



## Social and Spiritual Diseases and Their Solutions According to Mehmed Ali Aynî

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### Abstract

With the modernization movements that started with the Tanzimat period in Turkey, a rich environment for intellectual debate was formed in which a wide range of scientific, philosophical, social, and political issues were discussed. In this environment, every issue concerning society was discussed by intellectuals and solutions were tried to be found for the social issues that emerged with the change. Mehmet Ali Aynî, who graduated from the modern schools founded with the hope of reforming education in this period and started his career as a bureaucrat, became one of the most important figures of this debate environment in the second phase of his career, when he focused his interest on scientific, philosophical, and social issues. Aynî took a stance within the Islamic tradition against the positivist and materialist influences that emerged with the new developments and changes of his time and tried to support this stance in a unique way with the evidence he cited from the scientific and philosophical developments of the West. One of his primary goals was to protect the culture of society and the beliefs of the individual against these movements, which he considered dangerous, and thus to ensure the continuity of the foundations of social morality. Aynî presents his criticisms against the ideas of atheism, skepticism, and pessimism, which emerged because of positivist and materialist movements, to the reader's attention most prominently through a poem by Tevfik Fikret, one of the most controversial figures of the period, and continues to offer solutions to negative social behaviors such as despair and suicide in his other works. While he draws attention to the unhappiness and suicide caused by disbelief and pessimism, he presents his scientific, philosophical, and moral analysis and criticism by blending the education he received and the culture in which he grew up. One of the pillars of Aynî's intellectual and spiritual world is Islamic culture itself, with which he tries to respond to scientific and philosophical objections to the existence of God. In doing so, Aynî makes many references to modern philosophers such as Spinoza and Bergson, but he also takes the philosophers of the Islamic world, especially the Sufis, as a source of reference. Despite the evidence he brings from both cultures, it is possible to see traces of an agnostic attitude in the conclusion he reaches. Stating that God's existence cannot be fully known, Aynî nevertheless acknowledges that there is evidence for God's existence. His advice to his readers is to live a life of submission in the face of one's shortcomings and troubles by confessing one's lack of knowledge on matters such as God's wisdom and fate. However, this

submission should not be understood as a detachment from life. Aynî, who regards existence and life itself as essentially good, expects his readers to adopt the philosophy of optimism as a philosophy of life that is based on a commitment to life and therefore encourages making efforts to make life better. This study examines Aynî's criticisms of the ideas of atheism, skepticism and pessimism that emerged because of positivist and materialist movements and his proposed solutions to these ideas that emphasize that life is a blessing worth living.

## Keywords


Ethics, Atheism, Skepticism, Pessimism, Mehmed Ali Aynî, Tevfik Fikret.

## Citation


Özkan, Abdullah. "Social and Spiritual Diseases and Their Solutions According to Mehmed Ali Aynî". *The Journal of Near East University Islamic Research Center* 10/1 (June 2024), 122-141. <https://doi.org/10.32955/neu.istem.2024.10.1.06>

Date of Submission	09.03.2024
Date of Acceptance	24.05.2024
Date of Publication	30.06.2024
Peer-Review	Double anonymized - Two External
Ethical Statement	It is declared that scientific and ethical principles have been followed while carrying out and writing this study and that all the sources used have been properly cited.
Plagiarism Checks	Yes - Turnitin
Conflicts of Interest	The author has no conflict of interest to declare.
Acknowledgments	I would like to thank Ahmet Özer for his help in editing the article.
Grant Support	The author acknowledge that they received no external funding in support of this research.
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## Mehmed Ali Aynî'ye Göre Sosyal ve Bireysel Hastalıklar ve Çözümleri

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### Öz

Türkiye’de Tanzimatla birlikte başlayan modernleşme hareketleriyle beraber bilimsel, felsefi, sosyal ve siyasi çok çeşitli konuların tartışıldığı zengin fikrî bir tartışma ortamı oluşmuştur. Oluşan bu ortamda özellikle toplumu ilgilendiren her konu fikir adamları tarafından tartışılmış, değişimle birlikte ortaya çıkan toplumsal meselelere çözüm bulunmaya çalışılmıştır. Bu dönemde eğitimde reform ümidiyle kurulan modern okullardan mezun olan ve kariyerine bir bürokrat olarak başlayan Mehmet Ali Aynî, bilimsel, felsefi ve sosyal meselelere ilgisini yoğunlaştırdığı kariyerinin ikinci evresinde bu tartışma ortamının en önemli simalarından biri haline gelmiştir. Aynî, özellikle dönemindeki yeni gelişmeler ve değişimlerle birlikte ortaya çıkan pozitivist ve materyalist etkilere karşı İslam geleneği içinde tavrı takınmış, bu tavrını batının bilimsel ve felsefi gelişmelerinden naklettiği delillerle kendine özgü bir şekilde desteklemeye çalışmıştır. Onun öncelikli hedeflerinden biri tehlikeli addettiği bu akımlara karşı toplumun kültürünü ve bireyin inançlarını korumak ve böylelikle toplumsal ahlakın temellerinin devamını sağlamaktır. Aynî, pozitivist ve materyalist akımların sonuçları olarak ortaya çıkan ateizm, şüphecilik ve kötümserlik fikirlerine karşı yaptığı eleştirileri en belirgin şekilde dönemin en tartışmalı figürlerinden biri olan şair Tevfik Fikret’in bir şiirinden hareketle okuyucunun dikkatine sunmakta, bunların ortaya çıkardığı hayattan ümidi kesme ve intihar gibi olumsuz sosyal davranışlara yönelik çözüm önerilerini diğer eserlerinde de sunmaya devam etmektedir. O inançsızlık ve kötümserliğin doğurduğu mutsuzluk ve intihar gibi kötü sonuçlara dikkat çekerken ilmî, felsefî ve ahlâkî bakımdan getirdiği analiz ve tenkitleri aldığı eğitim ve içinde yetiştiği kültürü harmanlayarak sunmaktadır. Yaşadığı dönemde Tanrı’nın varlığına dair ortaya çıkan bilimsel ve felsefi itirazlara yine bilimsel ve felsefi delillerle cevap vermeye çalışan Aynî’nin entelektüel ve manevi dünyasının dayanaklarından biri de İslam kültürünün kendisidir. Spinoza ve Bergson gibi modern filozoflara çokça atıf yapan Aynî, İslam dünyasında yetişen filozofları ve özellikle mutasavvıfları da kendisine referans kaynağı olarak almaktadır. Her iki kültürden getirdiği delillere rağmen Aynî’nin ulaştığı sonuçta bilinemezci bir tavrın izlerini görmek mümkündür. Allah’ın varlığının tam olarak bilinemeyeceğini belirten Aynî, bununla birlikte Tanrının varlığının delillerinin olduğunu kabul etmektedir. Onun okurlarına tavsiyesi insanın içinde bulunduğu eksiklik ve karşılaştığı sıkıntılar karşısında Allah’ın hikmeti ve kader gibi konulardaki bilgisinin eksikliğini itiraf ederek teslimiyete dayalı bir hayat yaşamaktır. Fakat bu teslimiyet hayattan bir kopuş şeklinde anlaşılmamalıdır. Var

oluşu ve hayatın kendisini esasen bir iyilik olarak kabul eden Aynî'nin okurlarından beklentisi, hayata bağlılığı esas alan ve dolayısıyla hayatın daha güzel hale gelmesi için çaba sarfedenin teşvik edildiği bir iyimserlik anlayışını hayat felsefesi olarak benimsemektir. Bu çalışmada Aynî'nin pozitivist ve materyalist akımların sonuçları olarak ortaya çıkan ateizm, şüphecilik ve kötümserlik fikirlerine karşı yönelttiği eleştiriler ve bunlara yönelik hayatın yaşanmaya değer bir nimet olduğunu ön plana çıkaran çözüm önerileri incelenmiştir.

## Anahtar Kelimeler

Ahlak, Ateizm, Şüphecilik Kötümserlik, Mehmed Ali Aynî, Tevfik Fikret.

## Atıf Bilgisi

Özkan, Abdullah. "Mehmed Ali Aynî'ye Göre Sosyal ve Bireysel Hastalıklar ve Çözümleri". *Yakın Doğu Üniversitesi İslam Tetkikleri Merkezi Dergisi* 10/1 (Haziran 2024), 122-141. <https://doi.org/10.32955/neu.istem.2024.10.1.06>

Geliş Tarihi	09.03.2024
Kabul Tarihi	24.05.2024
Yayın Tarihi	30.06.2024
Değerlendirme	İki Dış Hakem / Çift Taraflı Körleme
Etik Beyan	Bu çalışmanın hazırlanma sürecinde bilimsel ve etik ilkelere uyulduğu ve yararlanan tüm çalışmaların kaynakçada belirtildiği beyan olunur.
Benzerlik Taraması	Yapıldı - Turnitin
Çıkar Çatışması	Çıkar çatışması beyan edilmemiştir.
Teşekkür	Yazının düzenlenmesindeki yardımlarından dolayı Ahmet Özer'e teşekkür ederim.
Finansman	Bu araştırmayı desteklemek için dış fon kullanılmamıştır.
Telif Hakkı & Lisans	Yazarlar dergide yayınlanan çalışmalarının telif hakkına sahiptirler ve çalışmaları CC BY-NC 4.0 lisansı altında yayımlanmaktadır.

## Introduction

In the environment created by the modernization movements that began with the Tanzimat period in Turkey, various issues concerning the society were discussed, and these issues were directly related to religion and the religiosity of the society. One of the most worrying aspects of these debated issues for the religious segments of society was the spread of irreligion or atheism in society and the decline in religious devotion, which constitutes the basis of morality. Mehmed Ali Aynî, who was born in 1869 in Manastır (modern day Bitola) and died in 1945 in Istanbul, was one of the important thinkers of the period who endeavored to protect the religiosity of individuals and society against atheism,<sup>1</sup> which had started to find considerable amount of supporters as positivist<sup>2</sup> and materialist<sup>3</sup> movements began to exert their influence in Turkey.

What makes Aynî important in this debate is not the philosophical depth of his criticism of the effects of positivist and materialist philosophical movements, but his efforts to eliminate the resulting spiritual vacuum. Aynî, who has carried out intellectual discussions with intellectuals who are directly involved in the spread of these negative influences or indirectly through the movements they imported to Turkey, thinks that national values should be preserved. In order to achieve this, he endeavored to prove that such ideas would have no beneficial contribution to the Turkish-Islamic world with the evidence he brought from both his own culture and tradition and the western world of science. It is not possible to say that he had a work in which he systematically dealt with the basic problems of philosophy. However, when all his works are taken into consideration, it should be said that he focused a significant part of his work on the fundamental issues of religion and philosophy. While Aynî, who is known to have embraced the idea of waḥdat al-wujūd,<sup>4</sup> was nourished by Turkish-Islamic culture in this respect, he was also very familiar with Western sources due to the new-style education he received in his time and his command of French language.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> İsmail Arar, "Mehmet Ali Aynî", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 1991), 4/274.

<sup>2</sup> For detailed information about the introduction of positivism to Turkey and its effects see Murtaza Korlaelçi, *Pozitivizmin Türkiye'ye Girişi* (Ankara: Hece Yayınları, 2002), 163-293; Nuray Karaca, *Pozitivizmin Erken Cumhuriyet Dönemine Etkisi* (Ankara: Anı Yayıncılık, 2008), 163-232; Emel Koç, "Klasik Materyalizm ve Pozitivizmin Türkiye'ye Girişi ve İlk Yansımaları", *Dicle Üniversitesi Sosyal Bilimler Enstitüsü Dergisi* 1/2 (Kasım 2009), 84-94.

<sup>3</sup> For detailed information about the entry of materialism into Turkey and its effects see Mehmet Akgün, *Materyalizmin Türkiye'ye Girişi ve İlk Etkileri* (Ankara: Kültür ve Turizm Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1988), 107-415; Emel Koç, "Klasik Materyalizm", 77-84.

<sup>4</sup> Arar, "Mehmet Ali Aynî", 274.

<sup>5</sup> Aynî, who started taking French lessons from a Bulgarian who was the chief physician of the Military Hospital while attending junior high school in Sana'a, continued to improve his French with the

Aynî observed the negative effects of the pessimist and atheist movements developed in the West on Turkey because of the spread of positivist and materialist ideas in the country. In line with the requests he received, he wrote *Reybilik, Bedbînlik, Lâilâhîlik Nedir? An Answer to Tevfik Fikret's Târîh-i Kadîm and What is Life?*. In these works, he drew attention to skepticism, pessimism and disbelief, and the phenomena such as unhappiness and suicide that they caused and tried to prevent their spread. His philosophy of life, which he considered appropriate for himself and his fellow countrymen, is an optimism nourished by piety and spiritual values. In this study, firstly, a brief information about Aynî's life will be given,<sup>6</sup> and then, based on some of his works, his view on the issues of skepticism, pessimism, and atheism, which he considered as the most important diseases of his time, and the solutions he proposed to deal with them will be examined.

## 1. Mehmed Ali Aynî's Life

Born in 1869 in the town of Serfice in the province of Manastır,<sup>7</sup> Mehmet Ali Aynî started his primary education at the school in the Taşlık neighborhood of Serfice and moved to Thessaloniki with his family when he was eight years old. Aynî attended the school opened by some young and enlightened converts in Thessaloniki,<sup>8</sup> and after a short time he came to Istanbul with his family. Here he attended Çiçek Pazarı Rüşdiyesi<sup>9</sup> for a while, and when his father went to Yemen for trade purposes, he entered Sana Military Rüşdiyesi.<sup>10</sup> After two years in Yemen, Aynî returned to Istanbul and first entered the Soğukçeşme Military Rüşdiyesi, and when he reached the last grade, he was transferred to Gülhane Rüşdiyesi and graduated from there. He started his high school education at the Mülkiye-i Şahane and graduated from the high school section of the Mülkiye<sup>11</sup> in 1888. Among his main teachers at the Mülkiye in those years were famous names of his time such as Murat Bey from Dagestan, the owner of the Mizan newspaper, Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem, Abdurrahman Şeref Efendi (school principal), Settâr Efendi from Crimea, Ali Şahbaz Efendi, Portakal

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encouragement of Ferik İsmail Hakkı Pasha, the governor of Yemen. *Canlı Tarihler: İkinci Kitap Mehmed Ali Aynî'nin Hatıraları*, nşr. Sezgincan Yağcı (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2023), 21.

<sup>6</sup> For a detailed information about Aynî's life, see Arar, "Mehmet Ali Aynî", 273-75; Mücellidoğlu Ali Çankaya "Son Asır Türk Târîhinin Önemli Olayları ile Birlikte" *Yeni Mülkiye Tarihi ve Mülkiyeliler (Mülkiye Şeref Kitabı)* (Ankara: Mars Matbaası, 1968-1969), 3/294-299; Ali Kemal Aksüt, *Profesör Mehmet Ali Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri* (İstanbul: Ahmet Sait Matbaası, 1944); Abamüslim Akdemir, *Mehmed Ali Aynî'nin Düşünce Dünyası* (Ankara: Kültür Bakanlığı Yayınları, 1997), 1-6.

<sup>7</sup> Mücellidoğlu Ali Çankaya gives Mehmet Ali Aynî's birth date as 25 February 1868, *Yeni Mülkiye Tarihi*, 294; This date is also given in Aynî's memoirs, *Canlı Tarihler*, 17.

<sup>8</sup> Aksüt, *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 14.

<sup>9</sup> Rüşdiye can be considered as the equivalent of junior high school.

<sup>10</sup> Arar, "Mehmet Ali Aynî", 273.

<sup>11</sup> Mülkiye were schools opened to train civil servants in the Ottoman Empire. For more information about Mülkiye see Ali Akyıldız, "Mekteb-i Mülkiye", *Türkiye Diyanet Vakfı İslam Ansiklopedisi* (Ankara: TDV Yayınları, 2019), 3th edition, v. 2, 238-240.

Mikail Pasha, Sakızlı Ohanes Efendi, Aristocles Efendi and Kemal Paşazade Sait Bey.<sup>12</sup> In his memoirs, Aynî mentions the influence of Mizancı Murat Bey and Recaizade Mahmut Ekrem on him and his friends. Aynî even published a magazine called "Gülşen" with friends such as H. Nazım and Ali Kemal under Recaizade's influence.<sup>13</sup>

During his student years, Mehmet Ali Aynî had been a member of a group called "Encümen-i Hamidî" with his friends who were interested in national issues. They chose the word "Hamidî" in the name of the group in order to avoid any problems that might arise from the political conditions of the period. Aynî and his friends would come together every Friday evening at the Süleymaniye mansion of Ali Kemal, the president of the group, to discuss various issues.<sup>14</sup> However, these meetings did not last long. Because the sultan of the period, Abdülhamit II, was extremely sensitive about the administration. Aynî and his friends were arrested after a meeting, taken to Beşiktaş police station and brought before the famous pasha of the time, Yedi Sekiz Hasan Pasha. After their interrogation, it was decided that they would be imprisoned in their school for five days. In the meantime, Abdülhamit made them receive twenty mecdiye each.<sup>15</sup>

After graduating from Mülkiye, Aynî entered state service at the age of twenty and continued his official work life for fifty-seven years until the end of his life, with some minor interruptions from time to time. His life during this long period can be divided into three main phases. The first of these was his work as a teacher, then his administrative duties, and finally his work at the university.

After graduating from Mülkiye, Aynî worked as an assistant teacher at the Istanbul Law School, as a teacher at Edirne İdadisi<sup>16</sup> in 1889, as the principal of Dedeâğaç İdadisi in 1890 and Aleppo Sultanisi in 1892, as the Diyarbakır Directorate of Education in 1893, and as the Chief Clerk of the Statistics Department of the Ministry of Education in Istanbul in 1895. After nearly eight years of education and training, he started his administrative career in 1896.<sup>17</sup>

Towards the end of his career as an educator, Aynî married Feride Hanım, the daughter of Sırrı Pasha, whom he met in Diyarbakır, and from this marriage two daughters and a son

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<sup>12</sup> Akdemir, *Aynî'nin Düşünce Dünyası*, 2.

<sup>13</sup> *Canlı Tarihler*, 7-8; Aksüt, *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 15

<sup>14</sup> Aksüt, *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 17.

<sup>15</sup> *Canlı Tarihler*, 9; Akdemir, *Aynî'nin Düşünce Dünyası*, 3; Aksüt, *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 17-21.

<sup>16</sup> İdadî can be considered as modern day senior high school.

<sup>17</sup> Akdemir, *Aynî'nin Düşünce Dünyası*, 3-4; *Canlı Tarihler*, 11-19; Ali Kemali Aksüt explains in detail the events that Mehmed Ali Aynî experienced during his education, by making a panorama of the period, see *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 21-69.

were born. Having lost his son Necip Sırrı, whom he raised with great care, at a young age, Aynî's wife Feride Hanım could not bear the death of their son and died a year later.<sup>18</sup>

Aynî's administrative duties began in 1898 as a letter carrier in Kosovo and continued until 1913 as district governor of Kastamonu, Sinop, Taiz, Ammara, Balıkesir and Latakia, and as governor of Elazığ, Bitlis, Yanya and Trabzon.<sup>19</sup> In 1913, while he was the governor of Trabzon, Talat Pasha forced Aynî to retire and his administrative life came to an end.<sup>20</sup> Even while he was in administrative duty, he endeavored to serve his homeland through science. When he came to Kastamonu from Kosovo, he brought a new printing press from Germany and endeavored to enrich the city culturally, both working himself and encouraging those around him.<sup>21</sup>

After the end of his administrative life in 1913, Mehmet Ali Aynî continued to work as a university lecturer until the end of his life and gave lectures in different fields at the university until 1942. Towards the end of 1944, Aynî underwent surgery to get rid of a boil under his armpit, but he never recovered from this seemingly insignificant operation and died on the evening of November 30, 1945 in Istanbul and was buried in the family cemetery in Zincirlikuyu.<sup>22</sup> Aynî left behind dozens of works in various fields such as history, philosophy, mysticism, ethics and biography.<sup>23</sup>

## 2. Social Diseases According to Aynî

In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, due to the intellectual turmoil caused by scientific developments, some people claimed that God's rule on earth had come to an end. According to the theory of evolution put forward by Charles Darwin, human beings were reduced to a higher category of animals descended from apes, and as a result, human beings lost their position as the representative of God on earth.<sup>24</sup> These assertions have taken their most succinct form in the statement "God is dead" by Nietzsche who was the representative of nihilism at the time. In our country, too, there have been some people influenced by these claims and have fallen into nihilism and atheism. One of them was Tevfik Fikret.<sup>25</sup> In

<sup>18</sup> Aksüt, *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 61-63.

<sup>19</sup> *Canlı Tarihler*, 20-82.

<sup>20</sup> *Canlı Tarihler*, 82-83; Akdemir, *Aynî'nin Düşünce Dünyası*, 4; For another claim about Aynî's retirement, see Aksüt, *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 305-307; Mehmed Ali Aynî, *Daru'l-fünûn Tarihi*, nşr. Metin Hasırcı (İstanbul: Pınar Yayınları, 1995), 15-16. According to this claim, Mehmet Ali Aynî's failure to act improperly regarding the return of Talat Pasha's in-law's lands confiscated by the government during his governorship of Ioannina caused Talat Pasha's grudge, and Talat Pasha took his revenge on him by forcing Aynî to retire.

<sup>21</sup> *Canlı Tarihler*, 24-25, Aksüt, *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 87-309.

<sup>22</sup> Çankaya, *Yeni Mülkiye Tarihi*, 3/297.

<sup>23</sup> Aksüt, *Aynî: Hayatı ve Eserleri*, 532-537; Akdemir, *Aynî'nin Düşünce Dünyası*, 10-15.

<sup>24</sup> Bertrand Russel, *Bilim ve Din*, trans. Hilmi Yavuz (İstanbul: Cem Yayınevi, 1999), 33-55.

<sup>25</sup> For Tevfik Fikret's life, see Hasan Akay, *Tevfik Fikret* (İstanbul: Timaş Yayınları), 1998.



his poem *Tarih-i Kadim* (History of the Ancient), Fikret simultaneously deals with the ideas of skepticism, pessimism, and atheism,<sup>26</sup> which are the currents that Aynî focuses on as social diseases.

In his work *Hacı Bayram Veli*, Aynî begins by pointing to the scientific and philosophical developments that nourished the movements of materialism and positivism, which led to the spread of the diseases of skepticism and pessimism. The leading names of these scientific and philosophical developments are Darwin and Nietzsche. According to Aynî, if principles such as the struggle for life and natural selection, which Darwin taught people through evolution, are accepted as the sole truths of nature, life will become an unbearable torture. The fragmentation and disorganization caused by such ideas in the field of ideas not only leads people to doubt and hesitation, but also corrupts morality.<sup>27</sup> According to ethics based on the idea of natural selection, all beings are in a state of struggle with each other. In this struggle, the strongest ones will survive by adapting to the conditions. In this case, the strongest ones expand their living space by crushing the others and lead a more comfortable life. The social life of human beings according to this line of thinking is also a battlefield. The reason that drives human beings and the goal they desire to achieve is to be victorious in the war of life. To live is to fight, and to be moral is to be the strongest in this battle.<sup>28</sup>

According to Aynî, Nietzsche's view of the superior man, who attached great importance to this approach, was inspired by the idea of struggle, which gained importance with the idea of evolution. The conception of the superior man had two major consequences. First, the only goal of the superior man, who is in a state of perpetual war, is to be victorious, to do what he wants and to make other people accept his vision. He creates his own truth and morality without any regard for the beliefs of the time, for good and evil, for right and wrong. This person wants to be the strongest and to have everything subject to his will, without remorse or compassion. The second is that the superior person who wants to realize these moral ideal aims to eliminate traits such as love, compassion, kindness, and generosity. According to him, such moral qualities are befitting slaves. Such feelings, which are indicative of weakness and laxity, should be eliminated, the fallen should be helped to fall more quickly instead of being lifted, and those whose time has come to die should be left to die.<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>26</sup> Esad Sezai Sümbüllük states that this poem of Tefik Fikret has been misunderstood, that this poem reveals Fikret's strong faith and shows his cry from those who trample religion and nation. See Esad Sezai Sümbüllük, *Tevfik Fikretin Tarihi Kadim Ünvanlı Manzumisinin Şerhi* (İstanbul: Aydınlık Basımevi, 1947), 10.

<sup>27</sup> Mehmet Ali Aynî, *Hacı Bayram Veli*, sad. H.R. Yananlı (İstanbul: Akabe Yayınları, 1986), 8-13.

<sup>28</sup> Aynî, *Hacı Bayram Veli*, 14.

<sup>29</sup> Aynî, *Hacı Bayram Veli*, 14-16.

Aynî sees a manifestation of this negative understanding of life stemming from the ideas of thinkers such as Darwin and Nietzsche in Tevfik Fikret's poem *Târîh-i Kadîm*. Aynî begins his work *Reybîlik, Bedbînlik, Lâ-ilâhîlik Nedir?* (What is Skepticism, Pessimism, Atheism?), which he wrote in response to a request against this poem, with a reference to Nietzsche, and his concern here is again that young people are being poisoned spiritually.<sup>30</sup>

According to Aynî, while Tevfik Fikret depicts history and tradition in the poem, he glorifies power and, like Nietzsche, equates the powerful with the righteous.<sup>31</sup> After a while, Fikret directs his anger at history and tradition towards religion, challenging the belief in the afterlife by claiming that the beginning and end of everything is nothing.<sup>32</sup> Referring to the wars and human suffering in history, Fikret sees God as the cause of them and declares war on him.<sup>33</sup> The last twenty-three couplets of the poem contain three basic ideas<sup>34</sup> and these are the three diseases that Aynî tries to fight against.

## 2. 1. Skepticism (Reybîlik)

According to Aynî, human beings have an innate curiosity, and they owe the knowledge they acquire to this trait of curiosity. Due to their nature, humans acquire knowledge primarily through their senses. However, after a while, it is realized that the senses are wrong. The first doubts about the reality of the external world begin with the realization that the senses are wrong. When errors in reasoning and memory are added to the fallibility of the senses and the contradictions in the investigations of scientists are added to this, the doubt becomes stronger.<sup>35</sup>

Aynî states that doubt is acceptable when it is related to the scientific goal. However, doubt, which emerges as a philosophical disease, is a terrible disease that slowly gnaws and slowly kills a person. Unless doubt is resolved, it persists in the form of consciousness and attacks all physical and mental activities. Thus, it causes more and more confusion in a person's life. This doubt has bad effects on the human being physically, mentally, and morally, and is also harmful in terms of its social consequences.<sup>36</sup>

According to Aynî, doubt causes rigidity, boredom, and clumsiness in a person's physical demeanor and movements. Such people shy away from sports and games, and

<sup>30</sup> Mehmed Ali Aynî, *Reybîlik, Bedbînlik, Lâ-ilâhîlik Nedir?: Tevfik Fikret'in Târîh-i Kadîm'ine Bir Cevâb*, sad. Ali Utku-Abamüslim Akdemir (Konya: Çizgi Kitabevi, 2014), 89.

<sup>31</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 95-98.

<sup>32</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 98-99.

<sup>33</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 121.

<sup>34</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 127.

<sup>35</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 128-130. In his work on al-Ghazali, Aynî uses a similar description of al-Ghazali's experience of doubt, see Mehmed Ali Aynî, *Hujjat al-Islâm Imâm Ghazzâlî* (İstanbul: Matbaa-i Amira, 1327), 33-35.

<sup>36</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 130.

their bodies fatigue quickly. It is also very difficult for people in doubt to exert mental strength. Their attention and memory are weak. As a result, their mental interests shrink day by day. Such people are morally timid and selfish, wanting to avoid everyone and live alone in seclusion. Their sense of control is also weak, as their spiritual personality has been degraded. Such people leave themselves to coincidence and become prisoners of their doubting minds. The harm of the skeptic is not only to himself. Such people also hinder many benefits of society. The skeptic not only sits idle himself, but also hinders the action of others with his objections, criticisms, and excessive laziness. Thus, he also discourages others.<sup>37</sup>

According to Aynî, one should pity the skeptics. Because their lives are spent in spiritual and constant distress. However, those who befriend the skeptic and are in his company are more in need of pity.<sup>38</sup>

## 2. 2. Pessimism (Bedbînlik)

According to Aynî, the problem of evil has occupied people's minds for a long time. Buddha, the founder of Buddhism, turned pessimism into a cult and complained about the suffering of being human. This philosophy of pessimism then passed from India to Egypt, where it found adherents. Pessimism is also found in the works of some Greek and Latin philosophers.<sup>39</sup> The existence of evil is one of the favorite arguments that atheists use to deny God.<sup>40</sup> Outlining the problem of evil, Aynî divides evil into three categories: metaphysical, corporeal, and moral.

Metaphysical evil is not evil at all. It stems from the fact that all beings other than God are limited, that is, incomplete. It is a contradiction to ask God to create the most perfect things He has created. This is because incompleteness is necessarily included in the essence of contingent beings. For to be complete and most perfect belongs to God.<sup>41</sup>

Corporeal evil consists of the suffering of living beings due to the irregularities experienced in nature. Animals do not suffer as much as they are supposed to because they do not have the ability to think long and hard about their suffering. Humans, on the other hand, prepare their suffering and prolong it by preferring to keep it in their minds.

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<sup>37</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 130-132.

<sup>38</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 133.

<sup>39</sup> According to Mehmed Ali Aynî, for ideas that are the source of pessimism, see Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, ed. İsmail Derviçoğlu (İstanbul: Büyüyenay Yayınları, 2013), 17-26.

<sup>40</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 134. For the connection between atheism and the problem of evil, see Cafer Sadık Yaran, *Din Felsefesine Giriş* (İstanbul: Rağbet Yayınları, 2010), 169-181; Mehmet S. Aydın, *Din Felsefesi* (Ankara: Selçuk Yayınları, 1992), 208-210.

<sup>41</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 135.

Corporeal evils arise because of human creation or the nature of things. The misuse of things and one's own nature increases them.<sup>42</sup>

Aynî explains this situation as follows. The living body is inherently created to accept deterioration and is subject to pain and death. In order for it not to be subjected to pain, it should not be sentient, that is, it should not taste pleasure as well as pain. The sensations that activate the living body experience pleasure when they are helped and pain when they encounter resistance and obstacles. Pain and pleasure are essential elements of feeling or being alive. One of the mixtures of being alive is to feel pain and pleasure. Pleasure is sometimes a sign of goodness, but it is not goodness itself. The virtuous person may sometimes prefer to do good over pleasure. Pain is also usually a sign of evil, but it is not evil itself. One can sometimes do good by being forced to suffer. In fact, having a good character is sometimes realized through suffering.<sup>43</sup> According to al-'Aynî, to move from corporeal suffering to metaphysics in order to make a case against God's wisdom, it is necessary to know the general plan of creation and to explain with certainty that corporeal evil is not a means to a higher good. Sometimes some things may have to be destroyed in order to maintain the general order.<sup>44</sup>

Moral evil, on the other hand, is specific to human beings and is not one of the necessities of human creation, as is pain. The reason for this kind of evil is the ability to make mistakes due to the limited will that God has given to human beings. The possibility of this kind of evil is a condition for a large part of the goodness in human creation. Because it is through this will that man chooses to be good or evil, and moral evil arises from man's misuse of his free will. To ask God to create human beings in the opposite way is to ask God not to create human beings.<sup>45</sup>

As a result of these evils, Aynî asks whether it is the right attitude to see this realm as the result of coincidence, as Tevfik Fikret did, and to adopt a philosophy like Schopenhauer's, which considers it the worst of all possible realms and which discourages human beings from living and leads them to suicide.<sup>46</sup> His answer to this question is to seek ways to overcome the difficulties of life by ignoring such thoughts that would lead one to weakness, despair and weariness.<sup>47</sup>

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<sup>42</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 136.

<sup>43</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 136-137.

<sup>44</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 138. With these thoughts, it can be observed that Aynî adopted Mâtürîdî's understanding of divine wisdom. For this understanding see, Emine Ögük, "İslam Düşüncesinde Şer/Kötülük Probleminin İzahına Katkı Sağlayan Etkili Öğreti: Hikmet", *Gaziosmanpaşa Üniversitesi İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* 3/1 (Haziran 2015), 30-33.

<sup>45</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 138.

<sup>46</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 139-140.

<sup>47</sup> Aynî, *Reybîlik*, 142.

### 2. 3. Ateism (Lâilâhîlik)

According to Aynî, Tevfik Fikret expresses in his poem that people have lowered God from the position of greatness, yet no disaster befalls them, and on top of that they make fun of God. According to Fikret, even God does not care about this situation, let alone people. With these thoughts full of rebellion, Tevfik Fikret reveals an extreme godlessness.<sup>48</sup> First of all, Aynî states that these thoughts of Fikret are a reflection of his pessimistic and disagreeable personality.<sup>49</sup> He then summarizes the main ideas of the unbelievers as follows: according to them, what happens in the universe is either the work of a blind force or a treacherous coincidence, such as the delusion of thought, or, according to those who adopt a more moderate attitude, the result of the automatic mechanism that exists in nature.<sup>50</sup>

According to Aynî, in this age of scientific progress, most people accept the existence of God and still love Him. But they also know that God cannot be the subject of scientific research. Most philosophers and scientists accept the existence of God and respect Him, although there are some unbelievers. In such a situation, it is better to adhere to these philosophers' and scientists' thoughts that point to the existence of God than to adhere to the corrupt and diseased thoughts of a few disbelievers.<sup>51</sup> Having said this, Aynî states that even Darwin, in his book *The Origin of Species*, wanted to see that God existed, and Bergson, in his book *Creative Evolution*, acknowledged that the idea of God could be deduced from the emergence of beings, although he did not touch upon the issue of God in any of his various works.<sup>52</sup>

Aynî thinks that the idea of eternity that exists in the human conscience is an answer to the claims of the disbelievers. According to him, there is a sense of before and after in the human heart. This feeling compels man to reach higher heights. Although reaching the highest is beyond the limits of man's power, this deficiency is not a reason that prevents man from trying to approach it. A similar situation is the case with developments in science and the arts. These fields are also infinite. But if man had refrained from studying them for this reason, he would never have reached the advanced level he is at now. Wanting all or wanting nothing is not in accordance with reason and wisdom. It is the best attitude to be content with what is possible. Despite everything, the amount one can obtain is important. Although human endeavor will gradually increase this amount, it will never reach a final

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<sup>48</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 142.

<sup>49</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 142-143. For a detailed and somewhat different account of Fikret's personality, see Mehmet Kaplan, *Tevfik Fikret: Devir-Şahsiyet-Eser* (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 1987), 59-67.

<sup>50</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 147.

<sup>51</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 145.

<sup>52</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 145.

limit. Because as man progresses, the limit will also progress. So, there will always be a point or a mystery that needs to be known and discovered.<sup>53</sup>

Aynî, who wants to show that the power that governs the universe is not a coincidence, also emphasizes the proof of universal order.<sup>54</sup> The power that Aynî calls "infinite" manifests itself clearly through invincible laws. There is no distortion or change in these laws. All natural events occur in an order that astonishes human beings. If there were any deviation in those laws, terrifying and frightening results would have occurred. Thanks to these laws, which are clear signs of a wise Creator, the stars rotate, and gravitational forces arise from them, keeping the whole universe in a finely calculated order. If there were a momentary deviation in this order, the whole universe would be turned upside down. A manifestation of this wisdom is also seen in the distance between the earth and the sun. This distance is so finely calculated that even though our planet benefits from the life-giving rays of the sun, it is not scorched and burned by its very high heat, and because it is not far from the sun, it is not damaged by extreme cold. In short, the distance between the sun and the planets has been perfectly calculated. Given all this, it is not difficult to imagine the existence of a creator and an organizer. According to Aynî, God does not intervene in the affairs of the universe the way humans organize their own affairs. His means are too great and too perfect. But this does not prevent His intervention. Because all these laws cannot be realized without a regulator.<sup>55</sup> To deny that the universe has a regulator is not because this regulation is not visible, but because of the absence of a sound mind.<sup>56</sup>

Aynî also establishes a relationship between matter and space to prove the existence of God. According to him, there is vitality and movement in every aspect of space, which necessitates the existence of matter. But matter is lifeless and motionless. Matter, which cannot do anything on its own, must be accompanied by a spirit. In short, coexisting matter and spirit must be compatible with each other. However, matter and spirit working together is not sufficient for the creation of the works that exist in the universe. For this, a wise ruler needs to run things with extremely strong laws and keep everything in order. Although we cannot understand what the purpose of this immense order is, we can conclude that it is aimed at human progress. Human intellect and thought, with some exceptions, are not sufficient to see beyond their short lifespan. So, man is incapable when it comes to this kind of knowledge. If the running of the affairs of the universe were left to man, there would be great confusion and misery. Therefore, it is imperative for all

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<sup>53</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 147-150.

<sup>54</sup> Here, Aynî makes a presentation of teleological and design arguments. For a historical and modern account about them, see Chad Meister, *Introducing Philosophy of Religion* (London and New York: Routledge, 2009), 91-109.

<sup>55</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 145-154.

<sup>56</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 148. According to him, if animals were capable of reasoning, they would use the same denialist language about the machines made by humans.

creatures, especially man, to have a ruler with absolute power and wisdom who maintains the general balance in the material world.<sup>57</sup>

For Aynî, it is not possible to know exactly what is the supreme purpose that provides all order. This is because this purpose is very great and encompasses a vast area beyond our estimation. The distance between us and the infinite cannot be measured in any way, and everything pertaining to it is beyond reason and understanding. Therefore, true reason and wisdom consists in knowing how to accept what God has ordained calmly and with trust in Him.<sup>58</sup>

Aynî acknowledges that our situation in the face of death is related to fate, just as in other events. This reality, which will always frighten people, will come to everyone one day, regardless of location.<sup>59</sup> In a similar way, human beings are confronted with many events and situations that they cannot control or understand. But to indiscriminately generalize all this and attribute it to a destructive "blind force" acting like a madman in a rage is a terrible perversion. A prudent and perceptive observer will see, contrary to those leaders of perversion, everywhere an uninterrupted and perfect follow-up and a conscious management and execution that is always directed towards a purpose. According to Aynî, this purpose is progress.<sup>60</sup>

Aynî, claims that a force that acts blindly and without consciousness cannot follow this planned order for progress. If that force did not have knowledge and perception, this order would not exist. Since the work reveals the nature of the author, the existence of knowledge and perception in human beings necessarily shows that this force is also a knowledgeable being that is aware of the universe. Any theory to the contrary is false.<sup>61</sup> Nevertheless, many intelligent people continue to embrace these misconceptions, refusing to give up their atheistic views. There is nothing for Aynî to do but feel sorry for them and call on them to have mercy.<sup>62</sup>

While acknowledging that it is not possible to know God completely, Aynî believes that it is possible to prove the existence of God. When man observes the universe, he will realize that he is subject to ascent and spiritual development, and that the natural force that enables them is not blind. Man's ability to live happily depends on sensing these divine laws governing the universe and living in accordance with them.<sup>63</sup>

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<sup>57</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 152-153.

<sup>58</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 154.

<sup>59</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 155.

<sup>60</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 155-156. Aynî responds to the objection that this progressive management takes away our personal interests by saying that this inconvenience is part of the general interest.

<sup>61</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 157-158.

<sup>62</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 157.

<sup>63</sup> Aynî, *Reybilik*, 158-160.

### 3. Aynî's Suggestions for Solutions to Problems

In his book, *What is Life?*, Mehmet Ali Aynî offers solutions to the problems of atheism, skepticism and especially pessimism. Before explaining his own views, Aynî states that there are three theories that explain what life is: animism, vitalism and determinism or physico-chemical doctrines.<sup>64</sup>

According to Aynî, although these three theories attempt to explain life, none of them is sufficient and does not teach the secret of life. In this respect, the question "What is life?" must first be considered. When one starts to think about this question, one encounters a strange conundrum. Because there are many contradictory judgments about life. Sometimes life is good, sometimes it is bad, sometimes it is appreciated and praised, sometimes it is hated. Sometimes it is considered more precious than anything else, sometimes it is wasted as if it has no value at all.<sup>65</sup> So the answer to the question of "what is life?" is hidden in the questions of what to think about life and how to use it. In order to answer these questions, one must close one's eyes to things, people and events and look inside oneself, into one's soul. However, he should not try to deduce everything from within himself. He must base these examinations of his soul on a solid foundation. This foundation is that human beings cannot prefer an animal-like life, and that living a human life is an imperative command of the human mind. When one thinks about what a human life is, one realizes that it is connected to the ideas of duty, human dignity, and responsibility, and therefore life is a very important and serious matter.<sup>66</sup>

According to Aynî, asking a question such as whether living is good or bad is beyond the powers granted to human beings. This is because all living beings are responsible for preserving and sustaining their lives in accordance with their creation. In this respect, according to him, it is good to have a life, and one is obliged to be grateful and thankful to the infinite being who gave him this life.<sup>67</sup>

When Aynî argues that life should be loved, he refers to Spinoza's life and what he says about it. Although Spinoza suffered many privations and hardships, he did not give up loving life and advised people to do the same.<sup>68</sup> Aynî, who wants to show that the toils and sufferings of life are not unnecessary, makes a comparison based on the law of inertia of matter to demonstrate this. Accordingly, to eliminate the inertia of matter, a force must be applied to it from the outside. In the field of spirituality, the troubles encountered by human beings are also a compulsion, like this force encountered by matter, which activates human beings and causes them to change. Therefore, one should not see the troubles and

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<sup>64</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 27-45.

<sup>65</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 48.

<sup>66</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 51-52.

<sup>67</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 75-80.

<sup>68</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 81-83.



hardships as a penance or punishment, but rather should welcome them as a blessing and a need.<sup>69</sup>

Aynî argues that the death of the body is necessary, but it is not the end of everything. According to him, man has an immortal soul that will continue to exist after the death of his body. Being aware of this, man should be aware of death. Man's helplessness in the face of death should not create a sense of poverty and pessimism in him but should lead him to kindness and humility. One should live accordingly and not fear the end of one's limited existence. In this respect, one should be content with death and combine it with the joy of living.<sup>70</sup> Explaining his thoughts on suicide, Aynî states that suicide is not permissible in any way and then provides philosophical and religious proofs for this claim.<sup>71</sup>

According to Aynî, who also explores what happiness is, the important point for human beings is to be happy despite and with their worries and excitements. A happy person is one who does not give himself completely to anything, who accepts everything else as makeshift and tries to strengthen his spiritual being. A person with a strong spiritual being is happy at all times and in all places, and the elements that ensure his happiness are always with him. What such a person has is a sound and accurate mind and a tendency towards useful knowledge.<sup>72</sup>

According to Aynî, one should take care of one's health to live happily. Because health is the greatest blessing for human beings. Apart from this, one should be busy with something every day, not spend time with unnecessary dreams and thoughts, try to increase one's knowledge by reading well-chosen books,<sup>73</sup> try to make good friends outside one's close circle, and control one's actions and behavior.<sup>74</sup>

Aynî expressed his conviction about life as follows: "I am convinced, not by conjecture but by a firm conviction, that we will never be able to solve riddles such as why we came to this world to live, without the help of the light of our divine spirit, and that we will never be able to succeed with our own limited and weak intellect. For this reason, I advise you not to try to see the secret of destiny through the mind, as all our elders advise."<sup>75</sup> As a result of these remarks, he emphasizes that there will be an unknowable aspect of life and the impossibility of knowing it in an absolute sense, leaving the secret of existence to the divine power and advising us not to strain our intellect too much. Aynî adopts the belief that

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<sup>69</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 87.

<sup>70</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 91-98.

<sup>71</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 104-119.

<sup>72</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 127-130.

<sup>73</sup> By well-chosen books, Aynî may have meant books about prominent figures of Islam, since he always reminds to his readers the books he has written about these personalities, see Mehmed Ali Aynî, *Şeyh-i Ekber'i Niçin Severim?*, hz. İsmail Kara (İstanbul: Dergah Yayınları, 2020), 26.

<sup>74</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 155-157.

<sup>75</sup> Aynî, *Hayat Nedir?*, 165.

existence is enough to be happy. In other words, according to Aynî, existence is good in itself and one should adopt an optimistic rather than a pessimistic attitude towards the necessities of existence.

## Conclusion

Mehmet Ali Aynî, one of the intellectuals who lived during the First and Second Constitutional Monarchy periods and the early years of the Republic of Turkey, deserves to be included as a distinguished figure in Contemporary Turkish Thought with his thirty-five books and translated works and many articles. Since he worked in a synthesizing manner between Turkish-Islamic thought and Western thought, it is possible to find the characteristics of both worlds in his thought.

What makes Aynî important in this period is his efforts to eliminate the spiritual void created by the effects of positivist and materialist philosophical movements. While conducting intellectual debates with the intellectuals who carried these negative influences, he emphasized the need to protect national and spiritual values. In doing so, he tried to prove that such ideas would have no beneficial contribution to the Turkish-Islamic world with the evidence he brought from both his own world of science and the western world of science. Thus, he tends to adopt all kinds of achievements of the positive sciences while feeding on his own cultural world.

While Aynî focused his criticism on positivist and materialist ideas, he also closely followed the negative effects of the pessimistic and atheist movements that developed especially in the West in Turkey. In his works written to protect Turkish youth from the effects of such movements, he drew attention to the bad consequences of pessimism and disbelief, such as unhappiness and suicide, and tried to prevent the spread of such movements with his scientific, philosophical, and moral analysis and criticism.

Another important aspect of Aynî's philosophical attitude is his views on life. When seeking an answer to the question of how life should be, he first presents his views on life. In analyzing what life is, he takes the external world and its structure as a basis. Without denying the material existence of man, he sees salvation in turning towards spiritual values. While advising commitment to life, he sees the attainment of eternal happiness in the return of the purified and cleansed soul to its original state. In this endeavor, he advocates the good use of reason. Based on a mystical commitment to life, he accepted optimism as a philosophy of life.

After all these explanations, we can say that Aynî handled the problems he dealt with in terms of the concepts of human being-existence-value. He grounded his thoughts around Sufism and tried to enrich them with evidence from philosophers and scientists. Although Aynî was not a thinker who developed entirely original ideas, he was an important scholar because of his familiarity with the world of science and philosophy of his time. In this respect, it can be said that he had a very important place in the development of Turkish

thought. It is still possible to trace the reflections of his intellectual attitude in contemporary Turkish thought.

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