

Is Method a Myth? Revisiting a Controversial Category of Early Modern Epistemology (Pascal's account)

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This paper investigates the notion of “method” in early modern philosophy, focusing on the 17th century and the case of Blaise Pascal. It examines the notion of method both as a philosophical concept and as a historical category, questioning its coherence as a distinct philosophical genre. While early 17th-century scientific philosophers proposed numerous theories of method, 20th-century historiography and the sociology of science, followed by a recent history of philosophy, criticized them as a “mythical discourse,” questioning their epistemological relevance for understanding the development of emerging modern science. In response, this study defends method as a consistent historico-conceptual category, central to epistemology understood as both a theory of knowledge and a doctrine of science. The paper argues that method, despite its variations, functions as philosophical discourse itself: it defines the foundations and limits of natural knowledge, establishes norms of scientific judgment, delineates the scope of science, and organizes knowledge in general. Beyond its epistemic role, the study highlights the social and moral dimensions of method, particularly through Pascal, for whom methodological reflection intertwines with ethical concerns and the cultivation of “a spirit of discernment” against the outdated scholastic culture. In this sense, Pascal’s epistemological writings show that, in the middle of 17th century, method emerges not only as a philosophical category but also as a vehicle for negotiating moral responsibility and social coherence, reflecting the broader ambitions of early modern methodologists to shape the new subject of science as a social and moral subject.