

## **THE INFLUENCE OF THE CARTESIAN DUALISM UPON THE THEORY OF KNOWLEDGE OF RALPH CUDWORTH**

*This article focuses upon the influence of the Cartesian dualism on the theory of knowledge of Ralph Cudworth, a Seventeenth-century Platonist from Cambridge.*

**Keywords:** Ralph Cudworth, the Cartesian dualism, a theory of knowledge.

Ralph Cudworth was an outstanding thinker of his time and a prominent figure of the so called school of Cambridge Platonism. In point of fact, the seventeenth-century English school of philosopher theologians from Cambridge was for a long time granted only occasional attention. One of the reasons why the representatives of the Cambridge movement were neglected so resolutely by historians in the past and are not paid sufficient attention to nowadays is, perhaps, that for a great many of them, particularly for the scholars of the elder generation, the history of modern English thought coincided predominantly with the history of English empiricism. Consequently, the Cambridge Platonists fell completely out of consideration. As Ernst Cassirer has demonstrated in his research, even the most celebrated German historians of philosophy, namely Kuno Fischer and W. Windelband held this biased view, and for them empiricism "always appeared as the central planet of English thought, about which all the other schools of thought gravitate like mere satellites." [1, p. 4].

The true value of the philosophical heritage of Ralph Cudworth was appreciated only in the twentieth century. Cudworth is said to be "the real founder of British Idealism" [6, p. 35], "the only philosopher of the Cambridge group" [8, p. 199] and "the most tough-minded and lucid among the Cambridge Platonists" [5, p. 96].

In our research we want to pay an attention only to one aspect of the Cudworth's extensive system – the relationship between the epistemological questions and the Cartesian problem of mind and body.

The problem of relation between mind and body or dualism became the subject of a major philosophical debate due to René Descartes' "Meditations on First Philosophy". However, the question had arisen before him and had been actively discussed by the Greek atomists, as well as by the Medieval Arabic philosophers. But unlike them, Descartes not only gave it the status of a fundamental problem, but also changed the very essence of the issue. Descartes proposed to focus not on finding a place where body and soul are in contact, but on questioning how it became possible to connect so different categories at all. And though the decision of Descartes dissatisfied his contemporaries because it triggered a number of contradictions, it has greatly stimulated the inquiries in the field of metaphysics and epistemology. And in the latter the conception of Ralph Cudworth has played a significant role.

For Cudworth the epistemological question of whether things made knowledge or knowledge things is obviously the center of the whole problem

of philosophy, morality, and religion. To answer this question he embarks upon investigating some essential theoretical issues. In his view the great virtue of the new science was that it had revived the atomic theory of body. Cudworth was certain that this teaching had firmly reasserted the most secure of all foundation for religion in general and theism in particular.

Anyhow, he describes two main advantages of the atomic hypotheses. First, it renders the corporeal world being intelligible to us. So, Cudworth agrees with the atomists that all qualities of things, except figure, position, and motion, are unreal. He thinks unless the atomistic position is taken, "the sensible and corporeal world is altogether unintelligible" [2, p. 3]. To import occult qualities and forms to explain the external world is to admit our ignorance of that world or "to make our ignorance of the cause, disguised under the terms of form and quality, to be itself the cause of the effect" [2, p. 110]. The atomic view makes qualities, such as hot or white, fancies and passions in us, and not qualities in bodies distinct from their mechanical disposition. It enables us to have a clear, rational definition of body as that which has only figure, motion, site, and magnitude, and thus gives us a rational, metaphysical grasp of the nature of matter. If we do not accept the atomic view we must agree with the Platonists in disparaging corporeal things as being outside of the realm of reason entirely. [3, p. 73].

The second advantage of atomism is that it "prepares an easy and clear way for the demonstration of incorporeal substance, by settling a distinct notion of body" [2, p. 87]. A sense image cannot be intelligently spoken of as a mode of motion. Motion itself requires some other concept beside body to explain its origin; and the atomic hypothesis itself is arrived at not by sense organs but by closing the senses.

Cudworth started building his philosophical thinking with critical analysis of the ancient Greek philosophy. The aim of this enterprise appears to have been to absorb what fits the framework of the perennial and thus true philosophy, and repudiate what came to be its denigration. When Cudworth scrupulously considers such important historical detail as Aristotle's assertion that Anaxagoras was the first to introduce "nous" or reason into philosophy, that some of the old Greek philosophers were completely immersed in matter and had not managed to see the real cause of things he does it to elaborate his own. And this is designed to repudiate any claim of materialism.

Cudworth's position is defended in various ways as an answer to every atheistic argument. So, he uses all his ingenuity and power of logic to clarify the concepts of mechanism and life to apply them to the problems of theology, metaphysics, ethics and epistemology. His own philosophy is an attempt to appreciate the mechanistic principles which Hobbes and Descartes so clearly presented, and yet unite these with ideal values. Cudworth's arguments to prove the connection between atomism and dualism is logically necessary is quite distinct from historically prior. Moreover, "he is involved in a modification of the Cartesian dualism, which assumes at his hands a form more characteristic of Idealism" [7, p. 20].

Cudworth presupposes that body is passive by nature. It fills space, and in that consists its whole nature. Thus, it can be moved only under external

pressure. "No body, or extension, as such being able to move itself or act upon itself" [2, p. 394]. Evidently, the world cannot consist entirely of body. To account for motion we must recognize that there are centers of "self-activity". In Cudworth's view, these cannot be other than incorporeal because they are self-active. They have their own force or "internal energy" which nothing corporeal can have. The atomists who hold that everything is corporeal cannot avoid the position of Eleatism when world would be uniformly and eternally at rest [7, p. 21]. But once we made the distinction between the corporeal and incorporeal, we can accept the atomic theory of the corporeal, yet affirming the reality of change and motion, deriving it from the activities of the incorporeal. Cudworth is certain that there is no other way of reconciling atomism with experience. He argues that it is implicit in the atomist's theory of perception that mind is not a corporeal entity. And a good proof to this hypothesis is the atomist estimation of such things as color, scent, cold to be not the properties of bodies.

Cudworth insists bodies can only give rise to forming of these subjective qualities in our mind. Yet they are formed by mind itself since it is the only active power. Eventually, Cudworth concludes that if a mind to be considered as merely an extended bulk of matter played upon it could neither make discoveries nor fall into error. "There must be something of self-activity in the soul itself, by means whereof it can give its assent to things not clearly perceived, and so error" [2, p. 427]. The fact that discovery and errors are possible proves mind to be active, and hence, by hypothesis not corporeal. Obviously, Cudworth managed to see what later on Locke was not to see, namely that passive mind cannot perceive.

Initially, Cudworth highly praised Descartes for the revival of "pure atomism" with its necessary conclusions of existing of incorporeal substance. He applauds the Cartesian postulation of two distinct metaphysical principles, mechanism and spirit, which gave a man the method of rational approach to the world of senses. Yet Cudworth had severe criticism for Descartes method of dealing with these principles. In short, his criticism can be reduced to such basic points. First, Descartes completely ruled out all final causes. As a result, God was reduced to a position of a mere "idle spectator of the various results of the fortuitous and necessary motion of bodies" whose wisdom is rendered "altogether useless and insignificant as being a thing wholly enclosed and shut up within His own breast and not at all acting abroad upon anything without Him" [2, p. 220]. Cudworth appreciates Descartes's thought of emphasizing the mechanistic side of nature. He evidently sympathizes with the desire for mathematical clearness and exactness. But Cudworth does not believe that men's ignorance of God's final causes allow them to neglect all teleology and to assume simple mechanism as an adequate explanation of the wonderful structure of the bodies of animals or the harmonious relation of all the phenomena of nature.

The second Criticism is that Descartes "makes the essence of cogitation to consist in express consciousness" [2, p. 275]. According to Cudworth, not everything which is incorporeal is mental, and not everything which is mental is conscious. For him to identify in the Cartesian manner the incorporeal with

the conscious would be to make reason itself corporeal. Cudworth assumes that the essential division must be drawn not between the unthinking and the thinking, but between the mechanical and teleological. So, he rejects the Cartesian view that animals are mechanisms, and along with it the sharp distinction between the animal and human. What links the human with the animal are instincts. Cudworth maintains they are certainly not mechanical. Unlike the latter they have ends, which no mechanism can have, and because they are not mechanical they are considered to be not corporeal.

Cudworth also asserts that "there is something incorporeal that cannot be accounted for in terms of the pressure of the extended masses, whenever ends are pursued, whether or not that pursuit is deliberate" [7, p. 24]. If for Descartes there is existing only the dualism of mind and matter, for Cudworth dualism comes as the dualism of the active and the passive principles. It enables Cudworth to make a further distinction within the active between "plastic powers" which pursue ends without deliberation, as in case of animals, and the deliberate operations of the human reason. It can be said that "his plastic natures are a sort of "third man" designed to bridge the gap between God and matter, mind and body; they are reasons immersed and plunged into matter and, as it were fuddled in it and confounded with it" [7, p. 28].

Criticizing Descartes's theory of knowledge Cudworth says that, instead of making thought and extension two basic substances, the French philosopher should have made them extension and life. The latter as an internal activity, in turn, must be subdivided into both acts with express consciousness and acts without it. Cudworth claims that if Descartes had adopted this principle he would have had a mediating principle between pure extension and pure consciousness, and would have obviously saved his system from its utter dualism.

A third criticism has reference to Descartes's view that all truth, even a mathematical theorem, is dependent upon the will of God and determined by his arbitrary decision. In Cudworth opinion, this view ruins the very nature of reason and morality, destroying the nature of God himself. Instead, Cudworth asserts that Reason is primarily in God's nature, and His will is dependent upon it. In other words, for him it is the Reason in God than the will that is God [4, p. 171]. So, Cudworth's argument runs thus: "Truth is not factitious; it is a thing which cannot be arbitrary made, but is. The divine will and omnipotence itself hath no imperium upon the divine understanding, for if God understood only by will He would not understand at all" [2. p. 33].

In any case, at the end of his discussion of the history of the atomic philosophy Cudworth gives five main conclusions which, in his opinion, resulted from a clear definition of body. First, life and thought cannot be qualities of body; second, an unmoved mover distinct from body is necessary to be supposed to explain motion of bodies; third, corporeal phenomena cannot be explained without appeal to the reason, which can hardly be a mode of body; fourth, since secondary sense qualities do not exist objectively in bodies, they must be regarded as the creation of the reason's activity; fifth, there must be a higher criterion of truth concerning bodies and senses. So, man is said to be able by using a higher principle to differ subjective from objective and thus determine what they really are.

All of these conclusions direct an epistemological subject to search for a higher activity than simple mechanism. According to Cudworth, the knowledge process can only be explained as the functioning of self-active beings, for even the lowest form of that activity which we see in sensation is a kind of creative activity. He attempts to define and estimate in the knowledge process the value of the sense perception and reason. As a result, he points out that perceptions themselves are neither pure passivity as the followers of mechanists and empiricists claim, nor pure activity as the Platonists held. It is rather a unity of the two.

Actually, in his arguments against the mechanistic philosophers Cudworth insists upon the place of sensation as a real activity of the self-active spirit. According to him, the function of sense is unfolded in three ways, namely, to furnish man with evidence regarding external objects; to give suggestions for the nature of bodies and thus enable the reason by its own native powers to find explanation of the phenomena provided by senses; and, eventually, by presenting objects to the reason to give it the occasion to begin its own inward activity. Cudworth argues that in all these activities sense remains a stranger to the real nature of the objects with which it deals. Because sense objects are external, they remain foreign to it. Whereas "to know and understand a thing is nothing else but by some inward anticipation of the mind, that is native and domestic, and so familiar to it, to take acquaintance with it" [2, p. 212].

To illustrate the process by which man's reason, when received a stimulus from outside, unfolds out of its own inner resources a great variety of ideas which enable man to penetrate to the very essence of the presented object, Cudworth uses the example of what happens when our eye sees a white triangle. When such a white surface is presented as an object of our perceptive faculty, that faculty "passively perceives an appearance of an individual thing, – and it will perceive no more than this, though it dwell never so long upon this object" [2, p. 350]. But reason begins by means of its "innate vigour and activity" gradually to unfold a series of ideas regarding that object". Among these ideas are those of corporeal substance, of existence of individual things outside itself; of the subjective nature of sense qualities; of causality as relation existing between the experience of colors in it, and the position of atoms in the object; of ideal triangularity involving perfection of lines, angles, surface; and finally of whole system of geometrical truths. None of these is taken from sense experience. Instead, all are the direct result of reason's activity. Cudworth concludes that it is the nature of perception passively to receive and remain content. It is the nature of reason, when stimulated by an object, not to remain content, but to go beyond that object.

As a matter of fact, Cudworth speaks of his conceptions as ideas of the reason and as objects of knowledge, but his treatment of them makes it clear that he thinks of them predominantly not as objects, but as manifestations or modes of the active power of the reason, as instruments by means of which the reason interprets a reality wider than its own finite powers. Apparently, his frequent assertion that these ideas as objects of knowledge cannot be

distinguished from the reason which knows them but exists only in being known shows that Cudworth thinks of them as activities of the reason which are instruments used in the knowledge process.

Cudworth's verdict is that sensation has no casual relation with the knowledge process. He gives this matter clearly from the viewpoint of Platonists, opposing it to what he conceives to be the scholastic doctrine of forming abstractions, according to which the "intellectus agens" by process of "hammering, beating, or unveiling" makes "intelligible ideas" out of sensations [2, p. 371]. The fact that sensation is the occasion which stimulates the reason to activity must not lead man to confuse reason and sense, or to assert that sensations cause ideas. Cudworth uses here the illustration of the way in which the idea of one's friend is aroused by seeing a picture which may bear but a very inexact resemblance. The vivid presence in the mind of all the ideas connected with our friend is not caused by some painted lines but by the fact that these ideas are latent in us. In general, all "intelligible ideas" arise not out of man's relations with corporeal things but out of the inward activity of the incorporeal, out of which men's reasons are made.

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### **ВПЛИВ КАРТЕЗИАНСЬКОГО ДУАЛІЗМУ НА ТЕОРІЮ ПІЗНАННЯ РАЛЬФА КЕДВОРТА**

*У статті досліджено вплив картезіанського дуалізму на формування теорії пізнання представника школи Кембриджського платонізму XVII століття Ральфа Кедворта.*

**Ключові слова:** Ральф Кедворт, картезіанський дуалізм, процес пізнання.

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### **ВЛИЯНИЕ КАРТЕЗИАНСКОГО ДУАЛИЗМА НА ТЕОРИЮ ПОЗНАНИЯ РАЛЬФА КЕДВОРТА**

*В статье исследовано влияние картезианского дуализма на формирование теории познания представителя школы Кембриджского платонизма XVII века Ральфа Кедворта.*

**Ключевые слова:** Ральф Кедворт, картезианский дуализм, процесс познания.