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ABSTRACTS



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МАТЕРІАЛИ

THE PROBLEM OF HUMAN ERRORS (SEARCHING PARALLELS AMONG RENE DESCARTES'S AND HADEWIJCH'S CONCEPTION OF HUMAN ERRING)

Inna Savynska, an Associate Professor of the Department of Philosophy and Methodology of Science, Taras Shevchenko National University of Kyiv, <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-3929-6801>, email: inna.savynska@knu.ua

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Introduction

In the history of European philosophy and science Rene Descartes is considered an author of a methodology of radical doubt, meditation and the conception that explains the cause of human's errors. But the course on internalization, knowledge of one's own Self, methodology of searching foundation of knowledge and conception of perfect reason have been formed already in the times of a Late Antiquity, particular by Augustine in his works "*Soliloquies*" and "Confession", Boethius's "The Consolation of Philosophy" and was continued in the New age by Loyola's "Spiritual exercises" and Teresa of Avila's "The Interior Castle". Therefore, Descartes could be rightfully considered rather the brilliant inheritor of this tradition than pioneer.

To this chain of philosophers and theologians who were forerunners of Descartes's theory of Radical doubt and especially problem of the source of human errors worth to add a new name – Hadewijch, the representative of medieval Dutch vernacular theology and her works "Visions" along with "Letters". Precisely her point of view on cause of human errors very close to the explanation have been given by Descartes in his IV Meditation.

The aim of research is to demonstrate common positions of Descartes's and Hadewijch's explanation of the nature of the errors.

Methodology

This research uses *comparative textual analysis* as the main method and applies *the holistic approach* to the consideration of philosophical conceptions.

Results

I. Hadewijch's person and works

The most plausible hypothesis is that Hadewijch lived in the middle of XIII century and was a well-educated beguine from Brabant, who chose to lead a life of apostolic poverty without taking vows as a nun that knew French and Latin, was acquainted with a program of "Septem artes liberales". It is possible, that she organized and was a spiritual guide of a beguine group.

Her texts have been written in Brabantian dialect and include: Letters (31) - didactic instructions, in most cases, for young beguines, Poems in stanzas (45) and Poems in couplets (16) - mystical love lyrics and Visions (14) - description of the mystical experience of union with God. None of these works gives a systematic doctrine. They're part of a larger canvas that needs to be reconstructed.

Reason in Hadewijch's vernacular theology

*In Hadewijch's conception, reasonable acting makes a very important function in terms of knowing God and in terms of human perfection. Reason (Rede – middle Dutch) is one of the faculties in the soul structure (Rede, Wille, Memorie – middle Dutch), that plays a role (**an instructor**) for virtues on the road of recognizing God (Minne, Karitate), it is the kind of epistemological virtue - **understanding** (onderscedechheit – Middle Dutch), that without God's enlightenment we prone to error. Hadewijch describes the epistemological role of reason through the literary form - allegory and uses notions and concepts that have a philosophical origin. Thus, she gives a new life to the ideas of the Stoics', Augustine, Martianus Capella and **Severinus Boethius**. At the same time her conception of reason has many parallels with the texts of philosophers of the New Age, in particular Rene Descartes.*

In her Letter 4 we find a passage about the delusion of human reason **in the ability to distinguish between good and bad**. She concluded the cause of reason's errors is **a lack of knowledge** about the properties of good and **a lack of practice** of goodness. As the result: "then when **reason is obscured, the will grows weak and powerless and feels an aversion to effort**, because reason does not enlighten it. Consequently, **the memory loses its deep notions, the joyous confidence [...]**" (Hadewijch, 1981, p. 51-53).

In the link: “reason, will, memory” the reason is the main.

Reason enlightens the will and memory keeps intentions for its doing. If reason without knowledge, the will is without its power of acting and memory couldn't save idea of a good outcome/intention.

How to avoid errors? – to keep humility and hope (hope - *middle Dutch*) for the goodness (goetheit - *middle Dutch*) of **God** (god - *middle Dutch*). He **will enlighten the reason**, and therefore drive away longing and fear (the result of obscuring the reason).

II. Rene Descartes in this IV Meditation thinks about truth and falsity. He writes, that human nature tends to make errors. As usual we make errors when we try to recognize ourselves or to think about the material world. The **cause** of reason's errors “is lack of some knowledge which somehow should be in me” (Descartes, 1996, p. 38). Descartes notices, nature of our errors “depend on two concurrent causes, namely on the faculty of knowledge which is in me and the faculty of choice or freedom of the will; that is, they depend on both the intellect and will simultaneously” (Descartes, 1996, p. 39). Thereby, we have two sources of mistakes: **intellect (understanding)** and **will**. But Descartes adds, that ultimate cause of errors is “the scope of the will is wider than that of the intellect; but instead of restricting it within the same limits, I extend its use to matter I do not understand. Since the will is indifferent in such cases, it easily turns aside from what is true and good, and this is the source of my error and sin” (Descartes, 1996, p. 40-41).

In Descartes's conception of relation “intellect-will”, the main is intellect too. But if intellect is without pure and clear ideas (knowledge), will become indifferent. To be a powerful will must have knowledge. Intellectual recognition precedes the will. Enlightened intellect guides the will and it could make the right choice. If intellect doesn't have pure and clear ideas about the subject it keeps will from the opportunity to make a choice. And **memory** helps him in this. The memory keeps from judging whenever the truth is not clear, thus the will has no authority to choose for nothing.

Consequently, ***in the link “intellect-will-memory” the main is intellect (understanding).***

How to avoid errors? – keep in the memory rule: do not accept ideas that are not crisp and non-clear and careful rethinking.

Ergo, Hadewijch and Descartes write, that human nature is prone to error, but it is not the reason to be upset about it. According to Hadewijch: “But one must err and suffer before being thus freed” (Mer men moet dolen ende doghen eermen dus verledicht werdet)

(Hadewijch, 1981, p.). Descartes sums: "And I have no right to complain that the role God wished me to undertake in the world is not the principal one or the perfect of all (Descartes, 1996, p.43).

Hence, Hadewijch's ideas have found a response in the texts of further philosophers, in particular – Mediations about human's errs by Rene Descartes.

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