

A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF THE PRAGMATIST THOUGHT: DEWEY AND ERİŞİRGİL

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SUMMARY

In this paper, a discussion has been being introduced that whether the Pragmatist thought was affected by the different social and cultural settings of Turkey and the United States, and the non-American reflections of Pragmatism has been being brought as one of the discussion issue due to the different conditions of the countries.

Thus, the similarities and dissimilarities of thoughts of the two have been being, comparatively, taken from the perspectives of epistemology, axiology, ontology, teaching methods, etc. With this comparasion, Erişirgil has been researching the philosophical foundations in order to find a way to develop the Turkish Educational System throughout the mostly accepted ideas, principles and theories of Dewey.

ÖZET

Pragmatist Eğitim Anlayışının Mukayeseli Analizi: Dewey ve Erişirgil

Bu makalede, Pragmatist felsefenin Amerikan toplumunun dışında, örneğin Türk toplumunda nasıl ele alındığı, Türk ve Amerikan toplumlarındaki kültürel farklılıkların, Pragmatist düşünce biçimine etki edip etmediği konusu tartışma ortamına getirilmektedir.

Bu nedenle, Dewey ve Erişirgil'in epistemoloji, aksiyoloji, ontoloji, öğretim metodları v.b. konulardaki düşüncelerinin, birbirlerine benzer ve farklı yanlarının neler olduğu, mukayeseli bir biçimde ele alınmaktadır. Erişirgil bu mukayese ile Dewey'in evrensel nitelikli kuramlarını, farklı kültür yapısına sahip Türk toplumunda uygulamada ne gibi noktalara dikkat edilmesi gerektiği ve bilimsel metod aracılığıyla, Türk eğitiminin geliştirilmesinin dayanacağı felsefi temelleri araştırmaktadır.

In his book *Sociology and Pragmatism*, C.W. Mills indicates that there is a need to examine the non-American reflections and criticism of pragmatism. In this context, this paper attempts to depict the interpretation of pragmatism in the

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hands of the Turkish scholar Mehmet Emin Erişirgil, from the historical as well as in the philosophical perspectives in order to enlighten the issue.

The term pragmatism was used for the first time, by Rıza Tevfik in Turkey¹. However, he used the term loosely mixing it with utilitarianism to form a kind of "cowboy-philosophy". However, when Mustafa Şekip translated William James's *Terbiye Musahabeleri*, which was a serious work, the Turkish intelligentsia became interested in pragmatism. The preface, in this book had a very important introduction on James and his philosophy. However, the Turkish pragmatist scholar Erişirgil was primarily responsible for disseminating the principles of the philosophy and endeavoring to implement them while he was at various posts in the ministry of education.

In his article "Nietzsche and Epistemology", Erişirgil first showed his inclination towards pragmatism². While he was an assistant minister of education, he established a close friendship with Avni Başman who was the one of the followers of pragmatist philosophy in Turkish educational policies. Together they prepared the program of "Elementary Schools' Policies" and at the outset of this program they defended the necessity of implementing pragmatic philosophy in Turkish education. The curriculum and its pedagogical principles served as the foundation for the reform theories of the "Village Institutes" yet to come, which will be a subject of another article to come³. In the article, "Nietzsche ve Maarif Nazariyesi" Erişirgil asserts that the roots of pragmatism reaches to Nietzsche⁴. He argues:

I shall not deal with the ambiguous points in philosophers theory of perspectivism. However I want to demonstrate that he is the first strong defender of pragmatism with his perspectives in epistemology. These important points have been missed by Western philosophical critiques for a long time. The reader of Nietzsche could not pay attention to the originality of his epistemology, both, due to either his artistic influential style of writing and his extremely critical attacks on social and moral values. Indeed, after James, pragmatism was emerged as a strong intellectual current. However, this current was also, earlier, mentioned by Charles S. Peirce. Though Nietzsche had not known these writings, however, he came to the same conclusion following the different perspectives⁵.

Erişirgil published some more articles, in *Mihrab*⁶, in which he clearly showed his interpretation of pragmatism.

As with Dewey, Erişirgil believed that the source of knowledge should not be based on institutions which could not grasp the absolute⁷. In the journal *Hayat*,

- 1 Hilmi Z. Ülken, *Türkiye'de Çağdaş Düşünce Tarihi II*. (İstanbul: Ahmet Saim Mat. 1966), p. 705.
- 2 ———, "William James" *Muallimler Birliği Dergisi*, II (Dec. 1925, Ülken, op. cit.,) p. 17.
- 3 Hasan Ali Koçer, *Türkiye'de Öğretmen Yetiştirme Problemi (1848-1947)* (Ankara: Yargıçoğlu Matbaası, 1968), p. 116.
- 4 Hilmi Ziya Ülken, op. cit., p. 708.
- 5 Ibid
- 6 Ibid
- 7 Ibid

he argued that science should be the real guide. Although, scientific knowledge had entered Turkey with *Tanzimat* (Gülhane Chapter), nobody could adapt the scientific method. Even though they were called alim they could not deal with those events which had not been explained in the special books. Moreover, new tendencies born in national *Hayat*⁸ distrusted the sciences. Despite this view, Erişirgil's pedagogical theory emphasized the prime importance of scientific practice and national democracy. Science is the means of investigation by which we accumulate valid information about the world. The theories of Erişirgil emphasized this idea:

The create a scholar who will be able to cope with solutions of the real problems rather than rehearsing a few concepts in scientific terms⁹.

Dewey argued the same issue:

There is but one sure road of patient, cooperative inquiry operating by means of observation, experiment, record, and controlled reflection¹⁰.

In brief, Erişirgil's ideas supported Deweyan theories. Scientific method points out that a better social can be constructed. Education is the instrument through which needed changes in society can be enacted from scientific hypothesis. thesis.

The issue of national democracy was stressed in Erişirgil's pedagogy, because of its importance to education. This was the Ziya Gökalp's influence. Dewey, however, did not restrict practices informing a government, but expanded them into an all embracing way of life. Democracy was one system whereby individual variations were treated as precious, since the society finds in them the means of its own growth. How does Erişirgil's understanding of national democracy differ from Dewey's view of democracy. In his article "Manevi Disiplin ve Yeni Nesil"¹¹, he explains that spritual discipline can be established with the help of philosophy and literature. Moreover, he searches to establish a national unity by utilizing the past experience of the war of independence. Though Dewey did not advocate adherence to past should be related to the objects of present experience; however, this experience should not lead to nationalistic ends. Dewey stated: "... present experience is stretched, as it were, backward. It can expand in to the future only as it is also enlarge to take in the past."¹² In this sense one can say that Erişirgil diverted democratic ends to nationalistic ends, but his path was characteristically Deweyan from the perspective of Turkish-culture which was nationalistic.

On the subject of teaching method, it was very difficult for Erişirgil to accept the assertion of progressive education, i.e. that the child is the center of the educational stage. The child is the final object of the teaching, according to him. The real center of the school is the conscience of the teacher. Erişirgil also argued that progressive education had treated the child as though he/she was an eternal infant;

8 Ibid

9 Ibid., p. 709.

10 John Dewey, *A Common Faith* (New Heaven: Yale Univ. Press, 1934), p. 34.

11 Ülken, op. cit., pp. 709-710.

12 John Dewey, *Experience and Education* (New York: Mac Millan Comp. 1938) p. 25.

childhood, he was claimed, just a transitory process. Whatever differed in Erişirgil's interpretation of teaching method, this interpretation did not differ largely from Dewey's statements on the assignment and task of teachers.

The role of the teacher according to Erişirgil is not only one of passive observation, he is the active director for what is to be learned¹³. In this sense, the teacher becomes the center of the class as he formulates the theory of learning and sets the models of conduct; however, the teacher gradually throws more and more responsibility upon the child, educating him by releasing his creative abilities. Erişirgil states:

The contemporary society gives importance to the individual who can effect both social and natural environments. The goal of education is to train complete perfect men who are able to influence his environment. In this context, the teachers have to be examples of this kind of personalities as well as transmit those qualities to the children¹⁴.

In Dewey's pragmatic philosophy the center of gravity shifts in progressive schools, from teacher to child. However, the teacher to child. However, the teacher still has a place in the learning experience. Having evaluated children's experiences, the teacher acts in a positive capacity as a leader of the group; but, the teacher is responsible for seeing that the experiences lead out into an expounding world of subjects matter. Also, the teacher must see to it that learning situations result in growth. In this case, Erişirgil's perspectives actually are not very different than those reflected in the ideas of Dewey.

The similarities between Erişirgil and Dewey are also evident in the area of discipline. The general characteristics of the traditional school was that the teacher kept order, since order was in the teacher's keeping. When the concept of external control is rejected, a substitute is required. Thus in the new schools the primary source of social control proceeds from the life of the school as a whole and not directly from the teacher¹⁵. This explanation was also brought into Turkish thought by Gökalp¹⁶, because of his explanation of informal and formal education. Social control stems from the activities which are carried on in active learning situations. In brief, for Dewey, discipline was always relative to an end in view. If this end was to enforce an acquiescence of attitude and a reaction to facts, then discipline would be devoted to securing this end. If the end was to achieve the attitude of social co-operation, then discipline would follow a different path. For Erişirgil, the "end" was a national, democratic, and experiment-oriented education for Turkish society.

The unity of system and setting is further evident in the theories of Erişirgil and Dewey. The school's setting — in general — has a particular relation to the

13 Ülken, op. cit., p. 713.

14 Ibid

15 Stanley D. Ivie, "A Comparison in Educational Philosophy: Jose Vascencelos and John Dewey", *Comparative Education Review*, X (October, 1966) pp. 404-406.

16 Ziya Gökalp, "Yaygın ve Organize Müeyyideler", *Yeni Mecmua*, II (May, 1918), pp. 307-308.

country in which it is placed. Thus schools are interrelated with the other institutions in society. Dewey accepted the same perspective that the school system has to conform to the particular society in which it finds itself. Dewey¹⁷ said that taking into consideration the industrial revolution, an educational system must pass through a radical transformation, too. In short, the school system must grow gradually out of the home system. The new school must present life, a life as a real and vital to the child as that which is found in his own home. This view, in Erişirgil's perspective:

Most importantly, reality comes from life, and reality, the most significant characteristics of pragmatism not accept anything rather than experience¹⁸.

This experience is reflective of the life of the larger society and permeated throughout with the spirit of art, history, and science¹⁹.

However, according to Erişirgil, the beliefs of the Turkish traditional school did not adhere to this Deweyan view of education. He states:

1. The older generation was individualistic and cosmopolitan. The goal of the society was to provide abstract individual rights.

2. Free thought was the highest symbol of the human mind. The older mentality did not pay attention to nationalistic feelings.

3. Finally, the older generation was silent. Their revolt against the oppression of the sultans was the consequence of the abstract concept of rights.

Almost the same criticism of the old school is evident in Dewey's philosophy. Dewey said that the traditional school made the child listen.

It did not have any place for the child's play. As a consequence of this, the child could not utilize the experiences, he had outside the school in any complete and free way within the school itself. Moreover, the child could not apply, in daily life, what he learned at the school. Thus, for Dewey only when the school acts as an extension of home life will it become alive as a vital part of society.

Erişirgil's view of teaching method is also Deweyan in that depends upon the developmental pattern of the child's growth; that is, his continuously evolving abilities and interests. The teacher orders the subject matter in accord with the child's different growth stages. On this theory, a vital prerequisite to learning is experience. Experience is more likely to nurture growth; it can educate, because it is continuous and interactive subsidies and contrasted his understanding of educational methods with Herbart's pedagogy was important for acquiring certain kinds of cultural information. In an article, "İdealsizlik Tehlikesi ve Darülfünun", he argues:

... (under the circumstances) Emerging hazard of Turkey is to train youth who are not interested in ideals and their subjugation of the materialistic inclinations²⁰.

To Erişirgil, The purpose of all pedagogical theory was to adapt a child's education to a comprehensive vision of life. For example, the child's devotion to

17 Ivie, op. cit., p. 412.

18 Mehmet Emin Erişirgil, "Yeni ve Eski Nesil" *Hayat* III (June, 1927), p. 2.

19 John Dewey, *The School and Society* (Chicago: Univ. Chicago Press, 1900), p. 36.

20 Ülken, op. cit., p. 714.

the flag, also becomes moral truth for the existence of society. Similarly, Dewey expands democratic practices into an all embracing way of life²¹. Democracy is the ideal kind of society. However, in Erişirgil's understanding, democracy has a nationalistic emphasis. In this respect, Erişirgil's pedagogical theories include national democratic perspectives for Turks. In contrast, Dewey was a stern critic of educational arrangements which divided children into distinct types of schools like nationalism or sharply separated stream²².

Another view of pragmatism and education in Turkish thought is related to moral issues. Erişirgil's thought focused on the proper relationship between knowledge and conduct. Learning which occurs in the regular course of study must affect character; otherwise, it is futile. This course of study is based on occupations. The learning itself becomes a form/of social life. The best moral learning is one which is recieved by entering into proper relations with others through work and tought. All education that exhibits the capacity to share effectively in social life is moral. Dewey's concept of the religious aspect of experience has similar moral ends. (Erişirgil never dealt with the issue of religious education. This may be the outcome of oppressive, dractic, and new political atmosphere of 1930's). When Dewey's concept of religious aspects of experience is applied to education it follow that education must communicatereligious values²³. In Dewey's explanation these values should represent "ideal ends", that which is the outcome of social experience. The ideal ends should become part of the student's social conscience and, as such should make a difference in actual behavior. This is the purpose of religious education according to Dewey a purpose shared by Erişirgil's moral perspectives on educational thought²⁴.

The aplicability of Dewey's theories to Turkish education, became evident in the years to come. As was mentioned, this will be analized as a subject later. Thus, basic conclusion can be drawn from this paper. Philosophic system tend to reflect the climate opinion out of which they emerge. This is also true of a philosophical systems, like pragmatism, which more from the nature to the adapted culture. A philosophical expression adapted by a particular culture. A philosophical expression adopted by a particular culture, especially at the national scale. In this sense, Erişirgil's interperetation of Deweyan pragmatism carries certain elements from Turkish culture.

Dewey's pragmatism reflects an epic sense of life and the philosophy of human achievmnt; as such, it is relevant to the goals and desires of a nation as a whole. His theories have been absorbed and modified by the Turkish²⁵.

21 Ivie, op. cit., p. 411.

22 Malcolm Skibeck, ed. "Introduction" in *John Dewey*. (London: The Mac Millan Com. 1970), p. 19.

23 John Dewey, *A Common Faith*, p. 3.

24 Ülken, op. cit., p. 715.

25 İlhan Başgöz and Howard E. Wilson, *Educational Problems of Turkey: 1920-1940*, (Bloomington: Indiana Univ. Press, 1968) p. 65.