is not defined as a useful tool to investigate nature or as a human device of knowledge. It is defined as a *mürşid*. Now, of course, the term *mürşid* cannot be properly translated by the seemingly neutral term “guide” (*rehber* is the Turkish word for that). A *mürşid*, in Sufi terminology, is a guide who leads to “absolute truth”. And that “absolute truth” is probably what Atatürk had in mind when he defined science as a *mürşid*. It is not very difficult to see the contours of the early Republican ideology, which interpreted science “religiously” (as something that will lead one to “truth”), in this dictum. That “certainty” of having the truth (as opposed to the superstitions of tradition and religion) is one of the reasons which, I think, explains why the early Republicans were so vehemently opposed to religion in Turkey.

Nuri goes on to argue that the only “mystery” that has not yet been solved by science is consciousness or soul (*ruh*) and that this mystery will probably be solved in the future as a result of further physiological studies on the gray matter of the human brain (*madde-i sincabiye*).³¹³ The human body, Nuri boldly argues, is essentially a machine, not different from an electrical or steam engine.³¹⁴

In the following chapter, Nuri deals with the subject of fine arts and argues that as a result of Islamic scholars’ earlier rejection of painting and sculpture (presumably because of a fear of idolatry), fine arts never got a chance to develop in Islamic lands.³¹⁵ It is certainly noteworthy that Nuri does not even mention non-representational art forms such as calligraphy, not to mention miniature, which flourished in the Islamic lands but urges the Young Turk government to sponsor the development of the western fine arts in the Ottoman domains.³¹⁶

Nuri’s dissatisfaction with the Islamic past of the Ottoman Empire reaches a boiling point in the final chapter of the book, where he essentially argues that the historical roots of Islamic civilization are much shallower than those of western

³¹³ Ibid., 133.

³¹⁴ Ibid., 134.

³¹⁵ “Bizde maa’tteessüf ulemanın fena bir tefsiri neticesi olarak sanayi’-i nefise doğmadan öldürülmüştür.” (“Unfortunately, in our lands the fine arts were killed before they were even born as a result of a bad interpretation [or exegesis] by the ulema.”): *ibid.*, 48.

³¹⁶ Ibid., 49.

civilization and that the Turks need to find a way of participating in the western modernity by internalizing the history of the West.³¹⁷

I want to emphasize here that the essence of Nuri's argument is almost the exact opposite of the Islamic modernization arguments put forward by Ahmed Hilmi, Mehmed Akif Ersoy and Said Nursi, which focused on taking the material achievements of western civilization and neglected the historical developments that made these scientific and material achievements possible. Celal Nuri makes clear to the reader that by "European past," he means the Renaissance, the Reformation, and the vast geographical, social, cultural and economic changes that occurred in Europe in the early modern period.³¹⁸

Nuri argues that the Ottomans did not participate in these vast, tectonic sociological changes which swept through Europe from the fifteenth century onward and created the modern world as we know it. As a result, Turks-- and other Muslim peoples, for that matter-- Nuri argues, do *not* have a historical foundation, so to speak, on which to

³¹⁷ "Mazimiz bize kafi gelmiyor...Nehr-i garb kuvvetini, ehmemmiyetini daha esash, daha uzak menbalardan alıyor. Biz şarklılar, sinn-i rüşde balığ olmuş, boyu posu yerinde fakat ma'atteessüf cahil, toy görgüsüzlere benziyoruz. İlerlemek için aşağı yukarı mazi denilen sermayeyi elde etmek lazımdır...." ("Our past simply does not suffice....The Western river takes its power and importance from much more fundamental and distant sources. We, the easterners, resemble ignorant and inexperienced young men without manners who are grown up physically but not otherwise . In order to progress, it is necessary to get hold of the capital called the past...."): *ibid.*, 151.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, 152.

build a modern project similar to the European one. Turks, he writes, are “orphaned of a past” (*yetim-i mazi*).³¹⁹

Nuri ends his discussion by arguing that although it is not possible to go back in time and participate in the economic, sociological and cultural movements which created the modern world, it is still possible to accept and adopt the intellectual principles of these movements in the Ottoman lands.³²⁰

AHMED HILMI'S CRITIQUE OF CELAL NURI:

Ahmed Hilmi begins his critique of Celal Nuri's book by arguing that Nuri's materialist “thoughts which are put forward in a dogmatic and childish manner” are not commonly shared by European philosophers despite Nuri's confident presentation, and that he will dispute Nuri's philosophical claims by also relying on European thinkers.³²¹ Then he informs the reader that the philosophical ideas espoused by Nuri have

³¹⁹ “İşte keşfiyat ve inkılabat-ı iktisadiyeye, rönensans inkılabat-ı fikriyesine, reform inkılabat-ı mezhebiyesine müdahale etmemekliğimiz bizi *yetim-i mazi* bırakıyor.” (“The fact that we did not have anything to do with the economic discoveries and revolutions, the intellectual revolutions of the Renaissance and the religious revolutions of the reformation, makes us '*orphaned of a past*'”: *ibid.*, 166, my italics.

³²⁰ That is why I think Cemil Aydın makes a slight mistake when he lumps Celal Nuri together with Ahmed Hilmi and argues that both accepted the material side of western civilization and rejected its spiritual side. Celal Nuri, although strictly anti-imperialist, was much more sympathetic towards the non-material components of western civilization than figures such as Ahmed Hilmi or Said Nursi. To his credit, Aydın also notes that “Celal Nuri made a distinction between the good enlightenment West and the bad imperialist West, and...his anti-Westernism did not extend to everything about, Western culture much less to modernity”: Aydın, 104.

³²¹ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi , *Huzur-u...*, 5.

been put forward countless times in Europe by “vulgar philosophers” and that these ideas do not currently have much of a following in Europe.³²²

It may be interesting to note here the fact that Ahmed Hilmi does not rely on any traditional Islamic ideas to refute Nuri's claims. Just like Nuri, his reference is to the European philosophers. But, unlike Celal Nuri or Baha Tevfik, Ahmed Hilmi is very well aware of the fact that by the late nineteenth century (and certainly by the early twentieth century), philosophical materialism of the kind advocated by Ludwig Büchner, Jacob Moleschott and Ernst Haeckel had become rather trite³²³ and, intellectually speaking, passé in Europe.³²⁴

More importantly, perhaps, Ahmed Hilmi argues vehemently against the presentation of materialism as essentially Islamic by Nuri. According to Hilmi, Nuri's attitude simply amounts to exchanging one religion for another.³²⁵ Ahmed Hilmi then

³²² “Maddiyun mesleği vulgarizatörleri tarafından layuhsa kere ta'mim ve tekrar edilmiş ve bugün orada pek de dinleyeni kalmamış...” (“Propagated and repeated countless times by the vulgarizers of materialism and yet does not have much of a following remaining there...”) Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi , *ibid.*, 6.

³²³ On this point, see Frederick Gregory, *Scientific Materialism in Nineteenth Century Germany* (Boston: D. Reidel, 1977).

³²⁴ So, pointing out to the obvious connection between the “dogmatic” German vulgar materialists and their Ottoman followers, Hilmi writes, for example, “Celal Nuri Bey'in eserini mütalaa edenler, bu dogmatizmayı o kadar bariz olarak görürler ki bila-irade hatırlarına Büchner, Ernst Haeckel, Moleschott ve Lange gibi rüesa-yi maddiyunun üslub-u beyanı tebadür eder.” (“The people who peruse the work of Celal Nuri Bey may see this dogmatism so clearly that unwillingly they remember the style of such leaders of materialism as Büchner, Ernst Haeckel, Moleschott and Lange.”): Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Huzur-u*, 7.

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, 9-10. In another place Hilmi makes fun of Nuri's “mental gymnastics” (*fikri cimnastikler*) to present an essentially Atheistic philosophy as Islamic: *ibid.*, 108.

goes on to argue that claiming that science is the only way of reaching the “truth,” as Nuri does in his book, is not a scientific but ultimately a metaphysical argument.³²⁶

His arguments gain momentum when Hilmi accuses Nuri and other Ottoman materialists of not understanding what science is and how it works. Science, Hilmi argues forcefully, works with hypotheses and theories, and revises them according to the results of observation. Hence, seeing these hypotheses and theories as repositories of truth is misleading, to say the least.³²⁷ It may be interesting to note that at the end of his argument regarding science and hypotheses, Hilmi refers to the work of the French mathematician, physicist and philosopher of science Henri Poincaré³²⁸ and argues, following Poincaré, that only people who do not understand how science works give it an absolute value.

Henri Poincaré, who was perhaps the last great mathematician who worked in, and made significant contributions to, practically every field of mathematics including analysis, geometry and topography, is generally known for his “conventionalist” approach to mathematics and science.³²⁹ Poincaré not only thought that scientific hypotheses cannot make any claim to absolute truth (any such absolute truth is anathema to science), but also argued that geometrical and mathematical properties are “frameworks” imposed by the human mind on the universe: “Space is another framework

³²⁶ Ibid., 21.

³²⁷ Ibid., 22-23.

³²⁸ See Henri Poincaré, *Science and Hypothesis* (New York: Dover Publications, 1952).

³²⁹ For a discussion of this issue, see Elie Zahar, *Poincaré’s Philosophy: From Conventionalism to Phenomenology* (Chicago: Open Court, 2001).

which we impose on the world. Whence are the first principles of geometry derived? Are they imposed on us by logic? Lobatschewsky, by inventing non-Euclidean geometries, has shown that this is not the case. Is space revealed to us by our senses? No; for the space revealed to us by our senses is absolutely different from the space of geometry. Is geometry derived from experience? Careful discussion will give the answer--no! We therefore conclude that the principles of geometry are only conventions; but these conventions are not arbitrary, and if transported to another world (which I shall call the non-Euclidean world, and which I shall endeavor to describe), we shall find ourselves compelled to adopt more of them.”³³⁰ Regarding the “truth” of these geometric properties, Poincaré is crystal clear that the whole question is meaningless: “In other words, the axioms of geometry...are only definitions in disguise. What, then, are we to think of the question: Is Euclidean geometry true? It has no meaning. We might as well ask if the metric system is true, and if the old weights and measures are false....One geometry cannot be truer than another; it can only be more convenient.”³³¹

Ahmed Hilmi, following Poincaré,³³² argues that attaching the label of absolute “truth” to any scientific hypothesis is a philosophical misunderstanding. Interestingly enough, in order to drive his point home, he refers to the hypothesis regarding the existence of the “luminiferous aether” (a medium for the propagation of light in space),

³³⁰ Poincaré, XXV-XXVI.

³³¹ Ibid., 50.

³³² For Ahmed Hilmi’s direct quotations from Poincaré, see Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Huzur-u.*, 80-86.

which was still a commonly accepted hypothesis in physics in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. This hypothesis was superseded largely as a result of the Michelson-Morley experiment and later by the establishment of the Special Theory of Relativity, which did not require the existence of ether to explain the movement of light.³³³ Hilmi argues that, just like any other scientific hypothesis, the hypothesis regarding the existence of ether is subject to change and therefore using such scientific theories to argue against religion is a horrendous mistake.³³⁴

It is important to emphasize here that Ahmed Hilmi does *not* try to reconcile faith and science at all. Reconciliation of science and religion, which occupied the minds of such well-studied Arab intellectuals as Muhammed Abduh and Rashid Rida,³³⁵ as well as Ottoman materialists such as Abdullah Cevdet and Celal Nuri, is a non-issue for Ahmed Hilmi because he does not see the “truth” of religion as being challenged by science at all. Part of the reason for that, as I will make clear in the next part of my chapter, is that Ahmed Hilmi was a Sufi and did not advocate a literal reading of the religious texts. But more importantly, perhaps, he saw religious truth as existing at a higher metaphysical level that is beyond the reach of scientific theories.

³³³ See Albert Michelson and Edward Morley, “On the Relative Motion of the Earth and the Luminiferous Ether,” *The American Journal of Science* 34, No.203 (1887): 333-345.

³³⁴ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Huzur-u*, 53.

³³⁵ On these figures, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age, 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 130-245.

Returning to the issue of materialist science, Ahmed Hilmi challenges Büchner and other materialists by arguing that the very foundation of the materialist viewpoint (the separate and eternal existence of “matter” in a void) has been challenged by the rise of thermodynamics and the related concepts of “energy” and “entropy”³³⁶ in physics.³³⁷ Unlike, Celal Nuri, Baha Tevfik and other Ottoman materialists, Ahmed Hilmi was quite knowledgeable about the latest developments in physics in the early twentieth century, which prepared the revolutions of relativity and quantum mechanics, and therefore Nuri’s references to the materialist German philosophers of the mid-nineteenth century did not impress him at all.

Ahmed Hilmi intensifies his attack on materialist philosophy in the following pages and argues that the core ideas of materialism, such as the eternal existence of matter or the unchanging nature of physical laws, are not scientifically proven hypotheses but are, in fact, *a priori* (“limmi”) propositions.³³⁸ Therefore, he argues, materialism

³³⁶ “Entropy,” which was coined by the great German scientist Rudolf Clausius, is essentially a measure of the randomness of molecules in a closed system. As a concept, it is central to the Second Law of Thermodynamics, which states that spontaneous changes in isolated systems always occur with an increase in entropy (referring to the increasing unavailability of a system’s energy to do further work). For a very good account of the rise of thermodynamics and how it challenged the then-existing theories of matter in nineteenth century physics, see D.S.L. Cardwell, *From Watt to Clausius: The Rise of Thermodynamics in the Early Industrial Age* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971). For further references by Ahmed Hilmi to the concepts of energy and entropy, and to the work of Rudolf Clausius, see Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Huzur-u*, 90-92.

³³⁷ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Huzur-u*, 64-65.

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, 72-73.

should not be considered a scientific position. It should rather be considered as another metaphysical viewpoint³³⁹

In brief, although Ahmed Hilmi believed that Islamic societies were in need of a significant intellectual renovation,³⁴⁰ he did not believe that such a renovation could be accomplished by trying to replace the Islamic tenets with materialist beliefs. Any such mixing of religious and scientific thinking, according to him, would result only in a dangerous metaphysics, which would be harmful to both science and religion.

If Ahmed Hilmi's deep knowledge of the latest theories of physics was one reason why he was not impressed with materialist ideas, the other reason was his mystical stance vis-à-vis the ultimate nature of reality. His mystical ideas are the subject of the next section of my chapter.

III: AHMED HILMI'S MYSTICISM:

Ahmed Hilmi's conceptualization of reality and truth is deeply mystical. In his mystical understanding of the ultimate nature of reality, Ahmed Hilmi directly follows the famous Andalusian mystic Ibn 'Arabi (1165-1240).

Toshihiko Izutsu, in an excellent study of the key philosophical concepts used by Ibn 'Arabi in his famous work *Fusus al-Hikam* (Bezels of Wisdom), argues that the "so-called reality, the sensible world which surrounds us and which we are accustomed to

³³⁹ "Gerek maddiyun ve gerek pozitivistler... *yeni bir metafizik meydana getiriyorlar.*" ("Both the materialists and the positivists....*create a new metaphysics.*"); Ibid74. Italics mine.

³⁴⁰ Ibid., 134.

regard as ‘reality’, is for, Ibn ‘Arabi, but a dream....Quoting the famous tradition, ‘All men are asleep (in this world); only when they die, do they wake up,’ he remarks: ‘The world is an illusion; it has no real existence. And this is what is meant by “imagination” (*khayal*). For you just imagine that [the world] is an autonomous reality quite different from and independent of the absolute Reality, while in truth it is nothing of the sort....Know that you yourself are an imagination. And everything that you perceive and say to yourself “this is not me,” is also an imagination. So that the whole world of existence is imagination within imagination.’”³⁴¹

For Ibn ‘Arabi, it should be emphasized here, “dream” or “imagination” does not mean something valueless or false; “it simply means ‘being a symbolic reflection of something truly real.’”³⁴² This absolute reality is being manifested, according to Ibn ‘Arabi’s ontological conception, on five different levels or planes of being:

The structure of these ‘planes’ (*hadarat*) is...as follows. In the Sufi world-view, five worlds (*‘awalim*) or five basic planes of Being are distinguished, each one of them representing a Presence or an ontological mode of the absolute Reality in its self-manifestation.

1. The plane of the Essence (*dhat*), the world of the absolute non-manifestation (*al-ghayb al-mutlaq*) or the Mystery of Mysteries.

³⁴¹ Toshihiko Izutsu, *Sufism and Taoism: A Comparative Study of Key Philosophical Concepts* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 7.

³⁴² *Ibid.*, 7.

2. The plane of the Attributes and the Names, the Presence of Divinity (*uluhiyah*).
3. The plane of the Actions, the Presence of Lordship (*rububiyah*).
4. The plane of Images (*amthal*) and Imagination (*khayal*).
5. The plane of the senses and sensible experience (*mushahadah*).³⁴³

As Izutsu hastens to add, the symbolic structure of the world depicted above is accessible only to the consciousness of an extremely limited number of enlightened persons. The majority of people live attached and confined to the lowest level of being (the fifth level), which is sensible everyday reality. This lowest level of being, “being tangible and graspable through the senses, is real for them. And even on this level, it never occurs to them to ‘interpret’ the forms of the things around them. They are asleep. But since, on the other hand, the common people too are possessed of the faculty of imagination, something unusual may-and does- occur in their minds on rare occasions. An invitation from above visits them and flashes across their consciousness when it is least expected. This happens when they have visions and dreams.”³⁴⁴

In its ordinary meaning imagination refers to the faculty of the mind producing a deceptive impression of the presence of something which is not there. However, for the ontological system of ‘Ibn Arabi, imagination “is not a wild fantasy or hallucination

³⁴³ Ibid., 11.

³⁴⁴ Ibid., 12.

which induces the mind to see things that are nowhere existent. What it produces is not a groundless reverie. It makes visible, albeit in an obscure and veiled way, a state of affairs in the higher planes of Being. It is a function of the mind directly connected with the 'world of images.'”³⁴⁵

The “world of images” is, of course, the fourth level of the manifestation of the absolute Reality (one above ordinary existence), and so imagination (*khayal*) acts as a link between the two different levels of manifestation. The “world of images” (*‘alam al-mithal*) is, ontologically speaking, an intermediate domain of contact between the purely sensible world (the fifth, which is the lowest level) and the purely spiritual worlds (of course, the first three levels of manifestation are all spiritual).

The five planes of existence (or five different levels of the manifestation of the absolute truth) are, in other words, organically linked and related to one another. The first of these five planes of Being “is Reality in its first and primordial absoluteness or the absolute Being itself....The four remaining stages are the essential forms in which the Absolute ‘descends’ from its absoluteness and manifests itself on levels that are to us more real and concrete. This self manifesting activity of the Absolute is called by Ibn ‘Arabi *tajalli*, a word which literally means disclosing something hidden behind a veil.”³⁴⁶

³⁴⁵ Ibid., 13.

³⁴⁶ Ibid., 20.

It is important to remark here that even the term God does not properly apply to the absolute Reality in its first level (the Essence, *dhat*) of manifestation. The absolute Reality is manifested as God in the second level of manifestation (Presence of Divinity, *uluhiyah*) and the whole existence (that is the entirety of the five levels of manifestation, which is simply called *Haqq*, or the Truth) descends in the above explained order.³⁴⁷ It may be important to note that these five planes constitute “an organic system of correspondences. Thus anything found in the second *hadrah*, for example, besides being itself a ‘phenomenon’ of some aspect of the first *hadrah*, finds its ontological repercussions in all the three remaining *hadarat*, each in a form peculiar to each *hadrah*.”³⁴⁸

Ahmed Hilmi, as I will demonstrate below, completely accepts the ontological views of Ibn ‘Arabi. He is almost categorical about the inability of human reason to grasp the entirety of existence simply because human reason is not an appropriate tool to use for understanding the higher manifestations of reality.³⁴⁹ Directly referring to the ontological views of Ibn ‘Arabi, Ahmed Hilmi argues that although the different levels of manifestation of reality are open to human intuition and imagination, they are not all

³⁴⁷ The absolute Being, in fact, reveals itself in an infinite number of degrees of manifestations. These degrees of manifestations (*hadrah*, or presence) are classified into five major categories by Ibn ‘Arabi. In the words of Izutsu, “Each *hadrah* is a particular ontological dimension in which the absolute Being (*al-wujud al-mutlaq*) manifests itself. And the absolute Being in all the forms of self-manifestation is referred to by the term *haqq*.”: *Ibid.*, 19-20.

³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, 20.

³⁴⁹ Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, *Hikmet Yazıları* (Istanbul: İnsan Yayınları, 2005), 212.

accessible to scientific observation.³⁵⁰ However, Ahmed Hilmi makes clear that this does not mean that science has the license to deny the existence of these levels.³⁵¹

Ahmed Hilmi wrote a semi-autobiographical novel in order to explain his mystical viewpoints to the lay reader in a more accessible manner.³⁵² As my study of this work below will make clear, the entire novel is, in fact, composed of mystical journeys made into the depths of imagination. In other words, Ahmed Hilmi gives a glimpse of the higher levels of Being to the ordinary reader by having the young hero of the novel, Raci, make mystical trips to the worlds above the ordinary existence of our everyday experience.

Ahmed Hilmi begins the novel with a first-person account of Raci's early life. After receiving a good modern education, our hero finds himself in a spiritual crisis as a result of which extreme philosophical and existential doubts occupy his mind.³⁵³ In order to ease his anxiety, Raci turns to constant entertainment and seeks consolation in alcohol. In one of the numerous entertainment trips he makes with his friends to the countryside, Raci meets a strange old man who changes his life. The old man has a very serious and

³⁵⁰ Ibid., 213.

³⁵¹ Ibid., 214.

³⁵² Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *A'mak-ı Hayal: Raci'nin Hatıraları* (Istanbul: Necm-i İstikbal Matbaası, 1341 [1922]). Amit Bein, in his recent article on Ahmed Hilmi, translates the title of this novel as "Profound Vision." (see Bein, 610). This is a profound mistake in translation. First of all, *A'mak* here does not function as an adjective; it is a plural noun, meaning "depths" ("*derinlikler*" in modern Turkish). Secondly, *hayal* cannot be translated as "vision: here, because it is used in this context as a special Sufi term. It simply means the *khayal* (the faculty of imagination) of Ibn 'Arabi's ontological world-view. A correct English translation, therefore, should be "Depths of Imagination".

³⁵³ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *A'mak-ı*, 5.

mature demeanor but, in strict contrast to his demeanor, wears strange clothes ornamented with hundreds of mirrors.³⁵⁴ When Raci asks about his clothes, the old man replies that his clothes are no more ridiculous than a fifty-year old man wearing a tie around his neck, which he likens to the halter of a donkey. His mirrors, he adds, are at least shiny. At this point, Raci understands that the old man is an extraordinary person, and he wants to kiss his hand in reverence. The old man refuses and invites Raci instead to his small hut to have coffee with him. The old man, called *Aynalı Baba* (father with the mirrors), it turns out, is in fact a Sufi master, and the rest of the book consists of a series of mystical journeys Raci makes to the higher realms of Being with the guidance of the old master.

In his mystical journeys, Raci meets such figures as Buddha, Zoroaster and a number of Chinese and Indian sages who teach him about the nature of reality in different worlds of imagination. These mystical journeys are always initiated by *Aynalı Baba*, who begins the process by playing the reed flute (*ney*), a major instrument in Sufi rituals, and by reading and singing mystical poems about the universe and the reality. As a result, Raci goes into a trance and travels, spiritually, in the depths of imagination.

In one of these trips, Raci finds himself in ancient Persia, in the presence of Zoroaster (*Zerdüşt*), who informs him about a coming battle between the forces of light and darkness. Although Zoroaster speaks in his native Avestan language, Raci, to his surprise, finds that he can understand and speak that language perfectly. He accepts

³⁵⁴ Ibid., 13.

Zoroaster's invitation to join the battle in the ranks of *Hürmüz* (Ahura Mazda), the supreme deity of Zoroastrianism, who is the leader of the armies of light against the dark forces of Ahriman. The two armies meet on a large battlefield, and after the speeches given by Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, represented as two kings, the best warriors of the two armies come forward in order and engage in successive single combats, a pattern typical of military encounters in the early Islamic period. The whole scene is being watched by a greater creature above, Hilmi writes, who will eventually decide who should be considered the winner of the battle.

Ahriman first sends one of his fiercest warriors named Discord (*Nifak*) to the battlefield. This warrior kills many of the warriors sent by Ahura Mazda until an able wrestler named Affection or Friendship (*Muhabbet*) beats him to the ground. Affection in turn is beaten by a new warrior sent by Ahriman, named Wrath (*Gazap*). When it becomes clear that nobody has a chance against Wrath, Ahura Mazda declares that tomorrow he will send a trusted warrior of his named Wisdom (*Hikmet*) to fight against Wrath. That night, to his complete shock and horror, Raci learns that he is in fact Wisdom and will fight against Wrath the next day. Wisdom, our own Raci, manages to kill Wrath by trickery.³⁵⁵ Wisdom continues to defeat many warriors sent by Ahriman, and finally Ahriman declares that he will send his most ferocious warrior, who has never lost a battle, against Wisdom. This warrior is named Egoistical Self (*Nefs-i Emmare*) and rides on a huge war elephant. Egoistical Self easily defeats our hero, Wisdom, but instead of

³⁵⁵ Ibid., 42.

killing him, he takes Wisdom prisoner and brings him to the army of darkness to peel onions in the army kitchen.³⁵⁶

While Ahura Mazda and his armies of light are preparing to accept defeat, a beautiful warrior suddenly descends from the sky and confronts the Egoistical Self and his prisoner Wisdom. The mere appearance of this magnificent young warrior is enough to convince the Egoistical Self to let Wisdom go free. The beautiful young warrior is named Love (*Aşk*), and he not only frees Wisdom from the hands of Egoistical Self but also ends the battle between the forces of light and darkness. Love reverently greets the luminous creature who sits higher than both Ahura Mazda and Ahriman, and then makes Ahura Mazda and Ahriman shake hands and end their rivalry.

The main point of this highly symbolic journey and story, it seems to me, is that Philosophy and Science have become tools of human egoism in the modern world. Philosophy and Science, which are normally noble and beneficent human endeavors, serve human arrogance now, peeling onions in the kitchen of the modern world, in other words. The solution to this problem is not to get rid of science, Hilmi's story implies, but to free science and philosophy from the prison of human egoism and arrogance. This solution, according to Hilmi, who argues in a very Sufi manner, is only possible through

³⁵⁶ "...kemerimden tutup beni filin üzerine aldı. Ahriman'ın huzuruna getirdi. 'Ya Ahriman! Hikmeti öldürmedim, esir ettim, mutfağımızda soğan soyar, tam kendisine münasip bir hizmettir' dedi. Bu latifeye Ahriman kahkahalarla güldü." ("He took me by my belt on top of his elephant and brought me to Ahriman. 'O Ahriman,' he said, 'I did not kill the Wisdom, but rather took him as a prisoner of war. He will peel onions in our kitchen, a very appropriate service for him.'"): *ibid.*, 44.

“love,” which not only frees the human intellect from egoism but also ends the eternal battle between the higher, spiritual components of human mind and character (symbolized by Ahura Mazda and his followers in the story) and the lower, material components of the human psyche, symbolized by Ahriman and his warriors in the story. The spiritual and material sides of the human mind and psyche do not need to engage in a fruitless battle, Hilmi argues implicitly. He thinks that it is possible to unite these components and make peace between them through love.³⁵⁷

Ironically, though, Raci ends up in an asylum at the end of the book, writing symbolic stories about human folly and arrogance. It seems to me that Ahmed Hilmi knew very well that his attempts at presenting the mystical side of Islam to educated modern readers would probably seem like the writings of a madman in an asylum to them.

IV: AHMED HILMI ON ISLAMIC REFORM:

Ahmed Hilmi’s ideas about Islamic reform and his criticisms directed towards the *ulama* (religious scholars) should be interpreted in the light of three major points. Firstly, Ahmed Hilmi was not educated as a religious scholar. He was criticizing the *ulama* of the time primarily from the standpoint of an intellectual who had been educated in modern schools, and secondarily from the standpoint of an autodidact in Islamic matters.

Secondly, he was a devout follower of the Sufi path, and hence he had very little patience

³⁵⁷ Love (*Aşk*), here, is of course not ordinary human love but divine love, which in this Sufi context should be understood as love directed towards the entirety of existence.

for the literal interpretations of Islamic texts put forward by religious scholars. And, thirdly, his unusually deep understanding of European philosophy and history gave him a unique perspective on the problems faced by the religion of Islam in the modern world.

In his book about the fundamentals of Islamic belief, Ahmed Hilmi makes the classic Sufi distinction between the “outer” and “inner” facets of religion³⁵⁸ and argues that the outer (or formal) facets of a religion are secondary to the inner (or characteristic) properties of a religion. The problem with Islam today, argues Hilmi, is that the formal (outer) properties of the religion have become entirely dominant over the inner and philosophical properties of Islam.³⁵⁹ The religious scholars, whom Hilmi accuses of causing this sorry state of affairs, act with a mindless traditionalism and care only for the formalities of the religion, resulting in the further decay of religion. In his two-volume history of Islam, Ahmed Hilmi in fact accuses the religious scholars of acting like a distinct social and religious class and causing the spiritual stagnation of the Islamic lands.³⁶⁰

As Amit Bein correctly argues, Ahmed Hilmi was not hopeful that the religious scholars would be able to reform themselves sufficiently not to be a burden on society, and so he concluded that “devout and well-intentioned intellectuals like him should lead the rejuvenation and reinvigoration of state, society, and religion while the religious

³⁵⁸ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Üss-i İslam*, 75.

³⁵⁹ Ibid., 78.

³⁶⁰ Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, *İslam...*, 512-513.

establishment ought to follow their lead or at least not hinder their initiatives.”³⁶¹ But what, in the face of European modernity, should be the strategy of these Islamic intellectuals to rejuvenate their societies? In order to answer this question, Ahmed Hilmi makes a crucial distinction between the different components of European modernity. In a lecture he gave at the Istanbul University (Darülfünun), where he taught philosophy for a brief period, he argues that European civilization offers a plethora of ideas and institutions, but only some of these would be beneficial for the Ottomans to adopt.³⁶² Then he argues that even the material accomplishments of Europe, which dazzle Ottoman intellectuals and visitors, are in fact based upon the ruthless exploitation of human beings.³⁶³ In another work, he makes a crystal clear distinction between what he calls the “material civilization” and the “spiritual civilization” of Europe. Whereas he is an admirer of the material civilization of Europe, he abhors Europe's spiritual decadence.³⁶⁴

The spiritual bankruptcy of Europe, in Ahmed Hilmi’s mind, is clearly related to

³⁶¹ Bein, 612. On this point, See Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, “Hikmet,” Hikmet, 24 November 1910, 4.

³⁶² Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Hangi Meslek-i Felsefeyi Kabul Etmeliyiz: Darülfünun Efendilerine Tahriri Konferans* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i İslamiye-i Hikmet, 1329 [1911]), 21.

³⁶³ Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, *Hangi Meslek-i...*, 22-23

³⁶⁴ “Biz Avrupa’nın maddi medeniyetinin en samimi takdirkar ve hayranlarındanız. Avrupa milletlerinin bugün vasıl oldukları sınai kemalat her düşünen adamı hayran edecek bir azamettedir. Lakin manevî medeniyetinin düştüğü alçak zillet tarihte misli görülmeyen bir esfeliyettir.” (“We are among the most sincere and appreciative admirers of the *material civilization of Europe*. The industrial perfection reached by the European nations today is at such a level that every thinking man admires it. However, the low degradation into which its *spiritual civilization* has fallen is a misery of no precedence in history.”) Şehbenderzade Filibeli Ahmed Hilmi, *Müslümanlar Uyanın* (Istanbul: Bedir Yayınevi, 1966), 17. This work was first published by Ahmed Hilmi under the *nom de plume* Mıhriddin Arusi as *Yirminci Asırda Alem-i İslam ve Avrupa: Müslümanlara Rehber-i Siyaset* (Istanbul: Hikmet Matbaa-i İslamiyesi, 1327 [1909]). Italics mine.

imperialism and the ruthless exploitation of the colonized nations. These colonized nations, argues Ahmed Hilmi, are like prisoners being constantly abused by their free masters.³⁶⁵

In conclusion, although Ahmed Hilmi argued for the necessity of modernization in Islamic lands in general and in the Ottoman Empire in particular, his modernization project advocated only the adoption of the material, technical and scientific components of European civilization. He was too much of a Sufi not to be appalled by what he perceived as the spiritual bankruptcy of Europe.

³⁶⁵ Ibid., 26.

Chapter 6: Bediüzzaman Said Nursi (1873-1960): Being a Religious Man in a Materialistic World

There has been a significant surge of interest in the ideas of Said Nursi (1873-1960) since the publication of the pioneering work of Şerif Mardin.³⁶⁶ Unfortunately we cannot say that this increase in quantity of works dealing with Nursi has been matched by a corresponding rise in quality of research. In fact, we do not yet have a satisfactory comprehensive account of the works of Nursi. In this chapter, I will try to provide a novel interpretation of Nursi's works based on a close reading and textual analysis of the entirety of his output.

Nursi is generally known as the author of an impressive body of religious and philosophical works collectively known as the *Risale-i Nur (The Epistle of Light)*, and the founder of a highly influential religious movement in Turkey called *Nurculuk*, which may be loosely translated as “the path of the supporters of light.” Without a doubt, he is one of

³⁶⁶ Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey: The Case of Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1989).

the most important religious thinkers of the late Ottoman Empire and the early Turkish Republic.

In a relatively recent article on Said Nursi, Şerif Mardin acknowledges his gratitude to Turkish intellectual Cemil Meriç,³⁶⁷ who first introduced Said Nursi's works to Mardin and pointed out to him that these works should be studied as a whole: "When Cemil Meriç represented Nursi's ideas to me as a totality, which was new both from the social and human points of view, original to himself, and *absolutely had to be studied in their entirety*, he was not wrong. I state once again my debt to him."³⁶⁸

I definitely agree with Mardin that the ideas of Nursi absolutely need to be studied in their entirety. Just like the works of Dostoyevsky or Shakespeare, Nursi's works become much more meaningful when they are studied as an organic whole because they revolve around certain recurring themes that reinforce one another and *produce a coherent world-view in the end*. Nursi is very much aware of this fact since he emphatically guides his reader in various places to read different parts of his oeuvre in order to understand other, related parts, and invites his reader repeatedly to reflect on what Nursi calls the "truths of faith" (*iman hakikatleri*), which he claims are explained in the *Risale-i Nur* as a whole.

³⁶⁷ On Meriç, see my "Thinking about Turkish Modernization: Cemil Meriç on Turkish Language, Culture, and Intellectuals," *Comparative Studies of South Asia, Africa and the Middle East* 16, No. 3 (2006): 434-445.

³⁶⁸ Şerif Mardin, "Reflections on Said Nursi's Life and Thought," in Ibrahim M. Abu-Rabi, ed., *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Life and Thought of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 47. Italics mine.

Ironically, as I will argue below, Mardin's own study of Nursi fails to give an accurate picture of the entirety of Said Nursi's monumental work. In fact, the failure to give an accurate and coherent account of the entirety of Said Nursi's work is a rather common problem in the expanding literature on Nursi. Like the proverbial blind men trying to describe the elephant, most contemporary scholars on Nursi seem to be content with describing certain parts of the *Risale-i Nur* that seem important, or rather convenient, to them for various reasons. The result is confusion at best and misunderstanding at worst. Therefore, in the first part of my chapter, after providing some brief biographical information about Nursi, I will provide a review and critique of the literature on him, pointing out the necessity of a careful textual analysis of Nursi's work as a way out of the current scholarly conundrum.

In the second part of the chapter, I will argue that, once one manages to find a way through and out of the labyrinth of ideas expressed in the rather peculiar language of the *Risale-i Nur*, one may perceive that there is in fact a deep and rather fascinating structure, indeed a "literary architecture," underlying Nursi's voluminous work. Without understanding this fascinating structure, one is bound to repeat the platitudes and half-baked ideas regurgitated continuously in the literature on Nursi. One of the primary aims of this part of the chapter, then, is to provide the reader with a guide to understand the underlying literary structure of Nursi's work conceived as a totality. Moreover, I will argue that understanding the structure of the text of the *Risale-i Nur* is a *sine qua non* for

comprehending the underlying arguments of the text itself, which, I believe, ultimately forms a comprehensive world-view.

This comprehensive world-view, which might be described as both “modern” and “Islamic,” for lack of better adjectives, in fact differs significantly from the rather “defensive” ideas of modern political Islamists such as Muhammad Abduh and Jamal ad-Din Al-Afghani³⁶⁹ in that it does not attempt to “reconcile” Islam and modernity (or religion and science, for that matter). It also differs from the politically charged Islamic modernism of the likes of Sayyid Qutb or Mawlana Abu'l-A^cala Mawdudi in that it does not posit an unchanging Islamic political essence against a perceived monolithic West.³⁷⁰ In fact, the world-view created by Nursi amounts to nothing less than a gigantic restructuring and recreation of the underlying philosophical edifice of Islamic civilization in a modern and globalizing world. Accordingly, the underlying themes of the third part of my chapter will be Nursi’s ideas about science, modernity and Islam, in addition to Nursi’s evaluation of Islamic civilization and the West in the context of a globalizing world.

Nursi’s religious genius lies perhaps in the fact that he deeply analyzed the spiritual and psychological consequences of rapid modernization fueled by technological

³⁶⁹ On al-Afghani, see Nikkie Keddie, *An Islamic Response to Imperialism: Political and Religious Writings of Sayyid Jamal ad-Din al-Afghani* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983).

³⁷⁰ However, this does not mean that Nursi was “apolitical”. In fact, as I will demonstrate below, he had a broader understanding of politics which went beyond the wildest imaginings of any ordinary political Islamist.

and scientific advances, engulfing not only the Islamic countries but the entire world, ultimately disenchanting humanity. The rapid material advances of European civilization, Nursi argued, were not accompanied by similar advances in the spiritual realm, creating what one may call a spiritual void in the consciousness of human beings. His writings, as I will demonstrate below, are designed to underline and illuminate the existential angst felt in late modernity. (As will become clear, I am not resorting to hyperbole when I use the term “existential angst” to describe Nursi’s depiction of the spiritual and psychological effects of an increasingly alienating world on human beings.) Rather than seeing the realm of Islam as threatened by the modernizing forces of the “Christian” West, Nursi sees both Islam and Christianity as threatened by an aggressive modernity which tends to deify reason and science. It is no wonder, then, that Nursi, at various points in his writings, ultimately advocates an “alliance” and understanding between religious Muslims and Christians against what he perceives as the malevolent social and psychological impacts of an increasingly atheistic modernity.

However, it should also be emphasized that, although various studies on Nursi, including the rather hagiographic work of Şükran Vahide,³⁷¹ fail to recognize it, Nursi’s level of understanding of the intricacies of late nineteenth-century developments in science, including advances in evolutionary biology, thermodynamics, and heat theory, does not seem to match his psychological acumen. As a result, Nursi, unlike Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, who was very well aware of European developments in

³⁷¹ Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey: An Intellectual Biography of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2005).

physics that led to the foundation of the theory of relativity and quantum mechanics, tends to criticize the “atheistic conclusions” of the mechanistic viewpoint of science while, philosophically speaking, remaining largely in the same mechanistic mold. Therefore, strangely, many of Nursi’s writings reify the same mechanistic viewpoint he criticizes, but with this key difference: while the vulgar materialists used a clockwork understanding of scientific laws to “prove” the vacuity of the concept of a God intervening in nature, Nursi uses it to “prove” the existence of an active God regulating nature with his laws.

Finally, in the fourth part of the chapter, I will deal with an often neglected but supremely important facet of Nursi’s work, namely, the “eschatology” of the *Risale-i Nur*. One of my main arguments in this part of the chapter will be that the incredible cohesion of the early *Nurcu* movement stemmed partly from the belief of Nursi’s early followers in the enormous, almost world-historical religious significance of the work of their master. Therefore, although Nursi was not interested in conventional party politics during the Republican period of Turkish history, it would be a serious mistake to label him an “apolitical” thinker, as some scholars recently have.³⁷² Rather, I will argue that Nursi had a “grand politics” of his own. This “grand politics” consisted of an Islamic cultural vision which primarily positioned itself against the secular aims of the Turkish state, and understood itself as facing and resisting the terrible forces of atheistic materialism on a

³⁷² For a rather crude and misguided reading of Nursi as an “apolitical thinker,” see Zeynep Akbulut Kuru and Ahmet T. Kuru, “Apolitical Interpretation of Islam: Said Nursi’s Faith-Based Activism in Comparison with Political Islamism and Sufism,” *Islam and Christian-Muslim Relations* 19, No. 1 (2008): 99-111.

world stage. I will argue that this cultural vision and Nursi's resulting sophisticated and subterranean "politics," which seem to have eluded most scholars working on Nursi, are, in fact, organically related to the eschatological ideas of the *Risale-i Nur*.

I: A BIOGRAPHY OF NURSI

Said Nursi was born in 1873 to an impoverished clerical family in the eastern Anatolian city of Bitlis. His early life consisted of attempts to gain an education in various *medreses* in and around Bitlis. He was expelled from a number of these, apparently because he thought that the archaic system of *medrese* education was too cumbersome for an effective learning process, and he did not hesitate to express his dissatisfaction to his teachers.

A remarkable passage in his official biography claims that he bypassed the typical method of reading a number of traditional texts in an established order (this process, in some cases, took more than ten years) and finished his traditional studies in three months by selecting a number of key passages from each of the books in the curriculum. Nursi's circumvention of the traditional methods seems downright mysterious when one remembers that he was merely fifteen years old at that time. We simply do not know what convinced him of the futility of the older methods of instruction in the *medreses*. What we know for sure is that after his very brief education, he engaged in a series of religious debates with the prominent sheikhs in and around Van and Bitlis, and often got the upper

hand. One might speculate that one of the reasons for his success in debating the religious scholars of the region may have been his superior command of Arabic.³⁷³

His success in religious discussions, accompanied by his unusual behavior, such as his refusal to wear the garb of a religious scholar and his habit of carrying weapons, aroused the interest of Ömer Paşa, the governor of Bitlis at the time, who took him into his household. Spending two years (1892-94) in Ömer Paşa's governmental palace, Nursi mastered a number of classical Islamic works on *tafsir* (exegesis), *fiqh* (jurisprudence) and *kalam* (theology). In 1894, he moved on to Van, where he was likewise a guest of the governor. There, he discovered western science, apparently by reading popular books and magazines on the subject.

We do not know much about Nursi's life in Van between 1894 and 1907. But it seems that his relationship with the governor of Van, Tahsin Paşa, gave him access to the tribes and the religious scholars of the region, for the governor used his literary and religious skills to settle tribal disputes. This experience, together with his access to western-oriented newspapers and popular scientific books, further convinced Nursi that there was something fundamentally wrong with the nature of education in the region. In any case, according to Şükran Vahide, "Van now became Said's base until he was sent into exile in 1925. A certain amount has been recorded about the twelve years he spent here before he made his first journey to Istanbul at the end of 1907; he divided his time

³⁷³ See, Necmeddin Şahiner, *Bilinmeyen Taraflariyla Bediüzzaman Said Nursi* (Istanbul: Nesil, 1997), 67.

between traveling among the tribes as a conciliator in disputes and man of religion generally, teaching in Van and mixing with the governor and other officials.”³⁷⁴

In the end, Nursi came up with the idea of establishing a *madrassa*, which he planned to name *Madrasat’uz-Zahra*, or “Luminous Madrasa,” in eastern Anatolia (comparative allusion to al-Azhar in Cairo is obvious), where the European sciences would be taught with the traditional religious sciences. He also had a plan to create a new curriculum for the study of traditional texts. In order to present his ideas to Sultan Abdülhamid II, he decided to go to Istanbul in 1907.

After settling in a small hotel in Istanbul, he began to establish contacts with the intellectual circles of the capital city. According to an eyewitness to his first visit to Istanbul, Nursi was very enthusiastic about his educational plans.³⁷⁵ In fact, he managed to submit a petition to Abdülhamid II in which he described his projects. One of the major points of the petition was his insistence that education in the new *madrassa* should be in both Turkish and Kurdish. His innovative and curious proposal was rejected. Moreover, during his personal meeting with Abdülhamid II, Nursi’s reckless attitude and manner of speech (one should not forget that Nursi learned Turkish in his twenties as his

³⁷⁴ Vahide, 27.

³⁷⁵ Fehmi Başoğlu, “Bir Hatıra,” *Uhuvvet Gazetesi*, December 11, 1964: “Sonra bir harita çıkararak Sark’ta dar’ul-fünun açılması icabettiğini ve bunun ehemmiyetini izah etti. O zaman Sark’ta Hamidiye Alayları vardı. O suretle idare ediliyordu. Şark’ın bu şekilde idare tarzının noksanlıklarını ifade ile, maarif, san’at ve fen noktasında Şarkın uyandırılması lazım geldiğini mukni olarak bize izah ile, bu gayesinin tahakkuku için İstanbul’a geldiğini anlattı ve diyordu ki: Vicdanın ziyası ulum-u diniyedir. Aklın nuru fünun-u medeniyedir.”

fourth language, after Kurdish, Arabic and Persian) so outraged the sultan that he decided that Nursi was mentally deranged. He was sent to a mental institution for examination.

After accepting that Nursi was sane, Abdülhamid II, employing a typical strategy, attempted to make him a salaried worker attached to Yıldız Palace. Nursi declined the offer, however, and began to engage in opposition politics against the sultan in Istanbul. Although he supported the 1908 Young Turk revolution, he was one of those who were dragged before the court in 1909 in conjunction with the March 31 counter-coup, apparently as a result of his membership in an Islamic organization at the time. As is well-known, the Young Turks and their organization, the Committee of Union and Progress, used the March 31 counter-coup, organized by a coalition of a section of the Ottoman army and a number of religious figures and madrasa students against the Young Turks, as an excuse to dethrone Abdülhamid II.

The court released Nursi after a remarkable defense, published later as *Divan-i Harb-i Örfi*. Between 1910 and 1914, he traveled extensively in eastern Anatolia to spread propaganda to the Kurdish tribes about the merits of constitutionalism. He was a staunch supporter of the 1908 constitution, and the fact that Sultan Mehmed V Reşad (r. 1909-18) invited him for a private talk immediately after his return to Istanbul in 1911 suggests that Nursi may have been sent to eastern Anatolia as a state agent, perhaps to convince the ordinary folk of the region of the benefits of the constitution promulgated by the Young Turks and its accordance with the *şeriat*.

Nursi accompanied Sultan Reşad during his visits to the Balkans in 1911,³⁷⁶ and convinced the sultan to provide money for his university project in the East. Having won permission for his project, as well as a promise of financial help, Nursi returned to Van to find a convenient site for the university. Due to financial difficulties in the capital and the Balkan Wars, the project could not start before 1914, when the outbreak of the First World War ruined any hope of its completion.

In this first period of his life, Nursi appears as an active participant in the turbulent politics of the capital city. He was staunchly pro-constitution, and his few writings from the period reflect a sincere optimism about the possibility of reconciling Islam with western science. This was the “Old Said,” who was later to be denounced as *ulum-u akliye ve felsefeyle kafası karışmış* (“confused by rational sciences and philosophy”) by the “New Said” of the post-1925 period. Although he did not lose his hope of a university where both religious and secular sciences would be taught, his attitude toward western philosophy and sciences (defined as nineteenth-century materialist natural science) became much more critical after 1925.

Nursi served as a volunteer on the eastern front against the Russians during the First World War and was taken prisoner in 1916. He was sent to a prisoner-of-war camp in Siberia. By his own account, he went through a profound psychological change during

³⁷⁶ “The previous year had seen the first Albanian uprising. The purpose of the sultan’s journey was to reawaken feelings of patriotism and solidarity among the various peoples of Macedonia and Albania in the face of the upsurge of nationalism, and to secure social calm. Niyazi Bey, an Albanian and one of the ‘Heroes of Freedom’ and prime movers of the Constitutional Revolution, figured on the trip, which had been advised by the C.U.P, and presumably at their suggestion, Nursi joined it as the representative of the Eastern Provinces. All the ethnic minorities were represented.” Vahide, 101.

his incarceration and realized that he was fast getting old. Having already spent a significant amount of his life in political activities, he began to recognize that they had not brought him much spiritual satisfaction.

After he escaped from the Russian camp in 1918, he returned via Europe to Istanbul, where he sank into a deep depression despite being appointed, along with a number of important Islamic scholars, including Mehmet Akif Ersoy, to the newly-founded *Daru'l-Hikmetü'l-Islami*, an advisory body established to help the government with religious matters.³⁷⁷ He suddenly realized that the western “philosophical sciences” he had carefully studied up until that time could not help him overcome his despair. In fact, he came to view these sciences as part of his problems.³⁷⁸

This realization, together with some of the passages he read at the time in the *Futuh-al Ghayb* of the famous medieval Baghdadi Sufi Abdulkadir Geylani (ʿAbdulqadir al-Jilani, d.1166), convinced him to withdraw from the political arena and devote himself entirely to the study of the Qur’an. Although he supported Mustafa Kemal’s resistance movement in Anatolia, and made a visit to Ankara in 1923, he was thoroughly disappointed with the apathetic attitude of the majority of the new Turkish Republican parliament toward religion, and he declined Mustafa Kemal’s offer to join the parliament and left Ankara for Van. There, he lived reclusively in a cave, where he began to study the Qur’an.

³⁷⁷ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Lem’alar* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat), 296-297.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, 297.

It is certainly ironic that the “New Said” who was studying the Qur’an alone in his cave was forced to return to politics once more, albeit in a totally different manner, because of the nascent Republican government in Ankara. In 1925, Nursi was forced to leave Van and settle in Barla, Isparta, in western Turkey, along with a number of prominent Kurds who were thought to have connections to the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925. (This religiously inspired Kurdish rebellion was led by the famous Naqshibandi Sheikh Said of Palu, who was not related to Said Nursi).

In Nursi’s case, the allegations were completely unfounded. But the brutal behavior displayed by the Ankara government in forcing him into exile in Isparta convinced him that “European materialism,” which he had already identified as the chief problem threatening Islam, was now firmly established in Ankara, and had begun to attack the Islamic sensibilities of the common people. Since he no longer believed in the efficacy of ordinary political action, and felt that the problem afflicting Turkish society was deeply cultural in nature, stemming from the overt and rapid secularization that threatened the existence of Islam in Turkey, he began to write his *Risale-i Nur*, a collection of religious works. He completed the bulk of it in Isparta between 1925 and 1934.

Şerif Mardin has put forward the most convincing sociological explanation to date of the success of the movement which gradually took shape around the writings of Said Nursi. In a nutshell, Mardin argues that Nursi managed to create a popular movement out of the limited resources he had in Isparta by emphasizing the “texts” he wrote and placing

them at the center of his Islamic vision, replacing the earlier “master-disciple” conception of the Sufi orders. However, as I will argue below, Mardin would have done a much better job of explaining the underlying vision of Nursi if he had paid more attention to these very “texts” that Nursi placed at the center, instead of resorting to far-fetched sociological theories. Ultimately, I think that the success of Nursi’s message cannot be explained by referring to the sociological conditions of the early Turkish Republic alone, since Nursi’s message has continued to be relevant and successful in the years since, even though the sociological conditions of Turkish society have changed drastically. The explanation for his success should therefore be sought elsewhere.

In this brief chapter, I cannot dwell on the details of the numerous exiles and trials that Nursi had to endure after 1935 in Turkey. It is sufficient to say that the Republican authorities entirely missed the point when they accused him of being the sheikh of a Sufi order, or *tarikāt*, engaged in a political battle against the Turkish Republic (Sufi orders had been outlawed on 30 November 1925). In fact, Nursi was not political at all in the limited sense that the Turkish authorities had in mind. The “New Said” of 1923-1950 advised his followers to stay away from politics. One could argue that he was wise enough to see that the single-party politics of the period did not offer him much hope of success in the political arena, anyway.

Nevertheless, I want to emphasize that Said Nursi was deeply political in another sense, which was totally outside the comprehension of the authorities who persecuted him. He was pursuing a “politics of culture,” devoting himself to an extensive re-

evaluation of the connection between Islam and modernity in Turkey. This is the main reason why he is such an important figure in the history of modern Turkey. He managed to establish multiple loci of cultural resistance to the authoritarian tendencies of the Republican elite in his writings. When he died in 1960, he left an important collection of writings which continued to inspire generations of Turks who felt themselves caught between the Scylla of traditional Islam and the Charybdis of anti-clerical Republicanism. His importance lies in the fact that he demonstrated that there was yet another way to think about the issue of Islam and modernity.

Although there have been a number of significant studies on Nursi, no single author has yet come up with a thorough and accurate reading of the entire *Risale-i Nur*. There are several reasons for this reluctance to dwell on the text and follow the argument of the author before reaching a conclusion about him. In some cases, such as the writings of John Voll,³⁷⁹ the reason is probably rather straightforward: the language barrier. However, in other, more sophisticated cases, such as those of Şerif Mardin's³⁸⁰ and Hakan Yavuz's³⁸¹ readings of Said Nursi, there seem to be more important structural reasons underlying the lack of sufficient attention to the text. In order to provide a better and more careful reading of Said Nursi's work, I will begin by assessing the contributions of Şerif Mardin and Hakan Yavuz and contrast them with my more textually-inclined

³⁷⁹ John O. Voll, "Yirminci Yüzyılın Ortasında Tecdit ve Islah: Bediüzzaman Said Nursi ve 1950'lerde Din," in Hamid Algar, John O. Voll, et al (eds.), *Bediüzzaman ve Tecdit* (Istanbul: Gelenek Yayıncılık, 2002), 33-51.

³⁸⁰ Serif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey...*

³⁸¹ Hakan Yavuz, *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2003).

interpretation of Nursi. I will then turn to Şükran Vahide's work on Nursi and will also briefly review the recent article on Nursi by Zeynep Akbulut Kuru and Ahmet Kuru, which emphasizes the "apolitical" nature of Nursi's work.³⁸²

As I have observed elsewhere,³⁸³ Hakan Yavuz's avoidance of a profound textual analysis stems from methodological confusion. In the introductory chapter of his highly important recent work, he explicitly identifies textual analysis with "essentialism":

Essentialism seeks to reduce the diverse spectrum of human relations to a few "essential" causes and to identify certain defining traits and texts as keys to understanding a particular religious or cultural community. This tendency, which can be seen in the textualism of Bernard Lewis, played a dominant role in the formation of modernization theory and the "cluster of absences" long noted by developmental specialists.³⁸⁴

I will not deny that there may be essentialist (and therefore reifying) readings of texts. But that does not mean that textual analysis must necessarily be essentialist. Textual analysis may also point to different layers of meaning inherent in a particular text and demonstrate the possibility of multiple interpretations of the text by different groups of people with different interests. There is less danger of an essentialized interpretation after a conscientious reading of the textual sources than there is without it.

³⁸² Zeynep Akbulut Kuru and Ahmet T. Kuru, "Apolitical Interpretation of Islam."

³⁸³ Serdar Poyraz, "Reflections on Bediüzzaman Said Nursi: Reinterpreting Sacred Texts in a Modern World," paper presented at the Fifth Great Lakes Ottoman Workshop, Notre Dame University, April 2008.

³⁸⁴ Yavuz, 16.

In fact, disagreement among Nursi's followers after his death in 1960 about the relative importance of particular passages of his writings was the main reason why the *Nurcu* movement divided into numerous branches in the 1970s. Whereas the *Yazıcılar* (a rather obscure group of *Nurcus* consisting mainly of farmers and peasants) chose a literal interpretation of some passages and continued to *write* (hence their name, *Yazıcılar*, or "the writers") the *Risale-i Nur* in Arabic letters *by hand*, the *Yeni Asyacılar* and, later, the Fethullah Gülen movement adapted to the modern Latin-letter printing press and ended up founding their own media companies to propagate the message of the *Risale-i Nur*. Indeed, the Fethullah Gülen movement now presides over a vast global media and educational network.

My point here is simply that the dichotomy of "textualism" versus "social constructivism" upon which Yavuz bases most of his methodological ideas is not necessarily a true dichotomy. If a text is being consciously used by a group of people to shape their actions and lives (in other words, to "construct" their social reality), then a theoretician who does not pay close attention to the text will be at a disadvantage in understanding the construction of reality by this group.

In his *Islamic Political Identity in Turkey*, Yavuz repeatedly claims that Said Nursi provides a "map of meaning" for Muslims to guide their conduct.³⁸⁵ This is certainly true. But, is it really possible to understand what kind of a map this is without paying sufficient attention to the text? Hakan Yavuz's numerous references to the cultural and

³⁸⁵ See Yavuz, 157.

ideological vacuum created by the hasty modernization of the early Republican statesmen, and his insistence that this vacuum was filled by the writings of Said Nursi (among others), would definitely have been more meaningful if he had spent more time explaining what kind of cultural material Said Nursi used to fill that vacuum. Without studying the texts thoroughly, this is not possible.

The problems with Şerif Mardin's interpretation of Nursi's text are more complex and serious. In a nutshell, Mardin argues that Said Nursi's writings represent a change from the old master-disciple relationship of the *tarikats* to a text-based movement in which legitimization of a lifestyle is accomplished not through contact with the sheikh but through reading of critically important texts. Mardin is certainly correct when he says that:

At one stage in his life, pointing to a pile of periodicals published by his followers and having spread his message he states: "Gazidirler...they are *gazis*," i.e., they have waged a battle against unbelief. This is a rather unusual use of *gazi*, but one with which Said Nursi legitimizes the use of mass communication media and the transition from orality to scripturalism.³⁸⁶

If Mardin had continued to make such highly interesting linguistic observations about Said Nursi's writings, his interpretation would have been more profound. Alas, he chooses the easier way and writes:

³⁸⁶ Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey...*, 4.

One of the puzzling features of Said Nursi's writings, which emerges from the corpus known as the *Risale-i Nur*, is its helter-skelter, relatively unsystematic structure. A section of these collected sermons such as *Lem'alar (Flashes of Light)*, for instance, covers the following subjects in its first few hundred pages: Jonah, the meaning of his tribulations; the affliction of Job; an interpretation of the Qur'anic verse of Man's attachment to the transitory as summarized in a Nakşibendi axiom;... etc.³⁸⁷

Even Mardin's assertion that the second *Lem'a* concerns the affliction of Job betrays a profound misunderstanding: it is *not* about the affliction of Job, although it may seem so at first glance. At the beginning of the second *Lem'a*, Said Nursi indeed presents a brief summary of the story of Job as relayed in the Qur'an.³⁸⁸ However, he goes on to explain the meaning of Job's affliction by making five remarks comparing the spiritual ills of modern man and the physical illness of the Prophet Job.³⁸⁹ As Said Nursi explains in his second remark, the physical pains of Job threatened merely his bodily existence, while the spiritual ills of the modern man threaten his eternal happiness. Therefore, he

³⁸⁷ Mardin, *Religion and...*, 160-161.

³⁸⁸ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 14.

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, 14.

concludes, we, the modern men, are in fact more in need of the prayer that is attributed to Job in the Qur'an³⁹⁰ than Job himself.³⁹¹

During my reading of Said Nursi, I realized that passages like the above one were much more common than I had initially suspected. The first and second *Lem'as* are obvious examples, but there are countless others in *Sözler* ("Words"), as well (especially in the shorter ones at the beginning of the book). I will discuss the literary methods pursued by Nursi in the third main part of the chapter, but let me briefly mention here that Nursi's focus is not on Qur'anic passages *per se*, but rather on the relevance of these passages for the rapidly changing modern life in which his audience participated.

In a recent article on Nursi, Mardin seems more willing to engage with the text and the message of the *Risale-i Nur*. Hence he writes:

Bediuzzaman's success in Turkey has usually been evaluated as the result of his followers' organizational activities. This characterization, of course, is putting the cart before the horse. It is true that his numerous followers, known as "Nurcu," have had a pervasive influence in Turkish politics and an even greater influence through the promise --carried by his message-- of a redeeming of Islamic society. However, these assessments are general

³⁹⁰ *Qur'an* 21: 83.

³⁹¹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Lem'alar*, 15.

and do not answer a core issue, namely, what the content of this powerful message was.³⁹²

After this promising start, however, Mardin once again disappoints the reader by claiming that “the message was one of hope. It labored to bring Islam back into the way of life of the Ottoman Muslims without mentioning the reforming of Islam as such.”³⁹³ One naturally wants to learn what this “reform” consisted of, and how “bringing Islam back into the way of life of the Ottoman Muslims” could ever give these people so much hope. But these questions are ultimately left unanswered by Mardin, who still seems to prefer concocting sociological theories about Nursi to seriously reading Nursi’s texts.

Şükran Vahide’s recent intellectual biography of Nursi³⁹⁴ is a curious mixture of admirable and accurate scholarship and hagiographic zealotry. One important aspect of this work is that it successfully portrays Nursi as the early *Nurcus* saw and understood him. So, while Vahide diligently and quite accurately deals with the text of the *Risale-i Nur* in her work, she also, like a good *Nurcu*, seems to believe that the texts of Nursi were essentially divinely inspired (*ilham edilmiş*).³⁹⁵ She does not seem to have any serious criticism of the texts whatsoever. Moreover, she mentions the various miracles attributed

³⁹² Şerif Mardin, “Islam in Nineteenth – and Twentieth-Century Turkey,” in Şerif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (New York: Syracuse University Press, 2006), 284.

³⁹³ *Ibid.*, 284.

³⁹⁴ Şükran Vahide, *Islam in Modern Turkey...*

³⁹⁵ See, for example, *ibid.*, 213.

to Nursi by his students as if these were simply facts.³⁹⁶ So, although Vahide's endless stories about the repeated poisonings of Nursi by "the godless and materialist" officials of the state and his miraculous recoveries while in state prisons certainly make interesting reading and good hagiography, they do not constitute good scholarship. If the state authorities had wanted so badly to kill Nursi, one would imagine that they could have done so more efficiently than by repeated poisoning attempts thwarted miraculously by God.³⁹⁷

Zeynep Akbulut Kuru and Ahmet Kuru make a good point in their recent article on Nursi when they correctly criticize Mardin for his unnecessary attempts to force Nursi into a strict Naqshibandi context:

[Mardin's] book searches for historical continuities between the late Ottoman and early Republican eras. In this regard, it attempts to show a historical continuity between the Naqshibandi tariqa and the Nur movement. However, Nursi never identified himself with the Naqshibandi, or any other tariqas. Although he was influenced by Sufism, he made it

³⁹⁶ "At Avni Dogan's instigation, Nursi's house was frequently searched by the police for copies of the *Risale-i Nur*, and his students had to hide them in whatever unlikely places they could find. However, some of the police officers charged with plaguing him paid for it. One, named Hafiz Nuri, would come every few days and go through Nursi's house with a fine-tooth comb; he was finally struck down by a mysterious illness and died. Another, named Safvet, also came to a sorry end. Nursi wished them no ill; as he told Hafiz Nuri's family who came to plead for him, they received these blows from the Qur'an": *ibid.*, 229. For further miracle stories about the poisoning of Nursi by state authorities, see *ibid.*, 289-291.

³⁹⁷ One should remember that many influential religious leaders, such as Iskilipli Atıf Hoca, were simply hanged by the "Independence Courts" (*İstiklal Mahkemeleri*) following the Sheikh Said rebellion of 1925.

clear that his faith-based movement was something new and different from Sufism. Moreover, the intellectual impact of Sufism on Nursi's life and *Risale-i Nur* is not confined to influence from the Naqshibandi tariqa.... He elaborated on how his search for a master led him to accept the Qur'an as his main master, rather than any shaykhs.³⁹⁸

However, the authors make a mistake when they overemphasize the supposedly "apolitical" nature of Nursi's works. If, as they claim, "political Islamists are in general agreement with modernists in the Muslim world in terms of the necessity to import Western science and technology" but "they [the political Islamists] disagree with modernists in that they criticize socio-political Westernization, since they believe in the total sufficiency of Islam as a socio-political blueprint,"³⁹⁹ then Nursi was the political Islamist *par excellence*, contrary to the claims of the authors.

As I will demonstrate in the third main part of this chapter, Nursi defended constitutional government and democracy ultimately because he thought that these forms of government reflected the spirit of Islam more than any other form of government. In other words, he did not defend these forms of government because he believed in the *intrinsic value of western thought and practices vis-à-vis Islam*. In fact, he reframed these practices and presented them in Islamic garb.⁴⁰⁰ Although Nursi was quite open to the

³⁹⁸ Zeynep Akbulut Kuru and Ahmet T. Kuru, "Apolitical Interpretation of Islam...", 105-106.

³⁹⁹ Ibid., 100.

⁴⁰⁰ Nursi writes, "Delicate freedom is instructed and adorned by the good manners of the Shari'ah...Freedom is this: apart from the law of justice and punishment, no one can dominate anyone else. Everybody's rights are protected. In his legitimate actions, everyone is royally free. The prohibition

idea of adopting science and technology from Europe, he vehemently opposed borrowing cultural practices from Europe which directly clashed with the tenets of Islam. In that regard, Nursi, again, was not much different from the “political Islamists” whom the Kurus seem to dread.⁴⁰¹ In his “Address to Freedom,” delivered in Istanbul after the constitutional revolution of 1908, for example, Nursi warned against acquiring “the sins and evils of civilization” while abandoning its virtues. The Ottomans should “imitate the Japanese in taking from Western civilization what would assist them in progress, while preserving their own national customs.”

We shall take with pleasure the points of Europe-like technology and industry that will assist us in progress and civilization. However...*we shall forbid the sins and evils of civilization from entering the bounds of freedom and our civilization with the sword of the Shari’ah*, so that the young people in our civilization will be protected by its pure, cold spring of life.⁴⁰²

As I will argue in the third part of the chapter, Nursi did not change his mind during his “New Said” period on this crucial issue of the *essential “spiritual” superiority of Islam* to

“Take not one from among yourselves as Lord over you apart from God’ (Qur’an 3:64) is manifested.” Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Münazarat* (Istanbul: Sözlür Yayınları, 1977), 15-17, quoted in Vahide, 86.

⁴⁰¹ Compare this to Nursi’s words on Islamic unity during his defense at the court martial of 1909: “My predecessors in this matter [of Islamic unity] are Jamal al-Din al-Afghani, the late Mufti of Egypt Muhammad Abduh, Ali Suavi Efendi and Hoja Tahsin Efendi, Namık Kemal Bey, and Sultan Selim.” Quoted in Vahide, 22. Although Nursi in the “New Said” period abandoned overtly political activities, he did not give up his concern with politics altogether, especially cultural politics.

⁴⁰² Vahide, 54-55. Italics mine.

western civilization, even though he continued to accept the necessity of “material” adoption from the West. He kept these ideas essentially intact until the end of his life.

II: THE LITERARY STRUCTURE OF THE *RISALE-I NUR*

Delineating the basic structure of the *Risale-i Nur* is a daunting task. First of all, it is not apparent at first sight whether such a structure even exists. In fact, as far as I know, the only scholar to emphasize the necessity of a comprehensive and structural reading of Nursi is Hamid Algar.⁴⁰³ Secondly, in terms of sheer volume, *Risale-i Nur* is simply gigantic and presents a genuine challenge to any attempt at systematization. A standard edition of the collection, published by the *Yeni Asya* publishing house, for example, consists of the following volumes: *Sözler* (“Words”),⁴⁰⁴ *Mektubat* (“Letters”),⁴⁰⁵ *Lem’alar* (“Flashes”), *Şualar* (“Rays”),⁴⁰⁶ *Mesnevi-i Nuriye ve İşaratü’l İ’caz* (“The Mathnawi of Light” and “The Remarks on Miraculousness,” two different books published in one volume),⁴⁰⁷ *Asa-yı Musa ve Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi* (“The Staff of Moses” and “The Affirmative Seal of the Unknown,” two books published in one

⁴⁰³ “Cok az sayıda ilim adamı, o zor anlaşılır bütünlüğü ve karmaşıklığı içinde bizzat metnin üzerine eğilmiştir ki bu, Bediüzzaman’ın iddialarının ileri derecede ayırt edici karakteri ve bu iddiaların aldığı karşılıkları kavrayabilmek için zorunlu bir görevdir. “ See Hamid Algar, “Yüzyılın Müceddidi: Bediüzzaman Said Nursi ve Tecdit Geleneği, in Algar, Voll et al, eds., *Bediüzzaman ve Tecdit...*, 11-31.

⁴⁰⁴ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Sözler* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴⁰⁵ Idem, *Mektubat* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴⁰⁶ Idem, *Şualar* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴⁰⁷ Idem, *Mesnevi-i Nuriye ve İşaratü’l İ’caz* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

volume),⁴⁰⁸ *Muhakemat ve İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri* (“Reasonings” and “The Balancing of Faith and Unbelief,” published in one volume),⁴⁰⁹ *Tarihçe-i Hayat* (“Biography”), *Emirdağ Lahikası* (“The Appendix of Emirdağ”),⁴¹⁰ and *Barla ve Kastamonu Lahikaları* (“The Appendices of Barla and Kastamonu,” published in one volume).⁴¹¹

So, in the *Yeni Asya* printing of the collection, there are fourteen different books in total, comprising over 6,000 pages in ten volumes. In these books, moreover, Nursi covers an incredible range of subjects, including, but not limited to, the basic tenets of the Islamic faith, life in the modern world, the civilization of Europe, the Prophet Muhammad’s miracles, the miraculous nature of the literary quality of the Qur’an, comparisons of religion and philosophy, the nature of the human soul, the necessity of daily prayer, Adnan Menderes and the Democrat Party government of the 1950s, the necessity of dialogue between Muslims and Christians, and even his cats and how their murmurs indicate their remembrance of God. It is no wonder that many scholars, including Mardin, just gave up trying to find a coherent structure to this stupendous amount of written material and declared that Nursi’s collected writings are of an irremediably unsystematic, “helter-skelter” nature.⁴¹² This is a serious mistake.

⁴⁰⁸ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Asa-yı Musa ve Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴⁰⁹ Idem, *Muhakemat ve İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴¹⁰ Idem, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴¹¹ Idem, *Barla ve Kastamonu Lahikaları* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴¹² Mardin, *Religion and...*, 160-161.

It goes without saying that in order to comprehend the structure of the *Risale-i Nur*, one first of all has to sit down and actually read the books. So, for example, as one reads *Mektubat* (“The Letters”), it becomes apparent that these are actual letters written by Nursi to answer the religious questions of his early followers. They take on added meaning once we realize that *Mektubat* was written after *Sözler* (“The Words”). In other words, the members of the nascent *Nurcu* movement, whose ideas were shaped by the early work *Sözler*, were asking their master for clarification of various issues raised or, on the other hand, not addressed in that work. It is no wonder, then, that in various places, Nursi himself sometimes refers to the entire body of the *Risale-i Nur* as simply *Sözler*, because this book was truly the foundation of the entire collection.

Mektubat consists of thirty-three letters, each of which deals with some secondary – that is, not foundational -- feature of the Islamic religion. For example, the twelfth letter concerns the divine reason for the creation of evil, the eighteenth letter *vahdetü'l-vücut* (“the unity of existence,” the preferred ontology of various Sufi masters, including Ibn Arabi), the twenty-third letter the story of the Prophet Joseph in the Qur’an and its significance for the belief in an afterlife. These subjects are not surprising because *Mektubat* is essentially intended as a supplement to *Sözler*, which deals with foundational Islamic beliefs, such as the unity of God, belief in the afterlife, belief in the Prophets and revelations and so on.

Things get more interesting when we get to the twenty-seventh letter. Here we read simply that this “letter” consists of the correspondence between Nursi and his students during his exile, in which the students extoll the benefits they have received

from their perusal of their master's writings while pointing out that these letters are *published separately* under the titles *Emirdağ Lahikası* ("The Appendix of Emirdağ") and *Barla ve Kastamonu Lahikaları* ("The Appendices of Barla and Kastamonu").⁴¹³ In other words, the collection's two volumes of appendices (containing three books in total), are in fact part of the *Mektubat*, which is itself a supplement to the earlier work, *Sözler*. Let me also note here that *Sözler* ("The Words") consists of thirty-three "Words" in total. The number thirty-three, as it will be clear below, is not arbitrarily chosen.

When we reach the thirtieth letter, we learn that it is also published as a separate book, namely *İşaratü'l-İ'caz*.⁴¹⁴ In other words, the entire book known as *İşaretü'l-İ'caz*, a work written during the period of the "Old Said" in which Nursi discusses the principles of *tafsir* (Qur'anic exegesis), is reproduced as the thirtieth "Letter".⁴¹⁵ As such, *İşaratü'l-İ'caz* (that is, the thirtieth Letter) nicely supplements the *Mektubat*, which is itself a supplement to *Sözler*. And, *Sözler*, as should be clear by now, is the backbone of the literary architecture of the *Risale-i Nur*.

Similarly, the thirty-first letter is also published as a separate work, namely, *Lem'alar* ("Flashes"). *Lem'alar*, similarly to *Sözler* and *Mektubat*, consists of *thirty-three* "Flashes." So the thirty-three "Words," supplemented by the thirty-three "Letters," which in turn contain thirty-three "Flashes" and their numerous appendices, comprise the

⁴¹³ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, 330.

⁴¹⁴ Ibid., 445.

⁴¹⁵ In fact, Nursi writes that this very structure was also "suggested and inspired" to his heart (*kalbime ihtar edilmiş*): "Kalbime ihtar edilmiş ki, İşarat'ül İ'caz tefsiri, Otuzuncu Mektup olacak ve olmuş.": idem, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, 40.

basic corpus of the *Risale-i Nur*. Note that the total number of the “Words,” “Letters” and “Flashes” is ninety-nine, corresponding to the number of the “beautiful names” of God (*Esmâ-i Hüsnâ*). In other words, as the reader reads the ninety-nine “Words,” “Letters” and “Flashes,” he is figuratively engaging in the activity of *zikir* (remembrance of God).

Within *Flashes* (in other words, the thirty-first “Letter”) the twenty-seventh “Flash” is in fact Nursi’s court defense in Eskişehir, published separately as a part of *Tarihçe-i Hayat* (“Biography”). So, yet again, these works are related to one another. Likewise, the thirty-first “Flash” was published as a separate book named *Şualar* (“Rays”). And finally, the thirty-third “Flash” comprises the entire *Mesnevi-i Nuriye* (“The Mathnawi of Light”),⁴¹⁶ again published as a separate volume.

By now, the amazing literary structure of the corpus of Nursi’s writings should be apparent to the perceptive reader. It essentially consists of the central body of *Sözler*, supplemented by the intricate “Chinese box” of the *Mektubat*, which contains within it *The Appendices of Emirdağ, Barla and Kastamonu*, as well as *İşaretü’l-İ’caz* and *Lem’alar*. The “Chinese box” of the book of *Lem’alar*, in turn, contains the *Mesnevi-i Nuriye* and the *Şualar* (“Rays”). And finally, “Rays” explicitly refers to the parts of the official biography of Nursi.

The only two volumes which do not seem to fit into this intricate structure and thus seem to be outliers, yet are published in the standard collection, are *Asa-yı Musa ve Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi* (“The Staff of Moses and the Affirmative Seal of the

⁴¹⁶ Idem, *Lem’alar*, 537.

Unknown”),⁴¹⁷ and *Muhakemat ve İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri* (“Reasonings and the Balancing of Faith and Unbelief”),⁴¹⁸ and there is a good reason why this is the case. The books *Asa-yı Musa* and *İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri* are in fact not original works, but simply reproductions of selections from various parts of the *Risale-i Nur* itself. For example, *İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri* consists of “Words” 1-8, 12, 17, and 23; “Flashes” 1 and 24; and parts of “Letters” 1 and 9, and so forth, which in their proper places, of course, conform to the basic structure that I have already explained. Similarly, *Asa-yı Musa* is a reproduction of the eleventh and seventh “Rays.” It seems to me that these two books are designed to give a taste of the main arguments of the “Words,” “Letters,” “Flashes,” and “Rays” for those who do not have time to read the entire collection.

Muhakemat (“Reasonings”), on the other hand, is simply a reproduction of a work that Said Nursi wrote before he embarked on the mission of writing *Risale-i Nur*.⁴¹⁹ In fact, this book seems to have been published by Nursi’s students and added to the collection, since one of the footnotes states that “the book of ‘Reasonings’ published by our venerable master during his ‘Old Said’ period ends here. The ‘second aim’ of the book, which was left unfinished in this form at the time of its publication, was completed

⁴¹⁷ Idem, *Asa-yı Musa ve Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴¹⁸ Idem, *Muhakemat ve İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002).

⁴¹⁹ *Muhakemat* was previously published as *Mariz bir Asrın, Hasta bir Unsurun, Alil bir Uzvun Reçetesi veyahut Saykal’ül İslamiyet veyahut Bediüzzaman’ın Muhakematı* (Istanbul: Matbaa-i Ebuuzziya, 1327 [1911]).

thirty years later and is incorporated into the collection of the *Risale-i Nur* as part of the ninth Ray and the tenth Word.”⁴²⁰

Finally, the other outlier, the book of *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi* (“The Affirmative Seal of the Unknown”), was initially not intended for publication as a part of the *Risale-i Nur* because it openly mentions a number of “miracles” (*kerametler*) associated with the person of Nursi and the “divine favors” that the text of the *Risale-i Nur* and the early followers of his movement received from God at various stages. Significantly, this is also the book in which the “eschatology” of the movement is best explained. It seems to me that Nursi simply did not want to further agitate the state authorities by publicly disseminating it. Nevertheless, he agreed to its publication after a private copy of the book was confiscated by the police and the court of Isparta.⁴²¹ I will return to the issue of the eschatology of the *Risale-i Nur* in the fourth part of the chapter.

So, far from being “relatively unsystematic,” then, the *Risale-i Nur* is intricately structured around the core of the *Sözler*. I will now explain the contents of this book in more detail.

Sözler (“The Words”), as noted above, consists of thirty-three “Words”. The first nine Words, sometimes called the “little Words” (*küçük Sözler*), deal almost exclusively with the psychological and practical benefits for human beings of believing in God and performing daily prayers. Using short allegorical stories, Nursi compares and contrasts

⁴²⁰ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Muhakemat ve İman-Küfür Muvazeneleri* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002), 163, n. 2.

⁴²¹ Idem, *Asa-yı Musa ve Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, 7.

the relative ease and happiness of a life supported by faith with the existential angst of a human being who lives without belief in an afterlife while knowing that his worldly life will ultimately come to an end. These first nine “Words” almost invariably stress the importance of the practical side of religion, especially daily prayers. It is certainly noteworthy that “orthopraxy,” rather than “orthodoxy,” is emphasized at the beginning of Nursi’s work.

In the tenth “Word,” Nursi turns his attention to belief in an “afterlife” and proposes a number of theological and semi-philosophical arguments designed to demonstrate the reality of an afterlife as described in the Qur’an. The eleventh “Word” deals with the “manifestation of God” in the universe, ultimately arguing that nature, like a mirror, reflects God’s creative power and majesty. In the thirteenth and fourteenth Words, Nursi argues that the Qur’an cannot be understood as a book of poetry or philosophy but should be regarded as a genuine revelation from God for the benefit of the human beings.

The sixteenth Word argues that this revealed God can be seen only as a “Unity” transcending human understanding. Yet, at the same time, this transcendent Unity is partly reflected in nature in general and in human nature in particular. The eighteenth and nineteenth Words deal with prophethood in general and the prophethood of Muhammad in particular, arguing that prophets are the vehicles of divine revelation.

The twentieth and the twenty-first Words return to the miraculous and “revealed” nature of the Qur’an and the benefits of worship and prayers. In the twenty-sixth Word, Nursi deals with destiny and predestination (*kader*), explaining destiny as the “general

program” of everything in the universe, including the lives of human beings. The twenty-seventh Word tackles the issue of *ijtihad*, or independent judicial reasoning; here, Nursi essentially argues that the doors of *ijtihad* are still open but cautions that it is more difficult to engage in *ijtihad* nowadays than it was in the past. The twenty-eighth and twenty-ninth Words deal with heaven, hell, and angels; Nursi provocatively argues that “angels” should be understood as divine servants “representing and controlling” the laws of nature.⁴²²

The book reaches its climax in the thirtieth “Word,” where Nursi makes a comparison between philosophy and revealed religion. He describes a dream-like, imaginary journey he made through tunnels dug in the depths of the underworld. These tunnels, he argues, were dug by the ancient Greek philosophers, Plato and Aristotle and their followers in the Islamic world, such as Avicenna and al-Farabi, with the intention of finding a way to the “ultimate reality” (*hakikat*). However, these philosophers, argues Nursi, failed in the end, and they remained imprisoned in their tunnels. The nature of the “ultimate reality” (represented by the sun in Nursi’s dream), in other words, remained unknown to them. In his dream, finally, an “electric-like” substance, as well as a mechanical device, are given to Nursi, and by using them, he manages to find his way out of the underworld tunnels to the surface of the earth and ultimately to the sun, representing “reality”. The substance and the device, Nursi is told in his dream by an unknown voice, are the “revelatory treasures” of the Qur’an.⁴²³

⁴²² Idem, *Sözler*, 471.

⁴²³ Ibid., 502.

Notice the sharp distinction Nursi makes between philosophy and revelation. These two forms of understanding, Nursi argues, have been in deadly combat with one another since time immemorial. Only when “philosophy” agreed to serve under “revealed religion” did true human happiness come into the world. In other words, although Nursi allows for a conditional reconciliation of revealed religion with reason and philosophy, he does not try to make religion compatible with reason as Muhammad Abduh, al-Afghani and other modern religious reformers did. In fact, philosophy, according to Nursi, should be *subservient* to the truth of the revealed religion. The problem with “philosophy” today, according to Nursi, is that it openly refuses to serve and work under the rubric of “revelation,” thereby creating a significant tension in the human psyche by encouraging a worldly science devoid of any contact with the divine.

Let me finish this section by briefly suggesting that the subjects addressed by Nursi in *Sözler* correspond roughly to the “six requirements of belief” still being traditionally taught to Sunni children in Turkey in the form of a common catechistic prayer.⁴²⁴ It is of course, natural, that the central book of Nursi’s grand project of revitalizing the religion of Islam in modern Turkey emphasizes the fundamentals of Islamic belief and tries to make these beliefs palatable to the taste of modern man.

⁴²⁴ The prayer is “Amentu bi’llahi wa malaikatihî wa kutubihî wa rusulihî wa’l-yawm al-akhîrî wa b’il qadari khayrîhî wa sharrihî min Allahî ta`ala wa’l-ba’su ba`d al mawt. Haqqun ashadu an la ilaha illallah wa ashadu anna Muhammadun `abduhu wa rasuluh.” (“I believe in God, and his angels, and in his books, and his prophets, and in the Day of Judgment, and in destiny and in the good and evil coming from God and in resurrection after death. I witness that there is no God but God, and that Muhammad is his servant and messenger.”)

III: THE METHOD AND ARGUMENTS OF THE *RİSALE-İ NUR*

Before going into more detail on the method and the arguments of the *Risale-i Nur*, let me emphasize that an accurate understanding of nineteenth-century materialism, especially German materialism of the mid-nineteenth century (the “vulgar materialists” denounced by Marxist tradition), is a necessity for an appreciation of the main arguments of Nursi’s works. In his works, Said Nursi clearly demonstrates a familiarity with the works of the materialists and an understanding of the essence of materialist ideas. Moreover, he consciously builds his own position in direct opposition to the materialist tradition. Therefore, contrary to what Mardin suggests in his book on Nursi, the European intellectual tendency that we have to observe closely for a better understanding of Nursi is not eighteenth-century deism⁴²⁵ but nineteenth-century materialism as reflected in the works of Karl Vogt, Jacob Moleschott and Ludwig Büchner.

In the defense that he presented to the court in the city of Eskişehir in 1935 against charges that he was a *tarikât* sheikh trying to undermine the secular Republic, Said Nursi included a passage that had an unmistakable comical effect. Against the prosecutors’ claims that his writings were anti-Republican, Said Nursi argued that the principal group of people that the *Risale-i Nur* addressed (and attacked) was “European

⁴²⁵ “For the deists of the 18th century, man was part of a system of matter in movement, and his privileged position in the center of the universe had already been withdrawn from him by the new scientific discourse.... Many thinkers in Europe adduced the new discoveries and the system of Newton as evidences for faith and Said Nursi was to adopt the same position.”: Şerif Mardin, *Religion and Social Change in Modern Turkey...*, 210.

philosophers.”⁴²⁶ As I continued to read his writings, I came to realize that Said Nursi was completely truthful in defining his work as principally addressing and targeting European philosophers. In a later defense, in Denizli in 1943, he went so far as to dismiss the “council of experts” which the court had appointed to analyze his writings in order to determine whether they constituted political attacks on the secular Republic. What he wanted from the court, instead, was a “council of European philosophers” to examine his writings.⁴²⁷ Moreover, a significant portion of his writings (including the twenty-third “Flash,” or the “Epistle of Nature,” among others) is dedicated principally to disputing the claims of the “European philosophers” about the nature of the cosmos and science.⁴²⁸

A careful reading of Said Nursi’s writings makes clear that he does not necessarily have the entire category of “the European philosophers” in mind when he attacks the *Avrupa feylesoflari*. The philosophy criticized by Nursi is nineteenth-century materialism in general, and the German *vulgar materialists* of the mid-nineteenth century in particular.⁴²⁹

⁴²⁶ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Tarihçe-i Hayat*, 204.

⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, 349.

⁴²⁸ “Nursi argued that the *Risale-i Nur* was a scholarly work...which silenced materialism and naturalism and the philosophers of Europe and their attacks on the Qur’an.... [4 dots] He saw the internal problems of the country as resulting from their corrupting influence.”: Vahide, 224.

⁴²⁹ Karl Marx coined the term “vulgar materialist” in order to distinguish the naïve materialism of the German natural scientists following Ludwig Feuerbach (such as Karl Vogt, Ludwig Büchner and Jacob Moleschott) from his own supposedly sophisticated “historical materialism.” For an early use of the term, see Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels, *On Religion* (New York: Schocken Books, 1964), 231.

The German materialists, led by Karl Vogt (1817-1895) and Ludwig Büchner (1824-1899), were not philosophers in the traditional sense of the term; they were rather natural scientists with a philosophical agenda, which consisted mainly of doing away with tradition and religion. In Germany, there were two historically significant responses to the agenda of the materialists, who wrote books for the general public aimed at popularizing their ideas about science and religion in European society. One was the harsh response of the young Friedrich Nietzsche in the form of a devastating attack on one of the minor representatives of the German materialists, David Strauss.⁴³⁰ Briefly stated, Nietzsche's response emphasized the intellectual aridity of the materialist approach to nature and its dehumanizing effect, as can be seen in the following quotation from his *Gay Science*:

It is no different with the faith with which so many materialist natural scientists rest content nowadays, the faith in a world that is supposed to have its equivalent and its measure in human thought and human valuations -- a "world of truth" that can be mastered completely and forever with the aid of our square little reason. What? Do we really permit existence to be degraded for us like this -- reduced to a mere exercise for a calculator and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one should not wish to divest it of its *rich ambiguity*: that is a dictate of good taste, gentlemen, the taste for reverence for everything that lies beyond

⁴³⁰ Friedrich Nietzsche, "David Strauss: Writer and Confessor," in Friedrich Nietzsche, *Unmodern Observations* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1990), 1-73.

your horizon. That the only justifiable interpretation of the world should be one in which *you* are justified because one can continue to work and do research scientifically in *your* sense (you really mean, mechanistically?)-- an interpretation that permits counting, calculating, weighing, seeing and touching and nothing more -- that is a crudity and naïveté, assuming that it is not a mental illness, an idiocy....⁴³¹

The second response to the materialists in Germany came from neo-Kantians like Julius Frauenstadt (1813-1879). Frauenstadt's criticism of the materialists, who claimed that they had dispensed with all the unnecessary metaphysics of traditional philosophy and religion and that they were using immediate sense perceptions to build their scientific theories about natural laws, consisted mainly of pointing out that there was an overarching (but somewhat hidden) "metaphysical belief" underlying the whole endeavor of the materialist scientists. In other words, the so-called "immediate sense perceptions," according to Frauenstadt, made sense only in a wider framework; and the "materialist" framework of the vulgar materialists was no less metaphysical than the "spiritual" frameworks against which they argued.

Due largely to the scathing attacks of the neo-Kantians, the vulgar materialists lost much of their influence in Germany and in Europe at large in the second half of the

⁴³¹ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* (New York: Vintage Books, 1974), 335.

nineteenth century.⁴³² But they definitely did not lose their influence in such peripheral areas of European culture as the Ottoman lands. Their position on science and religion continued to be seen as the predominant mode of thought on these matters in Europe by the naïve Ottoman intellectuals of the military medical school in Istanbul. Needless to say, a much more vulgarized form of this scientific materialism became the official cultural and educational policy of the early Turkish Republic under the name of Kemalism.⁴³³

Nursi's main criticism of the materialist philosophers, although it has some superficial resemblance to the position of the neo-Kantians, has a fundamentally different nature. In a nutshell, Nursi argues that the vulgar materialists and their followers in Turkey, such as Beşir Fuad, Baha Tevfik and Abdullah Cevdet, who supposedly based their materialist and atheistic philosophies on an investigation of nature, ultimately had a flawed understanding of nature. The materialist framework, according to Nursi, made the mistake of conceptualizing nature as a closed, self-sustaining system, thereby entirely missing its contingent character. To Nursi, not surprisingly, nature was contingent upon God.

⁴³² It is not without irony that the reincarnation of the vulgar materialists in the early 20th century under the banner of the *Logical Positivism* of the Viennese Circle gave way to another Kantian-inspired attack on them by Karl R. Popper.

⁴³³ See Şükrü Hanioglu, "Blueprints....," 28-116.

Şükran Vahide seems to understand the centrality of the idea of a nature that is contingent on God for Nursi's work. Explaining the general method of the *Risale-i Nur*, she writes that:

Nursi's involvement with science in his youth gained for him a view of the universe that, in the sense of its being a perfectly functioning "machine" or "factory" made up of component parts, is Newtonian, even mechanistic.... However, though Newtonian in scheme, his interpretation of the physical world is Qur'anic....Nursi's main achievement on his transformation into the "New Said" was his discovery and subsequent development of the *Qur'anic vision or method of regarding things, beings, for the meaning they express*. This he called *mana-yi harfi*, as opposed to the view of "philosophy and science," which regards beings as *mana-yi ismi*, signifying only themselves.⁴³⁴

The distinction between the two layers of interpretation by means of which natural phenomena may be understood -- the *mana-yi ismi* (emphasizing the "nominal meaning") and the *mana-yi harfi* (emphasizing the "significant meaning") -- is crucial for understanding the arguments of the *Risale-i Nur* as a whole. This distinction is explicitly formulated by Nursi in the twelfth "Word,"⁴³⁵ which points out that all natural phenomena, in addition to having "immanent" physical beauty and meanings (*mana-yi*

⁴³⁴ Vahide, 234. Italics mine.

⁴³⁵ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 121-122.

ismi) associated with the natural laws causing them, also have “transcendent” and symbolic beauty and meanings (*mana-yi harfi*) pointing to the author of these natural laws: God. The basic problem with secular philosophy in general and its materialist offspring in particular, according to Nursi, is that they completely neglect the symbolic and transcendent interpretation of nature as they overemphasize its explicit and immanent meaning (that is, the self-regulating character of natural laws, and so on).

Despite Mardin’s misleading claims about the influence of deism on Nursi, I have to emphasize here that Nursi’s argument about the “contingent” character of nature is essentially Qur’anic. Fazlur Rahman, in *Major Themes of the Qur’an*, explains the Qur’anic view of the contingency of nature as follows:

For the Qur’an, the whole of nature is one firm, well-knit structure with no gaps, no ruptures, and no dislocations. It works by its own laws, which have been ingrained in it by God, and is, therefore, autonomous; but it is not autocratic, for, in itself, it has no warrant for its own existence and it cannot explain itself...Why nature and the richness and fullness of its being? Why not just nothing and pure emptiness -- which is, on all counts, the easier and the more “natural” of the two alternatives? From the Greeks through Hegel it has often been said that “nothing” is an empty word without any real meaning since “there can be no nothing and we cannot imagine it.” But the question is: Why can we not imagine it? It is certainly theoretically possible that there might be no nature at all. Those who think that nature is “given” and therefore somehow “necessary” are like a child

for whom toys are a “given” and therefore “necessary”. This is exactly the meaning of contingency. But a contingent cannot be thought of without that upon which it is contingent, although it is possible to be so immersed in what is contingent that one may not think of that upon which it is contingent --again, like a child who may be so engaged with his toys that he does not care to know what is beyond them. But, according to the Qur’an, once you think of the whence (and the whither) of nature you must “find God.”⁴³⁶

But what happens if one does not find God in nature? More importantly, what if a group of people, who think that there is no God to be found in nature and that nature is essentially immanent and self-sustaining, propagate these secular beliefs and even try to build a society on these very beliefs? From an optimistic perspective, one may perhaps argue that they achieve “the modern world,” with its scientific wonders and infinite progress as envisioned by the philosophical founders of modernity, namely, Machiavelli, Bacon, Hobbes and Descartes. It goes without saying that the founders of the Turkish Republic shared this perspective, albeit in a more vulgarized form propagated by the German materialists of the nineteenth century.

Nursi, however, did not share this perspective. Above all, he argued that an atheistic society was an oxymoron, and that such a society would simply disintegrate.⁴³⁷

That is why he vehemently opposed the idea of borrowing materialist philosophy and

⁴³⁶ Fazlur Rahman, *Major Themes of the Qur’an* (Chicago: Bibliotheca Islamica, 1980), 3.

⁴³⁷ Bediuzzaman Said Nursi, *Tarihce-i Hayat*, 543. Italics mine.

associated secular and cultural practices from Europe. In fact, when it came to “borrowing” from Europe, Nursi was extremely and consciously conservative. In a personal letter he wrote to Prime Minister Adnan Menderes of the Democrat Party towards the end of his life, Nursi emphasized the materialist excesses of contemporary Western civilization: “Since modern Western civilization acts contrary to the fundamental laws of the revealed religions, its evils have come to outweigh its good aspects, its errors and harmful aspects to preponderate over its benefits; and general tranquility and a happy worldly life have been destroyed.... In short, since modern Western civilization has not truly heeded the revealed religions, it has impoverished man and increased his needs. It has destroyed the principle of frugality and contentment, and increased wastefulness, greed and covetousness.”⁴³⁸ Elsewhere, Nursi, recalling a conversation he had had with a “supreme military commander” (vaguely referring to either Enver Pasha or Mustafa Kemal, it seems) argues strongly against the cultural imitation of European civilization.⁴³⁹ In yet another publication, he virulently condemns European civilization for its supposed destruction of “decent family life” by “forcing” women out of their homes and into the workplace in, horrors, indecent and scanty clothing.⁴⁴⁰ It is worth

⁴³⁸ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (Istanbul: Sinan Matbaası, 1959), 97-99, quoted in Vahide, 318.

⁴³⁹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası* (Istanbul: Yeni Asya Neşriyat, 2002), 456.

⁴⁴⁰ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Sözler*, 374.

mentioning here that Nursi wrote an entire epistle defending the necessity of Islamic *hijab* for women (twenty-fourth “Flash” or *Tesettür Risalesi*).⁴⁴¹

How can we make sense of Nursi’s genuine openness toward European technology, science and even constitutional and democratic forms of government, on the one hand, and his complete antagonism towards the more cultural and social impact of Europe on Turkey?

In the fifth chapter, I argued that a number of Ottoman thinkers in the late nineteenth century and early twentieth century, including Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Said Halim Pasha and Mehmet Akif Ersoy,⁴⁴² made a distinction between the “spiritual” and the “material” aspects of European civilization. While these thinkers were eager to borrow what they perceived as the “material” components of European civilization, including science, technology and constitutional forms of government, they were much more reluctant to adopt the “spiritual” components, which included ethics and interpersonal behavior (especially the relationship between males and females), as well as morality and secular attitudes concerning religion.

But here an important question needs to be asked: Is it possible to borrow and adopt the “material” components of a civilization while avoiding the “spiritual” and cultural aspects of it? Are these “components” of a civilization, provided that we allow such figures as Ahmed Hilmi and Nursi to make this distinction in the first place, not

⁴⁴¹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Lem’alar*, 255-264.

⁴⁴² For Mehmet Akif’s and Halim Pasha’s acceptance of European technology and rejection of European cultural influences, see Hasan Kayalı, “Islam in the Thought and Politics of Two Late Ottoman Intellectuals: Mehmed Akif and Said Halim,” *Archivum Ottomanicum* No.19 (2001): 307-333.

ultimately related to one another? Would the technology, science and rationality, in conjunction with the rule of law and constitutional forms of government, not eventually pave the way for a socially and culturally liberal society as well? Were thinkers like Ahmed Hilmi and Nursi deluded about the “superiority” of their own “spiritual” culture? In order to answer these questions, I would like first to revisit the very concept of “civilization,” since it seems to me that both Ahmed Hilmi and Nursi had a rather reified conception of it.

Fernand Braudel, some time ago, warned against the idea of seeing “civilizations” as isolated islands.⁴⁴³ Conceptualizing a civilization primarily as a “cultural area,” Braudel argued that a civilization was formed ultimately by a great variety of “goods”:

...of cultural characteristics, ranging from the form of its houses, the material of which they are built, their roofing, to skills like feathering arrows, to a dialect or a group of dialects, to tastes in cooking, to a particular technology, a structure of beliefs, a way of making love, and even to the compass, paper, the printing press. It is the regular grouping, the frequency with which particular characteristics recur, their ubiquity within a precise area, which constitute the first signs of cultural coherence.

If to this spatial coherence can be added some sort of temporal

⁴⁴³ “We must not believe that a civilization, because it is original, is a closed and independent world, as if each one was an island in the midst of the ocean, whereas in fact it is their dialogues, the points where they meet, which are essential, especially as they are all increasingly coming to share a rich common basis.” Fernand Braudel, “The History of Civilizations: The Past Explains the Present,” in Fernand Braudel, *On History* (tr.) Sian Reynolds (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1980), 200-201.

permanence, then I would call civilization or culture the “totality” of the range of attributes. It is this “totality” which is the “form” of the civilization thus recognized.⁴⁴⁴

Notice that Braudel masterfully includes both “material” and “spiritual” characteristics in his definition of civilization as a temporal and spatial totality. Elsewhere, in fact, he explicitly writes that “[c]ivilization...has at least a double meaning. It denotes both moral and material values...Hence the temptation felt by many authors to separate the words, culture and civilization, one assuming the dignity of spiritual concerns, the other the triviality of material affairs.”⁴⁴⁵ Since he also argues against the conceptions of civilizations as isolated islands, a question naturally comes up here: When civilizations interact and borrow elements from one another, are the material and spiritual characteristics exchanged between civilizations at the same rate? More generally, perhaps, one should ask the following question: What indeed are the mechanisms through which civilizations influence and change one another, beyond the usual effects of cultural diffusion through warfare, trade and so on?

Regarding the speed and ease of the “material” exchanges between civilizations, compared to the “spiritual” exchanges, Braudel writes: “All these cultural goods, the microelements of civilization, are constantly on the move (this is what distinguishes them

⁴⁴⁴ Ibid., 202.

⁴⁴⁵ Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations* trans. Richard Mayne (New York: Allen Lane, The Penguin Press, 1994), 5.

from ordinary social phenomena). Civilizations are simultaneously exporting or borrowing them in turn. This vast traffic never stops. Some cultural elements are even contagious, such as modern science and modern technology.... *It remains to be seen if the borrowing of spiritual goods is carried on even more swiftly than that of technology. For myself, I doubt it.*"⁴⁴⁶ Moreover, he also argues that "however avid civilizations are to acquire the material adjuncts of 'modern' life, they are not prepared to take on everything indiscriminately....This is why, now as in the past, they are still able to safeguard characteristics that everything seems to threaten with extinction."⁴⁴⁷

It seems to me that Braudel is profoundly correct in his subtle suggestion that the "borrowing of spiritual goods" is not carried on as swiftly as the borrowing of technology. What might be the reason?

In his ultimately flawed but provocative book on civilizations, Samuel Huntington gives a rather interesting example of technological and material diffusion unaccompanied by cultural diffusion: "During the 1970s and 1980s Americans consumed millions of Japanese cars, TV sets, cameras, and electronic gadgets without being 'Japanized' and indeed while becoming considerably more antagonistic toward Japan. Only naïve arrogance can lead Westerners to assume that non-Westerners will become 'Westernized' by acquiring Western goods. What, indeed, does it tell the world about the

⁴⁴⁶ Braudel, "The History of Civilizations, 203". Italics mine.

⁴⁴⁷ Fernand Braudel, *A History of Civilizations*, 15.

West when Westerners identify their civilization with fizzy liquids, faded pants and fatty foods?”⁴⁴⁸

According to Huntington the historical expansion of the West has promoted the twin processes of “modernization” and “Westernization” of non-Western societies. Historically speaking, the political and intellectual leaders of these non-Western societies, he argues, have responded to this Western impact in one or more of the following three ways: rejecting both modernization and Westernization; embracing both; embracing the first and rejecting the second. He gives the example of Japan from 1542 until the Meiji reformation as an example of the first way (rejecting both modernization and Westernization), Kemalist Turkey as an example of the second way (embracing both modernization and Westernization) and the modern situation in most of the Middle East and China as examples of the third way, that is, embracing modernization but rejecting Westernization.⁴⁴⁹

Why was this attitude of distinguishing the material components of the West from its more cultural and spiritual aspects adopted by a significant number of relatively sophisticated thinkers in Turkey, the Arab lands, Iran, and India in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries? To answer this question, it is helpful to turn from the crude political theories of Huntington to the more subtle cultural writings of Homi Bhabha.

⁴⁴⁸ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1996), 58.

⁴⁴⁹ Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations*, 72.

In his important work *The Location of Culture*, Bhabha describes a highly interesting encounter which took place in Delhi at the beginning of the nineteenth century. One of the earliest Indian catechists (a recent convert to Christianity, not a member of India's ancient Christian population), Anund Messeh, journeyed from his mission in Meerut to a "grove of trees" in Delhi with the intention of converting the locals there to Christianity. He found ordinary people reading a copy of the Bible, which they had presumably gotten from earlier missionaries, apparently without knowing that it was the religious book of the European "sahibs." Bhabha quotes the original account, taken from a nineteenth-century text:

He found about 500 people, men, women and children, seated under the shade of the trees, and employed, as had been related to him, in reading and conversation. He went up to an elderly looking man, and accosted him, and the following conversation passed.... "These books," said Anund, "teach the religion of the European Sahibs. It is THEIR book; and they printed it in our language, for our use." "Ah! no," replied the stranger, "*that cannot be, for they eat flesh.*".... Anund observed, "You ought to be BAPTIZED, in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Ghost. Come to Meerut: there is a Christian Padre there; and he will shew you what you ought to do." They answered, "Now we must go home to the harvest; but, as we mean to meet once a year, perhaps the next year we may come to Meerut."... I explained to them the nature of the Sacrament

and of Baptism; in answer to which, they replied, “We are willing to be baptized, but we will never take the Sacrament. To all the other customs of Christians we are willing to conform, *but not to the Sacrament, because the Europeans eat cow's flesh, and this will never do for us.*”⁴⁵⁰

It is highly interesting to note that the Indians, who were already reading and apparently enjoying the moral contents of the Bible, refused to believe that this book was in fact the book of the Christians, who, from their points of view, engaged in the horribly indecent activity of “eating cow’s flesh.” They give no other explanation for refusing the Sacrament than Europeans’ habit of eating beef. In other words, knowing that Europeans ate cow’s flesh was enough to kill their interest. Bhabha stresses the fact that despite finding the message of the book appealing, they were appalled by the seemingly inconsequential point about the European habit of eating beef. Of course, the point is not inconsequential at all. In fact, eating flesh was the demarcating point where a good Hindu traditionally drew the line between “decent” and “indecent” behavior.

In this context, Ahmed Hilmi’s and Nursi’s obsession with the preservation of Islamic culture begins to appear more meaningful: they were opposing the more “cultural” and “social” adaptations from Europe, such as women appearing in light clothes without conforming to Islamic dress codes, the open consumption of alcoholic beverages and similar behavior, because these seemingly trivial matters were, to them,

⁴⁵⁰ Homi Bhabha, “Signs Taken for Wonders: Questions of Ambivalence and Authority under a Tree outside Delhi, May 1817,” in Bhabha, *The Location of Culture* (London: Routledge, 2004), 146-148. Italics are mine, capitals are in the original.

demarcating lines between decent and indecent behavior. Whereas they were able to imagine a “good” and “decent” Muslim, in a constitutional and democratic government, for example, using the latest technological innovations provided by science, they were simply unable to imagine a “decent” Muslim woman, let us say, revealing her hair to the *namahrem* (a man who was not within forbidden degrees of kinship). Hence, they were extremely open to the idea of adopting what they perceived as the material components of the West while they had their reservations when it came to more “cultural” forms of adaptation.

This distinction, it should be mentioned, has been made by a number of Arab and Iranian writers, as well, in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, including al-Afghani, Abduh,⁴⁵¹ and Ali Shariati.⁴⁵² It seems to me that Bhabha is right in pointing out that the “spiritual” forms a civilization are often located in the seemingly trivial matters of everyday life, such as the way of eating, covering the body, manner of speaking and so forth. A more salient point, perhaps, is that these are publicly visible behaviors and practices that would immediately make the borrowing obvious, which is especially problematic for law-based religions like Islam where orthopraxy starts with material details about bodily functions.

⁴⁵¹ On these figures, see Albert Hourani, *Arabic Thought in the Liberal Age: 1798-1939* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1983), 130-245.

⁴⁵² On Ali Shariati, see Ali Rahnama, *An Islamic Utopian: A Political Biography of Ali Shariati* (London: I.B Tauris, 1998).

IV: THE ESCHATOLOGY OF THE *RİSALE-İ NUR*

Eschatology may be defined as the “belief in the end of time and a conception of the ultimate destiny and purpose of humanity and the world.”⁴⁵³ In order to understand the extraordinary social cohesion of the early followers of Nursi, as well as the continuing appeal of Nursi’s writings for younger generations, it is imperative to study Nursi’s eschatological teachings. In her study of Nursi’s understanding of apocalyptic traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad, Barbara Stowasser correctly argues that in the fifteenth and twenty-ninth “Letters,” Nursi identifies

that fearsome individual named the Sufyan (Dajjal’s twin, the “Muslim Antichrist”) as the destroyer of the Shariah and leader of dissemblers, who as a group represent “the collective personality of the Sufyan”....In the same context, he then employed the Hadith metaphorically to pinpoint the specific forms in which he saw these evil forces at work in Turkish society at the time: naturalist and materialist philosophies, individualism, self-aggrandizement, and hubris, including the hubris of a tyrannical leader-figure who falsely but seductively claims to possess an almost godlike status. The figure of the Dajjal (“the great Antichrist”) likewise

⁴⁵³ Barbara Freyer Stowasser, “The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Said Nursi” in Ibrahim Abu Rabi (ed.), *Islam at the Crossroads: On the Thought and Life of Bediuzzaman Said Nursi*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003), 229.

symbolized atheism; his seductiveness derives from the enticements and rewards of “civilization,” while the true believers are thereby cast into danger, captivity and indigence. Release comes to them in the form of religion. The Dajjal will ultimately be slain by Jesus, and the Mahdi portends the *future unification of a true, a historical Christianity (symbolized by Jesus) with Islam....The great spiritual energy of these joint forces will then defeat the powers of ungodliness.*⁴⁵⁴

Nursi interpreted the antichrist (*Dajjal*) mentioned in the traditions attributed to the Prophet Muhammad not as a human being but rather as the “atheistic and naturalistic” philosophies that would engulf humanity towards the end of times.⁴⁵⁵ Likewise, the second coming of Jesus, according to Nursi, will be not the return of the person of Jesus but the return of a “purified form” (*tasaffi etmiş*) of Christianity which would ally itself with Islam against the materialistic forces.

Thus far, Stowasser’s argument is solid. Unfortunately, she does not realize that the “Letters” are not the only place where Nursi discusses his eschatological interpretations. Elsewhere, in fact, Nursi argues that the “Mahdi” (who will be not a single person but a “sacred society of men” [*kudsi cemaati*]), who will join forces with a purified form of Christianity against the atheistic forces of the antichrist, will have three

⁴⁵⁴ Barbara Freyer Stowasser, “The Apocalypse in the Teachings of Said Nursi...”, 232-233. Italics mine.

⁴⁵⁵ See, Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Mektubat*, 59-60.

major tasks to accomplish: to “salvage” the faith from the incursions of materialism and naturalism,⁴⁵⁶ to reinstate the Shari’ah and the caliphate,⁴⁵⁷ and to perfect the Shari’ah by interpreting and applying the Quranic principles according to the needs of the times.⁴⁵⁸ In *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, where he presents his eschatological ideas more openly, Nursi explains the third future task of the *Mahdi* as “uniting the Islamic world under a caliphate and serving the religion of Islam by creating an alliance with the Christian religious leaders.”⁴⁵⁹

There is no doubt that Nursi interprets the role of the *Risale-i Nur* as preparing the ground⁴⁶⁰ for the future coming of the Mahdi (that is, a future group of men who will ultimately re-establish the caliphate and forge an alliance with a purified Christianity), by helping the Mahdi to accomplish his first task of “salvaging the faith from the incursions of materialism and naturalism.” Thus, his complete vision is *profoundly political* beyond the wildest dreams of any ordinary political Islamist.

In conclusion, this chapter has tried to provide a blueprint of the truly magnificent structure of the *Risale-i Nur*. By closely studying the methods and arguments of Nursi, I aimed to clarify his overarching vision of Islam and tried to salvage him from the limited

⁴⁵⁶ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, 231.

⁴⁵⁷ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, 231.

⁴⁵⁸ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Emirdağ Lahikası*, 232.

⁴⁵⁹ Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, *Sikke-i Tasdik-i Gaybi*, 11.

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, 10-11.

sociological vision of Mardin, among others. This chapter, I hope, will serve as an initial guide for further text-based studies on the fascinating figure of Nursi and his works.

Within the context of this dissertation, Nursi represents the strongest religious critique made in Turkey against materialist ideas and their sociological implications.

Chapter 7: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar (1901-1962): Science, Literature, History and Cultural Change

The most ironic and witty critique of the Turkish modernization project in the twentieth century was not articulated by a philosopher such as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi or a man of religion such as Said Nursi. Instead, it was voiced by a gifted novelist and hardworking academician who throughout his life kept a low public profile: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar. Tanpınar's genius lies in the fact that although he was one of the first Turkish thinkers who truly discerned the intellectual vacuity of the Republican claims about creating a brand-new scientific society by severing ties to the supposedly archaic and non-scientific Ottoman past, he never fell into the trap of romanticizing and idealizing this past, either. While he was always skeptical of the overambitious state-centric social engineering projects of the Republican Turkish governments, especially concerning language and religion, he remained convinced of the necessity of gradual change and modernization. His idea of "change" emphasized the continuous relationship among the past, present and future of Turkish society. In other words, Tanpınar simply did not believe in magical new social beginnings or radical breaks with the past, but argued that any attempt at modernization should be grounded in the realities of history and local culture, which, in his opinion, formed an unbreakable whole.

Moreover, Tanpınar, largely as a result of his penetrating studies on the history of Ottoman literature and reform movements in the nineteenth century, isolated the “problem of identity” as the single most important characteristic of late Ottoman and contemporary Turkish society. This problem of identity, according to Tanpınar, had its roots in the dramatic “civilizational shift” experienced in Turkish society as a result of the aforementioned reforms, which led to a gradual mixing of western influences with Turkey’s Islamic heritage. Although Tanpınar did not offer an easy way out of the conundrum, I think he should be given credit for correctly identifying the general contours of the deep *social and psychological tension* permeating Turkish society at least since the reforms of the *Tanzimat*.

Since Tanpınar’s ideas, expressed in voluminous articles, essays, and novels, contain a rather fascinating mixture of liberal and conservative elements, together with an enormous cultural sophistication, a razor-sharp sense of humor and a deep literary and historical erudition, his oeuvre presents a unique challenge to any historian who wants to systematically analyze his works. So, it is perhaps not surprising that although we have a number of good article-length studies of various parts of Tanpınar’s oeuvre in English, we do not yet have a comprehensive study of his literary and historical output.⁴⁶¹ In this chapter, I will try to fill this vacuum by analyzing the entirety of Tanpınar’s published

⁴⁶¹ For a book-length analysis of Tanpınar’s short stories, see Sarah Moment Atis, *Semantic Structuring in the Modern Turkish Short Story: An Analysis of the Dreams of Abdullah Efendi and Other Short Stories by Tanpınar* (Leiden: Brill, 1983).

works currently in print, with the exception of his poems, which will have to wait for the attention of a more artistically inclined mind than mine.⁴⁶²

In the first part of this chapter, I will give some brief biographical information on Tanpınar. In contrast to such larger-than-life figures as Beşir Fuad, Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi and Said Nursi, Tanpınar lived a relatively quiet and uneventful life. Although he was a member of the Turkish parliament for a brief period, for the most part he worked as a professor of literature at Istanbul University, publishing articles and books on the history of Ottoman literature in addition to a number of remarkable novels and short stories. However, as I will make clear in the following pages, some of his insights and ideas about Turkish history and culture cannot be adequately understood without reference to certain elements of his biography, such as his travels in various provinces of the Ottoman Empire in his teenage years as the son of an Ottoman judge (*kadı*) or his discipleship during his undergraduate years to Yahya Kemal Beyatlı (1884-1958), a famous Turkish poet and right-wing thinker who taught literature and history to Tanpınar at Istanbul University and continued to be a friend and mentor to him for the rest of his life.⁴⁶³

⁴⁶² It is interesting to note, however, that Tanpınar did not have a high opinion of the artistic quality of his own poems. On this point, see Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Tanpınar'ın Mektupları* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2001), 39.

⁴⁶³ At the time of his death, Tanpınar was preparing a major work on Yahya Kemal. His unpublished notes for this work were published as a book in 1963. See Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yahya Kemal* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005).

In the second part of the chapter, I will concentrate on Tanpınar's ideas on cultural identity and historical continuity, and analyze his collected articles on Turkish literature and modernization,⁴⁶⁴ as well as his letters,⁴⁶⁵ articles on other subjects⁴⁶⁶ and university lectures,⁴⁶⁷ in addition to his major work on the history of Ottoman literature in the nineteenth century.⁴⁶⁸

I will argue that throughout these works Tanpınar tries to convey the problematic nature of the top-down Turkish modernization attempts and theorizes about the “dualism” (of “tradition” and “modernity”) they created in society. However, unlike a simple-minded conservative who might have wished to vanquish this duality by restoring the glories of the past, Tanpınar was fully aware of the impossibility of returning to a mythologized past in a fast-changing world. Therefore, as Nergis Ertürk quite accurately emphasizes, one may identify the principal character of Tanpınar's work as a “deep existential uneasiness (*huzursuzluk*) in the face of a profound cultural problem.... From the encyclopedic *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (History of Nineteenth-Century Turkish Literature), regarded as an authoritative account of modern Turkish

⁴⁶⁴ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005).

⁴⁶⁵ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Tanpınar'ın Mektupları...*

⁴⁶⁶ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım Gibi* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005).

⁴⁶⁷ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Edebiyat Dersleri* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2004).

⁴⁶⁸ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk Edebiyatı Tarihi* (Istanbul: Yapı Kredi Yayınları, 2006).

literature, to the five segments of *Beş Şehir* (Five Cities),⁴⁶⁹ on historically significant Ottoman cities, this impulse is thoroughgoing if also complex and contradictory.”⁴⁷⁰

In many respects, Tanpınar was an “impossible conservative” who truly detested the cultural insensitivity and bluntness of the Republican regime hell-bent on rapid and uncompromising modernization yet realized that some sort of change was ultimately necessary if Turkish society were to survive and thrive in the modern world. Consequently, in my opinion, Tanpınar wanted to replace the rather schizophrenic and antagonistic attitude of the Republican establishment towards the history and culture of Turkish society with a genuine understanding of its past which could then be effectively used to build a dynamic future.

In the third part of the chapter I will focus on Tanpınar’s novels. Firstly, I will argue that his three novels, namely *Huzur* (“Peace of Mind”),⁴⁷¹ *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (“Those Offstage”)⁴⁷² and *Mahur Beste*⁴⁷³ (“Song in Mahur Mode”)⁴⁷⁴ are structurally

⁴⁶⁹ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Beş Şehir* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2006).

⁴⁷⁰ Nergis Ertürk, “Modernity and Its Fallen Languages: Tanpınar’s *Hasret*, Benjamin’s Melancholy,” *Publications of the Modern Language Association of America (PMLA)* 123, No.1 (2008): 43.

⁴⁷¹ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Huzur* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005). *A Mind at Peace* is the name of the recent English translation of this novel by Erdağ Gökna. See Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *A Mind at Peace* trans. Erdağ Gökna (New York: Archipelago Books, 2008). Personally, I think that “Peace of Mind” is a better translation.

⁴⁷² Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005).

⁴⁷³ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2005).

⁴⁷⁴ “Mahur” is the name of one of the *makams* in Turkish classical music. *Makam* is used in Arabic, Persian and Turkish classical music to refer to an overall indication of the melodic contour and patterns of a composition. Its closest counterpart in western music is the medieval concept of “mode”.

related and that they should be read in conjunction to understand the overall picture Tanpınar is trying to create. This picture, in my opinion, is that of a lively tradition and history facing rapid change and modernization, leading to enormous tension and “indecision” in the minds of the novels’ protagonists. In the words of Erdağ Göknaç:

Faced with a decision between “East” and “West,” modernity and tradition, and Ottoman past and Turkish national future, Tanpınar’s characters cannot, or perhaps refuse to, decide. Indecision is their form of...protest. Indeed Tanpınar’s worldview is Janus-faced, implying that these choices are false, or even absurd. Rather than seeing the “two worlds” as alternatives, he sees them as synchronic, two cultural springs feeding his identity and art.⁴⁷⁵

Finally, in the second half of the third part of the chapter, I will analyze the structure and contents of the novel that I consider to be Tanpınar’s masterpiece: *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü* (“The Clock-Setting Institute”).⁴⁷⁶ In this novel, through an absurd fictional institute supposedly established in modern Turkey to synchronize clocks throughout the country, Tanpınar makes one of the most interesting and subtle critiques

⁴⁷⁵ Erdağ Göknaç, “Ottoman Past and Turkish Future: Ambivalence in A.H. Tanpınar’s *Those Outside the Scene*,” *The South Atlantic Quarterly* 102, Nos. 2/3 (2003): 648. *Those Outside the Scene* is not a good translation for *Sahnenin Dışındakiler*. In English, theater architecture includes “stages,” not “scenes.” “Offstage” is the word for anything out of sight of the audience, so “Those Offstage” would be the better translation.

⁴⁷⁶ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1999). *Saat* in Turkish may refer to both timekeeping instruments such as clocks and watches, and the concept of time itself. So, an alternative translation of the title of the novel would be “Chronometric Institute”.

of the state-centric Republican attempts to create a more orderly, efficient and scientific society. I will finish the chapter by summarizing Tanpınar's attitude towards science in general and "social engineering" in particular.

I: A BIOGRAPHY OF TANPINAR:

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar was born on 23 June 1901 in Istanbul. His father, Hüseyin Fikri Efendi, was a judge serving in various provinces of the Ottoman Empire before the empire's disintegration following the First World War. As a result, Tanpınar spent his childhood and teenage years in different cities such as Sinop on the Black Sea coast (1908-1909), Siirt in southeastern Anatolia (1909-1910), Kirkuk in northern Iraq (1914-1915) and Antalya on Anatolia's Mediterranean coast (1916).⁴⁷⁷ He received an irregular education in Sinop and Siirt secondary schools (*rüşdiye*) and the French Dominican School in Siirt, followed by high-school education in Vefa (Istanbul), Kirkuk and Antalya high schools (*sultani*).

In 1918, Tanpınar came to Istanbul University for his university education. After a one-year stint in the veterinary school, he transferred to the Faculty of Letters (*Edebiyat Fakültesi*) in 1919. According to Cengizhan Orakçı, the main reason for his change of subject was the presence of Yahya Kemal Beyatlı as a young and inspiring

⁴⁷⁷ For more information on the biography of Tanpınar, see Ömer Faruk Akün, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar," *Türk Dili ve Edebiyatı Dergisi* No:12 (1960): 1-32. See also Cengizhan Orakçı, *Türk Düşünce Ufukları: Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar* (Ankara: Alternatif Yayınları, 2003).

instructor at the Faculty of Letters.⁴⁷⁸ Since Beyatlı would be a lasting influence on Tanpınar's ideas, I would like to dwell a bit on Beyatlı and his ideas here.

Yahya Kemal Beyatlı, widely considered to be perhaps the most important Turkish poet of the twentieth century, was born in Skopje, Macedonia, in 1884 to a wealthy Ottoman family. After getting his university education in Paris at France's celebrated School of Political Science (École Libre des Sciences Politiques), he returned to Turkey in 1912 and, with the help of Ziya Gökalp, the foremost Turkish nationalist theoretician of the time, became an instructor at Istanbul University, where he was teaching the history of civilization as well as the history of Turkish and western literatures at the time of Tanpınar's arrival.

Although it is definitely accurate to label him a nationalist, as Tanpınar writes, Yahya Kemal, who was somewhat unsystematic in his ideas, significantly differed from thinkers such as Gökalp in his understanding of nationalism, notably in his refusal to turn to the pre-Islamic shamanic roots of the Turks in Central Asia for inspiration. His nationalism, which was remarkably devoid of racism, emphasized the cultural accomplishments of the Turks after their penetration of Anatolia following the battle of Manzikert in 1071,⁴⁷⁹ embracing and promoting the civilizational synthesis created by the Seljuks and especially by the Ottomans in Anatolia. So, while the official nationalist ideology of the Turkish Republic, following the lead of Gökalp, emphasized the pre-

⁴⁷⁸ Cengizhan Orakçı, *Türk Düşünce Ufukları...*,11.

⁴⁷⁹ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yahya Kemal...*,41.

Islamic depths of Turkish history, effectively ignoring the Ottoman Empire (which they treated as the *ancien régime*), Beyatlı's more cultural version of nationalism saw the pre-Islamic past as a "crude introduction" to the history of the Turks at best, and instead put the accent on the immediate Ottoman past.

At least since the publication of the seminal work of Benedict Anderson on the subject,⁴⁸⁰ the historian cannot afford to be naïve about nationalist constructs. So it seems futile to me to argue whether the nationalist vision of Beyatlı was "better" in any meaningful sense than the official one, but I think it is important that the Turkish nation "imagined" by Beyatlı (and also partly by Tanpınar, as I will make clear in the following pages) differed significantly from the official version by remaining much more willing to include Islamic cultural elements. By Tanpınar's account, Beyatlı on many occasions remarked that his emphasis on a "cultural and historical continuation" as the basis of nationalism was influenced by French right-wing counter-revolutionary ideologues such as Maurice Barrès (1862-1923) and Charles Maurras (1868-1952).⁴⁸¹ Partly as result of this emphasis on cultural continuity, Beyatlı never accepted the language reforms of the 1930s but continued to use Arabic and Persian vocabulary, which he believed had become a part of the "living Turkish language," extensively in his works.

⁴⁸⁰ Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origins and Spread of Nationalism* (New York: Verso, 1983).

⁴⁸¹ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yahya Kemal...*, 46.

Although Beyatlı did not make an immediate impact on the ideology of the young Tanpınar -- by his own admission, Tanpınar was much more “westernist” in his thought than Beyatlı throughout the 1920s⁴⁸² -- he helped Tanpınar to publish his first serious poems in the journal *Dergah*, which during the 1920s was publishing the works of such intellectuals as Beyatlı, Yakup Kadri Karaosmanoğlu (1889-1974) and Ahmet Haşım (1884-1933). His influence on him gradually grew to the extent that Tanpınar’s *Beş Şehir* (“Five Cities”), a collection of essays on important Anatolian cities clarifying their cultural significance, is composed in the style of Beyatlı. Tanpınar also used the figure of Beyatlı as a model for one of the most vivid and interesting characters in Turkish fiction, namely İhsan of *Huzur* (“Peace of Mind”) and *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (“Those Offstage”), about whom more below.

After finishing his university education, Tanpınar began to work as a teacher of literature at various high schools in Erzurum (1923-24), Konya (1925-1927) and Ankara (1927-1932). In early 1932 he returned to Istanbul and renewed his friendship with Beyatlı, with whom he would often go to the Istanbul Conservatory to listen to recordings of Turkish classical music.⁴⁸³ Although such ventures may seem trivial at first, it is important to remember that in the 1930s the Turkish government was actively promoting western classical music; for a brief time, Turkish classical music was actually banned from state-controlled radio. In 1939, Tanpınar was appointed to the newly created chair of

⁴⁸² On this point, see Necmettin Türinay, “Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar: 1932 Öncesi ve Sonrası,” *Hece* No.61 (2002): 84-90.

⁴⁸³ On this point, see Orhan Okay, *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar* (Istanbul: Şule Yayınları, 2000), 23.

“Tanzimat Literature” at Istanbul University, where he began to compose his seminal work on nineteenth-century Ottoman literature.

In 1942, for reasons that are not entirely clear,⁴⁸⁴ Ahmet Hamdi decided to enter political life by using his connections in the Republican People’s Party, notably Cevat Dursunoğlu, whom he befriended while he was teaching literature at Erzurum High School. He served as a member of parliament between 1943 and 1946, representing Kahramanmaraş, which was allotted to him by the Republican People’s Party government even though he had no connection to the town whatsoever. Tanpınar, it seems, disliked single-party politics and even likened the RPP (Republican People's Party) parliament and the cult of İsmet İnönü, who was called “National Chief” (*Milli Şef*) at the time, to a Sufi sheikh and his circle of disciples (singular, *mürid*).⁴⁸⁵ Instead of becoming another clown in the RPP circus, Tanpınar used most of his free time as a member of parliament to work on his novels, which he began to publish in the late 1940s. Not surprisingly, he was not named a candidate in Turkey’s first multi-party elections in 1946. In 1949 he returned to his old post at Istanbul University and, with the exception of travels to various European countries in the 1950s, remained there until his death from a heart attack in 1962.

⁴⁸⁴ In his letters to Dursunoğlu, he complains about the routine life of an academician and expresses his wish for a more fruitful life, which he claims will be possible if he enters parliament. For these letters, see Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Tanpınar’ın Mektupları...*, 54-60.

⁴⁸⁵ Cengizhan Orakçı, *Türk Düşünce Ufukları...*, 23.

II: TANPINAR ON CULTURAL IDENTITY AND HISTORICAL CONTINUITY

In his well-written article on Tanpınar's *Those Offstage*, Erdağ Göknaş argues that "Tanpınar's attention to the psychological effects of the Kemalist cultural revolution of the 1920s and 1930s, his recognition of the persistence of an Ottoman Islamic cultural legacy, and his depiction of the individual alienated and divided by modernization make his work *indispensable for anyone interested in modern Turkish society*."⁴⁸⁶ Yet, curiously, this "indispensable" work was largely ignored when Tanpınar was alive. His novels, most of which he wrote in the late 1940s, for example, began to be read widely only in the 1970s and 1980s, long after his death.

In fact, as Beşir Ayvazođlu mentions, although Tanpınar had many well-connected artists and politicians as friends, those friends often saw Tanpınar as an eccentric, though harmless, curiosity who did not "understand" the Republican reforms, rather than as an important thinker and artist who might have seen more deeply than his contemporaries. Nurullah Ataç, one of the most ardent and influential supporters of the Republican language reforms and a "friend" of Tanpınar, for example, gave him the often-repeated nickname *kırtipil* (shoddy, worthless) because of his ideas and eccentric lifestyle, which sometimes included a little too much alcohol and tobacco, together with an apparent

⁴⁸⁶ Göknaş, "Ottoman Past and Turkish Future...", 647. Italics mine.

neglect of proper attire.⁴⁸⁷ It is ironic, of course, that today most of Tanpınar's work is still in print, published by multiple printing houses and read by large numbers of readers, while the works of the likes of Nurullah Ataç are more or less forgotten. An obvious question, therefore, is why Tanpınar was not appreciated during his lifetime.

In his foreword to the second edition of *Beş Şehir* ("Five Cities"), Tanpınar, after stating that his main objective is to bring about a reconciliation with the Seljuk-Ottoman past with an eye toward resolving the crisis of modern Turkish identity, writes that he aims to "approach life and human beings *not as an engineer but as a man of heart*" (italics mine).⁴⁸⁸ Here, I think, is the real reason for Tanpınar's underestimation by his contemporaries, and the possible source of the difference in thinking that puts Tanpınar miles ahead of most other Ottoman and Turkish thinkers of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries: Tanpınar adamantly refuses to see the society he lives in as an "object to be molded" according to a social engineering project.⁴⁸⁹

I argued in the previous chapters that perhaps the most important reason for the obsession of the Ottoman and Turkish intelligentsia with social engineering was the pervasive effect of crude scientific materialism on Turkish intellectuals. It is not

⁴⁸⁷ See Beşir Ayvazoğlu, "Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar: *Beş Şehir*'le Başlayan Macera," *Aksiyon* No. 112, 25 January 1998, reprinted in Cengizhan Orakçı, *Türk Düşünce Ufukları...*, 203-208.

⁴⁸⁸ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Beş Şehir...*, 9.

⁴⁸⁹ In one of the letters he wrote to his friend Adalet Cimcoz from Paris in 1960, Tanpınar harshly criticizes the language reforms of the 1930s for attempting to create a "synthetic nation" (*sentetik millet*). See Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Tanpınar'ın Mektupları...*, 170.

surprising that they ended up imagining their society as a potential object of experimentation. In strict contrast to this materialist attitude, Tanpınar always argued that society is supported by a living culture which has a logic and memory of its own. Therefore, his real heroes were not the zealous modernizers and self-appointed savior-engineers of society, but rather the people who paid homage to and took care to preserve the cultural and social connections between the past and the present.

In a remarkable, though relatively little-known, short story entitled “Erzurumlu Tahsin” (“Tahsin of Erzurum”), for example, Tanpınar tells the story of Tahsin, an impoverished old *efendi* from the eastern Anatolian city of Erzurum, who, after being wounded in the Balkan Wars of 1911-12, refuses to return to his family, instead living the life of a beggar in Erzurum’s coffeehouses.⁴⁹⁰ In *Five Cities*, Tanpınar mentions that, in fact, an event that occurred while he was teaching in Erzurum inspired him to write this story.⁴⁹¹ One stormy winter night, Tanpınar was having coffee in one of Erzurum’s coffeehouses when an old, almost blind poet entered, reciting verses by memory from the legendary exploits of Battal Gazi, a legendary Arab hero of the early Islamic wars against the Byzantines who was often transformed into a Turkish warrior in local versions of the tales. Nobody paid any attention to this aged practitioner of a dying art form, who eventually sat down silently in a corner. Suddenly, the door of the coffeehouse opened and in walked Tahsin Efendi, the eccentric beggar who often frequented the coffeehouses,

⁴⁹⁰ Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar, *Hikayeler: Abdullah Efendi'nin Rüyaları, Yaz Yağmuru, Kitaplaşmamış Hikayeler* (Istanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2002), 81-95.

⁴⁹¹ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Beş Şehir...*, 48.

covered in snow and holding a wad of cash. He went to the old poet without saying a word, gave the money to him and left.

The scene is eerily reminiscent of a similar scene depicted by Naguib Mahfouz in his celebrated novel *Midaq Alley*.⁴⁹² However, while in Mahfouz's novel, the old Qur'an reciter is scolded and told to go away by the coffeehouse owner, Kirsha, who points to the radio and tells the poet that nobody wants to listen to him any more, the poet in Tanpınar's story is helped by the noble beggar, who reminds the ashamed customers of the proper etiquette in such circumstances. While there seems to be no hope for the "traditional" reciter in Mahfouz's novel, doomed to be crushed by "modernity," represented by the radio, the tradition in Tanpınar's story lives because it reminds the people of decent behavior and basic charity, which humanity will never abandon.

For Tanpınar, this appreciation of tradition was not confined to an act of preserving the picturesque qualities of a reified past. The past and the traditional are important for human beings, according to Tanpınar, because they are also parts of their current identity. In a private conversation mentioned by Şerif Oktürk, Tanpınar argues that a society that does not pay enough attention to its past is not so different from an amnesiac who loses all conception of his or her present, as well as past, identity. Yet, it is important to remember that for Tanpınar the appreciation of Turkey's Islamic cultural heritage would never degenerate into a crude conservatism or a meaningless anti-western

⁴⁹² Naguib Mahfouz, *Midaq Alley*, (tr.) Trevor Le Gassick (New York: Anchor, 1991), 4-6.

tirade.⁴⁹³ In the same conversation, Tanpınar adds that his main objective with regard to the past is not to “conserve” or “preserve” it, but to use the knowledge of the traditional Islamic past in such a way that it would be possible for people to “grow...and be fruitful, embracing the West as well.”⁴⁹⁴

This issue of a meaningful connection with the past is so important for Tanpınar that at the end of *Beş Şehir*, he insists that creating this connection is the “single most significant problem” facing the Turkish people, whom he describes as the “children of a crisis of conscience and identity” (*şuur ve benlik buhranının çocukları*).⁴⁹⁵ Tanpınar identifies the reason for this crisis of identity in an important article entitled “The Change of Civilization and the Inner Human” (*Medeniyet Değişmesi ve İç İnsan*), published in his collection of articles *As I Lived (Yaşadığım Gibi)*, as follows: “The reason for this crisis (of mind) is the duality brought about by moving from one civilization to another...This duality first began in public life; then it split our society in two in terms of mentality, and in the end, deepening and changing its progress, it settled within us as individuals.”⁴⁹⁶

⁴⁹³ In fact, Tanpınar, who often emphasized his gratitude towards French artists such as Paul Valery and André Gide for the formation of his own art, was an early advocate of “European Union” which he saw as “our only hope.” By “our”, he did not mean “Turks” but all “Europeans”, including the Turks. See Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Tanpınar’ın Mektupları...*, 198. In another place he simply refers to himself as a “European”: Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım...*,321.

⁴⁹⁴ Quoted in Ümit Meriç, *Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar: Ebediyetin Huzurunda* (Istanbul: Etkileşim Yayınları, 2006), 261-262.

⁴⁹⁵ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Beş Şehir...*, 208.

⁴⁹⁶ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım...*, 34.

In the same article, Tanpınar observes that the Turkish people have moved from one civilization to another in the past, as well, referring to the shift from the distant, semi-nomadic shamanistic past into the sedentary Islamic civilization, and yet managed to create a remarkable social, cultural and artistic synthesis, namely the Ottoman Empire, as a result of this process. So, the root of the problem is *not* change or the transition from one civilization to another. The problem, according to Tanpınar, is that the shift from Islamic to western civilization from the *Tanzimat* reforms onwards was imposed rather haphazardly from the top, without any regard for continuity or synthesis between the two.⁴⁹⁷ This concern with historical continuity is so crucial for Tanpınar that in an article he first published in the daily *Tasvir-i Efkar* on 7 September 1941, entitled “The Need for Critique” (*Tenkît İhtiyacı*), he even takes the slightly extreme position of accepting “continuity” as an almost reified “power” that pervades not only “physiology, but also social and intellectual life.”⁴⁹⁸ So, it is not surprising at all that Tanpınar ultimately argues for the creation of a “synthesis” between western and Islamic civilizations in Turkey, seeing both the “East” and the “West” as the sources of contemporary Turkish identity.⁴⁹⁹

Tanpınar’s concern for the historical continuity of cultural forms may look rather normal from the vantage point of an increasingly multicultural twenty-first century. Why,

⁴⁹⁷ “It was this idea of...continuity that we lost in the years following the *Tanzimat*.”: Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım...*, 36.

⁴⁹⁸ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler...*, 74.

⁴⁹⁹ “We can only regard the East and the West as our two distinct sources. Both of them exist within us, I mean in our reality.”: Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım...*, 42.

though, were a significant number of Ottoman intellectuals of the nineteenth century, some of whom are studied in this dissertation, so eager to get rid of everything related to the old Islamic tradition in favor of European cultural forms, without any apparent concern for cultural continuity or synthesis?⁵⁰⁰ Tanpınar answers this question in an immensely important article entitled “Fifty Years among Words” (*Kelimeler Arasında Elli Yıl*) which he first published in the daily *Cumhuriyet* on July 4, 1950:

The beginning of the twentieth century looked like the beginning of an earthly paradise. *Science kept all its promises. Life, in tremendous security, looked like a well-set clock....*Nobody could guess that all of those discoveries would lead to a destruction that would shake life to its roots.⁵⁰¹

Of course the destruction Tanpınar mentions above refers to the suicide of Europe in the First and Second World Wars. Tanpınar, unlike most of the Turkish modernizers of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, could not naively believe in the constant “progress” promised by science in a post-war world where European civilization itself, once regarded as the shining example of scientific and cultural progress, lay in ruins.⁵⁰²

⁵⁰⁰ Tanpınar, in an article he published in 1940, argues that the “most obvious characteristic of Turkish literature in the last seventy years is its gradual elimination of connections with the past [Islamic] sources...in creating a European literature.” Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Edebiyat Üzerine Makaleler...*, 91.

⁵⁰¹ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Yaşadığım...*, 84 (italics mine).

⁵⁰² Regarding the issue of science and God in contemporary Europe, Tanpınar, following his literary hero Dostoyevsky, argues in one of his lectures, recorded by his student Gözde Halazoğlu, that “[in Europe] Science destroyed faith...If there is no God, then everything becomes meaningless and absurd...There should be a purpose for life...Why would anybody live without a purpose? This is what Dostoyevsky is all about...and compassion.”: Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Edebiyat Dersleri...*, 32.

If, as I argued in chapter five, one important reason for the declining intellectual popularity of crude nineteenth-century-style materialism in the early twentieth century was the advances in theoretical sciences leading to and including Einstein's relativistic revolution in physics, which rendered most of the postulates of materialism defunct, another reason was certainly the psychological and social effects of the World Wars on the zeitgeist. As Tanpınar writes in his magisterial history of Ottoman literature, it was possible in the nineteenth century to be a "mystic of science" (*ilim mistiği*) and a total believer in progress like Beşir Fuad, who thought it meaningful to write down his thoughts for the advancement of science as his blood dripped to the floor after he slit his wrists.⁵⁰³ In the twentieth century, following the World Wars, however, the whole obsession with progress seemed increasingly meaningless.

III: TANPINAR'S NOVELS:

In his cogent article on Tanpınar's *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü* ("The Clock-Setting Institute"), Walter Feldman argues that "it may not be exaggerated to claim that *The Clock-Setting Institute* is the *most complex novel written in Turkish* until the contemporary group of novelists writing in the 1980s and 1990s" (italics mine).⁵⁰⁴ This argument for the literary complexity of *The Clock-Setting Institute*, which I think is fairly accurate, may be extended, to varying degrees, to Tanpınar's other novels, namely *Mahur*

⁵⁰³ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Ondokuzuncu Asır Türk...*,275.

⁵⁰⁴ Walter Feldman, "Time, Memory and Autobiography in The Clock-Setting Institute of Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar," *Edebiyat* No.8 (1998): 37.

Beste (“Song in Mahur Mode”), which was first published serially in *Ülkü* (“Ideal”) in 1944, *Huzur* (“Peace of Mind”), which was first published in 1949, and *Sahnenin Dışındakiler* (“Those Offstage”), which was published serially in 1950 but was published in book form only in 1973. In fact, I want to argue that these three earlier novels by Tanpınar are structurally and thematically related to one another. In my opinion, Tanpınar created them in such an ingenious way that together, they construct a fascinating “literary reality,” with obvious social and historical overtones, which is explicitly at odds with and implicitly challenging to the historical and social narratives propagated by the Republican elite. Once the reader enters this complex literary reality and the layers of meaning created in these three earlier novels, he or she will find it much easier to understand the depth and power of Tanpınar’s subtle yet devastating critique of the Republican modernization project in his later masterpiece, *The Clock-Setting Institute*, which was first published in 1961.

This is not to say that these three earlier works are to be read simply as preparation for *The Clock-Setting Institute*. Each of these novels stands on its own as an independent artistic achievement. In fact, one may argue that in terms of literary sophistication, at least one of these earlier novels, *Huzur*, is on a par with, if not at a higher level than, *The Clock-Setting Institute*. Notwithstanding, Tanpınar’s novels as a whole display an incredible unity of artistic vision, so that the sophisticated criticisms, as well as the sharp humor and cynicism, of *The Clock-Setting Institute* are most meaningful when seen against the background of Tanpınar’s earlier works. Therefore, before

analyzing *The Clock-Setting Institute*, I shall turn my attention to Tanpınar's earlier novels. I will begin with his third novel, *Those Offstage*.

In his perceptive analysis of *Those Offstage*, Erdağ Göknaç argues that the unique ideas expressed in this novel are best appreciated if they are set against the ideas of the generation of "nationalist" writers such as Peyami Safa (1899-1961), Yakup Kadri Karaosmanođlu, Halide Edip Adivar (1884-1964), Ziya Göknaç and Yusuf Akçura (1876-1935), many of whom were Tanpınar's contemporaries. According to Göknaç, in response to a perceptibly declining Ottoman Empire, the "semi-colonial" status of which was becoming increasingly obvious, these authors tried to "establish a new sociocultural narrative that imagined what might emerge out of the collapse of the Ottoman Empire: an independent Turkish nation-state. This involved not only a shift away from Ottoman-Islamic historiography, but also the creation of a *new identity based on Enlightenment ideas*. In order to reinforce this secular identity, the golden age of the new 'Westernizing' Turkish Republic would be 'pre-Islamic' and situated in Turkic Central Asia" (italics mine).⁵⁰⁵

I demonstrated in earlier chapters that the philosophical content of the so-called "Enlightenment ideas" that supposedly guided these authors included much more crude materialism of the nineteenth-century German type than liberal wisdom of the Scottish (à la Adam Smith and David Hume) or the French Enlightenment. In any case, Göknaç is certainly correct that this new "sociocultural narrative" would then become the basis of

⁵⁰⁵ Erdağ Göknaç, "Ottoman Past and Turkish Future...", 648.

the “Turkish national core narrative,” which, he argues, has four major plot points: “(1) colonial encounter, foreign military occupation; (2) the Anatolian turn, a movement toward the people; (3) national consciousness, nation over self; (4) cultural revolution, a new history and identity.”⁵⁰⁶ It is interesting that although this nationalist narrative is used as a subtext by Tanpınar in *Those Offstage*, he intentionally blurs and questions it by leaving his protagonists intentionally reluctant, almost in a “Hamlet-like indecision,” to use Gökner’s words, regarding the “break in history, culture, and identity that it necessitates.”⁵⁰⁷ In other words, Tanpınar is well-aware of the basic contours of the core nationalist narrative, yet he remains deeply skeptical about it.

The basic structure of *Those Offstage* is built around protagonist Dr. Cemal Bey’s memoirs, which recall the occupation of Istanbul by the Allies after World War I (November 13, 1918- September 23, 1923). The novel opens with Cemal’s return to Istanbul in 1920 and centers around his interactions with İhsan, his former teacher, friend and mentor; and Sabiha, his unrequited love interest. İhsan, an ardent nationalist with connections to the resistance movement in Anatolia, gradually convinces Cemal to undertake underground missions for the nationalists. The most important of these missions seems to involve convincing an elderly Ottoman statesman named Nasır Pasha, who is depicted as fluctuating between the anti-nationalist Ottoman government in Istanbul, which is collaborating with the Allies, and the nationalist resistance in Ankara,

⁵⁰⁶ Ibid., 648-649.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid., 649.

to help the nationalist cause by publishing his memoirs in a way that would show the characters connected to the nationalist cause in a good light. In fact, İhsan's intention is to use this memoir as a political tool to attack politicians and statesmen who oppose the nationalist cause. In the end, Nasır Pasha does not publish his memoirs but intentionally gives useless documents to İhsan and Cemal after declaring his intention to leave Istanbul for good. The climax of the novel is reached with Nasır Pasha's murder, in which İhsan and members of the resistance are loosely implicated.

At first glance, there seems to be no doubt about Tanpınar's inclinations regarding the issues of secularism and nationalism. In an important passage in which the nationalist İhsan debates with one İbrahim Bey and one Arif Bey, who are trying to convince him to take a job offered by the Istanbul government, İhsan bluntly states that his sympathy lies with the resistance movement in Anatolia and that "our fate will be decided there. There is the real stage. We all here are unfortunately just spectators. We are offstage."⁵⁰⁸

The above passage, from which the title of the novel is derived, seems straightforward enough to suggest that there is no choice but to join the nationalist movement and become part of the "real stage" of the bright secular nationalist future. However, the protagonist, Cemal, continues to be ambivalent about the whole issue throughout the book. When he takes a stroll in his childhood neighborhood, he continually laments the lost religious faith (*iman*), which "was not only a common tie in society relating us to God in the past, but was also the sole source that fed and created our

⁵⁰⁸ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler...*, 135.

facial gestures, polite ways of behavior and such, in short, interpersonal relations.”⁵⁰⁹

Cemal is simply not sure, it seems, whether the bright secular nationalist future promised by the resistance in Anatolia will be able to fill the “sociological hole” created by the decline of religion in society. In addition, he repeatedly expresses his doubts about the national resistance: “What complex issues! Were they really doing anything? Or did a few people get together and play a game of secret society....I have to say this, as well: that this anger and the sense of not believing in the seriousness of those around me will continue till the end....In reality, I was immersed in a strange lethargy, looking for solitude, peace and daydreams.”⁵¹⁰

Cemal is also deeply in love with Sabiha, and his unrequited love (and Sabiha’s marriage to another man later) adds another layer to his doubts and indecision. In the words of Göknaç, he is caught between “Sabiha and İhsan, between self and nation, between Istanbul and Anatolia, and between a cosmopolitan late-Ottoman cultural past and the nationalistic Turkish future.”⁵¹¹ Moreover, although Cemal continues to revere İhsan, who sends him to Nasır Pasha with the cynical intention of helping him to finish writing a set of memoirs that would be used later for the nationalist cause, Cemal seems even more empathetic towards Nasır Pasha, who represents the dying past of the empire.

⁵⁰⁹ Ibid., 21.

⁵¹⁰ Ibid., 173.

⁵¹¹ Erdağ Göknaç, “Ottoman Past and Turkish Future....,” 649.

In a critically important passage towards the end of the novel, after Nasır Pasha declares his intention of leaving Istanbul for Italy and agrees to relinquish the documents requested by İhsan (which later turn out to be useless), Cemal and Nasır Pasha begin to ritually burn each and every remaining document and photograph in the pasha's possession in the fireplace of his house. This is a thinly veiled allusion to the later Republican attitude towards the Ottoman past, which amounted to eradicating it, with the exception of some of the heroic feats of early sultans, such as Mehmed the Conqueror and Süleyman the Magnificent, which are repackaged and taught to schoolchildren as anachronistic instances of past "national glory". As they are frantically burning the documents and photographs, however, it suddenly dawns on Cemal that it is impossible to destroy the past: "As if we two alone would purge and cleanse the world....And we continuously were burning this strange thing called the past! But burning was of no use. Everything we burned was clinging to our minds, names were reminding us of other names, memories were adding up. The vacuum opened its mouth and it threw everything we poured into it back to us."⁵¹² It is exactly this psychological power of memory and history that the secular nationalist narrative fails to appreciate, according to Tanpınar, instead creating a society stuck in a shallow present reality devoid of any meaningful connection to history.

In *Those Offstage*, Tanpınar uses a number of references to characters from his two earlier novels in order to create a panoramic view of life in Istanbul from the end of

⁵¹² Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler...*, 271-272.

the late nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century. For example, Cemal and İhsan change the conversation abruptly when İhsan's nephew "Mümtaz enters the room."⁵¹³ This Mümtaz is the protagonist of Tanpınar's *Peace of Mind*. Similarly, when Cemal visits a certain Tevfik Bey, who is a friend of İhsan and connected to the nationalist cause, he meets a young girl named "Nuran" who informs him that she is Tevfik Bey's niece and shows him a device designed by her uncle to help her learn how to whirl like a whirling dervish. We encounter Tevfik Bey and his niece again in *Peace of Mind*, which is set in the Istanbul of late 1930s. In *Peace of Mind* Nuran is Mümtaz's love interest and the other main protagonist.

Likewise, İhsan, one of the main protagonists of both *Those Offstage* and *Peace of Mind*, assumes the role of the mentor of Mümtaz in *Peace of Mind* and has long, passionate conversations with him about the "East" and the "West" and the identity crisis suffocating Turkey. In fact, the very first chapter of *Peace of Mind* is entitled "İhsan". Not surprisingly, the character of İhsan, who acts almost like a mouthpiece for Yahya Kemal Beyatlı's ideas about culture and history, teaches at Istanbul University in both novels and writes propaganda pieces supporting the nationalist movement in Anatolia, just as Beyatlı did during the occupation of Istanbul. He is depicted as a respectable figure in both novels. Yet it is noteworthy that both Cemal in *Those Offstage* and Mümtaz in *Peace of Mind*, who I think are more representative of Tanpınar's own views about

⁵¹³ Ibid., 105.

culture, history and nationalism, subtly differ from İhsan in that although they are fascinated and moved by his charisma, they are reluctant to buy the nationalist dreams he sells wholesale.

In another passage in *Those Offstage*, Cemal visits the home of his uncle Behçet Bey and catches him in his room in the dark singing and playing the “Song in Mahur Mode” on his lute (*tanbur*).⁵¹⁴ This is the same Behçet Bey, son of İsmail Molla, a member of the Ottoman *ulema*, whose story is elaborated in Tanpınar’s first novel, *Song in Mahur Mode*. The song Behçet Bey plays, mentioned in both *Those Offstage* and *Peace of Mind*, was composed by a certain Talat Bey, a distant relative of Behçet Bey’s deceased wife, Atiye Hanım, after Talat Bey’s wife had left him for an Egyptian colonel.⁵¹⁵ Atiye Hanım, we learn in *Song in Mahur Mode*, was not happy in her marriage, which had been decreed by a royal order from the sultan himself.⁵¹⁶ She secretly loved a certain Dr. Refik Bey. She loved to sing the song in Mahur mode when she was alone, perhaps because Talat Bey’s love for his wife reminded her of her own love for Dr. Refik Bey. Tanpınar rather morbidly informs us in *Those Offstage* that rumors circulated that Behçet Bey had choked and killed Atiye Hanım with a piece of cloth one night as she was singing this song.⁵¹⁷ Tanpınar writes in *Those Offstage* that

⁵¹⁴ Ibid., 109-110.

⁵¹⁵ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste...*,66. Also, Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Huzur...*,56.

⁵¹⁶ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste...*,38.

⁵¹⁷ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Sahnenin Dışındakiler...*,110.

since Behçet Bey's books and calligraphy samples had burned in a fire, Behçet Bey, who was fond of fixing old clocks, "resembled a stopped clock" himself.⁵¹⁸ The burning of Behçet Bey's books harks back to the burning of Nasır Pasha's documents, but there, the message was that you cannot destroy the past by destroying its symbols. Here, the message seems to be that living only in the past is not a solution to the identity crisis, either.

Indeed, the metaphor of the "non-functional clock" serves to emphasize that the old *ulama* families, including Behçet Bey's, were no longer functional in the society of the late Ottoman Empire. As a whole, *Song in Mahur Mode* may be read as the story of the decline of the *ilmiye* class (men possessing specialized religious knowledge) in the late Ottoman Empire and the resulting crisis of faith in the public realm.⁵¹⁹

Thanks in large part to Carter Findley's groundbreaking work on bureaucratic reform in the Ottoman Empire,⁵²⁰ we know that the sociological reconfiguration of the ruling class in the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire was deeply connected to the reforms of the *Tanzimat*. As certain segments of the ruling elite increased their political influence vis-à-vis the sultan and as the traditional pattern of government slowly gave way to a legal/rationalist paradigm, a new game of political balance between the palace

⁵¹⁸ Ibid., 108.

⁵¹⁹ On this point, see Ekrem Işın, "Osmanlı İlmiye Sınıfının Romanı: *Mahur Beste*," *Kitaplık* No.40 (2000): 113-122.

⁵²⁰ Findley, *Bureaucratic Reform...*

and bureaucrats began that would continue until the end of the empire. The winners in this game, as Findley informs us, were the new-style bureaucrats emerging out of the old scribal service (*kalemiye*, “men of the pen”), with their knowledge of European languages in high demand. The losers were the members of the old religious class, *ilmiye*, or the men of specialized religious knowledge. As the empire’s need for the diplomatic and negotiating skills of the “men of the pen” increased, the old scribal service, which resembled a guild in its organization, was gradually transformed into what we may call a civil bureaucracy with an emphasis on the ideals of discipline and procedural rationality. Moreover the innovative character of the Tanzimat reforms led to new socio-cultural configurations within the ruling bureaucracy as a result of which the traditionalist Muslim officials with no knowledge of western languages found it increasingly difficult to rise in the ranks.

Ahmet Hamdi Tanpınar thoroughly understood these difficulties because his own father, Hüseyin Fikri Efendi, a judge, was a member of this dying class of “men of knowledge.” In fact, each of the main characters in his *Song in Mahur Mode* -- Sabri Effendi, İsmail Molla, and Ata Molla -- represents a particular response to the reforms by the members of the old religious class. Ata Molla, the father of Atiye Hanım, completely rejects the reforms and the new social reality they create, immersing himself in stories of the glory days of the religious class from the classical histories of Mustafa Naima (1655-1716) and İbrahim Peçevi (1572-1650). Sabri Efendi, in contrast, becomes a member of a Masonic lodge, begins to learn French and establishes contact with the Young Turks

working against the sultan.⁵²¹ In many respects, his story is similar to the real-life story of Ali Suavi (1838-1878), who began his life as a minor member of the *ulema* and gradually transformed himself into a strange type of revolutionary; he was killed in 1878 in an attempted palace coup aimed at dethroning Sultan Abdülhamid II.⁵²² In the novel, Sabri Efendi, who teaches Persian to Atiye Hanım when she is a small child by using phrases like “*Man ba diyar-e farank besyar tajaddud deedam*” (“I saw many novelties in the foreign lands”) or “*Mamalek-e mahrusa-e shahana mahrum-e tarakki est*” (“The protected lands of the sultan [the Ottoman Empire] are devoid of progress”),⁵²³ vehemently argues against İsmail Molla, claiming that Islamic civilization is bankrupt and that the East is dead.⁵²⁴ He concludes that the entire Turkish nation is just an orphan of this dead civilization.

In response, İsmail Molla, who seems much closer to Tanpınar in his views about civilizations and religions, argues that although the Islamic civilization about which Sabri Efendi “read in the books” may indeed be dead or dying, the “living civilization” that he sees every day seems to be doing just fine. Arguing that he learned more about Islam from an “old beggar who prayed alone in faulty Arabic” than by reading classical texts, he concludes that instead of referring to a fixed entity inscribed in the religious texts,

⁵²¹ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste...*,73..

⁵²² On Ali Suavi, see Hüseyin Çelik, *Ali Suavi ve Dönemi* (Istanbul: İletişim Yayınları, 1994).

⁵²³ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Mahur Beste...*,87.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, 87-89.

“what we may call the East, Islam or this and that are in fact realities that we ourselves create in these lands with our lives.”⁵²⁵ As long as vibrant and creative people continue to live in Turkey, according to İsmail Molla, there will always be some hope.

Having argued that there is indeed a unified artistic vision regarding religion, civilizations and social change in Tanpınar’s earlier novels and after delineating the general contours of this artistic vision above, I will now turn my attention to Tanpınar’s *The Clock-Setting Institute*, which I consider to be his most important work.

TANPINAR'S *THE CLOCK-SETTING INSTITUTE*

On the surface, *The Clock-Setting Institute* may seem to be an absurd story about a bureaucratic institute founded in Republican Turkey to synchronize all the clocks and watches in the country to prevent inefficiency and loss of productivity caused by uncertainty about the exact time. The book also specifically refers to the problem of public clocks that were not in agreement. As such, it is a thinly disguised allusion to the overall Republican project of creating a monolithic “Turkish” nation in Anatolia out of what remained of the cosmopolitan Ottoman Empire. Indeed, if the novel is read primarily as the fictional history of a bureaucratic organization, then it is quite difficult to account for the fact that a straightforward story of the institution does not appear until the book’s third main chapter. In fact, the first two chapters, entitled “Great Hopes” and “Little Truths,” give the rather convoluted life story of a certain Hayri İrdal, who will

⁵²⁵ Ibid., 92.

later be vice-director of the Clock-Setting Institute, in the form of a memoir written by him after the death of his *velinimet* (“benefactor”), Halit Ayarç1, who is the founder of and the true “intellectual force” behind the institute.

The real meaning and the symbolic complexity of the novel simply cannot be understood without clarifying the identity and the characteristics of Hayri İrdal himself. By his own admission, İrdal is not a well-read man. Walter Feldman, referring to the ludicrously small amount of material that İrdal admits to having read -- a few newspaper articles and some translations from Arabic, Persian, French and English -- writes that this “is indeed the reading matter of an individual who exercised the absolute minimum of personal choice, who accepted whatever might amuse an adolescent. What he enumerates here is essentially the late Ottoman equivalent of the magazines and newspapers in an American doctor’s waiting room.”⁵²⁶ This, however, is exactly the point that Tanpınar wants to make. İrdal has a sketchy education at best and, by his own admission, was a failure in life until his fortunate encounter with Halit Ayarç1. İrdal represents the “common Turkish man” after the disintegration of the cosmopolitan Ottoman Empire: he is gullible, uneducated and decidedly *un-cosmopolitan*. His only remarkable characteristics, as we will see below, are his opportunism and his malleability.

İrdal, who we learn was born in 1892, spent his teenage years either visiting the watch-maker Nuri Efendi’s shop to get some rudimentary knowledge of timepieces or frequenting the mansion of the elderly Ottoman aristocrat Abdüsselam Bey, where the old

⁵²⁶ Feldman, “Time, Memory and Autobiography in *The Clock-Setting Institute...*,” 39-40.

man lived with many of his relatives. This mansion, frequently visited by the Greek druggist Aristidi Efendi and the half-mad mystic Seyyid Lütfullah, as well as many of Abdüsselam Bey's relatives, is a symbol of the cosmopolitan Ottoman Empire, as Tanpınar makes clear: "After the declaration of freedom,⁵²⁷ this mansion, like the empire it resembles on many levels, disintegrated. First [Abdüsselam Bey's] brothers and sisters left, together with Bosnia-Herzegovina, Eastern Rumelia and the North African lands; then during the Balkan Wars, little *beys* and some of the brides left the house."⁵²⁸ At the end the only people who remained with the dying aristocrat were İrdal and his wife, one of the girls in the mansion raised and educated by Abdüsselam Bey. This feature supports my general point that İrdal is in fact a symbol for the common Turkish man. İrdal (symbolizing Turks) is the only remnant of the once glorious and cosmopolitan empire (symbolized by Abdüsselam Bey and the mansion).

The first chapter, "Great Hopes," which tells the story of İrdal's early life spent visiting this mansion is, if my reading is correct, a general allegory for life in the later period of the Ottoman Empire. The chapter ends with the deaths of Nuri Efendi, the watch-maker, who represents the mystical wisdom of the old empire, and the Greek druggist Aristidi Efendi in a fire before World War I. Obviously, the end of the empire and the founding of the Turkish Republic also meant, quite literally, the death or the deportation of the large Greek Christian minority from Turkey. Like Aristidi Efendi, a

⁵²⁷ Here, Tanpınar refers to the Second Constitutional Revolution of 1908.

⁵²⁸ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü...*, 40-41.

good friend of Abdüsselam Bey with whom he was doing alchemical experiments, the Greek community of the old Turkey died in the not-so-symbolic fire and destruction of World War I.

İrdal joins the war effort as a soldier; the second chapter, “Little Truths,” recounts his life in Istanbul after his return from the front. He stays for a brief time with his patron Abdüsselam Bey until the old gentleman’s lonely death. If my allegorical reading is correct, this brief time that İrdal spends with Abdüsselam Bey should correspond to the period between 1918, that is the end of World War I, and 1923, the foundation of the Turkish Republic.⁵²⁹ Abdüsselam Bey’s death triggers a bitter fight over his legacy among his old relatives, who accuse İrdal of stealing and concealing the old man’s secret treasure after İrdal, having had too much to drink one night, boasts to a friend about an imaginary diamond owned by Abdüsselam Bey. Of course there is no secret treasure at all because the old gentleman was nearly bankrupt when he died, just like the old empire he symbolizes. Nevertheless, in the ensuing legal nightmare, İrdal loses his temper and suffers a breakdown in court. As a result, he is sentenced to psychiatric incarceration and forced to be treated by Judicial Psychiatrist Dr. Ramiz.

So, Tanpınar implies that the first years of the Turkish Republic, corresponding in the novel to the first years of İrdal’s life after the death of Abdüsselam Bey, resembled a

⁵²⁹ Berna Moran suggests that this second part corresponds roughly to the historical period between the Tanzimat Reforms and the Second Constitutional Revolution of 1908: Berna Moran, “A.H. Tanpınar’ın Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü,” *Birikim* 6, No.37 (1978): 37-44. I do not think that this suggestion makes much sense.

madhouse. During this period, the 1920s, Atatürk launched his so-called “cultural reforms.” In earlier chapters, I argued that the now almost incomprehensible zeal for modernization which swept Turkey in the 1920s had its roots in the almost religious belief of the modernizers in the power of rationalism and science to change society on a grand scale. Dr. Ramiz, a true believer in progress and the power of European science, in his case “psychotherapy,” to transform society, is of course a perfect symbol for the zealous Turkish modernizers of the 1920s. Tanpınar captures this unshakable belief in the power of science when he has İrdal say, “On that day, I understood that Dr. Ramiz saw this treatment system not as a simple method to apply to appropriate patients, but as the sole means of saving the entire world, a way of salvation that you could only see in religions. According to him this new science was everything....It was the sole key to the enigma of life.”⁵³⁰

Dr. Ramiz, who was, not coincidentally, educated in Vienna, convinces İrdal that he has a “father complex”. In the words of Dr. Ramiz, “In a sociological way, we all suffer from this sickness. Look around: we always complain about the past; we are all busy with it. We want to change it. What is the meaning of all this? Is this not a father complex? Are we all not preoccupied with it? What is this love we profess for the Hittites or the Phrygians or the other tribes? Is that something other than a father complex?”⁵³¹ A

⁵³⁰ Ahmed Hamdi Tanpınar, *Saatleri Ayarlama Enstitüsü...*, 101.

⁵³¹ Ibid., 101.

major preoccupation of nationalist Turkish historians in the late 1920s and early 1930s, especially after the foundation of the Turkish Historical Society (*Türk Tarih Kurumu*) in 1931, was to investigate the history of early Anatolian civilizations and “prove” that all of these civilizations were, in fact, Turkish. Such unfortunate attempts eventually led to the now infamous *Türk Tarih Tezi* (Turkish Historical Thesis), taught as official dogma in Turkish secondary schools until the late 1930s, which argued that the pre-historic origin of the entire “white race” could be found in Central Asia, and that therefore all of the “civilized races” of the contemporary world were in fact Turkic in origin. But we may also argue that the “father complex” is “over-determined” and has more than one explanation. If one of these explanations may refer to the “Turkish Historical Thesis,” the other, more obvious one, may refer to the cult of personality created around Atatürk himself. The book selectively mentions only the one that is less risky to talk about.

Tanpınar’s depiction of Dr. Ramiz and his extravagant ideas is so surreal that one could hardly think that Dr. Ramiz, who seems to be an overarching symbol for the attitude of the early Turkish modernizers toward science, might be modeled after a real-life scientist. However, I would argue that this is, in fact, exactly the case. Dr. Ramiz and his psychoanalytic theories about Turkish society (and about İrdal, of course) show an uncanny resemblance to the ideas of Dr. İzzeddin Şadan,⁵³² the first Turkish

⁵³² On İzzeddin Şadan, see Levent Kayaalp, “L’histoire d’un rendez-vous manqué: l’exemple de la Turquie,” *Topique* 89, No.4 (2004): 119-127.

psychoanalyst, who in 1943 published a fascinating book about Turkish society called *The Hallucination of Happiness*.⁵³³

As Levent Kayaalp points out in his article on the history of psychiatry in Turkey, Şadan was an assistant of Dr. Mazhar Osman Usman (1884-1951) in Toptaşı Bimarhanesi, a mental hospital where Mazhar Osman, for the first time in Turkish history, treated mental patients using modern psychiatric methods.⁵³⁴ After returning to Turkey following a brief stay in France and setting up his private practice in Istanbul, Dr. İzzeddin Şadan published *The Hallucination of Happiness*, in which he argues that he has reached “certain sociological conclusions as a result of the psychiatric examination of the healthy and the unhealthy for thirteen years.”⁵³⁵

And what are these sociological conclusions? After stating that “the only way to examine society is to use the methods of psychiatry,”⁵³⁶ Şadan argues that Turkish society suffers from an “ambivalence complex” at the root of which lies its transition from the matriarchal shamanistic early Turkic belief system to the patriarchy of Islam.⁵³⁷ This trauma, argues Şadan, is reflected in such attitudes as a certain disinterest in

⁵³³ İzzeddin Şadan, *Birsam-ı Saadet* (İstanbul: Sinan Basımevi, 1943).

⁵³⁴ “Il est interné à Toptaşı Bimarhanesi et il est en conflit permanent avec le médecin-chef Mazhar Osman qui n’apprécie pas du tout, ni ce jeune interne querelleur ni les idées freudiennes. D’après les dires de Şadan, dans cet hôpital, même le personnel administratif ne veut pas entendre parler de Freud. En 1927 il est envoyé en France, dans le service de Fursac, où il résida jusqu’en 1930.” In Kayaalp, 122.

⁵³⁵ Şadan, *Birsam-ı Saadet*, 3.

⁵³⁶ Ibid., 3.

⁵³⁷ Ibid., 10-11.

individualism or an “enmity towards science,” especially modern biology, which is not only “the newest and the most extraordinary of human discoveries” but is in itself a “religion” (*Bioloji bizzat bir dindir*).⁵³⁸

The most significant cause of this enmity towards positive science in Turkish society, according to Şadan, is the “sickness of Islamic mysticism, which played a significant role in the formation of Turkish society.”⁵³⁹ After stating that the original Islam preached by the prophet Muhammad was a natural and healthy religion, he argues that later developments in Islamic history leading to the formation of various mystical schools -- which were, of course, quite influential in the Turks’ conversion to Islam -- fostered an unhealthful attitude towards loving God which can only be explained as a manifestation of homosexuality.⁵⁴⁰ Turks were particularly vulnerable to this “trap” of homosexuality, which he argues is related to the sexual urges a child feels towards his mother, because of their earlier matriarchal social system.

This covert homosexuality, which, according to Şadan, can clearly be observed in old Ottoman poems, is the main reason why Ottoman thought “could not reach the rationalist thought of the West.”⁵⁴¹ He continues his far-fetched and utterly unbelievable claims by arguing that the only way out of the conundrum and the only means of finally

⁵³⁸ Ibid., 18.

⁵³⁹ Ibid., 18. The other reasons, he argues in the same place, are its ignorance of rationalism and the encyclopedic tradition, and its inclination toward socialism.

⁵⁴⁰ Ibid., 20.

⁵⁴¹ Ibid., 28.

reaching the level of western rational thought is a “monistic materialism” that supposedly teaches us that there are no essential differences between human beings and animals but that, like animals, humankind consists of separate races. In a rather expected turn, he finishes his book by advocating nationalism based on racism as the most viable option for Turkish society.⁵⁴² For Tanpınar, however, Şadan/Ramiz serves chiefly as a symbol of boundless faith in the transformative effects of science, including psychology.

After being treated by Dr. Ramiz, İrdal, in the third chapter of the book, entitled “Toward the Dawn,” becomes a regular at a coffeehouse where one day Dr. Ramiz introduces him to a certain Halit Ayarç, whose watch needs repairing. Impressed by İrdal’s knowledge of watches, Ayarç, a con-man of extraordinary charisma and ability with connections to the state, convinces İrdal to be his right-hand man and the assistant director of a new institute he plans to found for the synchronization of the clocks and watches in the country. Ayarç’s plan is to combine İrdal’s knowledge of clocks with his American-style marketing technique to sell the idea to the state authorities and gain massive financial and political influence in the process.

This third chapter should correspond to the mid- to late 1930s, when Turkey experimented with “statism” (*devletçilik*). In this context, Halit Ayarç is the prototypical “Turkish Entrepreneur” (*Türk Müteşebbisi*) whom the Turkish government tried so hard to create in the 1930s. Now that Turkish society had been “cured” by the cultural reforms of the late 1920s and early 1930s, it was time to develop it economically by using state-

⁵⁴² Ibid., 59-61.

centric Import Substitution Industrialization (I.S.I), of which Turkey became one of the pioneers among developing countries.

What is actually produced by the institute founded by Ayarcı and İrdal is nothing more than empty slogans and absurd bureaucratization coupled with extreme nepotism. The book ends rather abruptly when a disillusioned Ayarcı, whose idea for producing clock-shaped private houses is rejected by a committee, disbands the institution and replaces it with a “permanent liquidation commission” where the old employees of the institute, essentially the family and friends of İrdal, will continue to be employed. Shortly thereafter, Ayarcı dies in a car accident.

If my reading of the novel is correct, then with his *Clock-Setting Institute*, Tanpınar managed to write the darkest satire imaginable about Turkish society. This is a novel devoid of any traditional “heroes.” Meanwhile, perhaps the most unsympathetic anti-hero of the novel is Hayri İrdal himself, who functions as a metaphor for Turkish society, opportunistically following the lead of charlatans in the guise of scientists and con-men in the guise of politicians and reformers.

Tanpınar's intricate artistic response to the scientifically-inspired social-engineering projects of the Turkish statesmen sets him apart from the earlier figures studied in this dissertation, such as Said Nursi and Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, in that there is no mention of religion in Tanpınar's works as a solution to the social and cultural problems of Turkish society. His deep understanding of history and society probably taught Tanpınar that there are no ready-made magical solutions to serious social

problems. The humor and cynicism displayed in his novels towards easy “scientific” answers to the problems of society, on the other hand, demonstrate that Tanpınar did not see much difference between the religious and scientific saviors of society. For this reason, he is probably the most complex and sophisticated Turkish intellectual in the entire period from the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth century studied in this dissertation.

Chapter 8: Conclusion

Regarding the philosophical question concerning religion and its future in an increasingly globalized modern world, interesting recent discussions of religion by evolutionary psychologists, biologists and anthropologists aside,⁵⁴³ I want to remark that my general assessment of religion and its social function is much closer in spirit to the ideas of early humanists such as the Italian poet Francesco Petrarca (1304-1374), who

⁵⁴³ See especially Scott Atran, *In Gods we Trust: The Evolutionary Landscape of Religion* (New York: Oxford University Press), 2002. See also Pascal Boyer, *Religion Explained: The Evolutionary Origins of Religious Thought* (New York: Basic Books), 2001 and Robert McCauley and Emma Cohen, "Cognitive Science and Naturalness of Religion," *Philosophy Compass* 4 (2010):1-14. These authors essentially argue that religion is an evolutionary "by-product" which exists not because it necessarily serves any function but because such basic religious traits as positing "supernatural agents" (spirits, gods, etc.) once had a distinct evolutionary advantage. To simplify things a bit here, the argument is that if a primitive hunter sees a slightly moving leaf of a tree in the jungle, it would be advantageous for him to assume an "agent" (perhaps a tiger, let's say) behind the tree and run away. If he is wrong, it means that he has lost only a negligible amount of energy, but if he is right, he has just saved his life by his assumption of the existence of an agent behind the natural phenomenon. A human being who did not possess such a human biological characteristic of positing and assuming agents behind natural phenomena would simply perish (a case of negative natural selection) because he would be more susceptible to attacks by animals, etc. The underlying argument here, of course, is that "God" or "gods" are in fact imaginary agents created by the application of this essentially adaptive human evolutionary trait, which was originally unrelated to religion, to all of the natural world. God is the super-agent posited by the human mind to exist behind nature. On the other hand, there is another evolutionary argument, represented by the works of David Sloan Wilson, among others, which claims that religions are not evolutionary "by-products" of other unrelated evolutionary adaptive mechanisms but that religions themselves play an adaptive role within inter-group competition. The argument, in a nutshell, is that early human groups which evolved to have primitive religions had higher levels of group cohesion and social solidarity, which gave them an evolutionary advantage over other human groups lacking such religious characteristics, which in time led to an almost universally religious human landscape. For the second argument, see David Sloan Wilson, *Darwin's Cathedral* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press), 2002.

emphasized the emotional appeal of religion and argued that “theology is actually poetry, poetry concerning God,” effective not because it “proved” anything but because it reached the heart.⁵⁴⁴ Popular religion, in this understanding, provides an “everyday poetry” to the masses and allows them to make sense of this turbulent world and the emotional challenges it presents to the human psyche. As such, religion provides a level of emotional comfort and ease for human beings which simply cannot be matched by the sophisticated, yet emotionally dull, philosophical consolations of science, and hence will be a continuing reality of human societies to varying degrees in the future. The exact form religion will take in the global world in general, and in Turkey in particular, however is difficult to assess.

The more relevant question here, however, is about the discourses of “modernization” and “westernization” in which religion plays a role rather than about religion itself. This study, hence, has focused on these discourses as they historically played out in the Ottoman Empire and the Turkish Republic between roughly 1860 and 1960. Recently, the issue of “modernization” as a distinct historical phenomenon from “westernization” has attracted the attention of serious historians. Accusing the political narratives, such as Francis Fukuyama's,⁵⁴⁵ which present the story of the twentieth century “as a triumph of the West,” of fundamentally misreading the trajectory of the past

⁵⁴⁴ Letter from Petrarch to his brother Gherardo, 2 December 1348, quoted in Karen Armstrong, *The Case For God* (New York: Anchor Books, 2010), 167.

⁵⁴⁵ Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press, 1992).

hundred years, “which has seen something more like a reorientation of the world towards the East,” Niall Ferguson forcefully argued that

It is only when the extent of Western dominance in 1900 is appreciated that the true narrative arc of the twentieth century reveals itself...This was nothing less than the reorientation of the world, redressing a balance between West and East that had been lost in the four centuries after 1500....If the Orient had simply “occidentalized” itself, of course, we might still salvage the idea of an ultimate Western triumph. Yet no Asian country- not even Japan in the Meiji era- transformed itself into a replica of a European nation state. *On the contrary, most Asian nationalists insisted that their countries must modernize a la carte, embracing only those aspects of the Western model that suited their purposes, and retaining important components of their traditional cultures.*⁵⁴⁶

Similarly, in an important review essay recently published in *Foreign Affairs*, Mustafa Akyol suggested that one must abandon “the standard narrative about Turkey’s recent history,” which presents the history of Turkish modernization as the triumph of western rationalism over traditional religious obscurantism, in order to understand the finer details of Turkish history and society. According to this “standard narrative,”

⁵⁴⁶ Niall Ferguson, *The War of the World* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), lxviii-lxix. Italics mine.

Turkey was once the sick man of Europe, trapped in religious obscurantism. Then Kemal Atatürk came along with westernizing reforms and took the nation on a great secular leap forward. Unfortunately, however, the forces of darkness survived and have recently reemerged in the guise of the quasi-religious Justice and Development Party (AKP). At the heart of this story is a battle between Western enlightenment and obscurantism. *But in fact, Turkey's real dichotomy has always been between its westernizers and its modernizers. Whereas the westernizers, led by Atatürk, sought to remodel Turkey into a fully European nation, emphasizing cultural westernization and secularization, the modernizers called for political and economic reform but insisted on preserving the traditional culture and religion at the same time.*⁵⁴⁷

This dissertation, for the first time in historical literature as far as I know, has provided an in-depth look at the philosophical roots of the differences between the discourses of “modernizers” versus the “westernizers,” to use Akyol's terminology, in late Ottoman and Turkish intellectual history. This study has argued that “science” and “religion” were, in fact, catchwords used in this debate to represent, in effect, two competing discourses of modernization. Refusing to conceptualize Turkish intellectual history as a Manichean struggle between “modernity” and “tradition” or between “reason” and “religion,” my historical approach has identified what may perhaps be

⁵⁴⁷ Mustafa Akyol, “An Unlikely Trio,” *Foreign Affairs* 89, No.5 (2010): 125-126. Italics mine.

called a “deep commitment to technological and economic development” as the hidden intellectual thread linking these two competing versions of modernity in Turkey. This study has also argued that “morality” and “interpersonal behavior” (especially the social norms regarding gender relations) became the historical grounds on which these contentious versions of modernity played a hidden game of political dominance.

Such a theoretical approach has allowed me to be attentive not only to the “continuities” in Turkish history, such as the narratives about secularization, nationalism, modernization, etc., which are emphasized and, perhaps, over-analyzed in the annals of Turkish studies, but also to the actual “*discontinuities*” in those narratives about morality, religion, and the ever-vague Turkish identity. The narrative of a “secular” republic smoothly replacing an “Islamic” empire, as a narrative of continuity, simply cannot make sense of historical realities emphasized throughout this study.

Michel Foucault argued some time ago that history becomes “effective” to the degree that it “introduces *discontinuity* into our very being,” and that this effective history “shortens its vision to those things nearest to it- the body, the nervous system, nutrition, digestion and energies.”⁵⁴⁸ From the perspective of effective history, it becomes clear why some of the so-called “traditional” intellectuals examined in this dissertation, such as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi and Said Nursi, voiced their concerns about rapid social and cultural change by constantly referring to the way young people behaved, the way the

⁵⁴⁸ Michel Foucault, “Nietzsche, Genealogy, History,” in D.F. Bouchard (ed.) *Language, Counter-Memory, Practice: Selected Essays and Interviews* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1977): 154-155.

women dressed and so on. Morality, understood as a system of ideas about nutrition, dressing, interpersonal relations, etc., became in their writings an ideological place of resistance to state-centric, top-down modernization. It is in this sense that the political game of modernization was played in Turkey, by both the straightforward westernizers and their critics, in a symbolically charged field where “appearing western” and assuming the most superficial behavioral characteristics of an imagined “western man” (drinking alcohol and dancing and having a “modern” wife) were equated with actually being western and modern.

The insistence of such thinkers as Şehbenderzade Ahmed Hilmi, Said Nursi and others on “modernization without westernization” might perhaps seem ideologically naïve to us in that such an insistence assumes that it is in fact possible to select “material” aspects of western civilization related to modernization and leave out the rest. In fact, I do not think that such an assumption is, historically speaking, defensible. However, if there was any ideological conviction which connected various Turkish intellectual groups, religious movements and political parties in the ideologically barren post-1980s political landscape of modern Turkey, where leftist alternatives were duly eradicated from politics, it was in fact this *yearning for modernization without westernization*.

It is important to realize that what has happened in the last few decades in Turkey is not simply a “reemergence” of a once politically repressed idea as a result of the effect of some unfathomable historical chain of continuity. As Foucault's quotation above reminds us, historical discontinuities are as real as historical continuities. What has

happened, in fact, is the reappropriation and remodeling of a historical idea (that is, the idea of being “modern” and “Muslim” at the same time) by new social and political actors, especially the emerging conservative middle class, represented by various neo-Nurcu movements, The Motherland Party (ANAP) of Turgut Özal and the Milli Görüş movement of Necmettin Erbakan. The current cadres of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AKP), as well as a significant component of the voting bloc supporting them, emerged out of this complex reality.

I need to emphasize that I do *not* think that Atatürk-era efforts to narrow differences between Turkey and the wider world in terms of clocks, calendars, costumes, etc., was totally misguided, especially if one recognizes that modernity was ultimately not just a western construct but a global one. Reducing expendable differences and gaining in transparency in relations to the outside world has produced a lot of benefits: the AKP definitely does not call for the reintroduction of “alaturka” time, for example. Also, the increasing number of girls wearing headscarves and demanding university education, or the whole new complex sociological reality of “*modern mahrem*” to use Nilüfer Göle’s probably inapt phrase,⁵⁴⁹ is certainly not a restoration of gender relations to the way they were before 1908. So, it seems, it is not only in technology that the westernizers were on to something.

⁵⁴⁹ Nilüfer Göle, *The Forbidden Modern: Civilization and Veiling* (Ann Arbor: University of Michigan Press, 1997).

In conclusion, this study, above all, has aimed to integrate the discussions on science and religion in the Ottoman Empire and Turkish Republic into the historical narrative of modernization between roughly 1860 and 1960. By challenging the linear historical explanations of westernization in the late Ottoman Empire and Turkey, I attempted to open a new line of historical research for the study of Turkish modernization and make a humble addition to ongoing historical research on late Ottoman and Turkish social, political and intellectual history.

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