

CONCEPTION OF HUMAN IN RENE DESCARTES AND ERZURUMLU İBRAHİM HAKKI'S THOUGHT

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ABSTRACT

The human nature was an inquiry in every civilization and therefore part in many philosophers' theories. This study aims to show the similarities between Descartes and Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı's thought on the human nature with respecting their differences. With referring to the main works of the thinkers, which are *Meditations* and *Marifetname*, we outlined how they define body and soul, the interaction of both and the connection to God. As outlined in subheadings, three main topics which both philosophers have discussed are the distinction of body and soul, the union of body and soul and the mark of truth. Both philosophers accept a distinction between body and soul. While Descartes advocates a sharp body-soul dualism and refuses that the soul could control the body, Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı argues that the soul, in particular its special part called *gönül* controls the body. Descartes' belief in dualism does not hinder him to argue also for a union of body and soul because he asserts that the body and soul cannot control one another but they can unite. About the connection to God, Descartes sees the thought of perfection in the human mind as a mark by God who makes himself known, because perfection cannot be attained by humans. For Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, it is *gönül* with which the human connects with God.

Keywords: Soul, body, Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, Descartes, mark of truth, *Meditations*, *Marifetname*

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Despite the differences between individuals, cultures and civilizations, the search for a common human nature has always been conducted in all parts of the world. Even though this search aimed to find a common ground for all humans, the definitions for human nature varied from place to place and from time to time. Especially in the 17th and 18th centuries, human nature has been a popular topic among thinkers including East and West.¹ To show connections and similarities in the conception of the human between two thinkers of different civilizations, we will examine Rene Descartes and Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı's thought. Each of them is a respected scholar and is counted as a representative of his time and civilization, namely Western civilization and Islamic civilization.

Since Greek philosophy truth has been reduced either to ideas by idealists or to matter by materialists. Even though the human seemed to be composed of both, the former believed that matter is temporal and that the soul is the immutable essence, whereas the latter believed that soul and thought is only a reflection of the body or matter. A third approach to this issue is dualism, which says that body and soul are two different substances which cannot be reduced to one another.² Descartes has developed and applied this third approach. His way of thinking was critical of scholastics who were deeply connected to Aristotelian philosophy.³

As an Ottoman scholar who lived in the 18th century, Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı was able to combine human's material and non-material sides in his definition of human. Even though he stresses more the incorporeal attributes of the human, he does not disregard his physical existence. Instead he brings them together at the human heart, which becomes a significant notion in his theory. For that, he synthesizes the methods of philosophy and Ottoman sufism (*tas awwuf*).⁴ He sets an extraordinary example for the scholars of his time, especially because he concentrated on the multifaceted nature of the human and utilizes the scientific tradition as well as empirical studies of the human body. He himself sets an example of the synthesis of tradition and innovation and shows that the latter is not possible without the former.⁵ His

outstanding broad perspective can be seen in his encyclopaedic work *Marifetname* which is one of his five principal books (which are *Divan*, *Marifetname*, *İrfaniyye*, *İnsaniyye* and *Majmu'atu'l-Ma'âni*) which he wrote in Erzurum. His other works are subdivisions written in Tillo.⁶

While Erzurumlu continues the Ottoman scientific tradition, Descartes aims at a reformation of scholastic thought which is bound to the Aristotelian philosophy. Both focus on the human being from different perspectives. They have in common a twofold conception of human nature which consists of body and soul and both also think that this nature is created by God. But a deeper look shows us that Descartes focuses on the human mind which acts as the authority for metaphysics. Erzurumlu, on the other hand, leaves the source of metaphysics to God. Though with different methods and results, Descartes and Erzurumlu are giving us guidelines on how to attain truth regarding the human being with their masterworks *Meditations* and *Marifetname*.

In *Meditations*, Descartes uses a cognitive method which is concerned with knowledge; hence it is epistemic. It should not be confused with the spiritual or religious method. Descartes wants to produce metaphysical knowledge in his six *Meditations*. In the *First Meditation*, he explores the reasons why everything, especially material things, can be doubted and that the knowledge acquired through senses is not reliable. In the *Second Meditation*, he outlines that the existence and nature of the mind are better known than material things. In the *Third Meditation*, he gives his principal proof of the existence of God.⁷ In the *Fourth Meditation*, he explains how to guide one's judgment so as to find truth and avoid falsity. In the *Fifth Meditation*, he considers the essence of material things and examines another proof of the existence of God. In the final and *Sixth Meditation* he discovers a real distinction between mind and body and proves the existence of material things.⁸

For İbrahim Hakkı, the reason why Allah created the universe and the human is for the human to attain *marifatullah* which is the knowledge of Allah. For that the human needs to know himself (*nafs*). In order to know himself he needs to know the body and in order

1 Tahsin Görgün. "18. Asır Osmanlı Düşüncesi ve Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı: Kadim ile Cedit İlişkilerinde Bir Model Olarak İbrahim Hakkı'yı Okumak" in *Bütün Yönleriyle Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı Hazretleri Sempozyumu*, ed. Ahmet Erkol and Abdurrahman Adak (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi Yayınları, 2012), 159.

2 Kadir Canantan. *İnsan Fenomeni: İnsan Doğası Hakkında Dini ve Felsefi Soruşturmalar* (Açılım Kitap, 2014), 85.

3 Justin Skirry. *Descartes and the Metaphysics of Human Nature* (London: Continuum, 2005), 80.

4 Mustafa Çağrı. "İbrâhim Hakkı Erzurûmî" in *TDV İslâm Ansiklopedisi*, (Istanbul: TDV Yayınları, 2000), 21: 307.

5 Babek Osmanoğlu Kurbanov. „Rönesans Ruhlu Bir Şahsiyet: Erzurum'lu İbrahim Hakkı Hazretleri (1703-1780)" in *Atatürk Üniversitesi Türkiyat Araştırmaları Enstitüsü Dergisi 11* (Erzurum: Atatürk Üniversitesi

Yayınları,1999), 32.

6 Haji-Mohamad Bohari Haji-Ahmad. *The Ideas of Waḥdat al-Wujūd in the Poetry of 'Abd al-Qādir Bidil* (Persian), İbrahim Hakkı Erzurumlu (Ottoman Turkish), and Hamzah Fansuri (Malay) (Berkeley: University of California, 1989), 289-90.

7 Rene Descartes. *Meditations on First Philosophy with Selections from the Objections and Replies*, trans. Michael Moriarty (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008), 11.

8 Gary Hatfield. *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Descartes and Meditations*. (London: Routledge, 2003), 51.

to know the body he needs to know the universe. This is possible through true sciences (*fann*) which are (1) astronomy and physic, (2) anatomy and psychology and (3) sufism (*tasawwuf*). İbrahim Hakkı organizes his work in accordance with these three sciences, with an additional introduction and an epilogue.⁹ Erzurumlu describes this in the first words of his *Marifetname*.

First of all, you should know that *Hak Ta'ala* (Allah) has announced that He created the two worlds for human beings and that He created human beings to know Him. As a matter of fact, He said with grace and kindness "I was a hidden treasure, I liked to be known and I created beings to recognize me". So, the last purpose and great will in the creation of the world and human is the knowledge of *Mevlâ* (Allah). This eternal state and inexhaustible bliss are above all else. But this is based on knowing oneself (*nafs*) and knowing oneself (*nafs*) is based on knowing the body. Knowing the body is achievable by knowing the universe. Knowing the universe is through real sciences.¹⁰

I. BODY- SOUL DISTINCTION

Descartes believed in a dualism of body and soul which suggests that body and soul are two completely different substances and that they can exist without one another. Hence the soul cannot be reduced to the body and vice versa. According to him, body and soul are two different substances which exist independent of each other. For Descartes, everything in the universe, including the human is divided into two. One, *res extensa* which includes corporeal matter and abstract things and two, *res cogitas* which includes incorporeal ideas and concrete things.¹¹

Every substance has a nature and all other attributes are bound to this nature. The nature of the body is extension and the nature of the soul is thinking. Therefore, anything that happens in the corporeal world is a modification of extension such as length, breadth,

and depth. Likewise, everything in the incorporeal world is a modification of thinking like doubting, affirming, denying, etc.¹² Descartes describes this as follows:

Now, first of all, I observe here that there is a great difference between the mind and the body, in this respect, that the body of its nature is endlessly divisible, but the mind completely indivisible: for certainly, when I consider the mind, or myself in so far as I am purely a thinking thing, I can distinguish no parts in myself but understand myself to be a thing that is entirely one and complete. And although the whole mind appears to be united with the whole body, if the foot is cut off, or the arm, or any other part of the body, I know [cognosco] that nothing is therefore subtracted from the mind. Nor can the faculties of willing, perceiving by the senses, understanding, and so forth be said to be parts of the mind, since it is one and the same mind that wills, that senses, and that understands. On the other hand, however, no bodily or extended thing can be thought by me that I cannot mentally divide into parts, without any difficulty; and I therefore understand it is divisible. This point alone would suffice to show me that the mind is altogether distinct from the body, if I did not yet sufficiently know [scirem] this for other reasons.¹³

Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı understands the universe as a whole and gives the human a crucial role in it. He clarifies the human's role in the universe with a tree metaphor. In this metaphor, the tree signifies the universe and its fruit the human, to show that the human came into being after all conditions were prepared.¹⁴ According to this theory, the human is a perfected animal. What differentiates him from other animals is his soul, his intellect and other abilities of his heart. With the help of these abilities, he is capable to understand this universe through reading and contemplating. In the absence of these qualities, the human being would be worthless. Instead, Allah has deemed him most worthy in all of creation and created everything for him. In return, God has expected the human to worship Him.¹⁵

12 Hülya Yaldir. "Akılcılığın Altın Çağında İnsan Doğası Üzerine Tartışmalar: Descartes, Malebranche ve Spinoza" in *Hikmetin İzinde Kenan Gürsoy'a Armağan*, ed. Fulya Bayraktar (Ankara: Aktif Düşünce Yayıncılık, 2016), 638-9; Descartes, *Meditations*, 20.

13 Ibid, 60-1.

14 Mustafa Yıldırım. "Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı'nın İnsan Anlayışı" in *Felsefe Dünyası* (1993) 35-6.

15 Çağrı, "İbrahim Hakkı Erzurûmî", 307.

9 Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı. *Marifetname*, abbr. M. Faruk Meyan. (Istanbul: Bedir Yayınevi, 1989), 1.

10 My translation is from Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı. *Marifetname*, abbr. Durali Yılmaz (Istanbul: Ataç Yayınları, 2019), 1:20. See also for English translation of *Marifetname* by Ali Akbar Ziaee, *Islamic Cosmology and Astronomy: İbrahim Hakkı's Marifetname* (Saarbrücken: LAP Lambert Academic Publishing, 2010).

11 Canantan. İnsan Fenomeni: İnsan Doğası Hakkında Dini ve Felsefi Soruşturmalar, 85-7.

II. BODY

Descartes explains the material part of the human which is part of this world based only on mechanistic rules. For him, the human body is a machine just like inanimate beings, albeit that plants, animals and humans are more complex beings or machines. Therefore, he does not approve that the soul causes the body's movement and action. Descartes denies the concept of the *locomotive soul*, which was suggested by the Aristotelian understanding of soul, that the soul is the cause of motion in the body. He extends the mechanist understanding of inanimate nature to also include the animate, including human nature. Thus, the life of the body is not depending on the soul but on the organization and function of its own limbs by itself. In sum, whatever happens in the body is subject to mechanistic nature laws.¹⁶

In his second science (*fann*) "mirror of the bodies" of *Marifetname*, Erzurumlu talks about the human anatomy, psychology and soul.¹⁷ According to Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, the human is created with both a body and a soul. The former represents the physical existence of the human which begins and ends with soil. This side of the human is the same as other beings on the earth because it is made of matter. The body is mortal and changes permanently due to being a part of the sublunary sphere where generation and corruption happen.¹⁸

If the human wants to know where he is coming from and where he is heading, he should know that he is created out of earth and will return to it, as Allah says in the Qur'an "From the earth We created you, and into it We will return you, and from it We will extract you another time." So, in order to know where the human will return to, he must imagine the stages through which he came to this day from being old to being a baby, a sperm/egg, food of parents, an animal, a plant, earth and an abstract essence. Someone who understands the circular movement inside himself among the organs and outside himself in the stages of existence, this person can be able to know his Lord and become an *'arif* (knower of Allah).¹⁹

As we see, the body goes through many stages of life and changes continuously. That means the body and the soul are not the same but that the soul is accompanying the body, yet its essence is separate from it.²⁰ The corporal body is subject to continuous change and

progress in the world of generation and corruption. İbrahim Hakkı theorizes the steady change of existence with the evolution from inanimate existence to vegetative existence, from vegetative existence to animal existence and from animal existence to human existence. This stage is the stage of the perfect human being (*İnsan-ı Kâmil*) which is only reached by few people.²¹ This is a process of perfection because it is a continuum from inanimate to animate and from primitive to sophisticate.²² The human body in this evolution is the most beautiful, most perfect, most important and most enduring.²³

Both thinkers suppose an understanding of the human body that is corporeal and subject to death while the soul is immortal. In his doubting process, Descartes rejects any information that is based on the senses because the knowledge attained from the senses is mainly built on childhood information and those are usually wrong. On the contrary, we see that Erzurumlu attaches to the human body a huge role which is the first step to acquire *marifatullah*. So, for Descartes, it is an obstacle which misleads the human from its search for certainty. For Erzurumlu, exaggerated bodily pleasures detain the human from its goal but at the same time a deep investigation of the body and its powers leads the human to his Creator.

III. SOUL

For Descartes, other than the body, the soul is a substance on which can be trusted in any case. It does not deceive one like the senses. It is nothing material and it differs from the body substantially. In order to defend his dualism Descartes uses a priori metaphysical proofs. In contrast to thinkers of his own time who believed that metaphysical principles are the last things to be learned, Descartes thought that these metaphysical principles need be discovered first without appealing to experience.²⁴

Descartes utilizes the method of doubt in order to purify the meditator's mind from previous information and opinions which are grounded on childhood experiences and this leads him to the *cogito* argument. Then, this first truth is sought analytically by asking what

16 Yaldır. "Akılcılığın Altın Çağında İnsan Doğası", op. cit., 639-40.

17 Yahya M. Michot. "Sufi Love and Light in Tillo: İbrahim Haqqi Erzurumi (d. 1194/1780)" in *The Mulzim World* (2015), 332.

18 Yıldırım, "Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı'nın İnsan Anlayışı", 36.

19 İbrahim Hakkı. (2019), 1:365.

20 Ibid, 368.

21 Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı. *Kâmil İnsan: İnsan-ı Kâmil*, ed. H. Rahmi Yananlı and İlknur Kirenci (Istanbul: Büyüyen Ay Yayınları, 2017), 14.

22 Hüseyin Subhi Erdem. "Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı'da "İnsanın Hakikati" Sorunu" in *İ.Ü. İlahiyat Fakültesi Dergisi* (2011).

23 Ejder Okumuş. "Marifetname'de Beden" in *Dinbilimleri Akademik Araştırma Dergisi VIII* (2008), 21.

24 Hatfield, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Descartes and Meditations*, 24.

could explain the given indubitable knowledge. This discovered basis can be used after that to find out other truths.²⁵ His conception of the mind is what underlies the modern approach to the body – mind problem and the understanding of mind.²⁶

For Erzurumlu, the intellect (*'aql*) is the opposite of *nafs* which is calling to follow one's temptations. The intellect belongs to the lightened and higher world whereas the *nafs* belongs to the darkened and deeper world. The former is habited by hearts, souls and angels while the latter is home for bodies and matter of this world. Thus, the intellect does not hold onto what is temporal but it is focused on the everlasting. The intellect is characterized by submission and obedience. It is a means in the heart (*gönül*) to know how to worship Allah.²⁷

According to Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, the soul (*rūh*) is a metaphysical essence and therefore immortal. Yet, the soul is connected to the body through its actions. This can be compared to the actions of Allah which are seen in the universe but not He himself is visible or can be perceived with senses. Likewise, the soul belongs to the superlunary sphere where eternity dominates. But the body and the soul are not completely separated from each other.²⁸

The concept of the soul differs in Descartes' and Erzurumlu's thought. For Descartes its function is clearly rational. He does not include religious or spiritual arguments as Erzurumlu does. Descartes aims to establish a metaphysics based on the mind independent of the senses. Therefore, he doubts everything in the first place. He compares this process to removing bad apples from a basket filled with apples by overturning the whole basket to sort out the bad ones. This process also enables one to find out new sorts of apples which we are not aware of. Hence, the process of doubting works when everything is doubted at first and then step by step something of which we can be certain about will appear.²⁹

On the other side, Erzurumlu also argues that rational thinking is a means to understand being and the creation of Allah but in terms of metaphysics he prefers to utilize religious thinking. Hence, the way to attain *marifatullah* is a spiritual one as well as rational.

25 Ibid, 40-1.

26 Marleen Rozemond. "Descartes's Dualism" in *Companion to Descartes*, ed. Janet Broughton and John Carriero (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2008), 372 + 387.

27 Ibid, 201-3.

28 Yıldırım, "Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı'nın İnsan Anlayışı", 37.

29 Hatfield, *Routledge Philosophy GuideBook to Descartes and Meditations*, 73.

IV. BODY – SOUL UNION

Even though Descartes claims that the body and the soul are two distinct substances which have different natures, modes and attributes, he says that the human is cannot be complete without one or the other. Voluntary bodily movement, sensation and the passions are modes that come from the whole nature composed of the unity of body and soul. Questions have been posed to Descartes regarding this interaction of two totally distinct substances presupposing an efficient causal interaction between body and soul. Descartes did not see a problem in the union of body and soul, rather the problem lies in the confusion of the soul's power with the body's power. For Descartes, it is not the mind that gives motion to the body because body and soul do not efficiently or mechanistically interact. To understand the union of body and mind, one needs to conceive of them as one thing.³⁰

How is it possible that body and soul are distinct substances and one union at the same time? The answer is that the distinction needs to be conceived in terms of the human parts and the union needs to be conceived in terms of the whole human being. It is this union or the relation of body and mind that results in the capacity for modes like voluntary bodily movement, sensation and passions. The relation which constitutes this unity is a formal causal interaction, not as assumed by few an efficient causation.³¹

Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı describes a black dot on the human heart and argues that this black dot is the place where the soul and the physical body meet and from where the soul has control over the body. He names this *gönül*.³² Hence Erzurumlu supports the idea which Descartes rejects. For Erzurumlu, the heart is the control centre of the body whereas for Descartes the body is subject to mechanistic natural laws and the soul is independent of it. But in terms of voluntary bodily movement, sensation and the passions, the relation in the union makes these possible.

30 Skirry. *Descartes and the Metaphysics of Human Nature*, 164-5.

31 Ibid, 166-8.

32 Yıldırım, "Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı'nın İnsan Anlayışı", 37.

V. MARK OF TRUTH

Besides explaining the nature of body and soul, Descartes also dedicates a part to prove God's existence. Here as well, he places rational thinking or the soul/mind in the focus. After having achieved certainty in his own thinking and existence, he continues with the ontological proof of God's existence. As he writes, "from the bare fact that I exist, and that in me there is an idea of a supremely perfect being, that is, God, it is proved beyond question that God also exists."³³

Descartes stresses the thought of perfection in the human being that cannot be any human because they are not perfect, therefore it has to be God. This thought of perfection is like the signature on art put on it by its artist. As he puts it: "And certainly it is no wonder if God, when he created me, inscribed this idea within me, to serve, so to speak, as the mark by which the craftsman makes himself known in his handiwork."³⁴

Finally, if we exist and the thought of perfection exists, then God who put it into us must exist as well. Hence, "by the same token, since we have in ourselves the idea of God, in which all conceivable perfection is contained, it follows beyond question that this idea depends on some cause in which all this perfection also exists, namely in God himself, who actually exists."³⁵

For Erzurumlu, the organ with which the human perceives signs of Allah is his heart. This is stated in multiple verses in the Qur'an and narrations from the Prophet Muhammad (pbuh) like "And know that Allah intervenes between a man and his heart."³⁶ Allah evaluates what is in the heart. Based on this, the human has to be conscious about what he takes into his heart and what not. If it is filled with the love of this world it will suffer but if it is filled with the love of Allah, it will feel comfortable and expansive because He is nothing physical, but greater than anything else in this temporary world. Once it is directed to Allah, the heart will not have an interest in this world anymore.³⁷

The heart has senses similar to the senses of a body with which it perceives the world. The heart witnesses unseen things with its eye, hears the words of the invisible with its ears, smells the scent of the invisible, tastes the taste of faith (*imān*) and spiritual knowledge (*irfān*). İbrahim Hakkı refers to the heart in two ways. When he attributes physical functions to the

heart, the corporal heart is meant but when he talks about metaphysical attributes, he uses heart and *gönül* as synonyms. A clear distinction between heart and *gönül* is not available here.³⁸

We see a parallel in the connection between God and humans in the thought of both thinkers. For Descartes, it is a sign which is put into the human by God. For Erzurumlu, it is *gönül* which is the place to connect with God. The difference between both lies again in Descartes' rational approach and Erzurumlu's multiplex approach which includes rational and religious thinking.

CONCLUSION

So far, I have outlined the conception of the human in Rene Descartes and Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı's thoughts. Generally speaking, there are some factors which are examined by both thinkers. Those are the distinction between body and soul, the unity of body and soul and the connection of human and God.

Not the material side of the human but the spiritual/non-material side is of importance according to Erzurumlu İbrahim Hakkı, because it enables the human to strive for its goal of *marifatullah*. Likewise, Descartes does not focus on the material but non-material part of the human, which is his soul, but the soul in Descartes' thought is purely rational and not spiritual. Descartes places the human at the basis of everything and this sheds light on modern Western philosophy. That existence is examined based on substance is a sign for a new age in philosophy.³⁹

Erzurumlu speaks about two parts of the human being (body and soul) but he does not present a sharp dualism as Descartes does. For Erzurumlu, the soul, in particular *gönül* has control over the body. Whereas Descartes' dualism reveals that it is not possible for the soul to move the body in the way in which a body moves another.⁴⁰ The mark of truth in Descartes' thought and *gönül* in Erzurumlu's thought might be seen as comparable as well because both are the connection to God from different perspectives.

33 Descartes, *Meditations*, 36.

34 Ibid, 37.

35 Ibid, 79.

36 Surah 8, verse 24.

37 İbrahim Hakkı. (2019), 2: 186.

38 Ibid, 195-200.

39 Ömer Mahir Alper. *Varlık ve İnsan: Kemalpaşazade Bağlamında Bir Tasavvurun Yeniden İnşası*, (İstanbul: Klasik Yayınları, 2016), 45.

40 Skirry. *Descartes and the Metaphysics of Human Nature*, 164.

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