

Monday April 11th 4:00 pm 470 Stephens Hall UC Berkeley
Berkeley Spring 2011 Colloquia in
History of Science and Technology

Natural Philosophy and the Cultural Status of Reason

Peter Dear
Cornell University



Seventeenth-century natural philosophy is often associated with empiricism and experimentalism. But reason too, as an element of knowledge-production, played a role as much theorized in practice as in principle. Reason lent an aspect of transcendence to knowledge of nature, because it went well beyond the application of mere logical rules of inference. Even experimental philosophy could only represent itself as true natural philosophy by incorporating a central role for reason. Reason could be glossed as causally structured, even mechanical, as long as it also reflected divine purpose, whereby “right reason” converged with experience. Such diverse philosophers as Descartes and Hooke illustrate similar ways in which “reason,” as well as experience, was turned to account in the making of natural philosophy.

Presented by
UC Berkeley Office for History of Science and Technology
http://ohst.berkeley.edu/ohst_events.html