



## THE GIFT PARADIGM: A SHORT INTRODUCTION TO THE ANTI-UTILITARIAN MOVEMENT IN THE SOCIAL SCIENCES

Sosyal Bilimlerde Fayda Karşıtı Harekete Kısa Bir Giriş: Faydacı Aklın Eleştirisi

Kazım Tolga GÜREL\*

### ABSTRACT

At the end of 1980, a group of social scientists founded a journal called *Bulletin du Mauss*. The social scientists gathered around this journal tried to criticise the utilitarian mind with anti-utilitarian publications and to show that this mindset was not universal. Alain Caille stated that at the beginning, this movement set out with criticisms only on economism. Later on, he further developed the intellectual platform and aimed to show that some of the patterns of modern and post-modern society are structures established over time: "Reversing them, learning to look at them differently". The minimum condition for these is to realise that societies, groups and individuals constitute a self-generating process. Although Caille seemed to be approaching the anarchist tradition, he could not escape the sterility of liberalism because he could not see that the fundamental phenomenon that could weaken the totalitarian state and erode the central government dictatorship was through labour.

**Keywords:** rationality, power, modernity, human, society.

### ÖZ

1980 yılının sonunda bir grup sosyal bilimci *Bulletin du Mauss* adlı bir dergi kurdu. Bu dergi etrafında toplanan sosyal bilimciler, faydacı aklı, faydacılık karşıtı yayınlarla eleştirmeye ve bu zihniyetin evrensel olmadığını göstermeye çalıştılar. Alain Caille, bu hareketin başlangıçta sadece ekonomizme yönelik eleştirilerle yola çıktığını belirtmiştir. Daha sonra düşünsel platformu daha da geliştirerek modern ve post-modern toplumun bazı kalıplarının zaman içinde oluşmuş yapılar olduğunu göstermeyi amaçladı: "Onları tersine çevirmek, onlara farklı bakmayı öğrenmek". Bunların asgari koşulu, toplumların, grupların ve bireylerin kendi kendilerini üreten bir süreç oluşturmalarının farkına varmaktır. Caille anarşist geleneğe yakın görünse de liberalizmin kısırlığından kurtulamadı; çünkü totaliter devleti zayıflatabilecek ve merkezi hükümet diktatörlüğünü aşındırabilecek temel olgunun emek yoluyla olduğunu görememiştir.

**Anahtar Sözcükler:** rasyonalite, iktidar, modernite, insan, toplum.

\* Dr., Eskişehir/Türkiye. E-posta: kazimtolgagurel78@gmail.com. ORCID: 0000-0002-1893-8887.

Caille, Alain (2007). *Faydacı Aklın Eleřtirisi*. Trans. Devrim etinkasap. İstanbul: İletişim, 182 p.

The “reversal” mentioned by Caille is reminiscent of Žizek’s metaphor of “looking crooked”. In this work, Žizek shows how seemingly ordinary phenomena are, in fact, “utilitarian” and how each is useful both in the production of the “subject” and the economic cycle. While he says that ordinary daily reality, the reality of the social universe in which roles are played, is an illusion based on a specific “repression” on overlooking the reality of our desire, he explains that this social construction is nothing but a fragile, symbolic spider web that can be torn apart at any moment by the intervention of reality (Žizek, 2022).

Again, Caille’s propositions about the non-universality of intellectual patterns mentioned in the book remind us of Thomas Kuhn’s criticism in his work “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions” that every economic structure establishes an intellectual and scientific structure and that this structure is not universal (Kuhn, 2021). As is known, thanks to thinkers such as Kuhn and Paul Karl Feyerabend, the domination of positivist and quantitative methodologies in the social sciences began to be shaken in the half of the 20th century, and especially European science began to show flexibility to different openings and ideas beyond this clamp. Feyerabend demonstrates that science is also an ideology and is influenced by people’s intellectual periods and the whole structure and that the utilitarianism of science today is a holistic whole with the economic system and social perceptions (Feyerabend, 2017) is one of the critical turning points of the perspective in which the study “Utilitarian Reason” is included.

Stating that anti-utilitarianism develops close relations with the idea of complexity, self-creation, existence and holism, Caille states that this opposition is as ancient as utilitarianism; it is the same age as human societies. Utilitarianism is woven into the whole body of analyses, beliefs and customs that stem from a certainty, realised or unrealised, thought or unthought, that the only way to satisfy needs and interests is not to sacrifice life for the work necessary to satisfy them. According to anti-utilitarianism, humanity can only become truly human beyond instrumentalism. Caille expresses utilitarianism as follows:

Let us characterise as utilitarian, without preoccupying ourselves with superficial details, any doctrine which maintains that men act

by selfish logic, calculating pleasure and pain, or by pure self-interest, and that this is good, because ethical norms can have no other basis than the happiness of the individual or of the community of individuals (2007: 24).

Stating that utilitarianism barely survives due to its inability to generate basic existential excitement and that it is imperative to give it a soul from somewhere, the author states that it relies on nationalism and religious nostalgia, as in the policies of Reagen and Thatcher. He then draws attention to the historical formation points of the concept. According to him, utilitarianism firstly constitutes the normative basis for modern natural law thought, that is, for any thought that defines the norms of justice that oppose the coercion of the powerful and the authority of tradition. Since society has ceased to deal with the law of God and, contrary to the natural law hopes of antiquity, has given up the expectation of re-establishing that law in conformity with an anthropocentric cosmic order, utilitarianism has become the only possible normative basis. It is no longer a question of seeking conformity to an external and forever lost law. However, in creating a society, a modern society seeks its ideal not in the past but in the future, which, radically breaking with the past, will be built exclusively on rational and utilitarian foundations (Caille, 2007: 27).

Addressing the relationship between the sciences and utilitarianism in the following pages of the book, Caille attempts to explain how the science of economics is shaped by utilitarianism, while the science of sociology softens the utilitarianism of this science. The author states that in the 1970s, another transformation took place in the humanities and social sciences that was as important as the transformations that had been taking place in the classical form of these sciences since the 1770s and that in the 1770s, sciences were formed at the helm of political economy and this legitimised the functional paradigm. In his book *The People's Science*, Conner, a historian of science, complements Caille's criticism of the utilitarian paradigm from a different perspective by emphasising that the role of capitalists and scientists in the formation of sciences is overestimated and that all sciences have their origins in the people (Conner, 2012).

The author states that primitive societies were more interested in ensuring their survival than in production and that the inhabitants of these societies pursued dignity or peaceful idleness rather than the accumulation of material wealth. He states that until the dawn of modernity, what mattered were concepts such as honour, dignity, not being disgraced by neighbours,

honouring ancestors, etc. The main difficulty with utilitarianism is that the idea that people are self-interested has taken root. Therefore, the author attempts to clarify the process of rooting this feeling. Four main factors determine utilitarianism: Reform, science, the market and the triumph of the middle classes.

The first factor, in order of importance rather than in order of history, is the Reformation. The Reformation created the first impulse by making the individual subject a sufficient source of ultimate legitimacy in opposition to the representatives of Church authority. Max Weber, as is well known, has shown with sufficient precision how the Reformation, by valorising the world's life, opened up space for the religious legitimacy of capitalism.

Science is another factor that supports and legitimises utilitarianism. It supported the ethos created by the Reformation. The desire for scientificity is based on two propositions that are inevitably deduced from the central utilitarian theorem: The first proposition is the principle that nothing in society can be explained by transcendence. Causes arising from the nature of things must be explained. The second is that only calculable and measurable things can be science. The ultimate and glorified cause of action will be interest.

The market is a natural consequence of this process. Economic interest can be established about things, and where this relationship will occur will constitute the market. The middle classes, seen as the last factor, will flourish as a result of this process and will turn utilitarianism into the dominant ideology. The intersection of these four events is the main factor in establishing utilitarianism. Although the author seems to criticise science and technology up to this point, he states that he criticises scientism and technocracy.

Continuing with the structural analysis of utilitarianism, the author goes to anthropological findings and attributes the urge to come together to reason in the first communities of humanity. Here, he opposes Tomasello, who proves with many experiments that the urge to live together is natural. Tomasello proved that the urge to live together and help each other is natural through his experiments on infants (Tomasello, 2014). He shows that work is not based on accumulation and that people in wild communities have the right to be lazy, worship and many other actions are carried out through rituals such as games, dances, etc. The period they allocate to non-working activities is much more.

Addressing the concept of rationality in the following chapters of the book, Caille states that this concept interprets thought through the phenomenon of calculation. Focusing on the ambiguity of the concept of rationality itself, the author states that the concept deals with things that can be calculated but cannot eliminate this ambiguity because many phenomena in the world cannot be understood or compared with calculation. Adorno and Horkheimer (2010), who criticised rational reason, criticised calculability and rational reason for differentiating the world of meaning and mechanising many phenomena, and Caille could not bring this criticism to a philosophical point where Marcuse (2016) could see the colourfulness of human beings narrowed by rationality and bureaucracy. Although the book approaches the Frankfurt School critics in its criticism of utilitarian reason, it fails to do so through a philosophy as deep-rooted as theirs.

Towards the end of the book, Caille touches upon the concept of democracy, stating that the concept can be evaluated according to which of the concepts of freedom, equality, and solidarity gives more weight. However, the author emphasises that the division of power is essential for the realisation of democracy and that the arbitrary interventions of power will increase if it is not balanced in this way; “power can be limited not only horizontally but also and especially if it is divided vertically” (2007: 137), and although he seems to approach an anarchist tradition that developed from Bakunin to Bookchin (Bookchin, 2013; Özcan, 2017), he could not get rid of the sterility of liberalism because Caille fails to see that the central phenomenon that can weaken the totalitarian state and erode the dictatorship of the central government is through labour. He never mentions that taking the power that the tyrannical central structure of the state gathers in its institutions and giving it to the people cannot be realised without reorganising the labour potential to construct subjectivities and sociality.

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