



Ca' Foscari
University
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Department of Philosophy
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European Research Council

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FARE
RICERCA IN ITALIA

FRAMEWORK PER L'ATTRAZIONE E IL RAFFORZAMENTO
DELLE ECCELLENZE PER LA RICERCA IN ITALIA

February 8, 2022

Aula Morelli, Malcanton-
Marcorà h. 4 p.m.

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Max Planck Partner Group "The Water City"
(*Max Planck Society / MPI for the History of
Science - Berlin*)

*ERC "EarlyModernCosmology" (Horizon
2020, GA 725883)*

*Project "EarlyGeoPraxis" (FARE, Italian
Ministry of University and Research)*

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Guest hosted by the ERC
EarlyModernCosmology GA 725883
and the FARE EarlyGeoPraxis
project ID R184WNSTWH

When rays puncture bodies: Digby contra Descartes.

Laura Georgescu
University of Groningen

In a letter to Mersenne, Digby claims that Descartes did not build his natural philosophy on sound principles. What does he mean by this? Why and where do Cartesian principles break down, according to Digby? This talk addresses these questions in the context of Digby's engagement with Cartesian optics. In particular, it looks into Digby's response to the Cartesian account of refraction with the purpose of showing how the Cartesian principles of bodies qua extension and of motion qua local motion break down. In discussing one of the Cartesian 'exemplars' – the striking of a tennis ball as a stand-in for how light hits surfaces – Digby appears to challenge the Cartesian distinction between the tendency to motion and the determination of motion of a body. In the same context, Cartesian local motion also comes under attack in order to be replaced by what Digby believes to be the proper notion of motion, namely division. The extent to which Digby's objections are successful is secondary to my goal here – what I am after in this talk is to understand what it was that Digby found unsatisfactory about the underlying principles of Cartesian natural philosophy, and why.