

Destructiveness: An Inner Drive of the Human Nature or a Fact of the Social Structure?

Yıkıcılık: İnsan Doğasının Bir İç Kavrayışı mı yoksa Toplumsal Yapının Bir Gerçeği mi?

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Abstract: According to natural sciences, destructivity is related to the competitive state of the natural selection. In this sense, nature is considered like a battlefield where all creatures only seek for their own survival in an unending rivalry. However, that perception of nature was not invented by natural sciences insofar as this pseudo-reality of universal conflict was already present in philosophy as a reflection of the social structure of the 16th and 17th centuries. Scientists borrowed that vision of nature as they observed the social structure in which they lived as universal and the state of war as an undeniable fact. This article aims to raise the question about the influence of political philosophy on the scientific paradigm and to understand the political and social source of destructiveness.

Keywords: Destructiveness, natural science, human nature, social structure, political philosophy.

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Introduction

Science tells us destruction and violence are a part of our natural inner drives and it is society and civilization which appease those destructive impulses. Mostly, we believe that the state of universal conflict and competition is a conclusion of natural sciences, especially of biology, insofar as the Darwinian evolution theory alleges the survival of the fittest and the Freudian psychoanalysis supposes the destructiveness as an outcome of the libidinal forces.

However, this vision of nature was already present in philosophy of Enlightenment as it was the case in the “Leviathan” of Thomas Hobbes who lived the English Civil War. Those scientific approaches were, in fact, influenced by their contemporaneous social structure and induced those conclusions of a universal state of war in nature as a result of the fact that scientists were already persuaded by the social phenomena of their era. The systematic destruction is in reality, a means of social cohesion as Simmel’s conflict theory clearly reveals. It is necessary for the maintenance of the identity of heterogeneous parts in the abstract structure of the social organization. It is crystallized as a universal fact of the human nature in the social context. This article aims to question and criticize the argument that destructiveness is a universal fact of human nature.

Destructiveness in Science

Science considers the human destructiveness is a product of its nature which impels the human being to struggle for survival. Since Charles Darwin (1909), the evolution theory is based on a universal state of conflict and struggle for the survival of the fittest. However, this vision has a major problem since it contradicts with the fact that the human being encounters far greater quantity of violence and destructiveness than any other species in the nature. The human reality is much more destructive and violent than the reality of nature. The human conflicts like wars and terror have much greater destructiveness than the cruelty in nature like the limited violence of the hunting predators in a jungle. While the former destructive and brutal action has the potential to annihilate an important part of the population and to destroy the conditions of the social



coherence, the latter is much limited and it does not bring forth any alternation in the conditions of nature.

The source of this error is hidden in the method of the scientific research. Science develops theories by first constructing hypotheses. The means of observation to test the validity of those hypotheses are created within the hypotheses as they are for the moment the best explanation of the facts that the scientist observes. This situation leads us to a paradigm problem: Since the scientist develops the observation tools in accordance with the hypotheses, the convictions of the scientist can never be thoroughly removed from a scientific study. Even the hypothesis passes the tests of observation and experience, since there is a close relationship between the hypothesis and the observation tools, the freshly confirmed thesis will have to include a part of the beliefs and the subjective explanations of the scientist as Thomas Kuhn (2012, pp.23-35) argued.

The history of science is full of examples of the effects of the convictions of scientists on the scientific theories. One of the first biology studies of the 18th century, “*Systema Naturae*”, written by Carl von Linné (1964) considered the nature as a hierarchical kingdom similar to the monarchy of his epoch. In this study, von Linné grouped all the species under different kingdoms, like animal, vegetal and even mineral kingdoms. Von Linné might have believed to discover the universal structure of nature as he tested his hypothesis with his observation, it is clear that this thesis is utterly influenced by the political paradigm that the scientist experienced. Since the study took the monarchy as a logical model, he was inspired by the social system of his period and he transformed it in a natural hierarchy in a “metaphor of monarchy as Elizabeth and Stuart Ewen (2011, pp.135-136) discussed in their book “Typecasting: On the Arts and Sciences of Human Inequality”.

Darwinian Theory can also be considered to be similarly influenced by the economic and social structure of the epoch in which the scientist lived. Darwin lived the triumphant period of the competition and the individualism insofar as he observed those social events as omnipresent facts in every level of life. This situation might have led him to reinterpret those facts as a part of nature. Consequently, he might have ended up with a theory of evolution based on the natural selection, which inter-



preted the nature as a reflection of the competitive and individualist society in which he lived as Hull (2005, pp.137-152) argued.

Insofar as Sigmund Freud had based especially the perception of conflict of his theory on Darwinian Theory (Ritvo, 1990, pp. 60-63), he might not be able to escape from imposing to the human nature the social structure that he experienced in his every day life as well. Accordingly, he might have described the destructiveness as a part of the animal side of the human nature and the libidinal inner drives as the philosophical main line in which he had his education and in which he became a specialist always supported a duality between body and mind since even Descartes. It was always considered that mind should control the body, for Descartes, Spinoza and many other philosophers who followed Descartes' duality theory, thought that it was the duty of the mind to abandon the desires produced by the physiological reactions of the mechanical part of the human being, the body. Freud considered the human being first of all as an individualist animal-machine like creature which constantly sought for its own libidinal satisfaction and he saw the destructiveness of the human being as an outcome of the animal part of the human. According to him, the destructiveness could only be controlled by the repression of the physiologically produced inner drives and by sublimed imaginary satisfactions through a set of means that the civilization puts in disposition of man (Freud, 1964, pp.380-389). In "Civilisation and its Discontents", he even interpreted the destructiveness as an instinct of death which was diffused in all tissues of life and would in anyway triumph at the end with the death of the person (Freud, 1961, pp.64-69).

Francis Bacon (1905, XLII) predicted in the concept of *idola specus* [the idol of the cave] this possible error of intellectuals and scientists. The scientific or paradigmatic convictions of a scientist can influence the thesis that the scientist proposes insofar as all of the observations, experiences and historical events that a scientist lives can influence the way that he/she interprets at the first place the hypothesis and the way to choose the observation tools to test it. Moreover, a conviction which is generally accepted by the scientific circles may also induce an *idola teatri* [the idol of the theater] (Bacon, 1905, XLIV) which can be observed in the tendency of scientists to share a wrong idea with their contemporar-



ies in a certain period like as geocentric model dominated a very long time the scientific paradigm (Kuhn, 1957, pp.100-133) or the myth of the 16th century alleging that California was an island was even shared by geographers (Polk, 1995, pp.105-121). Insofar as the perception of nature is not unbiased and independent of the social conditions of the observer, the positivist tendency to expect to achieve completely objective vision of nature may look utopist.

Destructiveness as Political Means

Although, at the first glance, the destructiveness looks like a biological fact because of our conviction that science always tells the *objective* truth, in reality, this universal state of conflict was already presented in philosophy, by Thomas Hobbes who came through that explanation by using an old philosophical method passing through *subjectivity*: “Read thy self” (Hobbes, 1985, p. 10). Hobbes suggested that the human being was in an incessant struggle for survival and one had to accumulate power as far as possible to prevail. Insofar as he considered that “the power of a man [was] his present means to obtain some future apparent goods” (Hobbes, 1985, p. 48), this alleged struggle of survival looks like a kind of a market competition. Moreover, as he also suggested that “the value of a man [was] as of all other things, his price to employ his power” (Hobbes, 1985, p. 50), the question of survival was obviously taken as a matter of will to power.

In general, Hobbes is not considered in relation with the supporters of the free market as a result of the defiance of the Scottish moral philosophers against his theory of egoism (Seth, 1898, pp.561-563). However, even the term of contract that he presented as the base of the social cohesion was thought in economical terms since it was considered as a commercial contract which is taken as the absolute model for all human relations (Gauthier, 1977, pp. 130-164). Although the Scottish moral philosophers, like Hutcheson, refused his egoist philosophy and they tried to replace it with the moral sentiments, it is obvious that those moral sentiments were generally considered by the same philosophers as a result of the egoist search of a balance between the individual desires and the demands of the group. That is to say that those moral sentiments were



products of the socially adjusted egoist desires as Dermange (2003, pp. 55-58) argued about the Smithian concept of sympathy. Thus, the concept of the naturally egoist man of Hobbes prevailed and it is still considered as the distinctive and decisive characteristic of the modern man. Hobbes believed to find out the nature of things as a universal order, but, in reality, he embraced the social structure of his period and reinterpreted it as a natural system through his subjective method based on an inner look to his own motives.

The tendency to destruction is about neither any natural drive nor a part of human nature (Fromm, 1973, pp. 1-11). Human destructiveness which leads to mass massacres and wars cannot be seen as biological insofar as it is only the human being which tends to such folly for the sake of political ideals. The human destructiveness is in reality a part of the political organization of society. It is a result of our social structure which is constructed on an incessant state of conflict incarnated in competition today. Society, as an abstract construction and identity of heterogeneous parts as Adorno (2004, p.5) defends, requires a reality for its existence. According to Georg Simmel, although conflict as a psychological problem can be destructive or violent, it realizes this crucial function to maintain the *raison d'être* of a social group. He thought that, symmetrical to the need of sympathy, it was this formal drive of hostility which was keeping the social harmony, insofar as society simultaneously needed harmony and dissonance, sympathy and antipathy, association and competition. As Georg Simmel (1989, p.382) explains in a very convenient way, thanks to the self-consciousness by which individual realizes his/her forces and existence in the confrontation, everybody feels attached to a social group under a role by means of awareness of inclusion in the common cause.

The conflict sets “the boundaries between groups within a social system by strengthening group consciousness and awareness of separateness, thus establishing the identity of groups within the system” (Coser, 1956, p. 34). Insofar as it is the basis of the social identity, its interruption means also the dissolution of the social group. Thus, for the stability of the social union, society has to maintain a constant menace and a perpetual conflict. The prevalence of the awareness of social inclusion is the assurance of the existence of society. Essential for the existence of socie-



ty, all the conflicts are not made to be resolved. Accordingly, Simmel believed that the conflict which directed the history belonged to a metaphysical reality due to the contradiction between forms and contents. He even reinterpreted all the human history according to that metaphysical conflict. Likewise, as Kenneth Allan (2014, pp. 259-265) explains, Lewis Coser realized the importance of conflict for the existence of society and, in order to guarantee its presence as a metatheoretical premise for the existence of society, he even crystallized it as a human instinct present in all human relations, impossible to dissolve.

Competition as the Concretized Universal Conflict for Social Cohesion

Competition is the concretized form of this metaphysical conflict. According to Georg Simmel (1895, pp. 415-416), the competition in the market is a form of conflict which can preserve the social unity insofar as it puts the clients and the merchants in close relation and increases the reciprocal dependence in which the consumer goods realize the function of continuous flux of interactions. In the state of competition, each person feels opposed by everybody and obliged to find some common ground in commercial conventions in order to prevent oppositions. The individual is obliged to oppose the rest of people in order to stay included in the social group. Thus, competition impels people to get to agreements serving as the base for the social cohesion. Seeing the fact that this antagonism between the individuals can never cease, competition appears as a perpetual menace assuring the social cohesion and peace in form of “natural harmony of interests”.

As anthropologist David Graeber (2011, pp. 158-162) demonstrates the excessive role of violence in the modern societies among people “ripped from their contexts”, the conflict is not instinctual and present in all of the human relations, but instead it must be perpetuated through being interiorized in the human nature and it must be present in any human relationship for the sake of the prevailing social structure, in order to prevent dissolution of power and social change. In other words, the conflict which results from the nonidentity of the metaphysical fact of society and which has the potential to lead to a social change or dissolution must be transformed into another form of conflict in order to keep



the social structure intact. The destructiveness is then necessary for the perpetuation of society insofar as the conflict is an apparatus of social cohesion.

Destruction has even an important theoretical place in economics as a means of regulation, which Joseph Schumpeter (2003, pp.81-86) called “creative destruction”. There are two sides of this destruction process in a merchant society: the authority of the capital and the conformism of the consumer. The destructivity of the capitalist is linked to its obligation to accumulate always more in the production within the productive consumption of labor while the destructivity of the consumer is linked to the search for sympathy of the individual through fashion, which can be seen as a valorization process equivalent to the market competition in the domain of consumption. Once all the domains of life are transformed in commodities in a merchant society, as Zygmunt Bauman (2005, p. 2) explained in his book “Liquid Life”, the life oscillates between the joys of consumption and the horrors of the piles of garbage. Insofar as anything can end up in the garbage because of the endless competition and its destructive forces, everybody has to play that game for survival. Accordingly, while the capitalists must incessantly increase the profits of their investments, the consumers must adapt themselves to the new fashions in order to keep their sympathy and social inclusion. Consequently, the competition results in the active destruction of the actual world in order to rebuild it by the way of creative destruction.

Conclusion

To sum up, the scientific vision is not completely unbiased and independent of the social conditions. As it observes the violence as a universal fact, due to its positivist convictions it can even normalize the violence in the perception of a meta-theoretical nature. Yet, the destructiveness of the human being cannot be rooted in nature insofar as the violence in nature is much more limited than the human violence and it is not destructive but necessary for the perpetuation of the conditions of nature as Erich Fromm (2013) argued in “The Anatomy of Human Destructiveness”. In reality, the human violence must be searched in the social conditions. As nature is replaced by the technical measures and the



organic by the inorganic, the human being becomes insignificant, only capable to destroy insofar as the civilization tends to reduce him/her to a non-generic creature. This is a dehumanizing mechanism of alienation which destroys all domains of life and puts everything to the service of the social unity to such an extent that individuals are alienated to their own lives and start even to aspire to death to overcome their insignificance. As Erich Fromm (2010, pp. 42-43) discussed in "On Disobedience and Other Essays", "*Viva la muerte*" could become a slogan only under such dehumanizing conditions.

Destructiveness has political, social and economic roots rather than being a result of natural violence. It results from the insupportable feeling of insignificance due to the destruction of the subjective culture by the objective culture, in the sense in which Georg Simmel (1987, pp. 35-38) used the term, due to the subordination of the human being to the immense social organization founded on the structural conflict of competition in which, as Fromm (1969, p. 78) underlines, everybody has the intention to overwhelm their competitors as a last tentative, almost desperately. In fact, destructiveness is not a part of human nature, but it is implanted in the human organizations as a political apparatus to maintain the social structure. That does not mean that the only source of destructiveness of human being is its social organization founded on classes and exploitation, but, to the extent that the violence produced by the deliberate human actions is the real destructive force menacing the human life, the source of the mass destruction should not be searched in any meta-theoretical human nature.

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Öz: Doğa bilimlerine göre, yıkıcılık doğal seçilimin rekabetçi durumuyla ilgilidir. Bu anlamda, doğa, bütün canlıların bitmek bilmeyen bir rekabette yalnızca kendi hayatta kalmalarını istedikleri bir savaş alanı gibi düşünülür. Yine de, doğaya dair bu algı, evrensel çatışmanın bu sahte gerçekliğinin 16. ve 17. yüzyıllara ait sosyal yapının bir yansıması olarak felsefede zaten bulunması dolayısıyla doğa bilimleri tarafından keşfedilmemiştir. Bilim adamları, yaşadıkları toplumsal yapıyı evrensel olarak ve savaşın durumunu yadsınamaz bir gerçek olarak gözlemledikleri halde, doğa görüşünü ödünç aldılar. Bu makale, siyaset felsefesinin bilimsel paradigma üzerindeki etkisi hakkındaki sorunu gündeme getirmeyi ve yıkıcılığın siyasi ve sosyal kaynağını anlamayı amaçlamaktadır.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Yıkıcılık, doğa bilimi, insan doğası, toplumsal yapı, siyaset felsefesi.

