

**Eötvös Loránd University of Budapest  
Faculty of Humanities  
Doctorate School of Philosophy**

**Modern Philosophy Doctoral Program  
Supervisor and Director of studies:  
Prof. Dr. Gábor Boros**

**Tamás Moldvay**

***Ratio* and rhythm:**

**Preliminary studies for a syntactic investigation of Descartes' *Regulae***

**Thesis**

The principal aim of the thesis is twofold and connected with in turn the notion of rhythm and ratio. Firstly, it establishes a direction of research integrating the concept of rhythm in a philosophical interrogation. Secondly, it seeks to reveal in Descartes' *Rules for the direction of the mind* (1628) (short for *Regulae*) the ensemble of techniques and gestures which can prove to be important for the former interrogation. The first part of my thesis, the *Introductory studies*, comprises a global interrogation about the concept of rhythm. The second part of the thesis, the *Philological investigation* proper, provides a philological test about the roles and functions of *ratio* in the *Regulae*.

The train of thought of the *Introductory studies* is the following. Descartes breaks with the syllogistic thinking in his *Regulae*. As a consequence of this break, time becomes a factor of thinking as its own time. The process of thinking enters time, now it has to take care of its own time. J-M. Beyssade's interpretation of Descartes explains this event by introducing the concept of rhythm: the time of thinking, as he says, is organized by means of a trochee. Since Beyssade's statement is supposed to be more than a mere metaphor, on this point the present thesis seeks to explore the far-reaching implications regarding the style of Beyssade's interpretation. First, since rhythm is not a Cartesian idiom, prior to describing with it the relation of two Cartesian idioms, namely that of thought and of time, we have to know our licences or authorizations to do that. Second, we do not know sufficiently the concept of rhythm itself for giving our judgement on the "licensing" or "authorizing" potential inherent in this concept and for exploiting this potential for the Cartesian philosophy. Therefore, we have to look into the rhythm as well as into the Cartesian philosophy.

The second chapter of *Introductory studies* begins to survey the reception of the concept of rhythm. Since E. Benveniste's article published in 1951 – where he argues that the Greek concept of *rhythmos* originally had nothing to do with the flow and the waves, but it meant form, shape, and configuration – the thought of rhythm has been inseparable from the

reflection on the oppositions as flow-state, dynamic-static, etc. Our finding is that the chief value of the concept of rhythm lies in the fact that it raises questions about these oppositions themselves. So, the questions setting out from the rhythm are not merely linguistic or philological questions but philosophical questions in the special sense that, by suspending the question of rhythm's sense, we activate syntaxes. We do not ask "what does rhythm mean?", but along the question "how does it mean?" we study the articulations of language, experience and ability through which the rhythm obtains this or that sense. These articulations of language, experience and ability is what we briefly call syntax and this study we call syntactic study. The syntactic study is basically stylistics concerning in an overall manner language, experience and ability.

The subject of the third chapter is the alternative foundations of rhythm and time. This chapter is divided into two parts. In the first part, we survey the changes of rhythm syntax from Plato to Aristoxenus. We show that rhythm and time are in contact with each other syntactically since Aristoxenus, the influence of which can be felt continuously from the Middle Ages to the present. In the second part, a phenomenological perspective on the issue is presented. We find that rhythm and thought are connected with each other already thematically – so as a philosophical theme – by the post-husserlian phenomenology. The Cartesian thought, thanks to J-M. Beyssade's Descartes-interpretation, has to do with both the former syntactic connection and with the latter thematic connection but without spelling out this relationship syntactically.

Thus we return to Descartes in the fourth chapter. We attempt this syntactical spelling out through the following strategy: if our question in Descartes was from the very beginning concerned with the manner in which the process of thinking takes care of its own time, in sticking to this direction we have to examine the thinking process in its own manner. This gives us a vantage point to consider how can rhythm mean anything for thinking. But where do we have this vantage point of the "how" or of style in the text of the *Regulae*? This vantage point can be found in the environment of reason's use. Descartes describes the how of this usage in his rules: after all, the *ratio* is nothing else than the mobilization of our *ingenium* in a certain style, that is to say the rational-style development of our *ingenium*. In so far as the style appears with reference to usage, and usage appears with reference to *ratio* in Descartes, then we can consider the *ratio* as a philosophical idiom fit for being an entrance point for the syntactic studies. Certainly, at the moment of outlining this strategy we do not know yet how the environment of *usus rationis* looks like exactly in the text. Hence we do not know yet what validity and licences the viewpoint of the "how" has. For this reason it is indispensable that we test philologically the roles of the *ratio* in the *Regulae*.

So the theme of the thesis's second part is the philological delimitation of *ratio* in the *Regulae*. We seek to test philologically if the *ratio* is suited, and on what conditions is it suited for opening the viewpoint of the style. We hope that a scope will take shape due to the dissociation of the *ratio* from its synonyms (as *ingenium*, *mens*, *intellectus*, etc.), a philologically concrete scope concretizing and delimiting the sense of our affirmation that "the *ratio* is style" and that these differences of meaning can be found out in the circle of the *ratio*'s synonyms. Since we carry out these philological investigations solely in the interest of the syntactic investigations, we reflect occasionally on these points where we must separate the strategy of the syntactic investigation from the philological, historical or other strategies of interpretation.

In the first chapter we establish that the *Regulae* undertake to direct the *ingenium*. With the concept of *ingenium* we have a spiritual characterization recognizing the diversification as a natural fact inherent in the development and the exploitation of the ability.

In contrast with this natural diversification, Descartes intends to subject the *ingenium* to a regularization having an essential reference to the characteristic of the *conditio humana*. Descartes seeks not to disregard our conditions but to return to them. Since Descartes recognizes that the *ingenium* can be regularized by means of different techniques (*artes*), we are in a position to state not only on the basis of the characterization of the *conditio humana* as he presented it, but also on the basis of the rivalry between these different techniques, that the *Regulae*'s program is the characteristic employment of the *ingenium*. In brief, the *Regulae* places the *ingenium* in the perspective of a particular style. Since Descartes distinguishes this style from the syllogistic style in such a way as to refer to the *ratio*, at the end of our *Introductory studies* we called this the rational-style exploitation of the *ingenium*. However, we will see that the attribute "rational" in the lexis of *Regulae* indicates the status of "pure", "not corporal", that is to say we can not expect that the textual presence of the attribute "rational" indicate the style of thinking. With the attribute "rational" Descartes does not intend to open the viewpoint of style: it is up to us to do this by means of the analysis of Descartes' style.

In the second chapter we try to compare the *ingenium* with the *ratio*. The two main features of the *ingenium*: 1) ability, faculty; 2) subject, not exclusively cognitive subject, but in a wide sense someone who is directed. So the *ingenium* is the subject of the direction, it is a directed ability. In connection with the *ratio* two questions arise from these two features: 1) Is the *ratio* an ability, a faculty? 2) Is the *ratio* a subject?

In the third chapter we find that these two questions lead to a problem, because in Rule 12, where Descartes enumerates our faculties and denominates the subject, the cognitive subject, he does not refer to the *ratio*. The *ratio* does not become a theme either as faculty, or as subject. Our solution to the problem proceeds, instead of a thematic explanation, by stating that Descartes is highly articulate in his choice of terms: in this rule he removes *ratio* from the side of the subject-position as well as from that of the faculty-position. The local shade of the *ratio* is not being either subject, or faculty.

In what follows, our philological investigation concentrates exclusively on the shades of the *ratio* which can be detected in the *Regulae*'s text. In the fourth chapter, through the texts, phrases and idioms like [\*Intuitus – lux rationis\*](#), [\*Prima rationis humanae rudimenta\*](#), [\*Humana conditio – humana ratio\*](#), [\*Usus rationis\*](#), [\*Vis cognoscens – ministerium rationis – rationis industria\*](#), we try to grasp the different shades of *ratio*. We find that, thanks to these shades, *ratio* performs certain roles while it is excluded from other roles. In the course of the investigation we prove that the fact of the *ratio*'s exclusion from the subject- and faculty-roles is not only a local, but a global shade in the entire text of the *Regulae*. At the same time, we find that "light" and "transparent" are local shades of *ratio*. Its global shade is participation: while the cognitive subject possesses and directly (without method) activates its faculties, the same subject participates in the *ratio* without possessing and directly activating it. The *ratio* can be neither possessed, nor can it be directly activated. It either remains a nature surrounding us like a transparent medium which produces fruits every now and then, or we transform our spontaneous contact with it into use which raises necessarily the question of the use's manner – as *ratio* is not a faculty. In this way the further global shades of the *ratio* emerge, as the operating space, universal instrument, technology of solving, symbolical representation and writing.

Findings and theses:

- In the *Regulae* the *ratio* is present not as the only dominant shade, but as a multitude of shades. Descartes puts to use the concept of *ratio* for his own purposes in the play of its shades and not as a motive exposed and unified by a definition.

- The *ratio* is not something or someone. It is not *res*, *entitas*, *aliquid*, nor *substantia*, *subjectum*, *ego*. We can not indicate for *ratio* any well-identified category like the former ones. And neither can we define for it one well-identified position with respect to these traditional philosophical categories. The *ratio* has not a position, rather, it has a lot of positions with respect to these categories.
- In line with it we affirm that the *ratio* is an impersonal and a-subjective manifestation not projecting any possibility or demand of an egology. At this point we have to oppose J-L. Marion' proposition that the *Regulae*'s approach of science – albeit without recognizing it – is founded on the *ego*. The *ratio*'s shades we detected do not reveal that the centre of gravity of knowledge is transferred to the *ego*. The centre of gravity of knowledge is in between the *ego* and object, exactly where we found the *ratio*, without the light of which the *ego* is unable to know by intuition just as the object is unable to be clear for the *ego*, that is to say for its ability of intuition. The principle of the *Regulae* on which their method and their technology of solving is not based on the *ego* but on the *ratio* that one can, of course, expose thematically as an *ego*, but at the expense of becoming indifferent with regard to the style: to the style of the *Regulae* and to the style of the reasoning according to their rules.
- We found, in line with the former lesson, that the *ratio* in the *Regulae*, in contrast with the classical Aristotelian theory of categories, mobilizes new categories: the order, the measure and the how or the manner. In Descartes the order and the measure are categories which are either more general than the category of quantity or a new category supplying for the quantity. As regards the how: the appeal for *usus rationis* is inseparable from the clarification of the manner of usage. Consequently it is not possible in Descartes to have a stylistically neutral reasoning: *usus* and *quomodo* go closely together with regard to the *ratio*. By way of the question of *quomodo?* in the *Regulae* we arrive to *ratio* from everywhere.
- That is to say we affirm that instead of being in a subject- or faculty-position, *ratio* is an *ordering praxis* by which the cognitive subject can progress in a problem and, in wide sense, in the world about which it is thinking. Hereby we affirm also that *ratio* is not a pre-established way facing the progressing subject – this is the sense of the method but not of the *ratio*. The *ratio* is not a way but a progression constructing its own way. The *ratio* is only available for us by the *ratiocinatio* and only as far as our praxis remains in accordance with some specific stylistic characteristics.
- We have also found some methodological lessons. We saw that the investigation of syntax can not be restricted either to the investigation of the thematic and philosophical intention or to such an investigation which resolves the philosophical expression into the historicity or the etymology. The milieu of the syntaxes is the style and the selection. With the syntaxes we do not intend to designate a particular level in the language but to reveal the possibilities of circulation along any levels. According to our philological investigation the question of the circulation is raised as a question of the relation along the shades. These relations are very rarely a fact or a data. These are rather possibilities opening or closing in function of the manners or the style of the statements we examined. The positions are mostly not static, overall validity reference points but they are in play and we must think of it as that.