



DOMUS COMELIANA

CENTRE FOR THE STUDY OF
MEDICINE AND THE BODY
IN THE RENAISSANCE



v i v a **M** e n t e
The Garden of Ideas

**Medicine in the Philosophy
of Descartes
*Lights & Shadows***

**19-20 November 2020
Domus Comeliana – Pisa**

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Organisers

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Keynote Speakers

Annie BITBOL-HESPERIES (Paris)

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Gideon MANNING (Los Angeles)

Franco Aurelio MESCHINI (Lecce)

Andrea STRAZZONI (Erfurt)

As uniquely shaped by Descartes, medicine assumed a new role in the development of early modern natural philosophy. That one-fifth of Descartes' entire output is dedicated to medicine should be regarded as a testimony to the constant attention he devoted to this subject, which kept him busy throughout his life in a series of anatomical observations and vivisections, visits to anatomical theatres, as well as protracted discussions with contemporary physicians. It is significant, in this regard, that Descartes' *Discours de la Méthode* (1637) originally attracted a great deal of attention from learned physicians in the Netherlands and Belgium, such as Henricus Regius (1598-1679) in Utrecht and Vopiscus Fortunatus Plempius (1601-1671) in Leuven. Not only is medicine one of the fruits of the tree of philosophy, but it may be used to illuminate Descartes' methodology, physics, metaphysics (i.e., the mind-body dualism), moral philosophy and theory of emotions.

Medicine features prominently as a topic also in Cartesian scholarship, and several contributions have been devoted to it, amongst which the classical Richard Carter, *Descartes' Medical Philosophy* (1983), Annie Bitbol-Hespériès, *Le principe de vie chez Descartes* (1990), Franco



Aurelio Meschini, *Neurofisiologia cartesiana* (1998), Stephen Gaukroger et al. (eds), *Descartes' Natural Philosophy* (2000), Thomas Fuchs, *The Mechanization of the Heart: Harvey and Descartes* (2001), Dennis Des Chene, *Spirits and Clocks: Machine and Organism in Descartes* (2001), and Vincent Aucante, *La philosophie médicale de Descartes* (2006). Likewise, attention has been devoted recently to sources and reception of Descartes' medicine, for example by Franco Aurelio Meschini, *Materiali per una storia della medicina cartesiana* (2013), Delphine Antoine-Mahut and Steven Gaukroger, eds., *Descartes' Treatise on Man and its Reception* (2016), Gideon Manning, "Descartes and Medicine" in the *Oxford Handbook on Descartes* (2019), and through a conference on the brain in Descartes that took place in Paris in 2019.

Despite the vast scholarly effort, however, a coherent and systematic approach to Descartes' medicine is still overdue.

This first round of the **Vivamente Conference in the History of Ideas** aims at drawing attention to the place of medical knowledge, practice and experimentation in Descartes' philosophy and to the various ways it developed following the efforts of its early and late proponents. It further aims at recapturing recent trends in Cartesian scholarship as well as at exploring different interpretations, and issues both in relation to Descartes' own philosophy and with regards to the acceptance and opposition it faced in the early modern history of knowledge and science. Lights and shadows emerging from this analysis would help drawing a new intellectual portrait of the philosopher who studied the passions of the soul *en physicien* and equated the living body to a machine.

Notably, the conference will explore four main areas:



Textual: devoted to the analysis of Descartes' 1) sources of medical knowledge, including their intellectual and social setting, and 2) published and posthumous bio-medical texts, with an emphasis on the medical texts produced by Cartesian scholars and critics;

Philosophical: focused on Descartes' approach to medical knowledge, especially the ways it befits, contrasts or develops the main strands of his natural philosophy (i.e., blood circulation, psychology, neurophysiology and embryology), other possible topics in this section include the role of medical experimentation and quantification in the seventeenth-century;

Exegetical: highlighting the early reception of Descartes' medical theories, with their success, obscurities and failures (e.g., the explanation of nutrition), the exchanges and collaborations with his contemporaries and proponents, and the paths Cartesian scholars travelled to fill the lacunae in Descartes' medical knowledge;

Legacy: exploring the later reactions of, and opposition to Descartes' medicine in early modern Europe, and especially in Italy, France and Germany, where Cartesian medicine was subject of academic discussions and polemics.

COVID-19

Although the plan is to hold the conference at the Domus Comeliana, we are open to the possibility of a virtual conference. The decision will be taken by the committee in early September and will be communicated to the speakers previous to paying any fees. In case of the conference being held online, fees will be reduced to cover the operating costs of the virtual conference. Pre-registration is required (see **Registration process** below).



PUBLICATION

Papers will be collected and a selection will be proposed for publication as an edited volume for the series **Palgrave Studies in Medieval and Early Modern Medicine (PSMEMM)**.

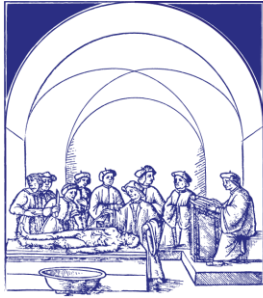
APPLICATION PROCESS

Proposals are invited in any of the above-mentioned areas from scholars working on any aspect of early modern medicine, philosophy, science and technology, widely construed.

Applicants should send a 300-words abstract with a short bibliography, along with a one-page CV, affiliation, and contact information to:

info@csmbr.fondazionecomel.org specifying the object
VivaMente 2020.

Application Deadline: 20 July 2020*



REGISTRATION PROCESS

Applicants of selected proposals should send the completed registration form (available on the conference website) and a copy of the payment's receipt to info@csmbr.fondazionecomel.org

Registration Fee:

(fees will change in case of a virtual conference and will cover the operating costs only --- communication will be given by early September)

Type A = € 80 includes coffee breaks and lunches for two days + 1 dinner on the first day (19 November)

Type B = € 50 includes coffee breaks and lunches for two days. Dinner not included

Payment can be made via Bank Transfer to the Institutio Santoriana – Fondazione Comel at (IBAN) IT 93 M 03268 01605 052882315420 – (BIC/SWIFT) SELBIT 2BXXX with the specification VivaMente 2020 by the registration deadline.

Registration deadline: 15 September 2020**

For further information and details on the event contact the organisers at

fabrizio.baldassarri@gmail.com

*Selected Proposals will be notified within 10 days from the acknowledgement of their receipt until all places are filled.

**Registration forms unsupported by payment's receipt will not be considered.