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THE ROLE OF ETHICAL LANGUAGE WITHIN THE CONTEXT OF ECOLOGICAL PROBLEMS

Hülya ALTUNYA[*]

ABSTRACT

This paper will attempt to shed light on the problem whether ethical language can play a role for dissolving the tension between science and religion within the context of ecological cruses. It will claim that ethical language, which concerns both the order of things in nature and human world can play a mediating role between scientific language which targets basically the order of things in nature and religious language which addresses human world. This is because ethical language has a semantic field which contains both the semantics of "nature" (khulq in Arabic) and the semantics of "actions" based upon nature (akhlaq, morality in Arabic) at the same time.

Keywords: *nature, ecology, science, religion, ethical language*

(Ekolojik Sorunlar Bağlamında Ahlaki Dilin Rolü)
ÖZET

Ekolojik problemler, insanın tabiat algısıyla ve bu algıyı ifade ettiği söylemle doğrudan ilişkilidir. Bilimsel bakış açısı tarafından bir araştırma nesnesine dönüştürülen tabiatta yaşanan bozulmalara bilimin yaklaşımı, yine bir nesnedeki problemin anlaşılıp tedavi edilmeye çalışılması şeklindedir. Mantık ve matematiğin hakim olduğu bir söylem biçimiyle dile getirilen bu yaklaşım biçiminde, bilimsel olduğu ileri sürülen olgusal önermelerin, tabiatın yaşadığı krizi sona erdirmesi beklenmektedir. Buna karşılık din, tabiatı, Allah'ın insana lutfu olarak görmekte ve bu verili alanı kutsayan aynı zamanda koruyup kollamayı hedefleyen bir anlayış doğrultusunda hareket etmektedir. Dolayısıyla din, bu alanda yine dinin dili üzerine kurulu bir söylemle konuşmaktadır. Dinin kullandığı bu dilin yapısı ise bilim tarafından metafizik önermelere dayandığı iddiasıyla reddedilmektedir. Burada bilim, olgusal bir alanda konuşmanın yine olgular üzerine kurulu bir dili gerektirdiğini ileri sürmektedir. Diğer taraftan bilim ahlaki önermelerin de olgusal değil, duygusal olduğunu iddia ederek bu söyleme de karşı çıkmaktadır. Bu çalışmanın amacı, ekolojik problemlerin çözümünde bilim ve din arasında yaşanan çatışmada, ahlaki önermelerin aracı olup olamayacağı sorgulanacaktır. İleri süreceğimiz iddia şudur: Ahlaki dil, nesneler düzenini ortaya çıkarmaya çalışan bilimsel dil ile insanın dünyasına özgü din dili arasında hem nesnelerin düzenini hem de insanın dünyasını aynı anda ilgilendirmesi açısından bir arabuluculuk üstlenebilir. Zira ahlaki dil hem tabiatı hem de tabiat üzerinde ortaya çıkan eylemleri aynı anda içeren bir semantik alana sahiptir.

Anahtar Kavramlar: *Tabiat, Ekoloji, Bilim, Din, Ahlaki Dil.*

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Introduction

Ecological problems are related to human apprehension of nature and to the language of this type of apprehension. Scientific approach toward ecological problems is of the same paradigm with the general scientific objectification of nature, where logic and mathematics determine the movement of thought throughout scientific investigations. Upon these logical and mathematical determinations of nature, ecological crises are expected to come to an end in terms of factual statements of sciences.

On the contrary, religion apprehends nature as a gift from God to human beings, and employs a specific religious language which tries to save nature by sacralizing it. Nevertheless, science rejects the legitimacy or validity of religious language on the claim that it is basically metaphysical and beyond the domain of scientific determinations. According to science, a language which aims at reflecting the order of nature must be based on the facts of nature. Right on this premise, it rejects the legitimacy or validity of ethical language within the context of natural ecological problems.

This article will attempt to shed light on the problem whether ethical language can play a role for dissolving the tension between science and religion with reference to ecological crises. It will claim that ethical language, which concerns both the order of things in nature and human world can play a mediating role between scientific language which targets basically the order of things in nature and religious language which addresses human world. This is because ethical language has a semantic field which contains both the semantics of "nature" (*khulq* in Arabic) and the semantics of "actions" based upon nature (*akhlaq*, morality in Arabic) at the same time.

Since determination of ecological problems and the solutions offered to them take place within language, language constitutes a medium between human mind and physical nature. Hence both science and religion approach nature within the language which characterizes their different perspectives. Accordingly, the tension and sometimes conflict between scientific and religious approaches toward nature is also a tension and conflict between religious and scientific languages.

Scientific and Religious Semantics of Ecology

While scientific language takes the old Greek term "*oikos*" as its point of departure when analyzing nature[1], religious language takes the words "heavens", "universe", "creatures" as the key notions in understanding of nature. Thus, ecology derived from *oikos* represents the field of vision determined by human being at the center of nature. Even if the notion of 'ecology' reflects the culture of dialogical relation between nature and human being, scientific demand for applying mathematical and logical language to attend a scientific certainty in researches on nature establishes a one-sided approach toward nature, which goes beyond dialogical relation.

This is so because factual or synthetic language of science paves way to deconstruction and reconstruction of nature according to calculative reasoning of human being. Modern semantics of ecology as a part of biology legitimizes the application of this sort of synthetic language. However, when we focus on the etymological sense of 'ecology', we can rediscover the original revelation of nature as a house/home of human being which is not an 'object', but rather a 'world' within which human beings dwell.[2]

Contrary to synthetic language of science, religious language organizes all kind of concepts around God or Sacred who is the Creator of nature. Accordingly, ecology has a distinctive semantics in religious language, which primarily reflects the creative relation of God toward nature. In this relation, God is not solely a cosmic power behind the constant creation of nature or a *telos* of the individual creation in Aristotelian sense; rather this 'creative relation' gains its highest sense when nature presents itself as a form of language of God. Therefore, nature constitutes a unique semantic field of religious language so much so that nature is not something out there; rather it is a constitutive part of linguisticality of human consciousness. When human being understands

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[1] The term 'ecology' was coined first by Ernst Haeckel (1834-1919) in his "Generalle Morphologie". Tuncay Önder, "Ekolojizm" maddesi"*, Felsefe Ansiklopedisi*, (Ankara: Ebabil Yayinlari, 2007), V, p. 228.
[2] Francis E. Peters, *Antik Yunan Felsefesi Terimleri Sözlüğü*, (Istanbul: Paradigma Yayinlari, 2004), p. 256.

the meaning of nature, nature functions as a part of linguistical medium of meaning. Put differently, from the perspective of religious language, since nature speaks to us, we are able to find a meaning in it.

Nature in the Mirror of Science

Ecological crises have created new visions of evaluation of scientific and religious conceptions of nature. In other words, global problems of ecology have brought scientific and religious conceptions of nature to the fore from different angles so that the difference between them has become more visible, comparable and contrastable. Ernst Haeckel, a man of science, thinks that science and religion differ in three basic points as follows: While religion accepts nature as a creation of God, science approaches it as a being which has a force or power in itself. While religion accepts a metaphysical Creator, science admits nature as a process existing by itself. While religion looks at nature from anthropocentric perspective, science accepts human being as a part of natural process or evolution.

It is clear that the basis, formulation, and solutions of ecological crises will be determined by scientific and religious viewpoints according to their basic premises concerning nature. These great differences between science and religion force us to reflect on their mirrors of nature more closely. This reflection seems necessary simply because scientific and religious mirrors of nature appear to be part of ecological crises. In this context, philosophy has a task to bring the problems created by scientific and religious mirrors of nature to the fore so that our visions for solutions of the crises should not be the part of new problems.

It has been generally accepted that the characteristics of scientific language was determined primarily by F. Bacon (1561/1626) who posited the notion of "domination over nature" (regnum humanum) as the general purpose of scientific research. Bacon assumes that human beings gain a universal happiness in terms of "regnum humanum". This discourse takes its starting point from natural facts or physical world and ends up with the separation of human being from nature in the sense of positing nature according to self-apprehension/isolation of human being.

This seems to be another version of antropocentric view of nature, which science ironically attributes to religion.

Scientific revolutions made possible and actual by Copernicus (1473-1543) and Newton (1642-1727) supported the antropocentric character of scientific mirror of nature since they contributed the notion of mechanical cosmos against sacred cosmos.[3] Within mechanical cosmos, human being and nature are seen as two opposing poles of power. Thus, scientific research methods which claim to produce objective knowledge of nature appear to be ideological and metaphysical since these methods themselves are oriented by non-scientific "will to power" at their background.

Nature in the Mirror of Religions

Religious language has a variety of perspectives within itself. However, generally naturalistic and metaphysical perspectives are taken to be the most significant ones when religions become a matter of discussion in the context of ecological problems. Taoism, Mahayana Budism, Hinduism and some ancient religions have naturalistic perspective which accepts nature to be sacred like God. Metaphysical perspective accepts nature as a distinct field of being created by eternal metaphysical God. Taravada Budism, Judaism, Christianity, and Islam are the religions of metaphysical perspective.[4]

While these religions accept the harmony and regularity constituted by God within nature, which allows scientific application of mathematics and logic in the analysis of nature, naturalistic and metaphysical perspectives use different languages. The former language approaches human being as a part of process of nature, the latter one puts human being at a different level between nature and metaphysical world. Thus, within metaphysical perspective, human being gains a kind of teleological significance. Said more openly, in the latter case, human being is considered as a being who is both representing the aim of nature and responsible from nature.

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[3] Ibrahim Uslu, *Cevre Sorunlari*, (Istanbul: Insan Yayinlari, 1995), p. 55.
[4] Ismail Râci el-Fârûkî, Luis Lâmia el-Fârûkî, *İslam Kültür Atlasi*, (Istanbul: Inkilab Yayinlari, 1999), pp. 343-344.

Chronic Tension Between Science and Religion

The tension and/or conflict between scientific and religious languages within the context of ecological crises take place mostly in determining the position of human being concerning nature. While scientific language accepts itself as a mirror of natural order, religious language (metaphysical perspective) accepts itself as a mirror of theological meaning of nature. In other words, within scientific language, the key concept is "facts of nature", while within religious language, the key concept is "metaphysical/theological meaning of nature".

While scientific language rejects teleological significance of natural order, religious language claims that nature without teleological significance is meaningless. Accordingly, the question of the position of human being concerning nature turns around the question if nature has a teleological significance.

From this perspective, the tension between scientific and religious languages is locked around the problem of legitimacy of "will to power". Apparently, scientific language accepts the legitimacy of "will to power" even when it attempts to save nature from ecological crises. This is because scientific idea of saving nature is oriented by the main target of saving human being who exists essentially as "will to power".

On the contrary, religious language rejects the notion "will to power" since it accepts nature as the revelation of God's omnipotence or infinite power. Therefore, according to religious language, nature is the revelation of God's voice through physical order. It is basically God's writing activity in terms of natural elements.

Ethical Language as a Medium of Dissolving Tension

At this point, the question 'whether ethical language can play a positive mediating role between opposing perspectives of scientific and religious languages with reference to ecological crises' gains its relevance. Ethical language differs from both scientific and religious languages in that it represents both the realm of nature and human world within itself. While both religious and scientific languages move from one point (God or human being) toward another point (nature) in the

course of thinking, ethical language takes two points as the constitutive vital elements of dialogical relations.

In other words, while scientific and religious languages are positing nature from their pre-determined fields of vision, ethical language accepts dialogical relation as the temporal creation of field of vision. Accordingly, for ethical language, there is no pre-determined perspective toward nature from where we are able to make a decision on behalf of nature. Rather nature is a dialogical part of meaning which allows human being to understand what he/she is supposed to do ethically. Thus, nature is not a silent and passive object waiting for our decision on itself. Rather it is a partner of conversation for the purpose of determining what is right and just to do.

Islamic ethical language represents these mutual roles of nature and human being in determining ethical decisions in terms of the notions *khulq*[5] and *akhlaq*. *Khulq* is the activity of nature within human being while *akhlaq* is reflecting activity of human being upon *khulq*. Accordingly, ethics in Islam is not a sole mental construction of right and just action; rather it is a result of dialogical relation between natural and mental parts of ethical problems.

Conclusion

As a result, ethical language plays a mediating role between scientific and religious languages since it represents both nature and human world in its dialogical character. It reveals that scientific and religious languages are one-sided since they accept human mind or mental construction of meaning as their starting point. Ethical language

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[5] "خلق: signifies The act of measuring; or determining the measure, proportion, or the like, of a thing; and the making a thing by measure, or according to the measure of another thing; or proportioning a to thing another thing." خلقهم: He consorted (or comported himself) with them according to their natures, or moral characters or qualities" Edward William Lane, *An Arabic-English Lexicon,* (Beyrut: Librairie Du Liban, 1968), v. II, 799-800. huluk خلق: A nature; or a naturel, a native, or an innate, disposition or temper or the like "سجي/secie, طبّ/tabb", خلقة/hilkat, /فطرة fitrat, nature, خليقة/halikatun; طبيعة/tabiatun/nature, خلق/hulk, moral character; or the fashion of the inner man; i.e. his mind, or soul, and its peculiar qualities and attributes; like as خلق/halk signifies the "fashion of the outer man, and its (peculiar) qualities and attributes." *İbid.*, p. 801.

puts emphasis on the following point: "Meaning" is something more than a mere mental construction of human being. When we attempt to view nature from ethical language, then we can start to understand that nature is not merely what we see, touch, analyze, love or hate; it is basically what allows us to see, touch, analyze, love or hate something. That is, it is part of our field vision which brings things before us. Thanks to nature, we can be a human being who has a world. Without nature there is no human world.

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