



Ca' Foscari  
University  
of Venice

Department of  
Philosophy and  
Cultural Heritage



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**Wednesday**  
**2019 Oct 30**

h. 3.00 – 4.30 p.m.

**Malcanton Marcorà**  
**Palace,**  
**Aula Valent**

Dorsoduro 3484/D,  
Venice

Introduction by prof.  
**Pietro Daniel**  
**Omodeo**

Guest hosted by  
the ERC endeavor  
**EarlyModernCosmology**  
GA 725883

Workshop ERC EarlyModernCosmology

## **Baroque Astronomy** Doing without the eye: Descartes naturalized epistemology

**Ofer Gal** University of Sydney

Sometime in the early 1620s young Rene Descartes came across Johannes Kepler's *Optical Part of Astronomy*. From that point on, his epistemological project was predicated on the fundamental insight of Kepler's new optics: that the eye is not a window but a screen; that it does not provide re-presentations of the objects but merely records the effects of physical process. Descartes first attempts to redress this blow to traditional epistemology by ascribing human knowledge with divine-like vision – intuition. When this fails he turns to apply to knowledge the same naturalizing tools of the New Science that created the conundrum. If sensations are causal effects, he explains in the *Meditations*, it is the causal order of nature that warrants their validity. To explain how meaning can arise from causality, Descartes then turns to the passions, which he explores through the *Principles* and his ultimate *Passions of the Soul*. It is these mediators of mind and world that choose among the infinity of causal effects those that affect us, and, sanctioned by our very survival as individual and species, found all our knowledge.