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SYMPOSIUM ON
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SAID NURSI**

**THE RECONSTRUCTION OF ISLAMIC
THOUGHT IN THE TWENTIETH CENTURY
AND BEDIUZZAMAN SAID NURSI**

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by Şükran Vahide

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Bediuzzaman's View of Philosophy

Süleyman Hayri Bolay

"No corrupter ever says that he is a corrupter; he always looks truthful. Or else he thinks what is false is true. Yes, no one says that his 'ayran' is sour, so don't you take it without testing it. For there are many defaced words on the market. What I say even; don't give it the benefit of the doubt because I said it, and accept all of it."¹

When I had taken the decision to participate in the International Symposium on Bediuzzaman with a paper on his views on philosophy, I told a well-known philosophy professor this. He told me not to. When I asked him why, he replied: "Because Ustad denies philosophy."

Does Bediuzzaman Said Nursi in fact reject and deny philosophy? Does he clash with it head on? Or does he find philosophy useful in some circumstances? If this is the case, what are the conditions he put forward? Or what did Ustad

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Prof. Süleyman Bolay was born in Ermenek in 1937. His family was originally from the village of Bolay near Tashkent, where he attended primary school. His middle and high school education were in Konya. He graduated from the Theology Faculty of Ankara University in 1961, then for ten years taught in middle schools. In 1967 he was sent to Iraq by the Ministry of Education to make a study, then in 1971 was appointed to the Theology Faculty of Ankara University as a lecturer in the history of philosophy. He received his doctorate of philosophy with the thesis 'A Comparison of the Metaphysics of Aristotle and Ghazzali.' In 1980 he rose to being 'Doçent' with the thesis entitled 'Emile Proutroux's Doctrine of Uncertainty.' In 1987 he was appointed Professor of the History of Philosophy in Hacettepe University, where he continues at present. Prof. Bolay's chief published works are:

Türkiye'de Ruhcu ve Maddecî Görüşün Mücadelesi (The Struggle Between Spiritualist and Materialist Views in Turkey) 4th ed. Ankara 1995; *Felsefî Doktrinler Sözlüğü* (A Dictionary of Philosophical Doctrines), 5. ed. Ankara 1990; *Aristo Metafiziği ile Gazâlî Metafiziğinin Karşılaştırılması* (A Comparison of the Metaphysics of Aristotle and Ghazzali), 4th ed. İstanbul 1994; *Emile Proutroux'da Zorunsuzluk Doktrini* (Emile Proutroux's Doctrine of Uncertainty), İstanbul 1989; *Ferid Kam*, Ankara 1988; *Bilimin Değeri Meselesi* (The Question of the Value of Science) (at the beginning of H. Poincaré's 'Last Thoughts') İstanbul 1986.

1. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Münâzarat*, İstanbul, Sözler Yayınevi 1978, 11.

understand by philosophy? Was what he understood by philosophy in conformity with what he rejected? While criticizing philosophy and philosophers, did he adopt a philosophical understanding, like Ghazzali? Did he without realizing it introduce a new philosophical understanding?

In this paper I shall attempt to find answers to questions of this sort and to throw light on these questions. But before discussing Bediuzzaman's view of philosophy, it is necessary to give a general outline concerning this point of the period in which he lived, and particularly the Second Constitutional Period.

In what sort of environment did Said Nursi live?

As is well known, subsequent to the Tanzimat, various political, literary, and philosophical movements which had emerged in the West slowly began to be introduced into the Ottoman Empire. Among these may be counted Materialism, Positivism, Darwinism, Naturalism, Romanticism, an Enlightenment understanding, and atheism. Although thinkers like Namık Kemal, Ali Suavi and Cevdet Pasha attempted to put forward indigenous ideologies in the face of these, they were overwhelmed by the Western currents. These currents left profound negative effects on many Ottoman intellectuals in the period up to the Second Constitution.

With the atmosphere of freedom brought by the proclamation of the Second Constitution in 1908, the above movements obtained the possibility to express themselves through their press organs and means of publication and so grew stronger and came out into the open. Although the intellectuals of the Tanzimat who had been opposed to religion had assumed a respectful attitude towards religion to a certain extent, some of those in the Second Constitutional Period, displayed an aggressive stance towards it.

At the head of these was Baha Tevfik and his companions. Baha Tevfik had written an eighty page book applauding materialist philosophy while still in the second class at school. He and the group around him recognized no values whatsoever. They took pleasure at attacking and destroying established customs and beliefs. And they did not hold back from doing this verbally and in writing.

Baha Tevfik translated the German doctor Büchner's work *Matter and Force* into Turkish. He gave his friends various works to translate. Taking as their basis various advances in physics, biology, and paleontology in the nineteenth century in the West, Büchner and his colleagues tried to explain that everything had emerged from matter.

The increase in publications of this sort upset the Muslims, who showed various reactions. Some of them wrote refutations of Büchner's work. Although some of these were sincere, they were inadequate due to lack of knowledge, sometimes even becoming ridiculous. If we make exceptions of a few people like İsmail Fennî, Ahmed Hilmi, and Hamdi Yazır, who followed closely scientific and philosophical developments in the West and studied them, the things written by the majority of the rest were merely general statements. The rise of imperialism after the Industrial Revolution resulted in the imperialist under-

standing being based on principles like the survival of the fittest, and scientific activities being exploited for ideological aims. We can read of this change in mentality from the pen of the philosopher Karl Popper, who died in 1994:

"... the Naturalist revolt against God, which preceded the historians' revolt, replaced God with Nature. Apart from this, almost everything remained the same. Naturalism replaced theology, natural laws replaced Divine laws, natural will and power (the forces of Nature) replaced Divine will and power, and finally Natural Selection replaced the Divine order and judgement. Naturalist determinism replaced theological determinism, that is, Nature's being omnipotent and omniscient replaced God's being omnipotent and omniscient."²

It is clear from this that a fundamental change in mentality came about in the West with the way opened up by Positivism, Materialism, and Marxism. New philosophical views also emerged to combat this change radically, but they were not as effective as the ideological activities mentioned above. This change in mentality was imported into Turkey together with the various movements. A number of writers and intellectuals set up belief in "Mother Nature" in place of belief in God's existence and power.

The struggle intensified at this point. While the West produced new philosophies in the face of this radical change, our intellectuals were unable to put forward an equivalent indigenous philosophical understanding. Also, they were misinterpreting the changes in science, and with deviant understandings seeing them as immutable absolute truths, and demonstrating them to others.

The Old Said's relations with philosophy

The chief of those combatting these currents and the new imported mentality were Ahmed Hilmi and İsmail Fennî. There were religious scholars and some other persons among them. One of them was known at that period of his life as the 'Old Said.' In the face of the negative effects of various philosophical movements, he was on the one hand trying to penetrate the views of these philosophical schools, and on the other, with the fierce debates he held relying on his knowledge, to remove the negative effects of their ideas, which he considered to be harmful. This person was Bediuzzaman Said Nursi.

Later on, unhappy at these activities, he gave up that method, and renewing himself, emerged as the 'New Said,' displeased at the 'Old Said.'

What did the Old Said do and say that he became displeased with himself? What was the reason, Said Nursi gave up, in his own words, being "the Old Said, who had relations with the way of philosophy"?

According to his own explanations, one of the reasons was his not liking combat, struggle, and debate. Addressing people's reason and logic by means of debate did not seem productive to him, and he felt it was an obstacle to his spiritual development. But according to what Ord. Prof. Hilmi Ziya Ülken related, the Old Said was very successful in his debates. Around 1920 when Said Nursi

2. Magee, Bryan, *Karl Popper'in Bilim Felsefesi ve Siyaset Kuramı* (Turk. trans. Mete Tuncay), Istanbul 1982, 148-9.

was in Istanbul, he used to come to the Nur-u Osmaniye coffee house in his original dress and boots and for hours debate with the lecturers from the University. (H. Ziya Ülken said that Ustad [that is, Bediuzzaman] followed Ghazzali's method, and then stated that he was not at Ghazzali's level.)

Did the New Said reject philosophy?

In what way was Ustad Said Nursi uncomfortable at having relations with philosophy? What were the things that upset him? What sort of characteristics did philosophy have so that it disturbed him in this way and made him give up the way he was following? Did he reject philosophy entirely, or did he leave a door open to it? Was there or was there not a philosophy he did not reject?

It is possible to see the answers to these questions in various places of the works written by both the Old Said, and the New Said, who did not like the Old Said.

Ustad encouraged the use of the reason

It should be first stated that in both periods of his life that Ustad Said Nursi frequently mentioned the importance of using the reason and particularly wanted Muslims to realize this. Right at the beginning of *Muhakemat* (Reasonings), in which in one respect he traced the main outlines of reflective thought, praising "the Pre-Eternal All-Wise One, Who guided us to the straight path with the Illustrious Shari'a," he defines the Shari'a like this: "Such a Shari'a that, uniting hand in hand the speculative sciences [reason] and transmitted sciences [those based on Divine revelation] confirms the veracity of its truths." Also in the introduction of the same work, he congratulates modern science and learning, because it has awakened the desire to search for the truth, and he accuses those who consider Islam to be opposed to science and science to be opposed to Islam of causing the eclipse of the sun of Islam, and he says that "Islam is the master and guide of the sciences and the leader and father of true knowledge." His saying that "If the speculative and transmitted sciences conflict, the speculative sciences should be taken as basic and the transmitted sciences interpreted. But in such a case, reason must be [true] reason." Also worthy of note are his insisting "truth instead of bigotry, proof instead of false arguments, and reason instead of natural disposition;" and, "do not be deceived by embellished claims; ask for proof!"

And in *Lemeât*, also written by the Old Said, in describing "the degrees of mind," he says: "First is imagining, then conception, then reasoned thought." Attaining to 'belief by affirmation' is tied to the condition of using the reason; he sees reasoned thought and investigation as conditions for reaching affirmation. He considers belief without use of the reason to be "bigotry." On the other hand, he says man is "unbiased in using his reason" and defends freedom of thought against the possible objection of "the more I use my reason, the more doubts I have; it's better not to think too much."

How can science and religion be combined?

In *Münâzarat*, Ustad describes the physical sciences are the "light of the reason," and attributes the manifestation of the truth to the combining of the religious and natural sciences, which is a very important point. He says concerning this:

"The religious sciences are the light of the conscience. The [modern] sciences of civilization are the light of the reason. The truth is manifested through the combining of the two. With those two wings the students' endeavour will take flight. When they are separated, it gives rise to bigotry in the former, and doubts and trickery in the latter."³

That is to say, on their own, the religious sciences tend to bigotry. This apt point of Ustad opens a little the door of the reason.

The reason should not be pressurized

Because, according to Ustad, the reason must be able to take decisions independently, it should not be under duress, the reason's power and will should not be taken from it. This point is very important from the point of view of human freedom and responsibility. Ustad considered essential the reconciliation and combining of the reason and religion, and the religious sciences and the physical sciences, which he calls the sciences of civilization. For man should not be like a one-winged bird. Ustad says that the students' endeavour takes flight with these two wings; in the absence of the reason and the sciences associated with it, the students are like birds with a broken wing. Basically, if religion is based on only reason or only emotion, it is opposed to human nature. Man cannot rise to God with such a religion. It opens the way to embodying God, and the associating of partners with Him, or materialism. A religion and worship unsupported by scientific facts is unproductive and deficient.

In his discussion in *Mektûbat* (Letters) about the miracle of the Splitting of the Moon, Ustad says that the miracle was shown "to persuade the deniers," not to compel them. That is, it would have been contrary to Divine wisdom and the mystery of human accountability to compel them to believe. He expresses this mystery as "opening the door to the reason, but not taking the will from it."⁴ He then explains the matter as follows:

"If the All-Wise Creator had left the moon split for one or two hours in order to show it to the whole world as the philosophers wished, and it had been recorded in all the general histories of man, then it would have been like all other occurrences in the heavens and would not have been an evidence for Muhammad's (PBUH) claim to prophethood and been special to it. Or else it would have been such a self-evident miracle that it would have annulled the reason's power to choose, and compelled the reason to accept it; willy-nilly, it would have had to assent to his prophethood. Someone with a coal-like spirit like Abu Jahl would have remained at

3. *Münâzarat*, 72.

4. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Mektûbat*, Sözlür Yayınevi 1981, 190 / *Bediüzzaman Said Nursi, Letters 1928-1932* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözlür Publications 1994, 249.

the same level as someone with a diamond-like spirit like Abu Bakr the Veracious; the mystery of man's accountability would have been lost."

It may be seen from this that Ustad paid great attention to the independent use of the reason, its not being pressurized or deprived of the will, that is, the freedom to take decisions and power of choice, and he was sensitive about this. He therefore opposes miracles being shown everywhere and to everyone, for then the messengership of God's Messenger (PBUH) would have been self-evident and everyone would have been compelled to believe in it, which he considers inappropriate. Because, he says, then "no choice would have remained for the reason." If the reason has no choice, it would not be responsible. And then it could not be known how and why a person believed. Therefore, Ustad rightly says: "Belief is attained through the reason's power of choice."⁵

Attaching this great importance to the independent use of the reason, Ustad describes the Sophists, who denied the existence of the external world and knowledge of it, as having "abdicated their reasons."

In another context, Ustad says the following about the value of reason and thought:

"Because, since contrary to the animals, man possesses a mind and he thinks, he is connected to both the present time, and to the past and the future. He can obtain both pain and pleasure from them. Whereas, since the animals do not think, the sorrows arising from the past and the fears and anxieties arising from the future do not spoil their pleasure of the present."⁶

In numerous other places in his works, Ustad again and again mentions the value of the reason and the importance of using it. In any case, if he had not given pride of place to the reason, logic, and *kalām*, he could not have said that the Risale-i Nur had opened up a way to the essence of reality within logical proofs and scholarly arguments in place of spiritual journeying and recitations.

While discussing Ustad's view of philosophy, it is necessary to bear in mind this importance he attached to the reason. If it is disregarded, it may give rise to many misunderstandings.

A second point that should be borne in mind, was Bediuzzaman's taking a 'middle way' in many matters, far from 'excess' and 'negligence.' This is a question connected with the value he gave man, whom he said was "noble by nature," and with his generally tolerant view. For example, when asked concerning the position of people who lived at a time between prophets (*fetret*), or when a prophet's message had been forgotten or corrupted, basing his answer on Imam Shafi'i and Imam Ash'ari, he said that such people would be among those saved, even if they did not believe in the fundamentals of faith. Also, the words "those bold enough to accuse others of disbelief should swiftly give thought [to their action]" are his. That is to say, Ustad always calls on his readers to be moderate and tolerant, and in his own life formed a very good example of this.

5. *Mektûbat*, 191 / *Letters*, 250.

6. Nursî, Bediuzzaman Said, *Sözler*, Sözleryayinevi 1980, 131 / *The Words* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözleryayinevi 1992, 158.

The combining of the physical sciences and religion

Similarly, when discussing his view of philosophy, the following matter should also definitely be kept in mind. A stance which sees Ustad as totally inimical to philosophy is not right. It would be more appropriate to speak of a stance inimical to philosophy which is attributed to him. For hostility of that kind does not conform with his life and what he wrote. For his statement, "one in a hundred have been saved, like Plato and Socrates" shows his point of view.⁷ In a letter he had added to the beginning of *Âsâ-yı Mûsa* (The Staff of Moses), he differentiates between two sorts of philosophy:

"The philosophy at which the Risale-i Nur deals severe blows and attacks is not absolute; it is rather its harmful sort. For the sort of philosophy which has served human society and morality and achievement, and the advance of arts and industries, is reconciled with the Qur'an. Indeed, it serves the Qur'an's wisdom and does not contest it. The Risale-i Nur does not attack this sort."

Continuing, Ustad says that it attacks "the second sort of philosophy, which leads people into misguidance, atheism, and the swamp of nature." Although it attacks this deviant sort, "it does not attack rightly-guided, beneficial philosophy." He encourages this "positive philosophy."

In the 'Fifth Note,' in which Ustad analyses European civilization, he makes a differentiation which may be considered in the same framework. Here, before embarking on his criticism of European civilization, he warns: "Let it not be misunderstood; Europe is two," and says that he is not addressing "the first Europe," which "follows the sciences which serve justice and right and the industries beneficial for the life of society through the inspiration it has received from true Christianity." He is rather criticizing "the second corrupt Europe, which, through the darkness of the philosophy of Naturalism, supposing the evils of civilization to be its virtues, has driven mankind to vice and misguidance."⁸

An Islamic philosophy is possible

In the treatise called the Thirtieth Word, which we shall discuss in detail in the continuation of my paper, he also differentiates between two philosophies, and says:

"In the world of humanity, from the time of Adam up to now, two great currents, two lines of thought, have always been and will so continue. Like two mighty trees, they have spread out their branches in all directions and in every class of humanity. One of them is the line of prophethood and religion, the other that of philosophy in its various forms. Whenever those two lines have been in agreement and united, that is to say, if the line of philosophy, having joined the line of religion, has been obedient and of service to it, the world of humanity has experienced a brilliant happiness and social life."

The above passage, which foresees a philosophy that obeys the line of prophethood, may be interpreted as there possibly being an Islamic philosophy. He says

7. *Sözler*, 690.

8. Nursî, Bediüzzaman Said, *Lem'alar*, Sözler Yayınevi 1995, 117 / *The Flashes Collection* [Eng. trans: Şükran Vahide], Sözler Publications 1995, 159-60.

that the happiness of mankind lies in this combining or synthesis. Ustad both combines science and religion, and with this combination offers a solution for the clash between philosophy and religion.

Some of his statements about philosophy

Following the above passage, Ustad analyses the philosophy which contests the line of religion basing it on the ego. He says:

1. The foundations of this philosophy are "baseless and rotten." It rests on the weak foundations of the 'I' or ego. "For the colour of an 'I' that is in this condition is atheism and ascribing partners to God, it is denial of God Almighty." Then, "...although the 'I' has, in itself, an essence as insubstantial as air, because the inauspicious attitude of philosophy regards it as relating only to itself, it is as if that vapour-like 'I' becomes liquid; and then, because of its familiarity and preoccupation with materialism, it hardens. Next, through neglect and denial, that 'I-ness' freezes. Then, through rebelliousness it becomes opaque, losing its transparency. Then, it gradually becomes denser and envelops its owner. It becomes distended with the thoughts of mankind. Next, supposing the rest of humanity, and even causes, to be like itself, although they do not accept this and disclaim it, it gives to each of them the status of a Pharaoh. Then at this point it ... accuses the Absolutely Omnipotent One of impotence."

2. This philosophy "caresses" the evil-commanding soul, and inflates it.

3. Its view is inauspicious.

4. It looks at things as signifying only themselves (*mânâ-yı ismî*), and working only on their own account. It supposes that they exist of themselves and through themselves. "It falsely assumes that... [it] is the real master in its sphere of disposal." "Also, by appropriating the beauty in works of art and the fineness in the decoration and attributing them to the works of art themselves and their decoration, and by not relating them to the manifestation of the sacred and sheer beauty of the Maker and Fashioner, it says: 'How beautiful it is,' instead of, 'How beautifully made it is,' thus regarding each as an idol worthy of worship."

5. "The line of philosophy that does not obey the line of religion, taking the form of a tree of Zaqqum, scatters the darkness of ascribing partners to God and misguidance on all sides. In the branch of the power of intellect, even, it produces the fruit of atheism, Materialism, and Naturalism for the consumption of the human intellect. And in the realm of the power of passion, it pours the tyrannies of Nimrod, Pharaoh, and Shaddad on mankind. And in the realm of the power of animal appetites, it nurtures and bears the fruit of goddesses, idols, and those who claim divinity."

6. "According to the principles of philosophy, power is approved. 'Might is right' is the norm, even. It says, 'All power to the strongest.' 'The winner takes all,' and, 'In power there is right.'" Whereas this principle "springs from the misuse of their inborn dispositions of a number of tyrants, brutish men, and savage beasts." In their place, Ustad sets the principles of "mutual assistance, magnanimity, and generosity."

7. Due to this understanding, philosophy "has given moral support to tyranny, encouraged despots, and urged oppressors to claim divinity."

8. "One of the beliefs of ancient philosophy is: 'From one, one proceeds.' That is, 'From one person, only one single thing can proceed. Everything else proceeds from him by means of intermediaries.' This misleading principle of philosophy which is stained by associating partners with God presents the Absolutely Self-Sufficient and Omnipotent One as being in need of impotent intermediaries, and gives all causes and intermediaries a sort of partnership in His dominicality. It attributes to the Glorious Creator the title of Prime Mover, which in fact indicates the status of creature. And, moreover, it allots the rest of His sovereignty to causes and intermediaries, thus opening the way to associating partners with Him in a most comprehensive manner." In this respect, this philosophy is "stained with misguidance and associating partners with God."

9. Philosophy takes force as its point of support in society, self-interest as its aim, conflict as the principle of life, and racialism as the bond of societies, and has therefore destroyed mankind's happiness. For the mark of force is aggression, that of self-interest, tussling for benefits, that of conflict is clashes, and the mark of racialism is devouring others and aggression. While "its fruits are gratifying the human passions and increasing man's needs."

Bediuzzaman's statements about philosophers

In addition to his statements about the principles of the philosophy that has declared war on religion, Bediuzzaman Said Nursi studies the ideas of a number of philosophers which they put forward, based on those principles. He says:

1. "It is because of these rotten foundations and disastrous results of philosophy that geniuses from among the Muslim philosophers like Ibn-i Sina and Farabi were charmed by its apparent glitter and were deceived into taking this way, and thus attained only the rank of an ordinary believer. *Hujjat al-Islam* al-Ghazzali did not accord them that rank, even."

Ustad relates an event in this connection, resembling a vision, which he had around the time the Old Said was transformed into the New Said. In this journey of the imagination, he says: "I saw myself in a vast desert. A layer of murky, dispiriting, and suffocating cloud had covered the whole face of the earth. There was neither breeze, nor light, nor water, none of these was to be found. I imagined that everywhere was full of monsters, dangerous and dreadful creatures. It occurred to me that through on the other side of this land there should be light, breeze, and water. It was necessary to get there. I realized that I was being driven on involuntarily. Under the earth I wormed my way into a tunnel-like cave and gradually travelled through the earth. I saw that many people had passed along this subterranean way before me, on all sides they were submerged. I saw their footprints, and once I heard some of their voices, then later they ceased." He then addresses the one accompanying him:

"O my friend who is accompanying me on my imaginary journey! That land is Nature and the philosophy of Naturalism. And the tunnel is the way that the philos-

ophers have opened up with their thought in order to reach the truth. The footprints I saw were those of famous philosophers like Plato and Aristotle, and the voices I heard those of geniuses like Ibn-i Sina and Farabi. Indeed, I saw in various books some of the things Ibn-i Sina had said and some of his principles, but he had become stuck, he could go no further, he was submerged before reaching the truth."

Later in this imaginary journey, Ustad says he is saved from the darkness of the tunnel by "a torch and device" given to him "from the treasury of the Qur'an."

Ustad also does not neglect to reply to possible objections to his severe criticisms of great philosophers like Aristotle and Farabi:

"While having a pre-eternal teacher like the Qur'an, in matters concerning truth and the knowledge of God, I do not have to attach as much value as that of a fly's wing to those eagles, who are the students of misguided philosophy and deluded intellect. However inferior I am to them, their teacher is a thousand times more inferior than mine. With the help of my teacher, whatever caused them to become submerged did not so much as dampen my toes."

Here, Ustad is explaining that the way indicated by the phrase "Nor those who go astray" at the end of Sura al-Fatiha is the way of those who hold the ideas of the Naturalists, which has deviated into Nature and by which it is extremely difficult to reach reality and the light; and those indicated by the phrase "Nor those who have received Your wrath" are the worshippers of causes, who ascribe actual creativity and effect to causes and intermediaries, and those like the Peripatetic philosophers who have opened up a way to the essence of reality and knowledge of the Necessarily Existent through pure reason and thought.

Continuing his criticism of a number of philosophers who have become submerged in philosophy, Ustad says:

2. "One group of philosophers, by calling Almighty God 'Self-Necessitating,' denied Him choice. They rejected the endless testimony of all creation, which proves that He has choice. Glory be to God! Although all the beings in the universe from the smallest particles to the sun show that the Creator has choice, each with its own appointed individuality, order, wisdom, and measure, this blind philosophy refused to see it."

3. "Moreover, another group of philosophers said: 'Divine knowledge is not concerned with insignificant matters,' and denied its awesome comprehensiveness, and thus rejected the veracious witnessing of all beings. Furthermore, by attributing effects to causes, philosophy has given Nature the power to create."

"The sincere student of philosophy is a pharaoh, but he is a contemptible pharaoh who worships the basest thing for the sake of benefit; he recognizes everything from which he can profit as his 'Lord.' And that irreligious student is obstinate and refractory... and .. conceited and domineering... And .. is a self-centered seeker of benefit whose aim and endeavour is to gratify his animal appetites; a crafty egotist who seeks his personal interests within certain nationalist interests."

"Indeed, the powers of evil have raised up the minds of atheistic philosophers as though with the beaks and talons of their 'T's' and have dropped them in the valleys of misguidance. Thus, IN THE MICROCOSM THE 'T' IS THE IDOL, LIKE THOSE IN THE MACROCOSM SUCH AS NATURE."

"Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Ibn-i Sina, and Farabi exacerbated egotism by saying that the ultimate aim of humanity was to 'imitate the Necessarily Existent One.'"

Now I shall attempt to analyze and discuss each of these statements of Ustad about philosophy and philosophers:

An analysis and critique of Bediuzzaman's views on philosophy

1. Bediuzzaman's statements that the foundations of philosophy are "baseless and rotten." It rests on the weak foundations of the 'I' or ego. "For the colour of an 'I' that is in this condition is atheism and ascribing partners to God, it is denial of God Almighty."

I have at once to say that the basis of philosophy is not the 'I' or ego; its basis is reason, mind, reasoning, thinking, logic, and the criticism based on these. Anyway no one could live without these. But there are different ways of using the reason. There are also millions of people who misuse their reasons and have no connection whatsoever with philosophy, and may not even like it.

There may be philosophers who have taken the ego as the basis of philosophy. However, Ustad differentiates between two 'I's or egos; he classifies one as "the key to the Divine Names," and the other as "the seed of a terrible tree of Zaqqum." That is to say, the ego is the potential source of two forces, one positive, the other negative. In his own words: "From the time of Adam until now, the 'I' has been the seed of a terrible tree of Zaqqum and at the same time, of a luminous tree of Tuba, which shoot out branches around the world of mankind."

"As the key to the Divine Names, which are hidden treasures, the 'I' is also the key to the locked talisman of creation; it is a problem-solving riddle, a wondrous talisman. When its nature is known, the 'I', that strange riddle, that amazing talisman, is disclosed, and it also discloses the talisman of the universe and the treasures of the Necessary World."⁹

"God Almighty has given to man, by way of a Trust, a key, called the 'I', that is such that it opens all the doors of the world; He has given him an enigmatic 'I' with which he may discover the hidden treasures of the Creator of the Universe. But the 'I' is also an extremely complicated riddle and a talisman that is difficult to solve."

According to the above, the thing called the ego is a trust given to man by God, it is an obscure riddle, the true meaning of which if known will solve the Divine mysteries of the universe. If this key to the doors of the world is used correctly "the attributes of dominicality and functions of Divinity" will be revealed. It has therefore to be "a unit of measurement," but does not have to have actual existence, "Rather, like hypothetical lines in geometry, a unit of measurement may be formed by hypothesis and supposition. It is not necessary for its actual existence to be established by concrete knowledge and proofs."

How is it that although a mysterious key given by God as trust with no actual existence, the ego can overstep the bounds? If noted carefully, Ustad is discuss-

9. Sözüler, 502 / *The Words*, 557-8.

ing the imaginary extension opening onto the world of a totally psychological element. How is it possible for this psychological element to be the basis of philosophy? But if a philosopher takes the manifestation of attributes concealed within the ego as a potentiality as the subject of thought and study, then a metaphysical ontology (theory of existence), an epistemology, emerges, which is not something very different to what Ustad has himself done. In which case it is possible to practise philosophy by opposing it and criticizing philosophers. Just as the famous physicist and mystic Pascal said: "To mock philosophy is philosophy," hinting that those who think deeply and logically cannot be saved from philosophy. Like Ghazzali, who while attacking philosophers, put forward his ideas like a philosopher since he had studied them for three years, and is now remembered among the great philosophers. His friend Abu Bakr al-Jassas said: "Our master Ghazzali plunged into philosophy and never again emerged."

In fact, philosophy does not consist of the ideas of either Plato, or Aristotle, or Kant, or Hegel, nor of the systems of Ibn Sina or Farabi, nor of the criticisms of Ghazzali, or Kant, or Comte. It is perhaps all of these, and perhaps none of them. If none of these philosophers had lived, there still would have been philosophy. Just as philosophy existed before them.

So when does this mysterious beneficial key become harmful?

Continuing his analysis of the ego, Ustad thinks: "An endless light without darkness may not be known or perceived. But if a line of real or imaginary darkness is drawn, then it becomes known." That is, he says that things are known through their opposites. Just as a perpetual light may not be perceived without darkness. (Ustad here thinks like the philosophers who explain the coming into existence of things through the clash or combining of opposites.) He continues:

"Since God Almighty's attributes, like knowledge and power, and Names, like All-Wise and All-Compassionate, are all-encompassing, limitless, and without like, they may not be determined, and what they are may not be known or perceived. Thus, since they have no true end or limit, a hypothetical or imaginary limit has to be drawn. It is the 'I' (ego) that does this. It imagines in itself a fictitious dominicality, ownership, power, and knowledge: it draws a line. By doing this it places an imaginary limit on the all-encompassing attributes, saying, 'Up to here, mine, after that, His;' it makes a division. With the tiny units of measurement in itself, it slowly understands the true nature of the attributes."

While continuing with this elucidation, he portrays it in a slightly different way, saying:

"That is to say, the 'I' is mirror-like, and, like a unit of measurement and tool for discovery, it has an indicative meaning; having no meaning in itself, it shows the meaning of others. It is a conscious strand from the thick rope of the human being, a fine thread from the raiment of the essence of humanity, it is an *alif* from the book of the character of mankind, and it has two faces."

According to these definitions, the 'I' or ego is a mirror of the World of Similitudes, that is, (Plato's) World of Ideas, an instrument of discovery, a conscious strand that has no meaning in itself, a fine thread, or an *alif*. If the ego is a reflector of the Divine beings in the world of Plato's ideas (similitudes), how can it be

conscious? And if it is an instrument, it again surely cannot be conscious. And if it is an *alif* of no content (indicative meaning —*mânâ-yı harft*), it must again be an unconscious means of knowledge. In which case, how can it be “an tool of discovery”? It is not clear. Especially if it is a hypothetical line, how can it lead man astray?

It does not appear to be possible to understand and comment on this analysis of the ‘I’ of Ustad with a bird’s eye view. On the contrary, such a view takes one to an interpretation which opens the door to the justified questions examples of which we gave above. For this reason, to take this analysis further it will be necessary to establish clearly with free thought what is meant by a hypothetical line, significative meaning, tool or instrument, and conscious. And this is possible only through the use of the reason and an investigative view; and these should not be the cause of fear but should be encouraged.

Ustad states that this *alif* has two faces: “The first of these faces looks towards good and existence. With this face it is capable of only receiving favour; it accepts what is given, itself it cannot create. This face is not active, it does not have the ability to create. Its other face looks towards evil and goes to non-existence. That face is active, it has the power to act.”

Immediately following this explanation, Ustad describes a further characteristic of the ego: “Furthermore, the real nature of the ‘I’ is indicative; it shows the meaning of things other than itself. Its dominicality is imaginary. Its existence is so weak and insubstantial that in itself it cannot bear or support anything at all.”

If, as in Ustad’s explanation, the ego is turned to good with its face that looks to existence, it should be active. Otherwise, it would give the effulgence it receives to man and would not urge him to good. Indeed, he could not know God. Here, objection could be made with the verse, “*Whatever good happens to you is from God, but whatever evil befalls you is from yourself.*”¹⁰ But then, one should not forget the verse “*It [the soul] gets every good that it earns, and suffers every evil that it earns.*”¹¹ Otherwise a strange situation would arise like all sins being attributed to man and all merits to God. For this reason, its face that looks to good should also be active. If, in its aspect that looks to evil the ego cannot bear and sustain anything because of its weakness, it should not be active. Because it cannot sustain anything, and if it cannot sustain anything, it means it cannot be effective.

It is clear that this analysis too is not a simple matter that can be grasped at a glance. On the contrary, the analysis conceals within itself an aspect that appears to be a paradox. And this paradox can be removed only by studying the matter together with the question of ‘acquisition,’ which Ustad deals with in his Treatise On Divine Determining (*Kader Risalesi*).

Ustad’s method of explanation here is basically a slightly more complex form of Ghazzali’s method in *Mizân al-‘Amal*. The thing called “ene,” the ‘I’ or ego, here, is what Ghazzali calls “*nafs*.” Ghazzali says that the *nafs* has two faces, one of which looks to the Divine world, from where it receives effulgence, while the

10. Qur’an, 4:79.

11. Qur’an, 2:286.

other is turned to the animal and physical world, by which it is affected in various ways. If the effects of the Divine world preponderate, good acts and morals proceed from man, and in the event of the other predominating, bad actions proceed from him.

2. *The statement that philosophy "caresses" the evil-commanding soul, and inflates it*

Philosophy is a critical mode of thought. Everyone may criticize everyone else's thought, and develop new ideas in the face of them. This demonstrates not the weakness of philosophical thought, but its strength. Just as opposing schools and opposing views within the same schools emerged in *fiqh*, that is, in legal thought and in theological (*kalām*) thought. This demonstrates the strength of the mind and reason's ability to think. The Qur'an, too, in hundreds of its verses, invites man to think. But not that everyone should think and say the same thing, for then there would be no progress.

Anyone who can produce new ideas feels happy during the act of thinking, and his evil-commanding soul may become inflated in taking its share. This may go as far as rebellion against God. But this is not a situation particular to philosophy; it may encountered in anyone who tastes success. This statement of Ustad is true. But the excesses of the soul may be found in someone unconnected with philosophy or who loathes it. The essential duty here falls to the person who has to control his own soul. Just as there are philosophers who have kept their souls under control, and not permitted them to become inflated. Ghazzali may be considered to be the chief of these.

According to Ustad:

"If the 'I' is not known for what it is, an insubstantial *alif*, a thread, a hypothetical line, it may burgeon in concealment under the ground, gradually swelling. It will permeate all parts of a human being. Like a gigantic dragon it will swallow up the human being; that entire person with all his faculties will, quite simply, become pure 'I'."

Briefly, the egotism or 'I-ness' of everyone who forgets God, of whatever sex or profession, increases, their egos and souls become inflated. It is not accurate to limit this to philosophy and philosophers. Not for nothing has it been said: "The soul leads astray the learned man in his learning, the worshipper in his worship, and the ascetic in his asceticism." The basic question here is to know the soul and its limits. For "he who knows his self, knows his Sustainer." He who knows his Sustainer will prevent the excesses of his soul.

3. *The statement that philosophy's view is inauspicious*

I reckon that it is not conformable with Islam to attribute inauspiciousness to the view of philosophy or of any science. There is nothing inauspicious in any view, that is, in any thought, or in any activity. It would in fact be more apt to call a way of thinking or scholarly work right or wrong rather than inauspicious. It is well-known that the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) warned those who considered a solar eclipse to be inauspicious. It might be more appropriate to see this expression of Ustad as metaphorical or an allusion.

4 *The statement that philosophy looks at things as signifying only themselves (mânâ-yı ismî), not as signifying another (mânâ-yı harfî)*

This statement may be considered correct. For denying God, some philosophers have considered only the physical world and world of phenomena, and have either denied what lies beyond it, or not been concerned with it. However, even if we disregard the Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages, certain philosophers of the 'New Age' (1453-1789) and our age have considered things and events with a significative meaning. An example is the famous physicist and philosopher Pierre Duhem, who died in 1916. He added a 93 page addendum to the second edition of his work *Theories of Physics* as a result of the attacks made on it, and gave it the title *Physics of the Believer (Physique du Croyant)*. He stated explicitly in the addendum that he was a sincere Catholic who believed in God and that He created the world, and that he studied the universe from that point of view. There are numerous examples similar to this in the West.

Considering things with their 'nominal' meanings, as signifying only themselves, arises therefore not from philosophy itself but from the attitude of the philosopher. There have therefore been two sorts of philosophers and scientists who consider things, and they should be carefully differentiated from each other. Recalling that Ustad differentiated between two sorts of philosophy and that he said that he attacked only those philosophers who pursued misguidance, it is understood that statements of his like "philosophy considers things as signifying only themselves" were restricted to the philosophy which looks in that way.

5. *The statement that like a tree of Zaqqum the line of philosophy spreads the association of partners with God and misguidance*

There have been those who have fallen into misguidance and associating partners with God among philosophical systems and philosophers, or those who have put forward ideas that have lead to these. There are materialists, atheists, and naturalists in the line of Western philosophy. But these are very few in number beside believers and those who have put forward ideas opposed to materialism. For example, among the ancient Greek philosophers were materialists, atheists, and naturalists like Democritus, Epicurus, and Lucretius. Pythagorus defended the superiority of spirit and its immortality; Csenophanes tried to spread Divine Unity and that God neither begets nor is begotten; Socrates said that a voice had directed him since the age of three, and that on accepting the existence of man and horses, one had to accept that this necessitated the existence of an Elevated Being who put the concepts of 'man' and 'horse' in man's spirit, and he gave up his life for this idea. His student Plato defined matter as the soiling of the spirit, and developed spiritualism and idealism against the materialists, and he defeated materialism at that time. Aristotle was contemptuous of the materialists, stating that matter was passive and that the form given by the Giver of Forms did not even have the true ability to receive.

We may here take a brief look at what Necip Fazıl said about Plato in his book *Batı Tefekkürü ve İslam Tasavvufu* (Western Thought and Islamic Sufism) (Istanbul 1982):

"Plato did not believe in matter, and did not seek the cause of matter in matter; he sought it in the World of Ideas beyond matter. And inner man is tied to the World of Ideas. Matter is only the form and embodiment of ideas...

"(Plato) imagined a sculptor. I say imagined metaphorically; see the subtly! Giver of Forms is one of the Divine Names. Of course God is the Giver of Forms. It is He Who traces the faces of all of us, and measures out matter.

"...the metaphorical sculptor... and the unlimited action of the chisel on the block of marble, the raw material of creatures...

"This view is the highest point, not any religion, an independent idea can rise... Plato was lower than the unattainable level of a Divinely appointed prophet, but he was far superior to the human mind."¹²

Necip Fazıl thus almost calls Plato a prophet. He does not say it and says he cannot, but he expresses beautifully the elevatedness of Plato's ideas. (He also says positive things about Aristotle.)

Such great philosophers should therefore not be criticized without being thoroughly studied.

Apart from the Christian philosophers of the Middle Ages, numerous philosophers of the 'New Age' (1453-1789) like Descartes, Pascal, Malebranche, Leibniz, Berkeley, John Locke, and Hegel, devoted their lives to defending Christianity against materialists and atheists and to reconciling it with reason. Muslim philosophers are further advanced in this matter.

That is to say, it is a generalization to say that philosophy is "tainted with misguidance" and spreads deviance. There is such a philosophical understanding, but it is not all like that. Philosophy is a way of thinking, formed of the ideas the philosopher produces through the effect of his beliefs. It does not of itself cause deviation. On the contrary, someone who has a good grasp of philosophy and a thorough knowledge of the chief ideas of the philosophers, may oppose deviant ideas supported by them. For example, a person who knows the proofs concerning God's existence of Descartes, Locke and many others, may refute opposing ideas and convince himself intellectually. For this reason, in his famous work *Dibace*, the great Qur'anic commentator of this age, the philosopher M. Hamdi Yazır, who had made a close study of Western philosophy, stated that the more he studied Western philosophy the more it strengthened his religious belief, rather than weakening it, because he saw it to be seeking belief in Divine unity, and without realizing it, it was serving Islamic belief. In his own words:

"But I understood as a consequence that reason [Western reason] was chasing after belief in Divine unity, which is our religion, with all its movements and progress, and despite desiring to do so, had been unable to prove both irreligion and the Trinity. In following it, let alone being shaken, the reason and philosophy I had obtained from Islam gradually strengthened, and found points that could be developed. The philosophical knowledge of our predecessors may be shown in this way with a date and if we can become acquainted with contempo-

12. Kısakürek, Necip Fazıl, *Ban Tefekkürü ve İslâm Tasavvufu*, İstanbul 1982, 28.

rary philosophy starting from Descartes, it will be possible to prove that philosophy is not licit for any religion other than Islam."

It is true to say that the atheists (*Dahriyyūn*) and materialists (*Māddiyūn*) were the products of the faculty of reason. But because it was ancient times, idealist, spiritualist, fideist, and even pantheist philosophies emerged, which were more powerful, and opposed the former with their philosophical systems, criticisms and proofs. This too should be taken into consideration. They too were the products of the faculty of reason.

The reason can be used for good or bad, the same as a pistol or knife may be used for good or bad. Just as Ustad made criticisms using reason and logic. How could it otherwise be compatible? For the following passage shows that he preferred logic and theology to sufism: "The Risale-i Nur opened a way to reality in knowledge in place of worship; it opened up a way to the essence of reality with logical proofs and scholarly arguments in place of spiritual journeying and recitations; a way to the 'greater sainthood' directly within the science of *kalām* and the sciences of the principles of religion and belief, in place of the learning of the sufism and the sufi way." One cannot take the statement of such an Ustad that the *Dahriyyūn* and *Māddiyūn* emerged from the faculty of reason and reach a conclusion that only they emerged from it. Anyway, in *Ishārāt al-I'jāz*, he says the correct use of the power of reason results in "wisdom," and he encourages this.

It should be said that rather than fragmenting human thought, philosophy has developed thought and thinking. It has opened up the way to new ideas, new views, theories, and discoveries. If there had been no difference in thought, Ustad could not himself have put forward new and original ideas. Moreover, there have to be different, opposing, and even deviant views, so that, based on the principle of "things are known through their opposites," which Ustad himself subscribed to, the value of correct views may be understood.

The statement of "In the realm of the power of passion, it pours the tyrannies of Nimrod, Pharaoh, and Shaddad on mankind" should not refer to philosophy. Because neither Nimrod, nor the Pharaohs, nor their spiritual offspring knew philosophy, nor were they informed about it. Anyone who suffers from pride and has an evil-commanding soul may become a Shaddad or a Pharaoh if they obtain wealth or power, even if they know nothing of philosophy and never consult any philosophers. Whereas those who think deeply and systematically and make correct use of their reasons will not permit themselves to become pharaohs. For they would think of the ends the Pharaohs met, and those who imitate them, and take the required lesson.

It is not right to make generalizations

Only, it seems to me that Ustad's analysis here may be understood as his considering philosophy to be the reason for the soul being inflated in whatever form, or to be the result of philosophy. This must be a correct understanding. Because in this case, one would have to say that it was philosophy or philosophers which

urged Cane to kill his brother Abel, while at that time there were neither philosophers nor philosophy. But man existed at that time, and so most definitely did his evil-commanding soul.

It is therefore understood that while criticizing the philosophy he objected to, Ustad sufficed with generalizations.

It will be useful to mention that philosophy and science proceed from doubt or uncertainty, for if there was no doubt, there would be no problem to think about and investigate. What is important here is investigating the subject of doubt and solving the problem. To be in a constant state of doubt destroys man, both mentally and spiritually; it makes it impossible to know and to practise science. It drives man to a crisis. Sceptics like Pyron and Montaigne did not want to be saved from doubt, while sceptics like Ghazzali and Descartes used doubt methodically; on attaining certain knowledge about the subject about which they were sceptical, and being convinced, they gave up doubting.

The thing that Ustad pointed out was dangerous may have been the above state of continuous doubt. But it is possible to be saved from this through in depth thinking, investigation, and taking steps to prevent the evil-commanding soul dominating a person. Because unbelief, that is, denial of God, consists in my opinion of the soul enveloping and suffocating the heart and intelligence and blocking its vision.

Mental and spiritual crises such as that may also be the birth pangs of great thoughts. There are many examples of this in history, the chief of whom is Ghazzali.

One of the generalizations about the philosophy that has not combined with line of prophethood is that "in the realm of the power of animal appetites, it nurtures and bears the fruit of goddesses, idols, and those who claim divinity." This is general. If, in the history of Western philosophy we leave aside the Hedonists, who formed a tiny minority in Ancient Greece, the rest opposed the pursuit of pleasure as an ethic and put forward various ethical views. The majority were affected by religion of some sort or another. For example, a Positivist philosopher like Auguste Comte said he had based the altruistic ethic which he developed, on the saying in the Gospels "Love your fellows as you love yourself." While John Stuart Mill, another Positivist, said he had based his utilitarian ethic on the golden rules of Jesus of "doing to others what you would have them do to you, and loving your neighbour as yourself."¹³ Also, there have been more than a few philosophers who were not religious who said that it was necessary not to give in to lust and to restrain one's sexual appetites.

6. *The statement that principles like 'might is right' and 'life is a conflict' are the basis of philosophy*

These too are generalizations. For sure there were philosophers like Thomas Hobbes, who said "man eats man," and Charles Darwin, who said "life is a conflict," but what did they mean in saying this, and what was the context? And was

13. Mill, John Stuart, *Faydacılık*, Istanbul 1986, 26-7.

this the view of all philosophers? Moreover, those whose ideas basically turned life into a conflict were Darwin biologically, and Karl Marx from the social and economic point of view. They both lived at approximately the same time. Darwin's (1813-1882) ideas of life being a conflict and the survival of the fittest were turned into the ideas of class struggle and social clashes by Karl Marx. The idea of 'might is right' from the point of view of political philosophy was Machievelli's. Marx anyway transformed some of his ideas into the principles of social philosophy. Numerous other philosophers and scholars developed new ideas opposing theirs. In the Islamic world, however, ideas of this kind have never emerged in any philosopher or scholar. The *al-Madīnat al-Fāḍila* of Farabi and similar works are full of ideas against rulers who used force.

Basically, philosophy is structurally unsuitable to put forward such an idea. Those who put forward ideas of all sorts were people, thinkers, or philosophers. In the Islamic world too, there are numerous theories of state and politics which differ greatly from each other. And the source of these is Islam, the Qur'an and the Sunna.

7. *The statement that the idea of 'From one, one proceeds' entered Islamic thought from Greek thought*

It would be more correct to say that this negates God's power of continuous creation. One has to agree with the explanation that Ustad put forward, that this idea contains the possibility of transforming God's absolute power into impotence. But in the understanding of 'the ten intellects' God's intervention continues. Just as although in Greek philosophy there was no idea of Divine revelation, Farabi and Ibn Sina established revelation in the way of the intellect and saw the Prophet as Head of State.

The statement that philosophers "allotted the rest of His sovereignty to causes, thus ascribing partners to God on a grand scale" is also true to an extent. For there are understandings which explain events completely by causes. But Islamic thinkers and Ustad himself described God as the Causer of Causes. Philosophers in the West who have opposed philosophical currents which adhere blindly to causes are also not few in number.

The French philosopher Malebranche (1683-1714) defended the idea of intermediary, cause — interval, cause, and opposed causality, just as Ghazzali opposed it. Moreover, a doctoral thesis was written in Philadelphia in 1968 which compared the two thinkers from this point of view.

Similarly, the English philosopher Hume (1711-1777) opposed induction and the idea of causality at its base, and like Ghazzali stated that a tie between causes was not necessary.

The famous German philosopher Hegel (1770-1831), whose ideas are considered to be the peak of rationalism, said that causes were themselves without consciousness or purposefulness, and just as cold did not know that it froze water, so water was not itself aware that it was cold that froze it.

On the other hand, positing that no tie was necessary between causes, the

French philosopher Émile Boutroux (1845-1921) came up with the doctrine of 'unnecessariness,' which stated that the natural sciences and laws of nature could hold man under compulsion. After becoming popular in the West, some of our thinkers were influenced by this idea in the Constitutional and Republican periods.

The sociologist-philosopher Gurvitch 1896-1965 stated that after Boutroux's doctrine of 'uncertainty' the idea of causality had become a smashed idol.¹⁴

8. *The assertion that having taken force and conflict as its principles, philosophy has destroyed mankind's happiness*

It is true that these have destroyed mankind's happiness, but so too happiness has not been attained in periods when there have been no philosophical movements or systems or philosophers or with peoples that were such. In which of the peoples of Asia or Africa was philosophical thought dominant? There were no true men of learning there, let alone philosophers. Even if it was colonialism that reduced them to this state, it is only a few hundred years since the colonialists first went there. Were philosophical ideas dominant in pre-Islamic Arabia so that immorality was rife and its people were wretched and not happy? If there is an absence of happiness and well-being today in Turkey, does highly developed philosophical thought have a role in this? Or is it because the businessmen, people, politicians and tradesmen, who all say they are Muslims, have become subjected to their evil-commanding souls? This means that one has to understand that Ustad said that philosophy had negated human happiness, without forgetting that he differentiated between two philosophies. Otherwise an unfair and incorrect generalization will have been made about philosophy.

Ustad is very right in saying that the mark of force is aggression, the mark of self-interest tussling after benefits, the mark of benefit-seeking clashes, and the marks of racialism to be nourished through devouring others and aggression. With these accurate statements, he summoned humanity to peace, unity, and brotherhood. But it should not be forgotten that all those who have obtained power have not aggressed against others and tyrannized them. The best examples of these are the Seljuqs and the Ottomans. And Ustad himself, when invited to join the Kurdish rebellion, refused, saying: "The sword may not be drawn against a people who have been the standard-bearers of Islam for a thousand years." He opposed such movements on the grounds of unity and combatted them. In devoting his life to establishing unity based on the unity of belief, he was utilizing for good the force acquired by the Ottomans, and continuing its ideal of establishing justice.

It should be added that the desire to gratify the lusts of the instinctual soul may both be the result of force, and be seen in the weak and poor, not based on force. For desires of this sort are part of man's nature. What is important is to subject them to the will and reason, and reach maturity.

14. Gurwitsch, George, *Sosyal Determinizmin Çeşitleri ve İnsan Hürriyeti* [Turk. Trans: N. Ş. Kösemihal], İstanbul 1958, 19.

It seems that Ustad Said Nursi attributes all immoral conduct in daily life, and associating partners with God, disbelief, sexual misconduct, and political corruption, to philosophy, without differentiating between them. But in fact he divides philosophy into two, and speaks positively of "the rightly-guided, beneficial philosophy which is reconciled with the Qur'an and serves it." That is to say, these statements are restricted to the "second sort of philosophy," which he saw as leading mankind into "misguidance, atheism, and the swamp of nature."

As a form of systematic and profound thinking, philosophy does not necessarily lead serious-minded people to idol-worship, vice, and such like. Otherwise one would have to attribute the widespread consumption of alcohol and addiction to women in the Umayyad, Byzantine and 'Abbasid courts, and the immorality of Pompei to the spread of philosophical movements, which would not be in conformity with logic and historical development.

An analysis and critique of Bediuzzaman's views about philosophers

1. Bediuzzaman said that because, being "charmed by its apparent glitter," they had taken the way of philosophy, geniuses like Farabi and Ibn Sina had "attained only the rank of an ordinary believer." He then states that when on a journey of the imagination resembling a vision, they had become submerged in a tunnel and their voices had died away to nothing. On the other hand, however, he considers it fitting that they should be described as "believers," a rank which Ghazzali did not accord them.

If it is understood from this that people have deviated from the truth because of philosophy, then one has to ask why all the unbelievers and holders of deviant ideas who understand nothing of philosophy, or loathe it, have disbelieved or strayed from the path, despite having no connection with philosophy.

Farabi and Ibn Sina have been severely criticized for some of their ideas. But in recent research there is near agreement that Ghazzali was over-hasty in his criticisms of Farabi and Ibn Sina and that he accused them of unbelief without seeing some of their works. Perhaps Ustad did not go as far as Ghazzali and said they were at "the rank of ordinary believers" in order to be cautious. It is my view that Ustad had never read any of the works of Farabi and Ibn Sina, for if he had he would not have spoken so generally and would have said that some of their ideas were correct, and like Ghazzali, would have criticized them on only some points.

Nevertheless, both Ghazzali, and Ustad, and the scholars of *kalām* continuously used the concepts and proofs that Farabi and Ibn Sina developed and established. If one compares the explanations in many of Ghazzali's works with those in the works of Farabi and Ibn Sina, one may see that many of them have been taken exactly from Farabi and Ibn Sina. That is, Farabi and Ibn Sina, and particularly the latter, form the background of Ghazzali and many scholars of *kalām*.

Similarly, Ustad did not hold back from frequently using terms like 'Necessarily Existent' and 'Sphere of Contingency,' which Farabi and Ibn Sina had

established. He uses Plato's 'World of Ideas' as the 'World of Similitudes,' which was the formula Suhrawardi developed. He even uses comfortably the term 'Maker' (*Ṣāni*), which was frequently used by the Greek philosophers. There is, however, of course a clear difference in their usages. The Greek philosophers used the name Maker because they did not believe in God's creativity. It was their view that God was merely the world's architect and maker. The architect draws up the plans and the maker makes the world out of existent materials. Although Ustad uses terms like 'All-Wise Maker' and 'All-Glorious Maker,' he also frequently uses the Name of Creator, to express God's creating out of nothing. But one has to be extremely careful in this question. The attribute of Maker should not over-shadow the attribute of Creator, or take its place, for that would be very incorrect. For as I said, 'creation' (*khalq*) is creation from nothing, whereas 'making' (*ṣun'*) is making the world out of existent materials like an architect, artist or craftsman. For instance, in Aristotle, God brought the world into existence from pre-eternal spirit and matter. Ustad is right from this point of view. But Farabi and Ibn Sina did not remove God's intervention.

That is to say, Ustad made some criticisms using generalizations and without going into the matter in depth, or what he wrote can be understood in that way. Ustad does not ascribe "as much value as that of a fly's wing" to philosophers like Aristotle and Farabi in relation to the Qur'an, which he says is his "pre-eternal teacher," but says that the Peripatetic philosophers opened up "the way to the ultimate truth and knowledge of the Necessarily Existent One by means of the intellect and reason alone," and this needs further explanation. If considered superficially, it might be deduced from this that Farabi and Ibn Sina did not believe in the Qur'an, which is not true. For they both believed in the Qur'an and Divine revelation, tried to make revelation conform with rational principles, and they also performed the five daily prayers, about which Ibn Sina wrote a treatise. They were not bound only to the reason. Ustad himself says in the Tenth Word that Ibn Sina said in connection with bodily resurrection that "the reason cannot take this way," but says that he believed in it as a truth taught by the Qur'an. This means one has to be very careful when making judgements about them and investigate the matter thoroughly.

2. A number of philosophers "calling Almighty God 'Self-Necessitating'," which denied Him choice in creation; and this is not correct. Personally I do not agree with this. That is, if God creates because it is necessitated by His own nature, then His will is negated because He is compelled to conform to that necessity. But it should be investigated who said this in what context. A generalization suggesting that all philosophers said this is not possible.

These statements of Ustad are in fact similar to some of the objections put forward by Ghazzali, and are to be found in the old books of *kalām*. But one may note that Ustad does not discuss at all any of the philosophical currents and problems which developed after the Renaissance, especially in the West. Was he uninformed about these? Or did he not study them? Or did he not consider it necessary to reply to them in particular? These matters should be researched and

published. It is written in his biographies that during the years he stayed in Tahir Pasha's residence in Van, he studied numerous books about the thought and sciences of that time in addition to the classic *medrese* education, but we do not know what these consisted of. Since there is no reference to this in his works, it gives rise to the feeling that like the religious scholars of the Second Constitutional Period, he put forward the general criticisms in some of the books of *kalām*, because he had made no further study.

3. It is not possible to agree with the idea that "divine knowledge is not concerned with insignificant matters," that is, it does not comprehend all creatures, that is, that God knows things generally, not in detail. For example, if God knows man but does not know 'Ali and Wali, He can neither call them to account, nor reward them. No need would then remain for the hereafter. Ustad is correct in this respect. The ideas of Farabi and Ibn Sina should be carefully studied before ascribing a view to them in this matter. For some researchers of the present hold opposing opinions.

4. The statement that the sincere student of philosophy is irreligious, overbearing, and arrogant, and that his chief aim is to satisfy the appetites of his stomach and animal nature and follow his personal interests is a very broad generalization. There are some that do this and some that do not. There are some that seek to gratify their sexual appetites and some that do not. That is, it would have been more appropriate to repeat Ustad's division of philosophy into two in every analysis of it, so that passages like the above are not made to refer to philosophy generally.

5. Philosophers like Plato, Aristotle, Farabi, and Ibn Sina saying that the highest aim of humanity is "to imitate the Necessarily Existent One" may be correct—if what they mean is manifesting in oneself attributes pleasing to God. But if it is the deification of man that is meant or man having a share in the Godhead, it is a very dangerous idea. The matter should therefore be clarified. It says in the Qur'an: [Say: 'Our life takes its] hue from God! And who could give a better hue [to life] than God, if we but truly worship Him?'"¹⁵ Similarly, the Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) advises: "Be moulded by God-given ethics." Ustad expounds this Hadith like this: "...by knowing their impotence to seek refuge with Divine power, by seeing their weakness to rely on Divine strength, by realizing their poverty to trust in Divine mercy, by perceiving their need to seek help from Divine riches, by seeing their faults to ask for pardon through Divine forgiveness, and by realizing their deficiency to be glorifiers of Divine perfection."¹⁶ This explanation holds great importance for explaining the matter.

We may say the following, based on what we have seen so far: Ustad differentiates between two philosophies and attacks the second, which he describes as leading mankind into misguidance, making those who follow it into pharaohs, pursuing their own interests and seeking to gratify their lusts, and as a field of activity which is stupid, blind, and damnable; and he speaks insultingly of the

15. Qur'an, 2:138.

16. Sözlür, 507 / *The Words*, 563.

philosophers who follow this way. When doing this, because he does not always differentiate between the two philosophies, it may be understood that the attacks and insults are directed at all philosophy and all philosophers. And because it may be understood in this way, Ustad may himself be seen as one of those who leave the use of reasoned thinking and logic, questioning and investigation to others, or who despise this. Or because of such generalizations, some experts in philosophy may reach the conclusion that "Ustad denies philosophy," as I said at the beginning of this paper. It should not be forgotten that he differentiates between two philosophies.

For thirteen centuries we left thinking and investigation to others. We forgot how to use reason, in consequence of which we were compelled to follow those who advanced in knowledge and thought.

Ustad puts forward "the line of prophethood" against "the line of philosophy," and says that the latter is so harmful, the former is the sole way of obtaining mankind's happiness. The line of prophethood considers the world as signifying the meaning of another (*mânâ-yı harfî*). In this understanding, the existence of the 'I' or ego is dependent or secondary, its ownership is illusory, and its reality shadow-like. Its function, "being a measure and balance for the attributes and functions of its Creator, is conscious service." "Causes are but an apparent veil; Nature is the set of rules of His creation, a collection of His laws, and the way in which He demonstrates His power."

Ustad compares this luminous line with a "Tuba-tree." Its "blessed branches ... have adorned with luminous fruits all parts of the world of humanity. By scattering the darkness of all the past, it shows that that long past time is not a place of non-existence and a vast graveyard as philosophy would have it, but is rather a radiant garden and a place of light for the luminous souls who have departed this world, who have cast off their heavy loads and remain free. It is a luminous, many-runged ascent and an orbit of lights for passing souls in order that they may jump to the future and eternal felicity." "Among the principles of the line of prophethood concerning social life are those of mutual assistance, magnanimity, and generosity." It is at the same time a unity arising from the affirmation of Divine unity.

These ideas of Ustad are correct and their expression is also very fine. Only in my opinion, it would have been better if he had not put forward the line of prophethood against that of philosophy and compared the two. For the line of prophethood comes directly from a Divine source and contains the commands of revelation. They are of a different nature. In the latter is no work of the human intellect. Whereas both the science of *kalâm*, and sufism, and law, and other fields connected with philosophy, most of them are the work of the human intellect. While 'making' philosophy, one may conform to the principles brought by revelation, or benefit from them. There are many examples of this in the West and at the present time. It seems to me that comparisons should not be made between the works of the human reason or intellect and revelation; the points on which they may be combined should have been investigated. Ustad must have

been aware of this for in his discussion of the ego, before discussing the two lines, he says "When those two lines have been in agreement and united... the world of humanity has experienced a brilliant happiness and social life." But since the difference is not clearly apparent in the following discussions, it might be construed that Ustad is totally inimical to philosophy; or others, basing themselves on him, might attempt such hostility.

The things preventing philosophical thought in Turkey

I consider it appropriate to explain a matter at this point: there are two groups who put people who hold religious beliefs in Turkey off philosophical thought:

1. Atheist philosophers

These believe that philosophy should oppose religion and its beliefs, and that where there is religion, there philosophy crumbles. Some of them even do not want any of the philosophers like Descartes who have put forward various proofs for the existence of God, or in whose thought a place is given to religion and revelation, to be taught to anyone, and they ignore this side of them. Dr. Takiyeddin Mengüşoğlu, who is considered to be the chief of these, said this:

"... it is essential to understand the ideas a philosopher has put forward and grasp why he has done this in the form he has and not in another way, but here his capacity for knowledge should be considered. For example, in Descartes, his constructive side and his capacity for knowledge should be differentiated, and only the latter should be taken into consideration. Thus, today, problems like Descartes' classification of 'ideas' and his proofs of God to the external world should be abandoned as a construction devoid of every sort of view and knowledge."¹⁷

In another place, Mengüşoğlu says:

"The knowledge afforded by religion is not knowledge in the sense of scientific and philosophical knowledge; it is in fact imperative that it is rejected by scientific and philosophical knowledge. For knowledge based on dogmas and belief based on dogmas can in no way concern philosophy and science."¹⁸

According to this understanding, ideas about God or similar ideas of certain philosophers should be dispensed with. But if this is done, would Descartes' theory of knowledge and existence remain? It would not, because he situated God's unerringness and not causing error on the basis of true knowledge. The philosopher's system would then collapse. Its collapse is not important, what is important is for them its religious aspects being ignored.

Is partial explanation of a philosopher's or a scientist's ideas conformable with the scientific understanding? That is another question.

It is seen that any form of thought which has any connection with any religious belief, near or far, or has been influenced by it is completely without value as far as the above understand is concerned. No one who believes in any religion could feel sympathy for these philosophers or such a philosophy. If such philosophers reject such ideas, believers take up a position opposing them. In this way

17. Mengüşoğlu, Takiyettin, *Felsefeye Giriş*, İstanbul 1958, 327.

18. Ibid., 309 fn. 2.

believers begin to say "philosophy is unbelief. Philosophy misguides people, makes them lose their religion, and leads them astray. Be sure to avoid it!"

2. Muslims who are vexed at the atheists

The other enemies of philosophical thought are just such religiously-minded people. What occurs to them when one says "philosophy," is hostility towards religion and destruction of it. Because the majority of the prominent intellectuals and thinkers from the Second Constitutional Period up to the present have been influenced by movements like Positivism, Materialism, atheism, and Marxism, and have endeavoured to spread the philosophical views they have favoured in a shallow way without studying them in detail. In this way, they have become alienated from the great majority of the people, who are believers, and thus a deep rift has continued between the people and the intellectuals for at least a hundred or a hundred and fifty years.

Numerous religiously-minded people have been inimical towards philosophy as a reaction against these atheistic and aggressive intellectuals and philosophers, and moreover, have said that there is no thought or philosophical thought in Islam, and that there should not be. In one respect they have cut off their noses to spite their faces.

On seeing this, atheist philosophers or materialists started to assert that Islam stifled thought and was inimical to it. Thus, a vicious circle was embarked upon, with rigid, shallow religious people nourishing atheistic philosophers without their realizing it, and vice versa, and so on. As a result, each being unaware of the other, the two groups united on the point that there is no philosophical thought in Islam.

Thus, in the face of the vicious circle in which they found themselves, a number of religious thinkers like Said Nursi sought a point of reconciliation, a solution, in "positive philosophy," despite his attacking to this great extent materialist philosophers and philosophy, which he called "the second sort." This was a synthesis. For he knew that where only science and reason are used there are doubts, scepticism and denial, and where only religion is dominant, is bigotry and ignorance. And it is known that bigotry and ignorance are hostile to Islam.

In fact, according to what Kâtib Chelebi wrote, in the seventeenth century after mathematics and philosophy had been removed from the *medrese* syllabuses, the country was plunged into a profound ignorance, strong bigotry, and hostility towards the physical sciences.

Ustad may have been stern towards certain philosophical currents and philosophers in order to preserve the belief of Muslims from doubt. But when doing this, he felt the need to leave the door ajar to science and philosophical thought. Ustad considered it remiss that "the Old Said and certain thinkers in part accepted the principles of human and European philosophy, and contested them with their own weapons," and he gave it up. He continued: "I gave up that way. And I showed in fact that Islam's principles are so profound that the deepest principles of philosophy cannot reach them."¹⁹

19. *Mektûbat*, 413 / *Letters*, 516.

I reckon it would not be in error to interpret these words of Ustad as meaning there may be an Islamic philosophy.

Ustad supports peace and reconciliation in society

Ustad stated that mankind's happiness lies in the combining or synthesis of religion and philosophy that I have discussed in this paper. He did not want a clash between religion and philosophy or between religion and science. He was in support of reconciliation in society, not conflict; similarly he did not support a clash between the mind and heart in the intellectual and scientific field. Nevertheless, man is compelled to defeat his ego and has to combat the lusts of his soul. The philosophy which Ustad attacks are atheistic and nihilist currents like Materialism, atheism, Naturalism, and the Sophists. But because he had not studied in detail modern, contemporary Western philosophy in particular, it is possible that he occasionally put all philosophical activity into the same basket. He therefore had no detailed knowledge about certain philosophical views which combat currents like Materialism and Naturalism. However, most of the proofs and ideas relied on in that struggle are those put forward by people subscribing to various currents like idealism and spiritualism.

Reinterpreting Ustad from the philosophical point of view

Today, therefore, it is meaningless to oppose philosophy by basing one's arguments on Ghazzali without understanding him and by ascribing them to Bediuzzaman without studying him closely.

Ustad was also a thinker, and a philosopher in some measure. For in various subjects he has ideas original to himself. Similarly, today some Risale-i Nur students have felt the need to establish his ideas on philosophical and rational bases. For instance, Safa Mürsel wrote a thick book entitled *Bediüzzaman'ın Devlet Felsefesi* (Bediuzzaman's Philosophy of the State) about the political ideas of the person who said: "I take refuge with God from Satan and politics." This shows that in spite of philosophy, Ustad had philosophical ideas. These may be related to various fields like ontology, theology, epistemology, and ethics. These should all be studied separately. For we have greater need than previously to reestablish the development of philosophical thought and its tradition.

The undesirable consequences of not combining science and religion

If it had not been for the *ulama's* bigotry, could the advanced observatory built by Taqiyyuddin in 1572 on a Western model been razed to the ground by cannon-fire ten years later? He had also discovered the telescope thirty-five years before the people of the West. No scientists emerged in that period who could appreciate his scientific work. Such bigotry could have been overcome only by freedom of philosophical thought and its unhampered development. The solution of the problem is the same today. Despite the secular system and for the last century there having been no pressurizing by religion, those who blame Islam for our backwardness have not been able to come up with any new philosophical view or ideas that might be the subject of debate in the West. Because

we lost the tradition of philosophical thought, we have considered the philosophical systems we have transposed from the West without studying them in depth to be the highest truth, and have not been saved from shallowness and superficiality. We have slid from one extreme to another, from one form of bigotry to another. But there is no advance and no civilization without thought, ideas, and science. For advances in philosophical ideas are always the result of efforts to find something new and develop new views and theories about the phenomenal world and to set them up in place of the old.

From this point of view I therefore meet with appreciation and gratitude this symposium and the opportunity it affords to discuss such a subject, and reinterpret Ustad, preventing this becoming taboo. This is also the way to refound philosophical thought and its tradition in a way far removed from bigotry. For we shall not advance by not thinking and by prejudging those who do think. We shall also not be able to defend ourselves in that way. Similarly, we shall not be saved from being the spiritual and intellectual slaves of societies which do think.

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