

An Evaluation of Gökalpian Thought From The Epistemological Perspectives

Suat ANAR*

SUMMARY

This article deals with the sociological and philosophical ideas of Gökalp, who is one of the most influential thinkers of Turkey, he lived from 1876 to 1924. His thought has been being evaluated from the epistemological perspectives through comparison with his contemporaries.

ÖZET

Gökalpçi Düşüncenin Epistemolojik Açıdan Değerlendirilmesi

Bu makalede ülkemizin yetiştirdiği önemli düşünürlerden biri olan Ziya Gökalp'in düşünce sistemi epistemolojik açıdan çağdaşı düşünürlerle karşılaştırılmakta ve görüşleri bilgi teorisi açısından değerlendirilmektedir.

Ziya Gökalp, a Turkish savant who lived from 1876 to 1924, is generally acknowledged as the intellectual father of Turkish Society. Gökalp, as a follower of Durkheim, used his ideas concerning the impact of social and philosophic relations on the epistemological problems. Thus, in this paper, Gökalpian thought will be demarcated and will be evaluated from the epistemological perspectives that whether Gökalp added some ideas to the Durkheimian sociological ideas due to the existing circumstances and conditions of the Turkish society or not.

* Doç. Dr.; Uludağ Üniversitesi Necatibey Eğitim Fakültesi Öğretim Üyesi, Balıkesir.

Gökalp believed that the collective representation, collective conscience and *mefkure* were the soul of the society. Two main stages are discernable in the development of Gökalp's theory of the ideal. The first stage was discussed in his article in *Türk Yurdu*¹. Gökalp attributed to ideals important functions in social life. The ideal in this limited sense is a kind of hidden force, moving and directing society in all its activities². In this sense, the ideal is the self knowledge of society which is born when man become aware of the existence and value of social group to which he belongs. In short, the ideals neither utopias never experienced, nor goals to be reached at some future time. The ideal are the educators of the present, the creators of the future, and realities of the past³.

Gökalp, at the second stage extends the meaning of ideal as a way to explain the nature of the values in a particular society. Why do certain ideas become influential while the others do not? At this time, he adopted Durkheim's theories and found an answer to his central question about ideal. In his article, "Yeni Hayat ve Yeni Kıymetler"⁴, he explains myths, tales, legend, proverbs, beliefs, moral, legal, economic and even scientific views are seen as ideals which are connected with value justments emotionally in tensified collective ideas. Thus, *mefkure* was the soul of society as was indicated and as in Durkheimian thought "collective representation" were religious in nature. After adding some qualifications and economic conceptions to achive the ideal, Gökalp, agreed with Durkheim's judgement, that in all societies collective representation had a type of quasi-religious charecter.

.... Religious mores invest the institutions to which they are related with a supernatural or, in clearer terms, a charismatic power and value. This power may be useful in its relation to institutions which are relatively spiritual and represent collective conscience of society⁵....

Indeed, collective representation are based on deeply rooted beliefs and through elaborate ideologies that are shared models, they will inevitably be used in society. However, collective conscience rests in moral philosophy. In Durkheim's thought, it has both cognitive and normative elements, with La Capra's analysis⁶, it becomes increasingly differentiated; nevertheless collective

1 Ziya Gökalp; Türkleşmek, İslamlaşmak, Muassırlaşmak (İstanbul: Toker Basımevi, 1974), pp. 48-50.

2 Uriel Heyd; Foundation of Turkish Nationalism (London: The Harvill Press, L.T.D., 1950), p. 51.

3 Kazım Nuri Duru; Ziya Gökalp (İstanbul: Milli Eğitim Basımevi, 1949), pp. 114-116.

4 Ziya Gökalp; op.cit., pp. 41-55.

5 ———; "Bugünkü Felsefe" ("Today's Philosophy"), in Turkish Nationalism and Western civilization, Translated and edited by Niyazi Berkes (New York: Columbia Univ., Press., 1959), pp. 46-50.

6 Dominick La Capra; Emile Durkheim-Sociologist and Philosopher (London: Cornell Univ. Press., 1966), pp. 265-266.

representations and collective consciences are never completely disjoined. According to Durkheim the higher order of paradigms of normal and pathological states have intimate relations between their cognitive and normative elements. In Gökalpian thought familiar collective representations are the realization of the collective consciousness and are mainly⁷ the causes of social phenomena dependent upon the achievement of certain social goals⁸, showing their characteristics to be normative and cognitive.

Gökalp was interested in the many aspects of a single problem. He claimed that a problem can be solved by rejecting the monistic principle of one and the same determinism for all phenomena. Though Durkheim did not raise the question of the relationship between epistemology and sociology and subordinated epistemology to metaphysics, Gökalp tried to improve and integrate sociology, as a science, with social philosophy and social metaphysics. Gökalp was concerned with knowledge in the other sciences only as they had significant social causes and effects, and only in respect of these social relations. That there are non-social aspects of existents and knowledge is a fact which has to be recognized.

His article⁹ "The Philosophy of Today" has comparison of old and new forms of philosophy related to metaphysics and epistemology.

...In the past, philosophy was regarded as the mother of all sciences. It was believed to have given birth to the sciences other disciplines. But when positive science born of observation and experimentation began to establish themselves, philosophy gave up its maternal duty and became instead the policeman of the sciences. The young sciences, in their realms, were transgressing their boundaries and were trespassing on the neighbouring domains. To maintain in accord between this quarreling neighbours, it was necessary to demarcate the area of each carefully and to put all them under the administration of the same laws. Philosophy, thus succeeded in unifying the various sciences under one science by realizing this task of reconciliation and unification. But the solidarity system of sciences which came into existence through this coordination began to clamor for independence. It wanted to gain autonomy by freeing itself from the tutelage of philosophy.

When philosophy thus lost its authority in the field of science... the young sciences had chased metaphysics from their precincts. When the sciences had established a united front among them-

7 Ziya Gökalp; op.cit., p. 62, also in: "Tarihi Maddecilik ve İctimai Mefkurecilik".

8 Robert F. Spencer; "Cultural Process and Intellectual Current: Durkheim and Atatürk", *American Anthropology*, Vol. 60, August, 1968, p. 649.

9 Necati Akder; "Gökalp'in Felsefesi", *Türk Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: Devlet Kit. M.E.B., 1969), v. 17.

selves, there remained beyond their frontiers only the mysteries
ghosts of metaphysics.

.....
As the data of science are external phenomena known through
the senses, science had always relied on observation and experi-
mentation... metaphysics, on the other hand, are internal experi-
ences known only through consciousness; metaphysics relied only
on introspection and internal experiences... Philosophy had assign-
ed the inside of nature to metaphysics as its subject matter... the
reality of observable things can not be grasped... Thus, metaphysics
started its job with the analysis of mind.

.....
The philosophy could be reconciled with science and that it
consisted of logic.

The center of gravity of philosophy is a new metaphysics. In this case: "...
philosophy must not contradict science and metaphysics..."¹⁰.

However, one shortcoming of Gökalp was to place too much emphasis on
the persisting problems of social science, in relation to existing conditions,
rather than discussing philosophic concepts which were necessary to the under-
standing of the subject. He attributes this lack of interest in philosophy to the
society where he lived. According to him the time had not come for the Turks to
occupy themselves chiefly with philosophy¹¹, since philosophy was luxury. He
was concerned with healing and as a sociologist was not an expounder of ab-
stract, utopian ideas beyond human limitations. He was the doctor who diag-
nosed the ills of the Turkish society and prescribed rational remedies.

Knowledge, today, is equated with a sense of certainty about empirical be-
liefs. Epistemology operates on a deeper level of analysis. There can be a diffe-
rentiation shown between epistemology and the sociology of knowledge to be an
empirical science and epistemology to be a philosophical concern, one runs into
difficulty in Gökalpian thought. In such concepts is the germ of alienation.

Gökalp was preoccupied with a very elementary kind of analysis. He was
probably far from living up to his own principles and his approach was some-
times mixed with subjectivism. Sometimes mixed with subjectivism. Sometimes
he offered his ideas as dogma which the leaders of public life had to follow¹¹.
Like Durkheim, he opposed classical conceptions of truth and replaced them
with satisfying illusions or practical considerations¹². A problem of validity lies
in the alienation process. Gökalp did not discuss the continuity of normative le-

10 Ziya Gökalp, op.cit., pp. 46-50.

11 Ibid., p. 50.

12 Heyd., op.cit., p. 43.

gitimation and cognition as ad distorted form of collective representation. This is different from Mark's idea of class domination and the pathologic state, distorted form of one group. Gökalp's faith in collectivism is rooted in the Islamic tradition of fraternity and equality among believers and his faith leads him to believe in solidarization. Thus, his sociology lacks atheory of social conflict, which is a very important subject of present-day sociology¹³.

Normally the value of chance was dialectically related to the prodominance of order and it had value in being marginal in incidence and significance.

Gökalp's approach was an interpretation of epistemology an analysis of the structural articulations of cultural experience and their relation to anomie. The object of epistemological analysis in this sense was to unearth the more or less related self of paradigms or categories which, in varying combinations, are symbolic experiences expressed in word an action¹⁴. This perspective drew a correlation between epistemology and society and culture. This view point gave special importance to the socialization process in epistemological investigations. In this critique of Kant, Gökalp stated that, with Durkheimian analogy, "if the mind is the synthetic expression of the world the system of categories is a syntetic expression of the human mind"¹⁵. He continued:

... And when Kant declared that our perceptions do not consist of objective forms, he only explained the insight formulated in the saying...¹⁵

Gökalp categorizes the fundamental logical institutions of the human mind as social, cultural reality with an organic base as does Durkheim. By identify the category with Durkheim's notion of the collective representation, he simultaneously grounded it in culture and nationality. In summary, Gökalp, did not intend his understanding of epistemology to serve in transcending empiricism and priorism as Durkheim did.

In conclusion, social metaphysics was his reductionist surrogate for belief, with close connections to social epistemology. Experience was interpreted to show society as a basic reality and in his pluralistic explanations, his ideas differed from Durkheimian views.

13 Ali Gevgilili; "Gökalp'in Tezleri ve Çağdaş Türk Gerçekleri", p. 161. Şevket Beysanoğlu; Diyarbakır'lı Fikir ve Sanat Adamları. II (İstanbul: No Press, 1964), pp. 153-163.

14 La Capra, op.cit., p. 272.

15 Ibid., p. 274.