

Reading Descartes' *Regulae*: Genealogy, Structure and Fate of the Text

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Abstract: Descartes' unfinished treatise, *Rules for the Direction of the Mind*, was abandoned in 1628, just prior to his moving to the Netherlands and launching his initial moves in metaphysics and systematic corpuscular-mechanical natural philosophy. These intriguing circumstances—and the fact that the *Regulae* teach an elaborate (and pre *Discourse on Method*) version of Descartes' vaunted method—have fascinated philosophically inclined Cartesian scholars. Historians of science, however, and some enlightened historians of philosophy have approached the text in a deconstructive and contextual way, following the claims of what is sometimes termed the Weber–Schuster thesis: That the text was constructed over time, in several strata with both overlapping and contrasting aims and content, and in the end was abandoned as a failure.

This approach, opening the life of Descartes to properly historical study has been attacked by devotees of an implausible unity of textual aim (not to mention sometimes also a pre-Koyré/Kuhn mythical belief in an efficacious 'Cartesian method').

The *Regulae* have been known in three early modern versions. But, a fourth, arguably earlier, manuscript version of the *Regulae* was unearthed at Cambridge by Richard Serjeantson some years ago. Preliminary accounts of this manuscript seem to vindicate the Weber-Schuster thesis, and especially Schuster's reconstruction of the young Descartes' shifting projects and aspirations, his successes, failures, and attempted rationalizations. This talk reviews the Weber-Schuster thesis and some of its discontented philosophical critics before enrolling the Cambridge ms. as further evidence in favour of Weber-Schuster.

1.0 The *Regulae*: its Structure and its 'Discontents'

2.0 The Core of Descartes' Teaching on General Method

3.0 The dating of Rules 4B and 4A: from 'physico-mathematics', to 'universal mathematics', to method. March to November 1619:

4.0 The Dating and Structure of the Later *Regulae*, 1626-28

5.0 Reasons for the Collapse of Descartes' *Regulae* Program 1628/9

6.0 Descartes' Career Inflection Point: Chandoux, Bérulle and the Cambridge Ms.

7.0 Some Untimely Reflections on Historian/Philosopher Relations

References:

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