

Role and meaning of the 'methodos' in the foundation of Copernican Heliocentrism

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This paper dwells on the methodos that Copernicus presents in the Dedication to Paul III as the demonstrative path leading man to comprehend the true foundations of the universe, the Earth's motions. These not only accurately account for celestial phenomena without departing from the first principle of the uniformity of circular motions, but reveal the divine creator's imprint on the revolutions of the machina mundi. A description of the various phases in which Copernicus articulates his argument in Book I suggests that the procedures leading to successive outcomes, and which have struck scholars as unusual, form a consistent whole when viewed in light of Plato's hypothetical method. Described in the Phaedo and Republic, this method had already captured Giorgio Valla's attention as a useful way of attaining the "perfect" astronomy.

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