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SOMATIC DISEASES IN PSYCHIATRY: A PHILOSOPHICAL OVERVIEW

PSİKİYATRİDE SOMATİK BOZUKLUKLAR: FELSEFİ BİR BAKIŞ

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Abstract

Psychiatric disorders are often reflected in physical symptoms. However, nearly all physical illnesses are accompanied by mental symptoms. Also, it is generally argued that mental function disorders and stress underlie the etiology of physical illnesses. Although modern science has defined in details all the functions of the body including the brain, some areas are not fully understood yet. Philosophical answers may shed light into those dark areas while trying to understand the entity and human.

Keywords: Psychosomatic, philosophy, dualism, mind-body, existentialism

Özet

Psikiyatrik bozukluklar sıklıkla bedensel belirtilerle yansır. Bununla beraber neredeyse bütün bedensel hastalıklara ruhsal belirtiler eşlik eder. Bedensel hastalıkların etiolojisinde ruhsal işlev bozukluklarının ve stresin yattığını savunanlar da çoğunluktadır. Modern bilim, beyin dâhil tüm beden işlevlerini ayrıntılarıyla anlamış olsa da henüz aydınlanmamış alanlar bulunmaktadır. Felsefi yanıtlar, varlığı ve insanı anlamaya çalışırken bu karanlık alanlara ışık tutabilir.

Anahtar Kelimeler: Psikosomatik, felsefe, düalizm, zihin-beden, varoluşçuluk

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"Mind-body" issue puzzles physicians and philosophers at least for 2500 years. Whether humans are composed of 2 substances, namely a material substance that is body and a non-material substance that is soul, or of material substance solely or of non-material substance solely is one of the important discussion topics of Philosophy (Taslaman 2007). Also, there are some that argue that this may not be the real issue, and there may be a more fundamental issue of existence.

According to historical records, existence and human's place in existence has been firstly questioned in Anatolia, by Ancient Greek philosophers. Idealism has been based on the idea that the most important task in the world is a reality based on consciousness or mind. The foundation of idealism has been laid by Plato's "Theory of Ideas", it then reinforced by various philosophers. According to the idealism, the entity does not change and is one; subject and object are one and the same (Taslaman 2007).

Materialist philosophy has emerged as a reaction to idealist philosophy that argues non-material (mental) powers determine basically all processes in the universe. The root of materialism is based on atomism. Although Leucippus pitched this idea as an ontology theory, Democritus is considered to be the first person who systematically put forth the theory. According to this, atoms are eternal; each formation and change is composed of unification and separation of atoms. The diversity of the objects arises from the differences in number, size, shape, and arrangement of atoms. Democritus claimed that the soul was composed of thin, flat, round atoms similar to fire atoms. Ultimately, although the soul is composed of different kind of atoms than the body, it is not a distinct substance, and the approach of Democritus to the soul is compatible with the understanding of materialist universe (Taslaman 2007).

With a view of the entity that cannot be explained solely by the matter, materialist philosophy has received rationalist objections. According to Parmenides the founder of rationalist philosophy, nothing changes in the universe. Reality, that is entity, is one being in the absolute sense, permanent, constant, uncreated, indestructible, eternal, and it won't move or change (Taslaman 2007). Descartes is one of the most powerful advocates of rationalism in the West. Seeking the information he wanted to be sure about the source and accuracy, Descartes objected to skepticism, the widespread understanding of the period, by using methodological doubt. He argues that we can't be sure of the accuracy of sensory information, "whatness" of the external world, and the accuracy of mathematical truth. But in the end, he puts the claim in the center of Philosophy that he can't doubt whether he doubts and even if he doubts, it requires the existence of something doubting. "I think, therefore I am" (cogito ergo sum) argument refers to that. His presence obtained by a rational intuition is the only thing known with certainty (Altuner 2013). Descartes explains the reality of thinking as follows: A person looking at a tree may suspect whether he is looking at a real tree or not. What he thinks as a tree may be another physical object or everything may be a dream. But according to Descartes, it can't be suspected that this person has thought about a tree. Although the

thought of a Pegasus has a representational reality in our minds, objectively a Pegasus does not really exist. In this sense, we can't know whether Pegasus actually exists as an object, we can only have its thought. Therefore, according to Descartes, reality is the thoughts being actual and direct objects of our minds. (Önal 2014).

Throughout the 17th and 18th century, predictability of the human nature has been focused. "Substance", that is "the sum of the invariant properties of human", defines human before existence. Although the dualism argument is directly relevant to the issue of substance, it argues that human is composed of two substances, namely mind and body, and the issue is whether these two substances can be reducible to each other. Mind-body dualism argument of Descartes still continues today. Descartes defines mind and body as two distinct substances. According to him, mind does not have any features of an object. Because it cannot be parted by its nature, but objects in three dimensional space can. So, the body can always be parted. Because the body is an entity that has a shape and dimensions, but mind doesn't have any shape or dimension, and does not occupy a place (Altuner 2013, Durakoğlu and Ay 2012).

According to Descartes, when we review what we are, we become aware that we don't need any space, shape and body to exist. Hence, our knowledge of the existence of the thought or the mind precedes our knowledge of the existence of the body. Because we know that we are thinking during the period of suspicion, even if we have doubts about existence of objects belonging to the eternal world, including our bodies. Thus we come to the conclusion that a thinking "self" exists. Then, "self" with its essence and nature to think is a substance that requires neither a place nor a material. In other words, "self" is quite different than the body and is identical with the mind. Descartes is aware of the impact of the brain on mental phenomena. He claims that the body-mind relationship is established through the pineal gland (Altuner 2013).

Descartes argues that mind and body come from two different substances, and unite or stick together in the pineal gland. According to this idea, psychosomatic symptoms indicate that mind is trying to cling to the body. Phantom pain is reflected to the body from the mind and thus the mind tries to cling to the body. Also, panic symptoms such as tachycardia, nausea, vomiting result from this. Depersonalization and derealization as a result of quadriplegia can be interpreted as efforts of the mind to cling to the body.

The most basic criticisms on rationalism come from Kant who is a rationalist. According to Kant, reality consists of judgments instead of the consciousness of being able to think as Descartes claims. Judgments alone produce the information. Impressions perceived through space and time—pure forms of sensory perception—are converted to judgment through categories—pure concepts of understanding. What we get as a result of this information is the world of appearances (phenomena) or universe. We are unable to know the objective world apart from this. Judgments which are the products of the human mind embody the object and the concept. In this sense, object

or concept is available as long as a thinking entity exists. (Önal 2014).

Through thinking and questioning, humans improve their capacity and become mature. According to Kant, depression and somatization are caused by the weakness of the capacity and maturation deficiency. People who improve their mental functioning and exist with their thoughts won't develop somatization. In humans with maturation deficiency, entity is expressed through somatic way.

Sartre says "Existence precedes essence". Sartre claims that predetermined human nature does not exist, and human essence does not exist as from the beginning of existence. Through the birth of human without substance a "conscious entity" (l'en-soi) is born just like other living things. "Conscious entity" consists of attributes specific to the type of entity. That is a reflection of the fullness of the entity. It doesn't contain any other specific thing than this fullness. (Aşar 2014). While evolving, conscious entity firstly opts to exist with its spirit. The spirit cannot evolve, and if it fails to make adequate progress, it tends to exist physically. That is, if it cannot exist spiritually, it tries to come into being as a somatic reflection by uniting its spirit and body. If a person is primitive and doesn't have the potential to experience depression, he/she will have psychosis or will somatize.

According to Sartre, there is no other phenomenon than the phenomenon of existence. This phenomenon of the existence creates the entity; we cannot think that there is another entity that is essential to this entity. Solution to all problems is found according to this basic understanding. Existential entity is everywhere embracing everything. It is unique and covers everything. According to this, it is not from anything, not from self, not from God through creation; because there is nothing except self. This existential entity gives a sense of nausea. Nausea allows us to discern entity as a "conscious thing" (Aşar 2014). Therefore, the sense of nausea is the result of existential questioning, even unconsciously, and it is almost the most common symptom of psychosomatic disorders.

According to Heidegger, the founder of existentialist philosophy, human being (Dasein) is thrown into the world, is grounded in the state of Being. Heidegger's main purpose has been to get over the Cartesian mind-brain dichotomy by formulating human existence as "Being-in-the-world" and by emphasizing mainly "to-be-in-the-world". According to Heidegger: "Beings as a whole are the ones that always exist before us and around us ... Being as a whole always has the complementarity to a certain extent; everything around us is connected to every other thing. All things have the quality of belonging together" (Önal 2014).

After Dasein has been thrown to the world like a seed, it may not have been planted, may not have blossomed. Unplanted Dasein makes a move to the object, but it is repulsed by the object. These repulses cause the emergence of somatic symptoms. So, if we look at it from an existential perspective, the failure of establishing a healthy subject-object bond, the subject being insufficiently expressed underlies somatic symptoms.

Dasein in its immature world adhering tightly to its narcissistic core feels its existence through its body.

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