

## DESCRIPTION FOR THE GENERAL PUBLIC

### **The Unnoticed Revolution: Richard Burthogge's Early Modern Constructivism.**

It is surprisingly easy to indicate a turning point in the history of early modern philosophy. There is no doubt that it was the Cartesian revolution which provided a theoretical ground for the theories forming the mainstream of 17th and 18th century European reflection. A specific “mentalist” orientation of early modern metaphysics, the move toward representationism in epistemology, the preoccupation with the matter-mind problem – in a word, all the components making up the unique landscape of 17th and 18th century thought have their roots in Descartes’ subjectivist turn to the thinking and perceiving mind. Nevertheless, a detailed model for the evolution of post-Cartesian thought has not been developed so far. One of the most important reasons undoubtedly lies in the fact that although the Cartesian tradition had its beginnings in France, it reached its culmination abroad – in British philosophy (especially in the form of Berkeley’s radical idealism), and in German idealism of Kant, whose transcendentalism ends the process of subjectivisation of western thought. As a result, although the general topography of “dispersion” of the Cartesian thought is perfectly known, the map so created contains only a few points scattered at a considerable distance from each other. Instead of finding their way through a maze of different linguistic, socio-political and cultural contexts, authors of the synthetic studies on evolution of 17th and 18th century philosophy usually prefer to focus their narration on the great names of the age, such as Malebranche, Leibniz, Spinoza, Locke or Berkeley. As a consequence, the intermediate stages, by nature less original and interesting, disappear in the shadow of great doctrines – partly under the weight of piling up comparative difficulties, and partly because of the natural hierarchy of importance. Thus, however, the multi-dimensional mosaic of doctrines forming the proper landscape of post-Cartesianism remain unnoticed by the researchers, accustomed to perceive it as an archipelago of separate theories – more or less closely related to the Cartesian context. At the same time we lose sight of the very line of the development of post-Cartesian thought – even though it can be proved under the most cursory comparative analysis that there is a number of striking similarities and analogies between the post-Cartesian doctrines from different linguistic and cultural traditions, suggesting the existence of what has been called “the internal dialectic of Cartesianism” [McCracken 1986]. In other words, the most important thing which is required to reconstruct the internal logic and dynamics of any historical process is to describe in detail the line of its development and internal relationships between its various elements – and this is precisely what we lack in the case of post-Cartesian thought (especially British). As a result, the evolution of Cartesianism remains a matter of conjectures and generalizations – both in the textbooks and in the specialist works devoted to it. And yet, the history of ideas has at its disposal all the means and methods necessary to change this situation. But to achieve this goal – i.e. to enrich the existing map of “metropolises” with some “villages” and “settlements” – serious attention must be given to the writings of the Cartesians *minorum gentium*. One of the most promising ways to do this leads through a forgotten British trail, which is proved by the analysis of some intriguing coincidence.

The evolution line of post-Cartesian philosophy basically comes down to the axis Descartes – Kant. Kantian transcendentalism can be seen as the extreme variant of the Cartesian philosophy or Cartesianism taken to the ultimate epistemological consequences. Although appealing, this hypothesis still appears to be mostly theoretical and, as such, can be criticized as being over-simplistic. Thus, it will not receive a historical grounding until the whole complex of processes that led to the emergence of such a specific type of constructivist post-Cartesian idealism as Kantian transcendentalism is revealed. The biggest obstacle to such research is, however, large temporal, theoretical and socio-historical distance between the contexts of development of the two systems mentioned above (Cartesian and Kantian). One of the remedies for this problem is to take into account the writings of British thinkers *minorum gentium*. The case of Richard Burthogge (c. 1638 – c. 1704), the author, among other works, of *Organum Vetus & Novum* (published in 1678), and *An Essay upon Reason, and the Nature of Spirits* (published in 1694), seems particularly promising in this context. For, his idealistic constructivism, largely philosophically inspired by the Cartesian thought (even though Cartesianism is often criticized by him), resembles, *toutes proportions gardeés*, Kantian idealism. At the same time, it is still relatively close in time to the original Cartesian context. The main objective of the proposed research is the detailed doxographic and historiographic analysis of Burthogge’s epistemology. It should shed a new light on the internal dynamics and logic of the development of British and continental post-Cartesian philosophy.