

# THE POSITIVIST UNIVERSALISM AND REPUBLICANISM OF THE YOUNG TURKS\*

BANU TURNAOĞLU

Department of Politics and International Studies, University of Cambridge

E-mail: [bt265@cam.ac.uk](mailto:bt265@cam.ac.uk)

*This article explores positivist universalism, one of the central aspects of contemporary approaches in political theory, through the study of the Young Turks' political thought. Current scholarship portrays the Young Turks as champions of a national cause, limited to overthrowing despotism and relaunching the Constitution of 1876 in the Ottoman Empire. This neglects their broader aim to guarantee peace, order, and progress, both at home and abroad, by adopting Comtean universal positivism, and it distorts their vision of society, politics, and history. From their base in Paris the Young Turks challenged the Eurocentric conception of universalism, suggesting a more egalitarian and comprehensive conception that has yet to be recognized. This article shows that, transcending the conventional boundaries between Western and non-Western political thought, the Young Turks' political ideology presents an early example of the formation of a modern, pluralist worldview, and that their core conceptions had a deep impact on the founding of Turkish republicanism.*

The 1870s saw the emergence of a new Ottoman intellectual movement that challenged the despotic regime of Abdülhamid II (r. 1876–1908). This intellectual tendency was rooted in Comtean positivist philosophical doctrines, which vigorously celebrated the core values of order, progress, the rejection of religious fanaticism, and the forward march of humanity according to predetermined laws. Ottoman positivists belonged largely to the Parisian branch of the Young Turks.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> “Young Turks” (*Les jeunes Turcs*) refers to an Ottoman opposition movement in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, composed of various groups: Ottoman exiles, intellectuals, army officers, and students. In 1895, the Ottoman Committee of Union and

The originality of their political thought lay in their synthesis of these positivist ideals with French republican ideas, which offered one of the early formulations of liberal republicanism in Ottoman political thought.

The few works on Ottoman positivism, nevertheless, fail to capture the centrality of the French republican tradition in the Young Turks' thinking, and the particular conception of humanity that informed it.<sup>2</sup> Concentrating largely on the political thought of the prominent Ottoman positivist leader Ahmed Rıza, this article looks at how positivism was received by Ottoman intellectuals and how they combined positivism with French republicanism and constructed a new original ideology, one that had an enduring impact on contemporary Turkish republicanism. The argument here is that by deliberately challenging Western domination and its subjugating foreign policy, Ottoman positivists sought to eliminate conventional intellectual, historical, and geographical boundaries between East and West and aspired to transcend these through an ideal universal order. In so doing, they preferred a global vision drawn from the work of Pierre Laffitte, which was less Eurocentric, less hierarchical, and more egalitarian than that of Comte. The Ottoman positivists applied this vision in their formulation of a distinctive and truly universalist theory of peace, asserting the multiplicity of world civilizations.

As the Ottoman positivists did not promulgate a single, comprehensive text that laid out their positivist and republican program in its entirety, it is necessary to uncover the sophistication and coherence of their social and political theory through archival research and in-depth analysis of their personal correspondence and of newspaper articles produced from 1895 to 1908.<sup>3</sup> A textual analysis will consider how Ottoman positivists evaluated and imagined politics, society, and morality; how they employed, utilized, and interpreted ideas like humanity, positivism, peace, and religion; and how these ideas shifted in meaning over time and space. This approach to intellectual history aims to make sense of the political

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Progress (CUP) branded its journal *Mechveret supplément français* as the “Organe de la Jeune Turquie.” From this, the expression became more widely used by both members of the CUP and the public. This article focuses on the political thinking of the Young Turk movement from 1895 until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.

<sup>2</sup> See, for example, Z. Fahri Fındıkoğlu, *Auguste Comte ve Ahmet Rıza* (Istanbul, 1962); Kemal Karpat, *Elites and Religion from Ottoman Empire to Turkish Republic* (Istanbul, 2010); Murtaza Korlaelçi, *Pozitivizmin Türkiye'ye Girişi ve İlk Etkileri* (Istanbul, 2002).

<sup>3</sup> Since surviving texts do not exist in one cohesive collection, this study demanded a full survey of available literature—including unused original texts. The consulted archives were (in Istanbul) ISAM (Center for Islamic Studies), Atatürk Kütüphanesi, and Beyazıt Devlet Kütüphanesi, and in Paris La maison d'Auguste Comte and the Bibliothèque nationale de France.

operationalization of positivism in Turkey but not to explain the political and social outcomes therein.

### COMTE'S UNIVERSALISM: UNITING THE OCCIDENT AND THE ORIENT THROUGH POSITIVISM

Positivism appeared first in France, in the works of Saint-Simon (1760–1825) and Auguste Comte (1798–1857), and spread to the rest of western Europe, dominating global social and political thinking until the early twentieth century.<sup>4</sup> Comte's philosophy had the practical aim of establishing harmony in society, essentially through a doctrine which reconciled order with progress:<sup>5</sup> “Order is the precondition of all Progress; Progress is always the object of Order.”<sup>6</sup> Order and progress would provide the basis for broader political harmony and even for the unity of mankind.

The precondition for the triumph of positivist approaches, for Comte, lay in overcoming discord between the Occident and the Orient, “the two necessities of humanity,” the former representing progress and the latter representing order.<sup>7</sup> “Positivism alone, by virtue of its relative character, can organize missions . . . By these missions it will gradually unite all nations with the unity which is its characteristic, the only unity which is worthy of universal extension.”<sup>8</sup> To spread this mission universally, the positivist project would be required to prevail primarily in western Europe, which encompassed all nations that had been under Roman dominion.<sup>9</sup> Once the ultimate regeneration of humanity was established in the Occident, positivism would spread to the Orient peacefully.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Auguste Comte's *Cours de Philosophie Positive* was published between 1830 and 1842. Following this, in England, John Stuart Mill published *A System of Logic* (1843) and *Auguste Comte and Positivism* (1866). In Germany, Ernst Mach's *Die Mechanik in ihrer Entwicklung* (Science of Mechanics) appeared in 1883. See Rom Harré, “Positivist Thought in the Nineteenth Century,” in Thomas Baldwin, ed., *The Cambridge History of Philosophy 1870–1945* (Cambridge, 2003), 13–15.

<sup>5</sup> Robert Nisbet, *History of the Idea of Progress* (New Brunswick, 1994), 255.

<sup>6</sup> Auguste Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, trans. J. H. Bridges, 2nd edn (London, 1880), 77.

<sup>7</sup> Auguste Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, trans. B. Franklin, vol. 4 (London, 1877), 10.

<sup>8</sup> Auguste Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, trans. Richard Congreve (London, 1858), 360.

<sup>9</sup> John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte, “Auguste Comte to John Stuart Mill, 23 January 1846,” in Oscar A. Haac, ed., *The Correspondence of John Stuart Mill and Auguste Comte* (London, 1995), 361. On the articulation of cosmopolitanism and humanity in England see Georgios Varouxakis, “‘Patriotism’, ‘Cosmopolitanism’, and ‘Humanity’ in Victorian Political Thought,” *European Journal of Political Theory* 5/1 (2006), 100–18.

<sup>10</sup> Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, 30.

To converge with the Orient, Comte contended, “the Mussulman nations [need] to put themselves under our [the West’s] guidance.”<sup>11</sup>

The union that Comte envisaged was not a cosmopolitan political cooperation. He believed that cosmopolitanism was too vague to indicate how a true and solid unity among different nations could be brought about. In a letter to John Stuart Mill, Comte wrote that “the basic situation of the elite of humanity requires everywhere, and with urgency, the hegemony, not of an unsatisfactory cosmopolitanism, but of an active European or rather, a profoundly Western (Occidental) disposition, corresponding to the necessary solidarity of the diverse elements of the great modern republic [of the West].”<sup>12</sup> He rejected cosmopolitanism because it placed the French and Germans on the same developmental level as the Turks or Chinese, in Comte’s view an undue elevation of the latter two. Cosmopolitanism could not create true political cooperation, because unity among nations required “the constant attitude of a more broadly based sympathy [for other nations], which is at once intellectual and social.”<sup>13</sup>

In his *Catechism of Positive Religion* Comte described the kind of union to which he aspired as necessarily “religious, not political.”<sup>14</sup> This spiritual and universal union would be knitted firmly together by the establishment of *la Religion de l’Humanité*, a positivist religion with a secular and homogeneous character, which disavowed God and the supernatural.<sup>15</sup> Comte believed that establishing *ordre universel* would be possible because intelligence and *altruism* (a term Comte coined to denote sociability), two defining traits of individuals and effective forces of collectivity, would evolve in time, bonding *humanité* together.<sup>16</sup> This *ordre universel* would be realized in practice by creating a “holy league” of the monotheistic religions—Catholicism, Protestantism, Islam and Judaism—linked together by a common past.<sup>17</sup>

Once the Religion of Humanity spread across the globe and “positivist homogeneity was sufficiently complete,” he professed that Paris would lose its preeminence, and Constantinople, the “true eternal city which will condense all great human memories,” would become the “final capital of the human

<sup>11</sup> “Auguste Comte to John Stuart Mill, 23 January 1846,” 362.

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Ibid., 361.

<sup>14</sup> Comte, *The Catechism of Positive Religion*, 358.

<sup>15</sup> See especially Comte, *A General View of Positivism*, chap. 6, “The Religion of Humanity.”

<sup>16</sup> Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, vol. 4, 431.

<sup>17</sup> Quoted in Mary Pickering, *Auguste Comte: An Intellectual Biography*, vol. 3 (New York, 2009), 521.

planet,” one that would “unite the Orient and the Occident.”<sup>18</sup> The Ottoman Empire, which he saw as part of an “Oriental Europe,” not of “Occidental Asia,”<sup>19</sup> occupied a key role in his universalism, enabling the ending of wars and the upholding of a new and peaceful world order. To initiate the universal propagation of his enterprise and launch the positivist process in Constantinople itself, Comte contacted the westernist Grand Vizier Mustafa Reşid Paşa, a leading Tanzimat reformer,<sup>20</sup> in an 1853 letter, inviting the Ottoman Empire to join the “positive faith,” a *religion universel*.<sup>21</sup> He expected Islam to adopt positivism effortlessly, because it “tended more toward reality due to its simpler beliefs and more practical disposition.”<sup>22</sup> The transition to this new faith would be achieved by replacing worship of “Allah” with “the cult of Humanity.” Positivism would enable the Ottomans to promote uniformity of opinions and customs, an objective Comte deemed to overlap with “the spirit of Islam,”<sup>23</sup> and would serve as a powerful tool uniting different groups within the empire to prevent foreign intervention. Comte later sent Mustafa Reşid Paşa the latest volumes of *Système de politique positive* and *Appel aux Conservateurs*, but his appeals received no response.<sup>24</sup>

Although Comte’s universal project was never completed, his sketch for it in his *Système de politique positive* clarified the general features of its design. The Comtean positivist doctrine, with its universal claims, had a powerful impact on the intellectual life of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. It was interpreted in diverse ways in different geographical contexts, and underwent a series of radical transformations.<sup>25</sup> In Japan, intellectuals used positivism to criticize the old order’s feudalism.<sup>26</sup> In a number of settings in Latin America, it was adopted to facilitate the continent’s integration into the modern world: in

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Comte, *System of Positive Polity*, vol. 4, 508.

<sup>20</sup> With a brief interruption in 1848, Mustafa Reşid Paşa served as grand vizier from 1846 to 1852.

<sup>21</sup> “Auguste Comte’dan Mustafa Reşit Paşa’ya Yazılan Mektup,” in Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekin, eds., *Cumhuriyet’e Devreden Düşünce Mirası Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet’in Birikimi* (İstanbul, 2006), 480.

<sup>22</sup> Ibid., 481.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid.

<sup>24</sup> Murtaza Korlaelçi, “Pozitivist Düşüncenin İthali,” in Bora and Gültekin, *Cumhuriyet’e Devreden Düşünce Mirası Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyet’in Birikimi*, 214–15.

<sup>25</sup> Christopher A. Bayly, “European Political Thought and the Wider World,” in Gareth Stedman Jones and Gregory Claeys, eds., *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2011), 851; Walter Michael Simon, *European Positivism in the 19th Century: An Essay in Intellectual History* (Ithaca, 1963).

<sup>26</sup> Yoko Arisaka, “Beyond ‘East and West’: Nishida’s Universalism and Postcolonial Critique,” *Review of Politics* 59/3 (1997), 542–5.

Brazil, Comtean principles were adopted to resolve the problem of slavery and advocate a decentralized republic.<sup>27</sup> The motto on the Brazilian flag, “Ordem e Progresso,” was a proclamation of positivism.<sup>28</sup> In Mexico, the positivist movement of the Científicos, led by Miguel S. Macedo, aimed to establish a society grounded on the laws of science.<sup>29</sup> The Ottoman positivist movement, manifested as the Parisian branch of the Young Turk movement, provided one of the most effective interpretations of global positivist thinking. It must be seen in a global, and not merely a local, context, but in order to understand how positivism was received by Ottoman intellectuals, it is necessary to talk about the emergence of this Young Turk movement.

### THE YOUNG TURKS’ IDEALISM, REPUBLICANISM, AND POSITIVIST UNIVERSALISM

The Young Turks movement originated as a secret society, İttihâd-ı Osmani (the Union of Ottomans), in 1889. Formed by five students—İbrahim Temo, Abdullah Cevdet, İshak Sükûti, Hikmet Emin, and Mehmet Reşid—at the Royal Medical Academy in İstanbul (Tıbbiye Mektebi), it was set up to resist the despotism of Sultan Abdülhamid II. Abdülhamid II had established total political domination over his people and exerted autocratic control over political, educational, and religious institutions by suspending the Constitution of 1876, closing down parliament in 1878, and centralizing and regulating control of the government.<sup>30</sup> He was obsessed with maintaining social stability, preventing the disintegration of the state, and securing support from European powers, especially Germany, to avoid isolation in the international domain. Revolts, most notably the Armenian and Greek uprisings of 1894–6 and 1896 respectively, were brutally repressed. Paranoid about security, Abdülhamid II formed a secret police organization (*hafîye*) and a system of conspiracy under it to counter threats to his authority. State spies (*jurnalci*) were appointed to every department of the government to monitor and log the actions and thoughts of individual bureaucrats in memoranda (*journals*) that were used to promote, dismiss, or even imprison subjects depending on their perceived loyalty or

<sup>27</sup> For positivism in Latin America see Ralph Lee Woodward, *Positivism in Latin America, 1850–1900: Are Order and Progress Reconcilable?* (Lexington, 1971).

<sup>28</sup> Isabel DiVanna, “Reading Comte across the Atlantic: Intellectual Exchanges between France and Brazil and the Question of Slavery,” *History of European Ideas* 38/3 (2012), 452–66.

<sup>29</sup> Leopoldo Zea, *Positivism in Mexico*, trans. Josephine H. Schulte (Austin, 1974), 156–61.

<sup>30</sup> Benjamin C. Fortna, “The Reign of Abdülhamid II,” in Reşat Kasaba, ed., *The Cambridge History of Turkey: Turkey in the Modern World* (Cambridge, 2011), 47–8.

disloyalty.<sup>31</sup> Adopting a censorship law based closely on one promulgated in France by Napoleon III, Abdülhamid II controlled information tightly, and many prominent newspapers, including *Muhbir*, *Vatan*, *İbret* and *Diyojen*, were closed. Key political words, including “republic” (*cumhuriyet*), “liberty” (*hürriyet*), “nation” (*vatan*), “equality” (*eşitlik*), “constitution” (*kânûn-i esâsî*), “plot” (*suikast*), “revolution” (*ihtilâl*), and “reform” (*ıslahat*) were censored in the press to control revolutionary impulses.<sup>32</sup> The circulation and publication of important Western philosophical texts, including Alfieri’s *De la tyrannie*, Cicero’s *De la republique* and *Harangues au peuple et au sénat*, Huxley’s *Science et religion*, Machiavelli’s *Le prince*, Mirabeau’s *Discours*, Montesquieu’s *Lettres persanes* and *De l’esprit des lois*, Rousseau’s *Contrat social* and *Discours sur l’origine et les fondements de l’inégalité parmi les hommes*, and Voltaire’s *Histoire de Charles XII*, *Le fanatisme ou Mahomet le prophete*, and *Dictionnaire philosophique*, were banned.<sup>33</sup>

The pressure exerted on liberty during this period prompted countless underground societies throughout the empire, from İttihâd-ı Osmani to Freemasons’ lodges, Le comité turco-syrien, La parti constitutionnel en Turquie, and Cemiyet-i İlmiye.<sup>34</sup> Like most nineteenth-century European secret societies, İttihâd-ı Osmani was composed of cells and utilized rituals, secret oaths, and mystic signs that remained largely intact up until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908.<sup>35</sup> Its founding members advocated revolutionary means to overthrow the Sultan. They sought to extend the franchise in the service of democracy and liberty, and break from traditional forms of authority and paternalism. They approached political change conspiratorially through violence, terror, and assassination. Their revolutionism and radicalism were not republican, but upheld the retention of a limited monarchy by restoring the Constitution.

The intellectual background of the members of the İttihâd-ı Osmani shaped their conceptions of violent revolution. The Royal Medical Academy was at the time the central Ottoman institution for disseminating knowledge about new scientific practices. It served as the focus of a new, young, intellectual group who

<sup>31</sup> Some of these *journals* were the products of mere rumour. The surviving ones are compiled as a book. See Asaf Turgay, *İbret: Abdülhamid’e Verilen Jurnaller ve Jurnalciler* (İstanbul, 1961).

<sup>32</sup> Cevdet Kudret, *Abdülhamit Devri’nde Sansür*, vol. 1 (İstanbul, 2000), 5–6, 48, 53.

<sup>33</sup> “Catalogue, des livres et des brochures dont l’entree dans l’Empire Ottoman a été interdite, İstanbul, 1318 [1910],” in Remzi Demir, ed., *Philosophia Ottomanica* (İstanbul, 2005), 187–8.

<sup>34</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, “Notes on the Young Turks and the Freemasons, 1875–1908,” *Middle Eastern Studies* 25/2 (1989), 186.

<sup>35</sup> For nineteenth-century radicalism see Gregory Claeys and Christine Lattek, “Radicalism, Republicanism and Revolutionism,” in Jones and Claeys, *The Cambridge History of Nineteenth-Century Political Thought* (Cambridge, 2011), 203.

accepted science and scientific investigation as truth and the sole way to access that truth.<sup>36</sup> This approach drew heavily on the German materialism of the classical triumvirate of Ludwig Büchner, Karl Vogt, and Jacob Moleschott. Büchner's *Kraft und Stoff*, translated into Turkish by Abdullah Cevdet (1869–1932) in 1890,<sup>37</sup> was widely read and recognized in Ottoman scientific circles.<sup>38</sup> Abdullah Cevdet, like Büchner, saw the physical universe as composed of matter and force: “We cannot think of anything not composed of matter or the product of matter.”<sup>39</sup> His counterpart, Ibrahim Temo (1865–1939), explained life in purely mechanical terms, as the result of chemical and physical events and reproduction.<sup>40</sup> This secular *Weltanschauung* carried a powerful political significance. The materialists believed that social phenomena behaved predictably, as science showed natural phenomena to do, and tried to create a science of revolution. By comparing social reactions to chemical reactions, the radicals stressed the need to unite disparate forces to create a greater opposition to the despot: the greater the union, the more powerful the force, and the more likely the success of the revolution.<sup>41</sup>

The movement gradually branched out and incorporated many members associated with the Royal Military School (Mekteb-i Harbiye), who brought militarism, activism, and patriotism into its radicalism. In 1892, when the movement was discovered by the Hamidian secret police, intensifying reprisals against its members followed. With most of the İttihâd-ı Osmani members forced to leave the capital, branches of the organization formed further afield, in the Ottoman cities of İzmir, Thessaloniki, and Cairo, and beyond the empire in European cities including Geneva and Paris.

The Parisian branch was formed in 1895 by the positivist intellectual Ahmed Rıza (1859–1930), an Ottoman bureaucrat, who, having studied at École d'agriculture de Grignon in Paris, encountered positivist ideas through *La philosophie positive*, and *Auguste Comte et M. Pierre Laffitte* by Jean-François Robinet, a close follower and collaborator of Comte's. During his stay in Paris he was actively involved in positivist movements. Critical of Abdülhamid II's despotism, he wrote memoranda and letters addressing the Sultan and the grand

<sup>36</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, *Doktor Abdullah Cevdet ve Dönemi* (İstanbul, 1981), 8–9.

<sup>37</sup> Abdullah Cevdet, *Fizyolojiya-i Tefekkür: Mehazımın Esası Kraft und Stoff Ünvanlı Kitabın Tefekkür Bahsidir* (İstanbul, 1892).

<sup>38</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, “Blueprints for a Future Society: Late Ottoman Materialists on Science, Religion, and Art,” in Elisabeth Özdalga, ed., *Late Ottoman Society: The Intellectual Legacy* (London, 2005), 28.

<sup>39</sup> Abdullah Cevdet, “Muktesebât-ı Fenniye: Herkes İçün Kimya,” *Musavver Cihan* 4 (23 Sept. 1891), 30.

<sup>40</sup> Ibrahim Temo, “Tegaddi ve Devam-ı Hayat,” *Musavver Cihan* 16 (12 Dec. 1892), 123.

<sup>41</sup> Rıza Nur, *Tıbbiye Hayatından* (İstanbul, 1911), 7.



vizier, which bolstered his reputation among Ottoman intellectual circles in the empire. In 1895, the leaders of the İttihâd-ı Osmani contacted Ahmed Rıza, requesting collaboration and intellectual guidance. He renamed the society İttihat ve Terakki Cemiyeti (Committee of Union and Progress, CUP) and spearheaded the movement up until the Revolution of 1908.<sup>42</sup>

The CUP's early years were marked by conflicts over the methods and ideologies for overthrowing despotism and establishing a democratic society through consultation (*meşveret*). The movement split into two competing groups. The first, led by Ahmed Rıza and composed of intellectuals like Halil Ganem, Dr Nazım, and Şerif Bey, promoted pacifism and non-activism.<sup>43</sup> The second, led by Mizancı Murad Bey (1854–1917), a Russian Turkish *émigré* intellectual activist and historian,<sup>44</sup> and supported by Çürüksulu Ahmed Bey, Ishak Sükûti, and Dr Şerafettin Mağmumi from the Parisian branch and Tunalı Hilmi and Abdullah Cevdet from the Geneva branch, advocated activism, revolution, and radicalism. The latter initially defeated the former, and Murad Bey assumed the movement's leadership in 1897. But that same year he made his peace with the Sultan, accepting the offer of a post in the state administration,<sup>45</sup> and the leadership reverted to Ahmed Rıza, whose own refusal of rapprochement with the government reinforced his reputation as a "freedom fighter."<sup>46</sup> Thereafter, his leadership defined the philosophical outlook of the Parisian Young Turks, who

<sup>42</sup> Ahmed Rıza initially suggested renaming the society Nizam ve Terakki (Order and Progress) to express his full commitment to positivism, but İttihâd-ı Osmani's members based in Istanbul preferred İttihat ve Terakki (Union and Progress). See Ahmed Bedevi Kuran, *İnkılap Tarihimiz ve Jön Türkler*, 2nd edn (Istanbul, 2000), 46–7. Ahmed Rıza's major works included *Tolérance musulmane* (1897), *La crise d'Orient* (1907), and *La faillite morale de la politique occidentale en Orient* (1922). See M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "Ahmed Rıza," in Kate Fleet, Gudrun Krämer, Denis Matringe, John Nawas, and Everett Rowson, eds., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*, at [https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_23352](https://doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23352), accessed 28 Nov. 2016. For an autobiography of Ahmed Rıza see Ahmed Rıza, *Meclis-i Mebusan ve Ayan Reisi Ahmet Rıza Bey'in Anıları* (The Memoirs of Ahmed Rıza, President of the Chamber of Deputies and of the Senate) (Istanbul: Arba Yayınları, 1988). For an intellectual biography of Ahmed Rıza see Erdal Kaynar, "Ahmed Rıza (1858–1930): Histoire d'un vieux Jeune Turc" (unpublished Ph.D. thesis, École des hautes études en sciences sociales, Paris, 2012).

<sup>43</sup> Halil Ganem was an influential Lebanese leader of the Turkish–Syrian Committee, which merged with the Committee of Union and Progress in 1895. He published a journal, *La jeune Turquie*, in Paris. M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "The Young Turks and the Arabs before the Revolution of 1908," in Rashid Khalidi, ed., *The Origins of Arab Nationalism* (New York, 1991), 36–7.

<sup>44</sup> For Mizancı Murad Bey's life and works see Birol Emil, *Son Dönem Osmanlı Aydını Mizancı Murad Bey* (Istanbul, 2009).

<sup>45</sup> Mizancı Murad, *Mücadele-i Milliye: Gurbet ve Avdet Devirleri* (Istanbul, 1994), 246.

<sup>46</sup> Hüseyin Cahit (Yalçın), *Siyasal Anılar* (Istanbul, 2000), 61.

disseminated their ideas through two main propaganda newspapers, *Meşveret* in Turkish and *Mechveret supplément français* in French, both founded in Paris in 1895 with the goal of shaping French and Ottoman public opinion.<sup>47</sup>

### Republicanism without a republic

Over time, divisions and disagreements among the Parisian Young Turks saw some stray from their original positivist philosophical doctrines. It is thus necessary to distinguish “Ottoman positivists” as the group on whom the remainder of the article will focus, and as distinct from those Parisian Young Turks who ceased to advocate for positivism. Ottoman positivists were republican monarchists and idealists who stressed the central role of ideas in interpreting society and politics. Their views were irreconcilable with the materialism of other Young Turk branches, rejecting metaphysics and emphasizing the nature, values, and essence held in common by all humanity.<sup>48</sup> In contrast to the materialists, they believed that the transformation to an orderly society would be achieved only through intellectual means without necessarily changing the dynasty. Echoing Comte’s emphasis on ideas as the motor of history, Halil Ganem argued that “the strength of ideas destroys what is bad, [and] grow[s] what is good, noble, and great.”<sup>49</sup> Similarly, for Ahmed Rıza, “in a nation, a concrete idea [*fikir*], a great ideal [*emel*] must exist; this idea and ideal must lead the nation towards a political plan [*maksad-ı siyasiye*].”<sup>50</sup> Like Comte, both believed that an intellectual revolution would occur first which would trigger a moral revolution and then lead to a social and finally a political one.

Ottoman positivists’ republicanism was not antithetical to the sultanate, with its abolition and the substitution of a republican government by election a central aim. Rather, it was associated with the creation of a constitutional republican monarchy and the rule of law as opposed to arbitrary will. Ottoman positivists valued republicanism not for its institutions but for its ideas of liberty (*hürriyet*), equality (*müsavet*), justice (*adalet*), and fraternity (*uhuvvet*). Liberty, understood in its classical republican sense, meant living freely in a free state. It allowed

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<sup>47</sup> *Mechveret* appeared as the supplement of the Turkish *Meşveret* but not as its direct translation. It contained different articles with a more positivist tone. *Meşveret* was published only for two years. From 1897 until the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, *Mechveret* served as the major newspaper of the Young Turks in Paris. Because of Abdülhamid II’s censorship, the newspapers were smuggled secretly into the Ottoman Empire to reach the Ottoman intellectual elite.

<sup>48</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Les positivistes et la politique internationale,” *Mechveret* 19 (15 Sept. 1898), 6.

<sup>49</sup> “Banquet de la jeune Turquie,” *Mechveret* 26 (1 Jan. 1897), 3.

<sup>50</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “İhtilal,” *Meşveret* 29 (15 Jan. 1898), 2.

man to direct and organize himself; to be his own master, not the property of someone else; to think, speak, and work freely. “Liberty consists,” Ahmed Rıza wrote, “in learning science and developing skills, transferring the knowledge for the benefit of the nation as a whole.”<sup>51</sup> Equal rights were the fundamental basis of a free society. The people, not the arbitrary will of the Sultan, were the source and subject of the law. This notion of legal equality meant the subjection of each citizen to a set of laws common to all, and the removal of any kind of privilege.<sup>52</sup> This notion of “equality before the rule of law” was based on the Tanzimat conception of egalitarianism, which affirmed the extension of rights to all Ottoman citizens, regardless of their race and religion.<sup>53</sup> Besides this legal equality, Ottoman positivists advocated gender equality. In his treatise “Kadın” (Woman), Ahmed Rıza highlighted women’s suffering and exploitation in Ottoman society. This was not an argument for their greater cultural and civic participation in the community, but for bringing women out of subjugation to their husbands in the family. He insisted on expanding women’s role in raising moral individuals within the family to facilitate generational progress, and serve both the nation and humanity.<sup>54</sup>

Liberty and equality, Ottoman positivists believed, could be achieved only by combined effort, and this collaboration was possible only if fraternity (*uhuvvet*) was recognized and felt among all Ottoman citizens. Fraternity would remedy hostilities and social conflicts by bringing citizens together through their representatives in parliament to enact all their rights, while they remained free and equal. Fraternity implied affection and commonality, and promised, by dedication to shared goals and love of the fatherland (*vatan*), the salvation of the empire. It did not formulate a myth to heighten common beliefs, ceremonies, or symbols; to emphasize Turkic roots; or to privilege the empire above other societies or above the idea of self-determination.

As opposed to nationalism, which Comte also categorically rejected, fraternity as understood by Ottoman positivists aimed to construct Ottoman citizenship (*Osmanlı vatandaşı*) on a common legal and secular basis without “separating

<sup>51</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Kadın,” in Mustafa Gündüz and Musa Bardak, eds., *Ahmet Rıza Bey ve “Vazife ve Mesuliyet” Eserleri* (Ankara, 2011; first published 1908), 139.

<sup>52</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *La crise de l’Orient: Ses causes et ses remèdes* (Paris, 1907), 55–7.

<sup>53</sup> The Tanzimat (“reordering”) (1839–76) was the extensive reform and westernization movement of the nineteenth-century Ottoman Empire, which aimed at integrating with the “Concert of Europe.” Various reforms ranging from education to the military, finance, and administration were undertaken in this period.

<sup>54</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Kadın,” 113–52. He drew inspiration from Comte on women. For more on Comte’s ideas on women’s roles in the family see Mary Pickering, “New Evidence of the Link between Comte and German Philosophy,” *Journal of the History of Ideas* 50/3, (1989), 441–63.

the Turks from the Armenians and the Greeks,” enabling Ottoman subjects to reinterpret their social worlds and describe their own society.<sup>55</sup> Ottoman positivists advocated patriotism and categorically rejected Turkism, nationalism, and religious fanaticism, seeing them as threats to sociopolitical unity and order.<sup>56</sup>

A state, for Ottoman positivists, was not merely a collection of complex institutions, rather it was a nation organized in a certain way around the ideas of liberty, equality, justice, and fraternity. They introduced an organic conception of the state, which embodied social totality and power, deriving its authority from the sovereignty of the people. In the words of Ahmed Rıza, “the state is a body inseparable from the people; it is the impersonal protector of the people, and the institution looking after the affairs of the country.”<sup>57</sup>

The extant Ottoman state, however, was some way from this ideal. Under the Hamidian regime the dramatic expansion of the state and centralization of sultanic authority dominated the citizenry through arbitrary and coercive rule incompatible with political liberties, justice, and unity. The state became a person and a machine, terrorizing and conspiring against its people, polarizing society and constraining freedom of expression.<sup>58</sup> As a result, in the eyes of Ottoman positivists, Ottoman people became subject to increasing administrative regulation in all spheres of their lives. This observation was not merely a complaint, or in Şerif Mardin’s terms “moaning literature,” describing a daily irritation, but a diagnosis of Ottoman sociopolitical decay under despotic government.<sup>59</sup> To avert further degeneration, Ottoman positivists sought the most suitable form of government for their own state, one that could both maintain order and stability and ensure liberty, fraternity, and equality.

Invoking Montesquieu’s typology of governments in their search for a moderate form of government, the Ottoman positivists discussed whether constitutional monarchy or a republic was best suited to governing the Ottoman state. They believed that a republican government would, in theory, be suitable for the Ottoman state, because the first Islamic state during the time of the four caliphs was at its inception “a kind of Republic” that “recognizes, in principle, the ruler as someone elected by a decision of the national assembly.”<sup>60</sup> But while they repeatedly affirmed their devotion to republican ideals, they did not champion a

<sup>55</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Hükümetsizlik,” *Meşveret* 17 (21 Aug. 1896), 1.

<sup>56</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “İcmal-i Ahval,” *Meşveret* 19 (20 Sept. 1896), 1–2.

<sup>57</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Mukaddime,” in Gündüz and Bardak, *Ahmet Rıza Bey ve “Vazife ve Mesuliyet” Eserleri*, 40.

<sup>58</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Ben mi Aldanıyorum Padişah mı Aldanıyor,” *Meşveret* 25 (8 Oct. 1897), 1.

<sup>59</sup> Şerif Mardin, *Jön Türklerin Siyasi Fikirleri, 1895–1908* (Istanbul, 2011), 193.

<sup>60</sup> Cited in Şerif Mardin, *Religion, Society, and Modernity in Turkey* (New York, 2006), 171. See Ahmed Rıza, *La revue occidentale*, 2nd series 3 (1891), 116.

republic in place of the monarchy. The evident vulnerabilities and instabilities of nineteenth-century republics made them doubt the capacity of republics to secure stability and order. Moreover, the transition from a monarchy to a republic would require a revolution, which the Parisian branch, in sharp contrast with those of Geneva and İstanbul, wished by all means to avoid. The transformation to an orderly society would be achieved not abruptly but only through intellectual and peaceful means, without changing the dynasty, and it would take place primarily in collective thought, attitudes, and values.<sup>61</sup> In “İhtilal” (Revolution), Ahmed Rıza responded to letters from the İstanbul branch that criticized pacifism: “It is impossible to propagate a great revolution [*inkılâb-ı kebîr*] through short-sighted uprisings . . . It is easy to provoke the people. However, it is hard to bring an imprudent and uncalculated revolution to a successful end.”<sup>62</sup> His antirevolutionary view was derived from the postrevolutionary crisis in France, which brought more unrest and chaos to the country.

The ideal political regime envisaged by Ottoman positivists was quite a novelty in Ottoman political thought. It was a centralized “republican constitutional monarchy,” with a representative government of ministers drawn from the ranks of learned men, equipped with a sense of freedom of conscience, and assuring freedom of the press. Ahmed Rıza believed that, because ordinary people were often mistaken in their moral judgments, the only solution to Ottoman degeneration was guidance of the *grande masse*. He saw the population at large as lazy and incapable of thinking for themselves, part of an Ottoman state and society “subject to cyclical illnesses.”<sup>63</sup> Like Comte, who favored the rule of an enlightened elite, he believed that “the doctors of the society” must heal the masses by awakening them to the prospect of an ideal state and society, and peacefully transforming sociopolitical life.<sup>64</sup>

Ahmed Rıza’s contention was that democracy in the hands of an unenlightened people would fail to produce good government: the people had to choose from the educated elite a group of representatives to legislate on their behalf.<sup>65</sup> Similarly, for Halil Ganem the foremost right of “the liberal elite” was to rule, not only because they possessed the personal qualities necessary for

<sup>61</sup> Fuad, “Indépendance et integrite de l’Empire Ottoman,” *Mechveret* 14 (1 July 1896), 3; Ahmed Rıza, “Confusion de pouvoirs en Turqui,” *Mechveret* 2 (15 Dec. 1895), 1.

<sup>62</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “İhtilal,” 2.

<sup>63</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Le Sultan et les princes,” *Mechveret*, 1 Sept. 1905, 1.

<sup>64</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *Vatanın Hâline ve Maarif-i Umûmiyenin İslahına Dair Sultan Abdülhâmid Han-ı Sâni Hazretlerine Takdim Kılman Altı Lâyihadan Birinci Lâyiha* (London: Imprimerie internationale, 1895), 17. This text was an advice treatise, addressing the Sultan.

<sup>65</sup> For the reference to Condorcet see “Asker,” in Gündüz and Bardak, *Ahmet Rıza Bey ve “Vazife ve Mesuliyet” Eserleri*, 91.

leadership, but also because an organized minority acting in a coordinated manner always triumphed over a disorganized majority.<sup>66</sup> This insistence that elites must rule was not novel in Ottoman political thought. The originality of the Ottoman positivists' view was to attribute elite legitimacy to societal and organizational rather than psychological or moral factors. Their conclusion was that the progressive development of Ottoman society could occur only through a strong, centralized state, represented by an elite with transformative power. Centralization was an essential means for creating a sense of national identity and unity, and for breaking down particularistic attachments. A transformation to a centralized republican monarchy, Ottoman positivists believed, could not be achieved merely through political means like the opening up of parliament and the drafting of a constitution.<sup>67</sup> Rather, it could be realized by orchestrating a radical transformation in collective thought, attitudes, and values under the guidance of positivist philosophy.<sup>68</sup>

### Ottoman positivism

The Ottoman commitment to positivism was proclaimed in the first issue of *Meşveret*:

An intellectual elite must implement positivist proposals for constitutional and political change to lead the Empire towards an era of stability and integrity. We believe that to maintain order, there is no need to overthrow the existing dynasty. We should work together to spread the concept of progress to achieve its triumph by peaceful means. Our principles are order and progress [*ordre et progres*].<sup>69</sup>

The committee's name, *Union and Progress*, implied its dedication to positivist doctrine. "Union" (*ittihat*), associated with "connecting" or "making whole," was emphasized as a weapon against the nationalist separatism of ethnic and religious groups within the empire. It also referred to the importance of the organic society, the community, crucial to both Comte and Islam. Linked to union was the concept of "order" (*intizam*), implying both domestic and international stability. The third principle, progress (*terakki*), was viewed, as it was by Comte, dialectically, and explained in evolutionary terms: to secure progress, order, and stability were indispensable. Thus, in Ahmed Rıza's reading of Comte,<sup>70</sup> "progress can only

<sup>66</sup> Halil Ganem, "La Constitution et le peuple Ottoman," *Mechveret*, 15 Sept. 1889, 4.

<sup>67</sup> "La politique du Sultan," *Mechveret* 8 (1 April 1896), 1. This article appeared in *Justice* on 29 March 1896.

<sup>68</sup> Fuad, "Indépendance et integrite," 3; Ahmed Rıza, "Confusion de pouvoirs en Turqui," *Mechveret* 2 (15 Dec. 1895), 1.

<sup>69</sup> "Mukaddime," *Meşveret* 1 (1 Jan. 1895), 1.

<sup>70</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *La crise de l'Orient*, 3.

come out of order” (“le progrès ne peut sortir que de l’ordre”).<sup>71</sup> Positivism must infuse into all aspects of life, including society, politics, morality, religion, and international relations. To realize this positivist order, Fuad noted, “the Ottomans must have patience.”<sup>72</sup>

Ottoman positivists aligned themselves with orthodoxy, a version of the ideology that emerged, after Comte’s death in 1857, under the leadership of Pierre Laffitte (1823–1903) in contrast to the heterodoxy of Emile Littré (1801–81) and his followers. While Laffitte accepted the idea of faith in the Religion of Humanity, he eschewed the idea that there should be a High Priest of Humanity, taking on instead the presidency of “the religious committee,” renamed later the “positivist committee.”<sup>73</sup> In a stream of books and articles in *La revue occidentale*, and in lectures at the Salle Gerson and the Collège de France as professor of the *histoire générale de sciences*, Laffitte extended and popularized Comtean ideas.<sup>74</sup> His influence on Ottoman positivists came through Ahmed Rıza, who took part in positivist debates at the collège as a student and became one of Laffitte’s disciples.

Under the influence of Laffitte, Ottoman orthodox positivism diverged from Comte’s own views on two major points. While acknowledging the importance of the positive spirit, Laffitte and Ahmed Rıza were less enthusiastic about the Religion of Humanity, the Positivist Church, or religious rituals of positivism.<sup>75</sup> Moreover, both disagreed with Comte on the boundaries and borders of Europe. Laffitte insisted that “with the spread of Positivism, the use, as a political expression, of the purely geographical term ‘European’ must be dropped; for it was applied in an utterly irrational way to an assemblage of very distinct and dissimilar peoples.”<sup>76</sup> To accomplish the goal of positivism, Comte’s vision of the triumph of Western superiority must be abandoned, and the intellectual and spiritual unity of positivism must be broadened to render it genuinely universal. In contrast to Comte, he argued that this Roman vision of the world must include Eastern populations like Turkey and Russia, but exclude colonies of the West.<sup>77</sup>

<sup>71</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “L’Orient à l’exposition II,” *Mechveret* 100 (1 July 1900), 4.

<sup>72</sup> Fuad, “Patience!”, *Mechveret* 9 (15 April 1896), 1–2.

<sup>73</sup> See Leslie Bethell, *Ideas and Ideologies in Twentieth-Century Latin America* (Cambridge, 1996), 150; Terry N. Clark, *Prophets and Patrons: The French University and the Emergence of the Social Sciences* (Cambridge, 1973), 101–2; Jeremy Jennings, *Revolution and the Republic: A History of Political Thought in France since the Eighteenth Century* (Oxford, 2013), 363.

<sup>74</sup> Simon, *European Positivism in the 19th Century*, 39.

<sup>75</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “La construction d’une mosquée à Paris,” *Mechveret* 1 (1 Dec. 1895), 1.

<sup>76</sup> Pierre Laffitte, *The Positive Science of Morals: Its Opportuneness, Its Outlines and Its Chief Applications*, trans. J. Carey (London, 1908), 196–7.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid.

Ottoman positivists were actively involved in French positivist and intellectual circles, contributing to the universalization of positivism. Their impact on positivism in France itself became more apparent when Ahmed Rıza joined the Société positiviste in 1906 and became one of the thirteen founding members of the Société positiviste internationale, the chief French positivist society, led by Emile Corra (1848–1934). He wrote extensively in leading positivist journals like *La revue occidentale* and *La revue internationale positiviste*. His desire to reconcile reform with social stability, and progress with order, prompted intense interaction with contemporary French positivists and intellectuals, who recognized and supported the Young Turks in their own writings. Georges Clemenceau, the statesman and future French prime minister, defended the Young Turks' goals of liberal and parliamentary politics and just reforms under a controlled government. By failing to support them effectively, he argued, "we [the French] are letting the Asian despot direct policy and laws. We pretend to spread the ideas of liberty and equality outside our borders yet we let the Asian despot . . . rule."<sup>78</sup> Similarly, Edouard Conte of *L'echo de Paris* criticized the French government for its inconsistency in pursuing liberal revolutionary aspirations whilst attempting to expel Ahmed Rıza from France at Abdülhamid II's command: "How illogical is it to reject strangers from France who became liberals in Turkey thanks to the influence of French education?"<sup>79</sup> A banquet organized by the Young Turks in Paris in 1896 to celebrate the twentieth anniversary of the promulgation of the suspended Ottoman constitution was a clear demonstration of French recognition and support for the Young Turks' demands for a peaceful, anti-despotic regime.<sup>80</sup>

Thanks to *Mechveret*, the Young Turks' positivism extended beyond European geographical boundaries, reaching Latin America.<sup>81</sup> In *Lettre à M. Ahmed Rıza*, Juan Enrique Lagarrigue, a leading Chilean orthodox positivist, expressed his appreciation for the Young Turk movement and thanked Ahmed Rıza for inspiring Latin American positivist movements.<sup>82</sup> Similarly, the Mexican positivist Augustín Aragón hailed Ahmed Rıza "nuestro querido y distinguido correligionario turco" (our dear and distinguished Turkish coreligionist).<sup>83</sup>

<sup>78</sup> Georges Clemenceau, "Pour faire plaisir au Sultan," *La dépêche*, 14 April 1896, in *Mechveret* 9 (15 April 1896), 7.

<sup>79</sup> Eduard Conte, "Le jeune Turquie," *Mechveret* 9 (15 April 1896), 8.

<sup>80</sup> "Banquet de la jeune Turquie," *Mechveret* 26 (1 Jan. 1897), 4.

<sup>81</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, *Preparation for a Revolution: The Young Turks, 1902–1908* (Oxford, 2001), 39.

<sup>82</sup> Juan Enrique Lagarrigue, *Religion de l'humanité . . . Lettre à M. Ahmed Rıza*, Par Juan Enrique Lagarrigue (Santiago Ercilla, 1901).

<sup>83</sup> Augustín Aragón to Ahmed Rıza, Mexico, César 10, 117/2 May 1905.



Ottoman positivists' efforts to spread positivism echoed Comte's mission to unite the Orient and the Occident through intellectual means. Like Comte himself, they believed that positivism provided the basis for domestic and universal order, and could be effective only when all restraints on human conduct were removed. But, unlike Comte, they did not believe that Eastern nations must be guided passively by their Western counterparts, insisting on the imperative to recognize equality and fraternity between nations in realizing the universal ideal of a united humanity (*l'humanité*, and *insaniyet*). By placing humanity at the heart of their positivism, they offered a new ideal for East–West relations and an alternative to Westernization.

## OTTOMAN CONCEPTIONS OF HUMANITY

### Universal world history and the laws of three stages

For Ottoman positivists, humanity had two senses and operated on two levels, mental and moral, as it unfolded, promising the evolution and progress of a world civilization. In the nineteenth century, most European positivists still tended to see Europe as the center of the world and the norm against which to measure world progress. Ottoman positivists rejected the European-centered conception of progress, stressing the contributions of Eastern civilizations and presenting the evolution of world history as the progress of humanity as a whole towards betterment. In so doing, they offered a truly universal vision of the evolution of mankind.

To reveal its totality, Ottoman positivists deployed the Comtean evolutionary theory of humanity, with its foundation in the primacy of human reason or intellect, which was seen to progress according to developmental laws through three stages. Following Comte, Ahmed Şuayb (1876–1910), a prominent positivist who sympathized with the Young Turks in exile,<sup>84</sup> identified these stages as *hâl-i mevzu* (theological stage, *état fictif*), *hâl-i mücerred* (metaphysical stage, *état abstrait*), and *hâl-i müsbet* (scientific stage, *état positif*).<sup>85</sup>

In the first stage of mental evolution, the human mind was dominated by superstitious conceptions of knowledge, explaining reality by reference to divine powers. Beşir Fuad (1852–87), commonly recognized as the first Turkish positivist, who adopted a similar philosophical stand to Ahmed Şuayb's,<sup>86</sup> argued that

<sup>84</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioglu, "Ahmed Şuayb," in Fleet et al., *Encyclopaedia of Islam, THREE*. at [http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912\\_ei3\\_COM\\_23442](http://dx.doi.org/10.1163/1573-3912_ei3_COM_23442), accessed 10 Dec. 2016.

<sup>85</sup> Ahmed Şuayb, *Hayat ve Kitaplar* (Ankara, 2005; first published Istanbul, 1899, 2nd edn Istanbul, 1913), 70.

<sup>86</sup> M. Orhan Okay, *Beşir Fuad: İlk Türk Pozitivist ve Natüralisti*, 2nd edn (Istanbul, 2008).

throughout the Middle Ages only what was accepted by the church was recognized as truth, eclipsing the “minds and reason of the people.”<sup>87</sup> The Renaissance marked a transition to the second stage (*état abstrait*) of mental development, the Enlightenment, a triumph of reason over superstition. In this phase, the beginnings of progress were to be found in the works of Newton, Bacon, Descartes, and Bruno.<sup>88</sup> Beşir Fuad described the *Encyclopédie, ou dictionnaire raisonné des sciences, des arts et des métiers* as “the ocean of human knowledge,” and its authors as advancing ideas indispensable to any sane theory of progress.<sup>89</sup> He praised Voltaire as “one of the geniuses who was able to attain salvation of the mind” and to illuminate the minds of others, and admired his courage in denouncing the Catholic creeds and helping “break the chains of civilization and progress from slavery.”<sup>90</sup>

In the final, scientific or positive stage, the human mind passes into an age of positive thought, freed from religious dogma and fanaticism, and from the metaphysical content of earlier philosophies, and characterized by a new scientific knowledge. Following Comte, Ahmed Şuayb argued that there were only two modes of thinking, “the speculative” (*nazarî*) and “the scientific or positive” (*müsbet*).<sup>91</sup> The former’s explanations were formulated in terms of deities and abstract spirits, or other entities without empirical foundation, while the latter’s were rooted in the study of nature and the discovery of actual laws by an appropriate combination of techniques of observation, experimentation, and comparison.<sup>92</sup>

Knowledge and science, for Ottoman positivists, reached their height in the scientific–industrial phase of history. Unlike Marx and Engels, who were suspicious of economic liberalism in industrial society, Ahmed Rıza, with Comte and Hegel, was optimistic over a successful transition to modernity out of absolutism and progress towards a better future through industrialization. The most advanced country at the time and epitome of the achievement of modern industrial society was France. French enthusiasm for science and progress, Ahmed Rıza wrote, “makes man see humanity in an extended manner and recognize the people who have led the way. This feeling of recognition should be the motivating

<sup>87</sup> Beşir Fuad, “Mukaddime,” in Erdoğan Erbay and Ali Utku, eds., *Voltaire* (Istanbul, 2003; first published 1886), 103.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 104–5.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 139.

<sup>90</sup> *Ibid.*, 164.

<sup>91</sup> Ahmed Şuayb, *Hayat ve Kitaplar*, 135.

<sup>92</sup> *Ibid.*

force behind people who wish to carry the flag of progress forward, handed down to them by their ancestors.”<sup>93</sup>

Ottoman positivists saw the law of three stages as applying to all civilizations, but different civilizations as evolving at different rates. To aid the universal spirit of progress, all nations must help one another remove barriers to improvement. Despite advancements in the Tanzimat period,<sup>94</sup> the spirit of progress in the empire had been abruptly disturbed by Abdülhamid II, whose lack of interest in science left the empire lagging dramatically behind the scientific and industrial developments of the West.<sup>95</sup> Ottoman positivists saw it as their duty to do away with despotism, as it harmed the evolution of both their society and humanity. “To attain this great goal,” Fuad wrote, “we demand the help and moral support of those who love their family, their *patrie*, and humanity.”<sup>96</sup> This statement did not express an acceptance of foreign intervention in Ottoman domestic affairs, but signaled the Ottoman positivists’ desire for humanitarian assistance or support from Western nations. Whilst Ahmed Rıza believed that to perpetuate the spirit of progress, the Ottoman people must invest more in industry and scientific knowledge to boost wealth and lead to peace, by contrast to Abdullah Cevdet, he did not mean to emulate the modern West or accept Western civilization and values in their entirety, but aimed to keep up with the scientific and industrial developments of the West to serve the evolution of humanity.<sup>97</sup>

“The cult of science and progress,” Ahmed Rıza remarked, “is the only international doctrine which invoked the feeling of altruism” between civilizations.<sup>98</sup> “Civilization” here did not refer exclusively to the West, but to “a collection of truths, based on the acquisition made by human intelligence in all the various domains of knowledge; truths that have been accumulated and transmitted from generation to generation.”<sup>99</sup> By stressing the collection of truths, Ahmed Rıza highlighted the integrated past of Islamic and Christian civilizations to emphasize that European progress would have been impossible without the contributions of Islamic civilization, a point forgotten or ignored by European thinkers at the time. Littré, the main positivist opponent of Laffitte, disputed the significance of Islamic civilization during the Middle Ages, arguing that Arabs had simply copied the learning and books of the ancient Greeks, and

<sup>93</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “L’Orient à l’exposition,” *Mechveret* 99 (1 June 1900), 2.

<sup>94</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “L’Orient à l’exposition II,” *Mechveret* 100 (1 July 1900), 2–4.

<sup>95</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Devoir du Calife,” *Mechveret* 12 (1 June 1896), 3; Ahmed Rıza, “L’Orient à l’exposition III,” *Mechveret* 101 (15 July 1900), 2.

<sup>96</sup> Fuad, “Les armeniens et le self-government,” *Mechveret* 15 (15 July 1896), 4.

<sup>97</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “L’Orient à l’exposition II,” 2.

<sup>98</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *La revue occidentale*, 2nd series 3 (1895), 374–6.

<sup>99</sup> *Ibid.*

failed to assimilate the literature and fine arts of the Hellenes. In reply, Ahmed Rıza insisted that “Littré, though a positivist, failed to observe in his search for truth the correlation of general phenomena, thus violating accepted historical method which prohibits the formation of theories on the basis of isolated facts.”<sup>100</sup> Like Comte and Laffitte, he believed that Islam was essentially progressive and more open to modernization than the Catholic Church during the Middle Ages.<sup>101</sup> It preserved and developed the spirit of science from the seventh century to the fifteenth, demonstrating that for hundreds of years the oriental civilizations were more organized and advanced than their occidental counterparts.<sup>102</sup> Ahmed Rıza insisted on the debt owed by modern civilization to Muslim scholars like Farabi, Ibn-i Sina, Al-Biruni, Ibn-il Rushd, and Ilgh Bey, who together had paved the way for the Renaissance, and helped humanity to pass from the theological to the metaphysical stage.<sup>103</sup> By revealing the mixed heritage of European civilization, Ottoman positivists summoned Europeans to rethink their identities and redefine their relationship with the rest of the world, and with the Ottoman Empire in particular.

### Laicity and morality as the foundation of a universal order

For Ottoman positivists, progress began with the mind; from there it would lead to the reorganization of morality and society, which would bring order. They saw humanity as a vast progressing organism, a continuous moral spirit, developing and evolving without geographical constraints throughout the course of history. This view predicted the realization of humanity in a universal order, whereby all people from different religions were spiritually tied together to live in peace and harmony.

Order, for Ahmed Rıza, was the establishment of harmony between the selfish interests of individuals and groups in a society. An orderly society would generate stability in the individual mind, foster feelings of harmony with the whole race, and encourage the intention to do good. Order was the foundation of ethical life, consisting in fulfilling duties in one’s social position; disorder, on the contrary, is caused by leading an unethical life. However, what he observed was disorder and disunity within the Ottoman Empire. He saw the empire as mired in political and moral decadence, anarchy and interstate conflict, “a disastrous crisis [*buhran-ı felaket*] never heard before,” since it had no basis to unite minds

<sup>100</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *The Moral Bankruptcy of Western Policy towards the East*, trans. Adair Mill (Ankara, 1988; first published 1922), 147.

<sup>101</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Pierre Laffitte,” *Mechveret* 137 (1 Feb. 1903), 4.

<sup>102</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “L’Orient à l’exposition III,” 2–3.

<sup>103</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *Moral Bankruptcy*, 18, 111–37.

in shared convictions and since the ruler himself was so irresponsible.<sup>104</sup> Because Abdülhamid II subordinated the common good to his selfish interest and failed to protect the national interest of his people, the imperial powers had taken advantage of the regime's weakness by intervening and economically exploiting the empire, deepening the crisis in the Orient and harming humanity as a whole.<sup>105</sup>

Despite this bleak picture, Ottoman positivists believed that moral decay could be averted through a positivist reorganization of their society via a secular religion, without using the term "religion of humanity," but rather based on the *laïcité* (laicity) of contemporary French republican ideology.<sup>106</sup> Ottoman positivists were the first to introduce this term into Turkish, which later became one of the chief pillars of Turkish republicanism. *Laïcité* indicated the need for Islam, in a positivist form, to bind together a divided society by serving as a spiritual norm, an effective institutional force, and a collective discipline, imposing itself with the overpowering authority of habit on Ottoman society. For Ahmed Rıza, it still offered hope and consolation to the unhappy, and inspired a love of virtue.<sup>107</sup> Like Comte, he emphasized the integrative and socially expressive function of religion in reinforcing group identity, prompting group action, and connecting individuals.<sup>108</sup> Hence, for Ahmed Rıza, "The mosque is not only a place of worship but also, as its name *cami* indicates, a center of attractions and reunions, a gathering place for the community."<sup>109</sup> Pan-Islamism, practiced with love and tolerance, would produce conciliation between Ottoman people, end conflicts, create order, and promote progress.<sup>110</sup>

*Laïcité* divided the private sphere, where Ottoman positivists believed religion to belong, from the public sphere, in which each individual should appear as a citizen equal to all other citizens, devoid of ethnic, religious, or other particular characteristics. As Ahmed Rıza put it, "It is not a part of our program to bring religion into politics; we have respect for all faiths, but as long as other people talk about religious principles and include them in questions and national politics, [we] have a duty to give them an answer."<sup>111</sup> His answer was that governing state affairs according to religious doctrine was a practice that belonged not to the

<sup>104</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Mukaddime," 40.

<sup>105</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Padişah," 12–13.

<sup>106</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Laicisation du protectorat," *Mechveret* 138 (1 Dec. 1904), 1–2.

<sup>107</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *Moral Bankruptcy*, 213.

<sup>108</sup> Aykut Kansu, "20. Yüzyıl Başı Türk Düşünce Hayatında Liberalizm," in Tanıl Bora and Murat Gültekin, eds., *Tanzimat ve Meşrutiyetin Birikimi* (İstanbul, 2006), 291.

<sup>109</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Devoir du Calife," 3.

<sup>110</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Panislamisme," in Ahmed Rıza, *La crise de l'Orient*, 39.

<sup>111</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Une nouvelle tactique," *Mechveret* 13 (15 June 1896), 3.

scientific stage but to past eras, and that secularization was required for society to progress.<sup>112</sup>

*Laïcité* also implied that the government should play no part in religious affairs and refrain from taking positions on religious doctrine. It did not preclude state interest in moral questions, but required official neutrality between different faiths. The state must guarantee each citizen's freedom of religious affiliation (*hürriyet-i mezhebiye*), without interfering in their private life, and allow all to practice their faith in a sphere that would not cause harm to social order.<sup>113</sup> This *laic* vision could be promoted through education. Ottoman positivists aimed to establish positivist schools in which the traditional curricular emphasis on religion was replaced by scientific teaching.<sup>114</sup> By providing equal educational opportunities for men and women, they would improve the morals of the whole nation, providing the basis for a harmonious, orderly, and civilized society, leading ultimately to international harmony and coexistence.<sup>115</sup>

As order is the foundation of an ethical life, social cohesion could also be achieved through a new ethics, which, Ahmed Şuayb argued, "consists in duties people have to perform to themselves and to others."<sup>116</sup> It encompassed all multifaceted social obligations and duties, individuals, families, countries, and humanity as a whole and matched different sentiments: pity (*merhamet*), filial sentiment (*aile duygusu*), compassion (*şefkat*), and altruistic love (*altruizm*), as in the Comtean sense.<sup>117</sup> Were the people and their rulers to cultivate these sentiments and duties at each stage, the social, political, and moral problems brought on by despotism would be resolved.<sup>118</sup> Hence politics, for Ahmed Rıza, was the practice of ethics in social life. Citing Cicero, Ahmed Rıza wrote that "everywhere, duties and obligations are the foundations of justice, and good

<sup>112</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *Vatanın Haline ve Maarif-i Umumiyyenin Islahına Dair Sultan Abdülhamid Han-ı Sani Hazretlerine Takdim Kılınan Layihalar Hakkında Makam-ı Sadarete Gönderilen Mektuptur* (Geneva: Imprimerie et lithographie A. Friedrich, 1895), 21.

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Beşir Fuad, *İlk Türk Materyalisti Beşir Fuad'ın Mektupları* (Istanbul, 1988), 28–9.

<sup>115</sup> Ahmed Rıza was preoccupied with the women's question and education. Upon his return to Istanbul he formed a committee, Sultani İnas Cemiyeti, to launch the opening of schools for girls. In 1916 he initiated the opening of the school for girls, Adile Sultan İnas Mekteb-i Sultanisi (Adile Sultan Imperial Girls' School), but this project was delayed due to the First World War. This school started functioning later and had its first graduates in 1920. See Ahmed Rıza, *Anılar* (Istanbul: Cumhuriyet Yayınları, 2001), 32.

<sup>116</sup> Ahmed Şuayb, *Hayat ve Kitaplar*, ed., Erdoğan Erbay (Ankara, 2005; first published 1899), 149.

<sup>117</sup> Ibid.

<sup>118</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Mukaddime," 1.

morality, pertaining to bonds and relations between people's minds."<sup>119</sup> To forge a just society, the rulers must know their moral duties towards their citizens.<sup>120</sup> The Sultan's most important duty was to distribute justice to his citizens, which only a well-educated prince was equipped to do. In his pamphlet *Vazife ve Mesuliyet* (Duty and Responsibility), Ahmed Rıza listed the Sultan's duties: to act responsibly for his nation; to refrain from conspiracy, compulsion, and control; to eschew physical force as a legal penalty; and to rule according to the constitutional law (*Kânûn-i Esâsî*).<sup>121</sup> Only moral rulers, who respected the wishes and interests of the people, could help end internal political strife and social conflict. But citizens too had duties to one another, as well as to the state. The ultimate duty of the Ottoman citizen was to obey the state and its just laws, an essential condition for maintaining unity, political cohesion, and the integration of different ethnic nationalities within a united empire. They needed to love their country and be Ottoman patriots.

Once order was established in particular societies, contradictions and hostilities between nations would be resolved, and altruistic love and morality would transcend their societal boundaries to a universal order, binding a humanity hitherto divided between East and West.<sup>122</sup> Ottoman positivists traced the roots of humanity's division to the struggle between Islamic and Christian civilizations in religious wars and crusades, which had "produced poverty, weakened the established order, and undermined the security of property relations,"<sup>123</sup> replacing solidarity with hatred and vengeance. Ahmed Rıza observed the world to be divided by religions, and this divide was deepened by European colonialist and interventionist policies. Every nation was autonomous and must primarily protect its own national interests against external pressure or domination, and each nation must respect this national autonomy. Western powers, however, undermined this principle by foreign intervention and economic exploitation through the capitulations, and only harmed Ottoman unity and security.<sup>124</sup> Their behavior showed that "they [the Europeans] think of their own interests rather than the broader question of humanity for the solution of the Eastern Question."<sup>125</sup> Ahmed Rıza was

<sup>119</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>120</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Şehzâdeler," 54.

<sup>121</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Padişah," 47–50.

<sup>122</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Mukaddime," 1.

<sup>123</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *Moral Bankruptcy*, 138.

<sup>124</sup> Cited in M. Şükrü Haniöğlü, "Private Papers of Ahmet Rıza (2)," in Haniöğlü, *The Young Turks in Opposition* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995), 190.

<sup>125</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Pourquoi l'Europe ne réclame pas le établissement de la Constitution en Turquie," *Mechveret* 21 (15 Oct. 1896), 3.

particularly critical of the hypocrisy of France's universalism. Within its frontiers, the Republic nurtured and enforced a constant belief in the civic power of universal suffrage and the supremacy of art, sciences, culture, and philosophy, while, beyond its frontiers, it propagated colonial ambitions under the pretext of "universality" and "civilization." This *mission civilisatrice*, for Ahmed Rıza, contradicted France's *esprit laïque* and image as a modern, industrialized, and scientific nation.<sup>126</sup>

A divided humanity would not be overcome merely through diplomatic relations, as Ottoman positivists, like Comte, did not trust politicians to establish relations between states on honest and moral grounds. Politicians, Ahmed Rıza argued, "make no attempt to dispel the memories of religious hatred and to weaken racial prejudice, the real sources of antagonism and war."<sup>127</sup> Persisting religious intolerance, prejudice, and fanaticism could not be solved by political measures or diplomacy, because they were merely an "art of deception," which had damaged relations between Christian and Muslim nations at length in the past.<sup>128</sup>

In describing the international union, Ottoman positivists, like Comte, avoided the usage of the term "cosmopolitanism." Instead they simply used "human union," which would be created by applying positivist moral principles and the fulfillment of every nation's duties towards its counterparts: "The conception of unity appears . . . as an aspect of human unity. This is also the tendency of all religions."<sup>129</sup> The key text concerning this viewpoint and universal ethics and peace was later developed in Ahmed Rıza's *La faillite morale de la politique occidentale en Orient*, published in 1922 in the context of the Turkish War of Independence (1919–22) to persuade European public opinion of the immorality of the war and the justness and legitimacy of the independence movement. This propaganda piece spoke of creating a perpetual peace through the adoption of Comte's universal ethics by all nations, and relied on the axioms of equal worth, respect and dignity of all, mutual recognition, nonintervention, and anti-imperialism.

The principle of equal worth viewed humanity as a single moral realm, in which each person and nation deserved equal respect and consideration—a moral judgment, rather than an empirical claim. Ahmed Rıza blamed humanity's current division on the European imperial powers' immoral treatment of other states. Their arrogance, prejudice, and treatment of Eastern people, and particularly the Ottomans, as "barbarians" or "members of an inferior race" hurt

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<sup>126</sup> Ibid.

<sup>127</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *Moral Bankruptcy*, 210.

<sup>128</sup> Fuad, "La diplomatie et la question d'Orient 2," *Mechveret* 17 (15 Aug. 1896), 2.

<sup>129</sup> Ahmed Rıza, "Panislamisme," 28.



national pride and honor, worsening the relations between East and West and causing a struggle between nations: “Before insulting the members of another nation, one should first of all prove that one is at least less guilty than they are.”<sup>130</sup> In this, he acknowledged Laffitte’s influence: “My mentor, Pierre Laffitte, would often say to me: “The West must carry out its own regeneration before being more worthy to transform the East. I can imagine nothing more absurd or impertinent than the claim of Christians to assume the guidance of the human species.”<sup>131</sup> Each nation must recognize the autonomy and liberty of other states.<sup>132</sup>

The principle of mutual recognition meant that each state must accept the cultural, social, and ethnic variety of other nations.<sup>133</sup>

There is no reasoning with pride and animosity based on ignorance. Those who love only themselves disdain others simply because they are incapable of any true recognition or charitable appreciation of another’s worth, and it is practically impossible to come to any sort of agreement with those one hates. The instinct of self-preservation, it is true, sometimes draws together men who have no love for one another, but that type of “entente” ironically described as “cordial” is never enduring.<sup>134</sup>

Civilizations had something important to learn from each other in improving their moral and material qualities: “Let us try to know each other better, to reach a better understanding, and to act only in full awareness of our motives. The free exchange of ideas between our respective countries seems to me to be as necessary as the exchange of food products without any fraud or swindling.”<sup>135</sup>

The principle of anti-imperialism and nonintervention, while underlining a commitment to these related principles of equal worth, dignity, and mutual recognition, required the creation of understanding, communication, and interconnections between people and nations. Reiterating his earlier views at the turn of the century, Ahmed Rıza believed in national autonomy and a nation’s right to protect its own interests against external pressure or domination. Western interventionism and colonialism reflected only selfish desires and interests, at the expense of the needs and wishes of other human beings. Commercial expansion in the colonies led to a brutal and repressive exploitation of indigenous peoples:

When no other pretext can be found for the military occupation of other countries and the pillage of the local inhabitants’ goods and property, the unfortunate natives are proclaimed

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<sup>130</sup> Ahmed Rıza, *Moral Bankruptcy*, 14, 29.

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.*, 14.

<sup>132</sup> *Ibid.*, 27.

<sup>133</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>134</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>135</sup> *Ibid.*, 209.

to be of an inferior race and a danger to Humanity, and a claim is laid to the divine right of endowing them with the blessings of civilization; in exactly the same way as politicians who wish to overturn a ministry but can find no serious motive to justify their action, have recourse to lying pretexts, claiming that their sole aim is the happiness and welfare of their fellow citizens . . . Have they at least contributed to the happiness of the people they have subdued? I direct that question to all men of good faith, to the Americans with regard to their Red Indian tribes, to the English with regard to the Australian Aborigines, to the French with regard to the African negro, and, with even greater reason, to the Germans with regard to the Namibian tribes!<sup>136</sup>

Each state must be aware of and accountable for any of its actions, direct or indirect, intended or unintended, that might radically restrict the choices of others. Once individual countries grasped international moral principles and fulfilled their duties to one another, humanitarian values would triumph and the salvation of humanity could be pursued. Ahmed Rıza supposed, optimistically, that aggression would become increasingly futile as the benefits of peace became more obvious: “Let us therefore work primarily to co-ordinate the tried and tested ideas and principles that we hold most dear, and combine them with exalted sentiments of duty. Order can only be established by men of energy, conviction, and virtue.”<sup>137</sup>

For Ottoman positivists, the universal positivist project was no utopia. They saw Japan’s victory over Russia in 1905 as a symbolic triumph of humanitarian values over Europe’s mythical invincibility, intolerance, and suppression.<sup>138</sup> “[W]e wish to see [Japan] universalized,” Ahmed Rıza wrote, “because it is the fruit of a principled, faithful, and highly intelligent organization, because it is based on a conception of human destinies that excludes holy icons and false sentimentalities.”<sup>139</sup> Japan’s victory also strengthened the Ottomans’ hope that constitutionalism and freedom would triumph over decaying despotism and slavery in the world at large.<sup>140</sup> The realization of humanity was an imminent possibility, fulfilling Comte’s prophecy, in which the order of the Orient would unite with the progress of the Occident to forge a new universal order.

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<sup>136</sup> Ibid., 6.

<sup>137</sup> Ibid., 214.

<sup>138</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Muharebe ve İhtilal,” *Şura-yı Ümmet*, 72 (6 April 1905), 1–2; Rıza, “Port Arthur’un Sükutu,” *Şura-yı Ümmet*, 69 (19 Feb. 1905), 1–2.

<sup>139</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Légions japonaises,” *Mechveret*, 1 March 1905, 1, cited in Renée Worringer, “‘Sick Man of Europe’ or ‘Japan of the Near East’? Constructing Ottoman Modernity in the Hamidian and Young Turk Eras,” *International Journal of Middle East Studies* 36/2 (2004), 207.

<sup>140</sup> Ahmed Rıza, “Küstahlık,” *Şura-yı Ümmet*, 75 (20 May 1905), 1.

## REACTIONS TO POSITIVIST UNIVERSALISM

Ottoman positivists saw their theory as an overarching social and political philosophy, offering wide-ranging perspectives on Ottoman society and politics, justifying public authority, informing international ethics, and elucidating many features of Ottoman life: relations between state and society; the principles of leadership, patriotism, religion, education, and public and private morality. It was not just a system of thought or assembly of ideas, but a scrupulously defined moral code for reorganizing Ottoman society as a whole to achieve constant progress.

This entire republican positivist plan, nevertheless, entailed theoretical flaws. Because of its doctrinal weaknesses—republicanism without a republic, progress without much change, religion without much content—Ottoman positivism was soon challenged by Prince Sabahaddin (1877–1948), the leader of the liberal opposition, Osmanlı Hürriyetperverân Cemiyeti (the Ottoman Freedom-Lovers' Committee), who categorically rejected centralization as lying “at the heart of despotism.”<sup>141</sup> The positivists' commitment to centralization (*merkeziyetçilik*) as a means of ensuring political order through dynastic stability meant that the empire would remain subject to the despotism of the elites.<sup>142</sup> Instead, Sabahaddin suggested a decentralized model borrowed from Anglo-Saxon political structures, according to which the various parts of the empire would have their own governments to handle administrative, municipal, and judicial affairs, and finance and public works would be managed locally. He took issue with the fundamental positivist notions of progress and universal ethics. Employing the language of Victorian imperialism, he insisted in the name of universal progress on the legitimacy and even the necessity of the empire's receiving aid from a superior and civilized Europe, particularly Britain, which had effectively improved living standards in underdeveloped countries like India and Egypt.<sup>143</sup> “It is desirable that the action of Europe in the East should be more equitable and more respectful of human dignity. It is on this condition only that progress and peace may be secured.”<sup>144</sup>

Another major point of contention with the positivists was the means by which to overcome despotism. Against the non-activist stance of the positivists, the liberals advocated turning the Young Turk movement into an activist,

<sup>141</sup> Sabahaddin, “Merkeziyet ve Adem-i Merkeziyet,” *Terakki* 1 (1 April 1906), 10.

<sup>142</sup> *Ibid.*, 9–10.

<sup>143</sup> Ali Erkul, “Prens Sabahattin,” in Emre Kongar, ed., *Türk Toplum Bilimcileri* (Istanbul, 1982), 134.

<sup>144</sup> Sabaheddine, “The Sultan and the Pan-Islamic Movement,” *The Times*, 13 Aug. 1906, 6, also in Mehmet Ö. Alkan, ed., *Prens Sabahaddin: Gönüllü Sürgünden Zorunlu Sürgüne* (Istanbul, 2007), 155.

revolutionary organization. To achieve this, Sabahaddin planned a *coup d'état* to overthrow Abdülhamid II. In this, he sought the help of Great Britain, formed alliances with Armenian separatist groups, and established new organs in the Balkans and in activist communities like İntikamcı, and İstirdat.<sup>145</sup> The dispute between the positivists and the liberals reached its peak at the First Young Turk Congress of 1902 in Paris, which led to the gradual decline of the positivists within the movement.<sup>146</sup>

A further challenge came from militarism. Its most radical strands issued from the popular urban militias of the Ottoman provinces, and mainly from the Ottoman Freedom Society (OFS), a secret conspiratorial society founded in Thessaloniki in 1906. With the efforts of two founding members, Mehmed Talat Bey (later Paşa) and Enver Bey (later Paşa), the organization grew quickly by recruiting associates in the civil bureaucracy and armed forces, primarily in the Third Army.<sup>147</sup> Although the positivist wing of the Young Turks rejected militarism because of its fundamentally aggressive, separatist, and activist emphasis, in the early 1900s the rising activist faction, spearheaded by Parisian branch members Dr Nazım and Bahaeddin Şakir, prompted the movement to ally with the OFS. In the end, activism and militarism defeated positivism at the Second Young Turk Congress of 1907 in Paris. Conspiracy, secret networking, and violence were agreed on as the means to overthrow the regime and establish a free democratic society (*meşveret*). This intense struggle over ideas prepared the ground for the 1908 Revolution, the forerunner of the Republican Revolution of 1923.

## CONCLUSION

With the Young Turk Revolution of 1908, Ottoman positivists in exile returned to Istanbul and brought their ideas, slowly transforming the terminology of Ottoman politics. They pioneered a modern, pluralist worldview that transcended the conventional geographical boundaries between Western and non-Western political thought by underlining the interaction of ideas in a striking and highly consequential way. It bridged East and West by drawing determinedly on the resources of each, which still had relevance in contemporary international politics. The participation of Ahmed Rıza, as president of the

<sup>145</sup> M. Şükrü Hanioğlu, "Der Jungtürkenkongress von Paris (1902) und seine Ergebnisse," *Die Welt des Islams* 33 (1993), 61–63.

<sup>146</sup> On Ahmet Rıza's side were Hoca Kadri, Halil Ganem, Ahmed Ferid, Doctor Nazım, and Mustafa Hamdi. See Hanioğlu, *Preparation for a Revolution*, 3–4.

<sup>147</sup> Among them were Niyazi Bey and Karabekir, both of whom later became key influential figures during the formation of the republic. Nader Sohrabi, *Revolution and Constitutionalism in the Ottoman Empire and Iran* (New York, 2011), 90.

Chamber of Deputies, and another prominent positivist, Dr Rıza Tevfik, as Turkey's representatives at the First Universal Races Congress, convened in London in 1911 to discuss East–West relations and develop mutual understanding and cooperation, demonstrated the international recognition which the Young Turks won in their own time.<sup>148</sup>

The positivist universal project of spiritual union between East and West was then challenged by nationalists in response to the rising military threats of the 1910s. Nationalism categorically rejected the previously dominant French universalism, replacing it with a theory of self-contained and incommensurable civilizations. Nationalists like Ziya Gökalp and Yusuf Akçura perpetuated distaste for the notions that the world was a rational harmony and idealism could explain it as it was. In nationalist politics, there was no place for universalism or the utopian aim of serving an imaginary humanity. Instead, they stressed that humanity is naturally divided into nations, each of which has its own peculiar character. During the First World War, nationalism pushed universal idealism to the intellectual margins.

Although, in 1919, Ahmed Rıza's presidency of the Meclis-i Ayan (Senate) brought positivist universalism once again to the forefront of political life, it was short-lived. After the Turkish War of Independence (1919–22), it was overshadowed by nationalism and completely forgotten. Despite this philosophical shift, constitutionalism, republicanism, and the positivist ideas of laicity and anti-imperialism still laid the primary intellectual foundation for the young republic and remained an enduring legacy of Turkish political thought.

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<sup>148</sup> “Preface,” in G. Spiller, ed., *Papers on Inter-Racial Problems Communicated to the First Universal Races Congress Held at the University of London July 26–29, 1911* (London, 1911), v.