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The Structural Unity of the Cartesian Method: Continuity between the Regulae and the Discourse on Method

A unidade estrutural do Método Cartesiano: continuidade entre as Regulae e o Discurso do Método

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ABSTRACT:

This article examines the concept of method in the philosophy of René Descartes by analyzing the relationship between the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* and the *Discourse on Method*. While these works are often treated as belonging to distinct stages in Descartes' intellectual development, this study argues that they exhibit a fundamental structural continuity. The central problem addressed is whether the methodological doctrine presented in the *Discourse* represents a reformulation or a simplified expression of principles already articulated in the *Regulae*. Through a close textual analysis grounded in the Adam and Tannery edition of Descartes' works and informed by interpretations from scholars such as Martial Guéroult, Henri Gouhier, and Lewis White Beck, the article reconstructs the four rules of method presented in the *Discourse* and examines their conceptual correspondence with key passages in the *Regulae*. The analysis demonstrates that the principles of evidence, analysis, order, and enumeration—formulated in a concise manner in the *Discourse*—are already systematically developed in the earlier work. This continuity indicates that the Cartesian method should not be understood as a product of a specific moment, but rather as a coherent and enduring framework underlying Descartes' philosophical project. The article concludes that the method functions as a structural axis of Cartesian philosophy, ensuring both the unity of its theoretical foundations and its applicability across different domains of knowledge.

KEYWORDS: method, *Regulae*, *Discourse*, Descartes.

RESUMO:

O presente artigo examina a concepção de método na filosofia de René Descartes a partir da análise das relações entre as formulações presentes nas *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* e no *Discurso do Método*. Embora essas obras sejam frequentemente interpretadas como pertencentes a momentos distintos do desenvolvimento intelectual cartesiano, sustenta-se aqui que elas apresentam uma continuidade estrutural fundamental. O problema central consiste em determinar se a doutrina metodológica exposta no *Discurso do Método* representa uma reformulação ou uma expressão simplificada de princípios já articulados nas *Regulae*. A análise baseia-se na leitura direta dos textos cartesianos, sobretudo na edição de *Œuvres de Descartes*, e no diálogo com intérpretes como Martial Guéroult, Henri Gouhier e Lewis White Beck. A partir da reconstrução das quatro regras do método apresentadas no *Discurso*, examinam-se suas correspondências conceituais com passagens centrais das *Regulae*. A investigação demonstra que os princípios de evidência, análise, ordem e enumeração — formulados de maneira sintética no *Discurso* —

já se encontram sistematicamente desenvolvidos na obra anterior. Essa continuidade indica que o método cartesiano não deve ser compreendido como produto de um momento específico, mas como um quadro teórico coerente e duradouro que estrutura o projeto filosófico de Descartes. Conclui-se que o método desempenha a função de eixo estrutural da filosofia cartesiana, assegurando tanto a unidade de seus fundamentos teóricos quanto sua aplicabilidade a diferentes domínios do conhecimento.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: método, *Regulae*, *Discurso*, Descartes.

INTRODUCTION

The reflection on method occupies a central place in the philosophy of René Descartes, constituting a fundamental element for understanding his project of grounding knowledge. From the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*[1] (an unfinished work of his youth, probably written around 1628 and not published during his lifetime) to the *Discourse on the Method*[2] (1637), Descartes seeks to establish rules that guide the understanding in the investigation of truth, ensuring clarity, order, and certainty in the process of acquiring knowledge. In this sense, method does not appear merely as a set of technical procedures, but as a necessary condition for the development of science and for overcoming the limitations imposed by the Scholastic tradition.

Although these two works belong to distinct moments in Descartes' life—the *Regulae* being a youthful text and the *Discourse* a mature and published work—both share a common concern: the elaboration of a universal method (*mathesis universalis*) applicable to all domains of knowledge. This proximity raises a significant interpretative question: to what extent can the method set forth in the *Discourse on the Method* be understood as a continuation of that developed in the *Regulae*, and to what extent does it represent a reformulation or simplification of principles previously established?

The present article aims to analyze the four rules of method presented in the *Discourse on the Method*, seeking to understand their main characteristics and to establish their relations with the formulations found in the *Regulae*. It proceeds from the hypothesis that, despite differences in exposition and degree of elaboration between the two works, there is a fundamental unity in the Cartesian conception of method, manifested in the persistence of principles such as evidence, analysis, order, and enumeration.

[1] References to Descartes' works will be made according to the standard edition: *Œuvres de Descartes*, edited by Charles Adam and Paul Tannery (Paris: Librairie Philosophique J. Vrin, 1897), 12 vols. Citations will follow this format: the editors' initials, followed by the volume number and page (e.g., A.T. VI, p. 17). When no line number is provided, this indicates an indirect citation, referring to an idea from the text without quoting it *ipsis litteris*. Unless otherwise specified, all translations are our own.

[2] Hereafter referred to simply as the *Discourse*.

In order to develop this analysis, the text is organized into four main sections, corresponding to the four rules of method. In each section, the aim is not only to explicate the content of the rule as presented in the *Discourse*, but also to indicate its connections with passages from the *Regulae*, so as to highlight the continuity between the two works. In conclusion, the article seeks to show that the Cartesian method, far from being an occasional formulation, constitutes a structural axis of Descartes' entire philosophy. It maintains an internal coherence that allows for its application across the most diverse fields of knowledge—Descartes' overarching objective in relation to method.

THE RULES OF METHOD IN THE *DISCOURSE*

After presenting the four rules of method in Part Two of the *Discourse*, rules intended to guide the mind in the search for truth, René Descartes states that one must "suppose that all the things which can fall under human knowledge are interconnected in the same way" (A.T. VI, p. 19). The author thus appears to entertain a clear ambition to propose a unity of knowledge or, at the very least, to identify an element that would allow access to all possible knowledge. Descartes "sets himself the task of discovering a center of knowledge," as Paul Natorp observes (1896, p. 418). In this sense, the central core of the *Discourse*, which for our purposes consists in the exposition of the rules of method, assumes the function of grounding the discoveries Descartes made in the sciences and which are demonstrated in the subsequent Essays. Moreover, the Essays themselves are constituent parts of the method; they are its execution.

That said, it is first necessary to situate the method in its proper place, giving it due weight without elevating it beyond what it is.

To place method at the center of the *Discourse* is not, strictly speaking, to overestimate it, but rather to affirm that the possibility of science depends on it, insofar as it organizes thought that is already present, exemplified in the figure of the *cogito*. In other words, it is the method that orders thought, and within the methodological plane of the development of science, it comes first. However, the agent who produces science through the application of the method precedes it—though on another level, namely the epistemological.

For the sake of expository clarity, it may be helpful to draw a brief analogy with Aristotle's theory of act and potency (2014, pp. 395–431). The human being, as a rational animal, is capable of science in potency; yet this potency is actualized only through method, which structures thought and gives it a systematic character, proceeding from first truths to more complex and subsequent ones—or again, from the simplest intuitions to, by way of deduction, the more complex truths of the sciences.

Still, the importance of method must not be underestimated, since the entirety of Descartes' work derives from it, and without it science would not be possible. The function of method is to establish order and to enable evident knowledge of the things upon which the understanding focuses.

Once this function is acknowledged, we can ask more precisely what the Cartesian method consists in and what its principal characteristics are. To that end, we must turn to other writings in which Descartes develops more fully concepts that, in the *Discourse*, are stated without extended justification yet retain the same sense. We shall argue that the idea of a general method for the sciences runs throughout Descartes' corpus and is already articulated in the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*, an early work. Although it appears in a more condensed form in the *Discourse*, we maintain that the method presented there is manifestly derived from that of the *Regulae*. Let us consider how, in 1628, Descartes defines method:

> I understand by method certain and easy rules which, if exactly observed, will prevent anyone from ever taking what is false to be true, and which, without uselessly exhausting any effort of the mind, but by steadily and gradually increasing knowledge, will lead to the true cognition of all those things of which one is capable of knowing. (A.T. X, pp. 371–372, emphasis added)

One of Descartes' principal concerns in presenting his method seems to have been to make clear two of its essential characteristics: simplicity and efficiency. The method must be simple enough to be understood by anyone; hence, in the *Discourse*, it is reduced to four basic rules and thereby distances itself from traditional logic, with its many precepts. It must also be efficient: applicable to any subject matter within human understanding and capable of yielding results that are as reliable as possible. Adherence to these two characteristics helps ensure that nothing is omitted from the chain of reasoning and—above all—that what is false is not taken to be true.

The simplicity of the method is perhaps most evident in the *Discourse*, where it is presented in four fundamental rules. It is therefore important to analyze the structure of each rule in turn, paying particular attention to what it retains from the *Regulae*.

The First Rule

The first rule enjoins us "never to accept anything as true unless it is known evidently to be such" (A.T. VI, p. 18). The principle of evidence must replace that of authority and become the new criterion of truth. It is therefore necessary to follow the path that the understanding—and it alone—is capable of constructing through its own cognitive operations in order to arrive at the truth of propositions and of things (Landim, 1992, pp. 11–35). If what presents itself to the understanding is

recognized with clarity and distinctness, it is necessarily true (A.T. VII, p. 35). This autonomy of reason, invoked by René Descartes, aims to ensure that science and philosophy henceforth become the product of an attentive mind—an inquiry that privileges clarity and distinctness over the teachings propagated by the Scholastic tradition. Evidence is thus established as the first criterion of validity and certainty for the knowledge we acquire. As Flage and Bonnen observe, "principles known by the natural light are evident; they provide the epistemic basis for any further clarification" (1999, p. 33).

Descartes seeks to ensure that, within the limits of our intelligence, the knowledge we have of things is certain (Guéroult, 1968, p. 19). On his view, it is preferable to know little with certainty than to remain within a body of vast but merely probable beliefs and to take them as true, as tradition has done and as the Scholasticism insisted, relying on the authority of Aristotle's writings.

A second precept of the first rule is to "carefully avoid precipitation and prejudice," two common sources of error. To avoid precipitation is to refrain from judging prematurely, before the mind has undertaken careful inquiry; that is, one must withhold assent in the absence of sufficient reflection.

Descartes' concern is to eliminate errors that arise from hasty judgment. More precisely, the aim is to refrain from forming judgments about what is not known clearly and distinctly, or what does not present itself to us with evidence. Prejudice, by contrast, is a source of error when the understanding is affected by the passions and allows itself to be dominated by them. Thus, it is essential to overcome not only external authority but also internal volitions, which belong to the domain of imagination and passion and—which, when poorly regulated—impede the mind's freedom to judge well.

Accordingly, the first rule is meant to ensure that all knowledge arises from a conception so illuminated by the natural light that, once its complete clarity and distinctness are grasped, it is impossible not to take it as true. In other words, all knowledge must begin from an intuition, according to the definition Descartes provides in Rule III of the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*:

> I understand by intuition not the fluctuating conviction provided by the senses or the deceptive judgment of an imagination that improperly combines its objects, but the conception of a pure and attentive mind so easy and distinct that no doubt remains concerning what we understand; or, what is the same thing, the indubitable conception of a pure and attentive mind, arising solely from the natural light of reason, and, being simpler, more certain even than deduction, though the latter cannot be wrongly performed by man. (A.T. X, p. 368, emphasis added)

Intuition is a form of understanding that does not err, because it is the pure act of thought and remains the most manifest certainty one can attain. It requires no other means of acquisition than the application of the mind itself. An intuition is so evident that it needs no demonstration. Since it cannot

be analyzed, it is entirely simple in nature and cannot be misunderstood; such is the case, for example, with the fact that a triangle has three sides, or that "I am, I exist" (A.T. VII, p. 25).

The certainty of intuition precedes method; it is innate and grounded in logic. Indeed, the certainty that intuition does not err guarantees the very possibility of a method. For method consists, first, in identifying intuitions and relying on them in order to proceed toward complex questions, where method becomes necessary. It is in the understanding of these complex questions that the acquisition of science resides—the principal function of method—and this cannot occur without it. For this reason, one aim of method is to extend the certainty of intuition to complex matters.

Regarding the correspondence between the method in the *Discourse* and that of the *Regulae*, Octave Hamelin holds that the first rule of method in the *Discourse* and Rules I–III of the *Regulae* have a character distinct from the subsequent rules in each work. According to him, the precepts of this first rule are not, strictly speaking, procedures for acquiring knowledge; rather, they function more as an indication of the aim of knowledge than as a description of the way to attain it (Hamelin, 1921, p. 64). Thus, there is a metaphysical dimension to these rules that is not as manifest in the others. Hamelin identifies this metaphysical issue but does not treat it adequately, since he addresses it only briefly. His analysis centers on the claim that the rule of evidence connects method to metaphysics, and that it is therefore necessary to ask whether the method is, at least in some respects, identifiable with a theory of knowledge (Hamelin, 1921, p. 64). We do not pursue Hamelin's question further here. What matters at this stage is to reinforce the relation between the two works in which Descartes presents the method—particularly because Hamelin offers too little argument to settle the issue.

Lewis White Beck likewise offers a reading similar to Hamelin's. However, he draws what he describes as a rough comparison, and he does not group Rule I of the *Regulae* with Rules II and III, as Hamelin does, when suggesting that they correspond broadly to the first rule of the *Discourse*. He does not develop the point beyond this brief observation (Beck, 1952, p. 149).

The Second Rule

The second rule of method states that each difficulty under examination should be divided into as many parts as necessary in order to resolve it more effectively (A.T. VI, p. 18). Such decomposition ensures that each difficulty is understood in isolation, in terms of its simplest elements. This analytical procedure proceeds by considering each element of the chain separately and by identifying the conditions that may guarantee the best possible solution for each problem. Analysis is an indispensable procedure for the proper use of the method: the need to divide difficulties is the path that leads to the distinction

of ideas. By dividing difficulties, the object under investigation is revealed in its elementary features, and thus we arrive at intuition—the first epistemological truth—from which all knowledge is constructed.

The analytical procedure is the principal element of the second rule. Although it had already been widely employed in mathematics, René Descartes' ambition was to show that it could be applied to all domains of knowledge, thereby advancing a bold and distinctive Cartesian proposal (Battisti, 2010, p. 572). Analysis is more than a mathematical operation: it is an operation of reason itself. Indeed, after his initial investigations, Descartes came to hold that it could be applied to all sciences, including metaphysics. In the *Replies to the Second Objections*, he states: "for my part, I followed only the analytic method in my *Meditations*" (A.T. IX, p. 122). Although this passage refers to the *Meditations on First Philosophy*, Descartes also employs analysis in the *Discourse*, explicitly establishing it as one of the rules of method.

As Descartes writes, analysis "shows the true path by which a thing has been methodically discovered and reveals how effects depend on causes" (A.T. IX, p. 121). Thus, anyone who follows the analytical procedure with due care and takes care to omit nothing will share in the certainty of others' results, as if they themselves were the discoverer. The essential feature of the analytical procedure lies in consistently processing information through decomposition, with the aim of clarifying the simplest elements. Although the ancients had already employed analysis in mathematics, Descartes was the first to propose it as a universal method for all knowledge.

Through the analytic method, Descartes develops his epistemology and metaphysics. Although the *Discourse* defines it in only a few lines, in his broader corpus it underpins the central pillars of his philosophy. This is evident in the *Meditations*, where the *res cogitans*, the existence of God, the soul, and the world are all demonstrated by this same method. As Andrade notes, "analysis allows for a form of demonstration that situates the principles of metaphysics within a network of ontological implications, through which they may be apprehended in an ordered manner according to their respective degrees of priority" (Andrade, 2009, p. 165). Accordingly, and still in line with Andrade's interpretation, the method of analysis "makes possible the construction of a demonstration without relying on axioms, thus constituting an especially effective path for demonstrating the fundamental principles of metaphysics" (Andrade, 2009, p. 164).

Together with the third, the second rule of the *Discourse* essentially preserves the same procedure Descartes establishes in Rule V of the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*. In this sense, "the methodological doctrine is essentially the same," as Lewis White Beck affirms (1952, pp. 149–150). Beck goes further, arguing that one cannot properly speak of two doctrines of method, or even of two stages within a single doctrine (1952, p. 151). On his view, the method remains virtually unchanged, and Descartes' primary conception of method (A.T. X, pp. 378–381) is substantially the same as that of the 1637 work. In

agreement with Beck, we hold that the second rule of the *Discourse* should be read in light of Rule V of the *Regulae*, since the two stand in a close relation of continuity and complementarity.

In the heading of Rule V of the *Regulae*, Descartes suggests that complex propositions should be gradually reduced to simpler ones until they reach the level of intuitions, from which all knowledge can be reconstructed and true propositions developed. In other words, Rule V initially prescribes the analytic procedure for discovering simple natures. The same rule then emphasizes the need to guide thought step by step, as if ascending a staircase, until one arrives at the knowledge of all things within the scope of human inquiry—at which point synthesis appears to come into play. In this alone, as Descartes states at the outset of the rule, the method consists.

The Third Rule

If analysis is the procedure adopted by the second rule for resolving problems, the third operates by recomposing knowledge so as to draw the conclusions that follow from the conjunction of these two procedures. For this reason, the third rule enjoins us to "conduct my thoughts in an orderly manner, beginning with the simplest and easiest objects to know, and ascending little by little, as if by steps, to the knowledge of the more complex" (A.T. VI, p. 18). The movement of the third rule is thus the inverse of the second: the latter decomposes the whole and examines its parts, whereas the former proceeds from these decomposed elements and reconstructs the whole, now with an understanding of each stage of the process. It may therefore be said that the fundamental characteristic of this rule is synthesis, since it unifies the truths discovered through the preceding rule.

Accordingly, Rule V of the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii* remains coherent with the second and third rules of the *Discourse*: in the later work, Descartes revisits what he had previously stated and refines the essential elements of his methodological doctrine, rendering it more mature, clearer, and more precise. The second and third rules of the *Discourse* are fundamentally complementary: the second prescribes dividing difficulties in order to resolve them more effectively, whereas the third requires guiding thought in an orderly progression from the simplest (intuition) to the more complex (deductions).

Thus, the analytical path outlined in the second rule is carried forward by the third. Here we also find what may be called the recomposition of discovered truths, or the synthetic procedure of the Cartesian method. The trajectory prescribed by this rule allows knowledge that begins with intuitions to be extended through deductions derived from them. The criteria of certainty belonging to the former can be transferred to the latter, provided that the rigor of the method is maintained.

Descartes' metaphor of Theseus' thread (A.T. X, pp. 379–380) vividly illustrates the procedure he adopts in the pursuit of scientific knowledge. Just as Theseus entered the labyrinth with a thread so that he would not lose his way and could retrace his path from beginning to end, so Descartes establishes, through method, an order and arrangement of objects for anyone seeking truth in the sciences. Reducing difficulties until they can be distinctly understood—thereby securing knowledge by intuition—and then proceeding from these intuitively discovered truths so that subsequent truths may be deduced from them constitutes the path of the method. As Theseus' thread enabled a safe return from the labyrinth, so the Cartesian method enables one to grasp complex matters without losing the connection between first truths and final conclusions.

Indeed, the procedure ensures not only the discovery (or invention) of truth but, above all, its communication, since anyone who follows the same path Descartes followed can arrive independently at the same truths. Understood as the firm and constant resolution to employ the mind in the best possible way, the method thereby acquires the capacity to universalize the scientific knowledge derived from it; and, through the synthetic procedure characteristic of the third rule, it can produce definitions, axioms, and theorems that "demonstrate clearly what is contained in their conclusions" (A.T. IX, p. 122).

The Fourth Rule

The fourth and final rule of method in the *Discourse* reaffirms that analysis and synthesis must be continuously exercised. Its aim is to review what has already been discovered, ensuring that nothing is omitted in the course of inquiry and that no later element is considered without full knowledge of the intermediate steps that made it possible to reach it. In this way, once completed, the method appears as a structural organization of logic—and therefore of reason—for the purposes of scientific discovery. As Henri Gouhier writes, "the Cartesian method is a reflection on reason well conducted; reason is well conducted thanks to the method" (Gouhier, 1973, p. 76).

Although the Cartesian method cannot be understood as pure reason in the Kantian sense, it is nevertheless possible to observe that Descartes' aim in establishing the four rules of method in the *Discourse* is to show how reason operates independently of any particular subject matter to which it may be applied. Reason does not err so long as it is grounded solely in logic, which serves as the instrument by which the understanding discovers truths by itself. If this were not the case, it would be impossible to speak of science and certainty in human knowledge, and mathematics — the most elementary science, precisely because it is closest to logic—could not sustain its discoveries as unquestionable truths.

Accordingly, it is not possible to speak of error in mathematics itself; error arises not within mathematical science but from the improper use of its fundamental logical precepts. These features of mathematics provide Descartes with a model for the pursuit of all knowledge accessible to the human mind.

The exhaustive enumerations recommended by Descartes in the fourth rule must ensure: (i) that no stage is connected in an imprecise manner; (ii) that conclusions follow necessarily from intermediate steps; (iii) that these intermediate steps are direct consequences of the first intuitions concerning what is being analyzed; and (iv) that the conclusions yield discoveries that could not be reached without strict adherence to the full methodological process.

The fourth rule of the *Discourse* largely corresponds to what Descartes sets out in Rule VII of the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*, where the principle is articulated at greater length and with greater explicitness. At the beginning of this rule, he writes:

> To complete science, it is necessary to survey one by one all the things that relate to our aim, by a continuous and uninterrupted movement of thought, and to comprehend them in a sufficient and methodical enumeration. (A.T. X, pp. 387–392)

The demand for certainty requires that the method undertake an exhaustive review of what is already known. This continuous movement of thought leads back to first principles, thereby mitigating the shortcomings of memory, until the entire chain of deduction can be traversed as if it were a single intuition—eliminating the need to rely on memory to secure the connection between the terms of the series.

Descartes' notion of "sufficient enumeration," which he also calls induction, may be understood as follows:

> That which yields truth in its conclusion with greater certainty than any other kind of proof, except simple intuition. Whenever knowledge cannot be reduced to intuition, after all chains of syllogisms have been rejected, this alone remains as the path in which we must place complete trust. (A.T. X, p. 389)

From this perspective, induction—when carried out in accordance with the method—may be understood as a further way of showing that a chain of reasons has been firmly established, as though reduced to an intuition, provided that we can grasp the evidence displayed in its concatenation.

Although the Cartesian procedure, as thus presented, may resemble the rules of the Aristotelian syllogism, it is precisely against it that Descartes seeks to construct his method. Immediately before presenting his four rules in the *Discourse*, he offers a critique of the logic taught at the Collège de La

Flèche, which was essentially Aristotelian logic, arguing that it serves "rather to explain to others things that one already knows, or even, like the art of Ramon Llull, to speak without judgment about things one does not know, than to learn them" (A.T. VI, p. 17).

The results of Aristotelian syllogism did not exhibit the fecundity that Descartes sought in order to advance the sciences and discover truths useful for life. According to him, its function was merely to ensure that what is already known is logically true. In this way, the syllogism serves only to determine whether an argument is valid or fallacious, yielding certainties primarily within the domain of formal reality, but proving insufficient to secure truths for practical life and useful science.

By contrast, the Cartesian method, inventive by nature, consists in deriving complex truths from elementary intuitions through a continuous movement of the mind, always seeking knowledge more distant from those initial intuitions, yet known only through the certainty derived from them. Above all, it aims to show "that it is possible to attain knowledge highly useful for life, and that, instead of the speculative philosophy taught in the Scholastic tradition, one can discover a practical philosophy" (A.T. VI, pp. 61–62).

The general reviews prescribed as the final procedure of the fourth rule must fulfill the function of traversing the entire chain of reasons, since these reasons are all interconnected and allow truth to be known according to the natural order, rather than according to the order of subject matters. As Descartes writes in a letter to Marin Mersenne, dated December 24, 1640:

> It should be noted that in everything I have written, I do not follow the order of subject matters, but only that of reasons; that is, I do not intend to say in one place everything that belongs to a given subject, because it would be impossible to prove it adequately, since some reasons must be drawn from more distant points than others; rather, by reasoning in order *a facilioribus ad difficiliora*, I deduce what I can, now for one subject, now for another—which is, in my opinion, the true way to discover and explain truth properly. (A.T. III, p. 266)

In the final analysis, the fourth rule reaffirms the principles of clarity and distinctness, as well as those of order and measure. To follow the order of reasons is to operate methodically, and Descartes appears indeed to have constructed his entire philosophical system on the basis of the four rules set forth in the *Discourse*, which contains, in essential form, what had been more extensively elaborated in the *Regulae*.

Apart from certain interpretative nuances, the Cartesian method exhibits an internal unity and may be applied to any science, even to the most complex ones, such as medicine and ethics.

CONCLUSION

Throughout this study, we have sought to examine the conception of method in the philosophy of René Descartes through an analysis of the four rules set forth in the *Discourse on the Method*, in constant dialogue with the formulations found in the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*. The trajectory pursued has made it possible to demonstrate that, although there are differences in exposition between these two works—whether due to the condensed form of the *Discourse* or the more technical and unfinished character of the *Regulae*—the fundamental principles of the Cartesian method retain a significant unity.

Indeed, the analysis of the first rule has shown that the principle of evidence, grounded in clarity and distinctness, is already fully articulated in the *Regulae*, particularly in the definition of intuition as the original act of the understanding. Likewise, the rules of analysis and synthesis, treated respectively in the second and third rules of the *Discourse*, reveal themselves as developments of a single methodological procedure which, in the *Regulae*, already appears structured in the reduction to simple natures and in the ordered guidance of thought. Finally, the fourth rule, by insisting on complete enumeration and the continuous review of chains of reasoning, reaffirms the demand for totality and rigor that characterizes the method in its application to the sciences.

It thus becomes possible to maintain that the Cartesian method should not be understood as an occasional formulation or as restricted to a specific work, but rather as a structural axis that traverses different moments of Descartes' production, preserving an internal coherence that allows for its application across diverse domains of knowledge. The relation between the *Regulae* and the *Discourse*, in this respect, does not indicate a rupture, but rather a continuity expressed through different levels of elaboration and presentation.

Nevertheless, this continuity does not eliminate the possibility of further investigations. It remains an open question, for instance, to deepen the analysis of how the method is articulated with metaphysics in the *Meditations*, as well as its application in specific fields such as physics, medicine, and ethics[3]. Similarly, a more detailed examination of the status of deduction in relation to intuition, or of the implications of the method for the constitution of a practical science, may offer new avenues for understanding the scope of the Cartesian project. Thus, far from exhausting the issue, this study aims to contribute to the renewed consideration of a problem that remains central to the interpretation of Descartes' philosophy.

[3] We have published an article on method and morality in Modernos & Contemporâneos – International Journal of Philosophy (UNICAMP), available at:
https://ojs.ifch.unicamp.br/index.php/modernoscontemporaneos/article/view/3267

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