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## A Note on Method in Philosophy

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BY method, as here used, we understand a process which develops rationally a system of philosophy. To indicate some of the conditions of such a development is our intention in this article. Such a proposal, however, recalls so forcibly the celebrated *Discours* of Descartes that we feel at once impelled to question the possibility of conducting thought in the province of metaphysics along rigorously logical lines. This principle, quoted from the *Regulae ad Directionem Ingenii*, is repeated in the second part of his *Discours de la Méthode* in these terms: "The third rule prescribes that I direct my thoughts orderly, beginning with objects the simplest and most easily apprehended, thus to rise little by little, as by degrees, even to the most comprehensive knowledge."<sup>1</sup> Without proceeding further to follow him into all the details of his system we should like to offer an explanatory note on these few lines which contain in substance a complete method of deduction.

For the one who would follow Descartes, therefore, there should be a twofold progression in the process of thought: a combination of analysis and synthesis. By analysis he would ascertain the constituent parts of the problem, and by a discovery of its simplest elements, solve it. The second step, the inverse of the first, is the process of synthesis, which, by starting from these first principles recognized as simple and elementary, enables one to reconstruct the whole complexity of detail in the question, to perceive how this latter proceeds from the simple ele-

ments, which is just another way of understanding and solving the problem. In the first instance, thought passes from the complex to the simple to ascend again, in the second, from the simple to the complex, somewhat after the manner of one, who, to understand the value of a certain number, reduces it to a simple unit, and then reconstructs by adding this same unit to itself until the original number is reached. Or, again, in the same way as one, who, knowing the law of any mathematical progression, can form for himself all the degrees of that progression, discover indefinitely all its successive terms, "in such a way that each successive term depends upon and follows from the preceding. The *order* in this case makes it possible not only to put each term in its proper place, but further, to discover by reason of the place assigned to each, the value of the unknown terms. Thus there is a creative and inventive capacity resulting from such an order."<sup>2</sup>

With all the reserve that is put on the *mathématisme* which such a method of procedure introduces into the realms of metaphysics, the method itself does not belong to Descartes alone. We have met with it in the pages of modern dialectic as well, in France in the works of Hamelin, and of Hegel and others in Germany. By beginning with notions the most simple, nay, even the most abstract, stripped of all complexity and multiplicity, these philosophers intend to deduce all the manifold variety of reality according to the laws of pure reasoning. In holding fast,