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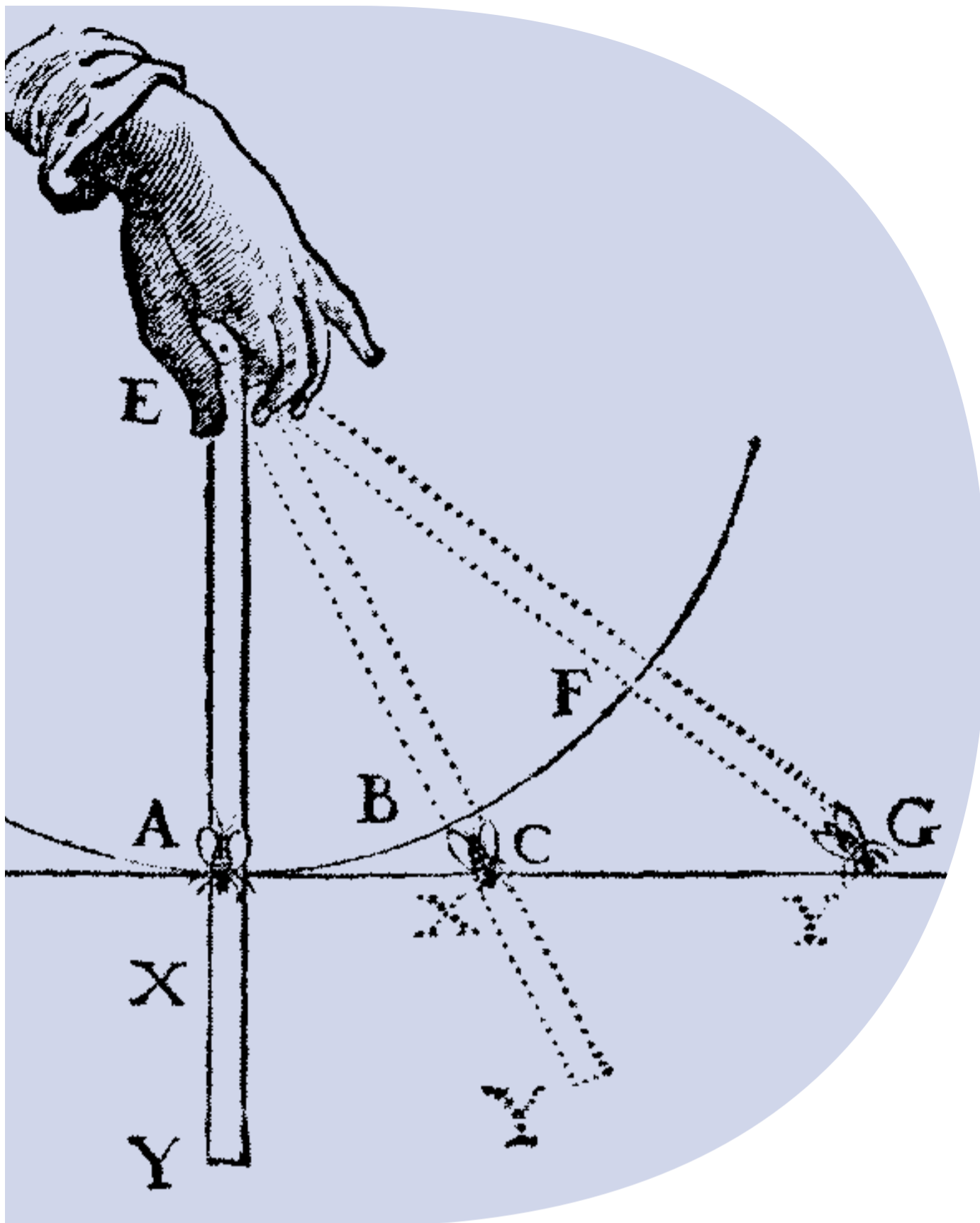


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FRAMEWORK PER L'ATTRAZIONE E IL RAFFORZAMENTO
DELLE ECCELLENZE PER LA RICERCA IN ITALIA



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A registration is required.

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Image: Drawing from book *Principles of Philosophy* by René
Descartes. Movements of objects. / Wikimedia commons

The Origins of Mechanical Philosophy

Mattia Mantovani
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"Mechanical philosophy" is known to occur for the first time in 1637, in Descartes' correspondence concerning the just-published *Discours de la méthode*. By the end of the century, the mechanical philosophy had become a major intellectual player. Nowadays, it still features as a prominent historiographical category. The paper reconstructs the origins of the mechanical philosophy starting from a hitherto neglected occurrence of the term "mechanical" to qualify a philosopher's doctrine: in this case, Aristotle's. The paper analyses how the term and cognates shifted in meaning after 1632 – from *mechanicōs* (artisan-like) to *mechanica* (technology-based), from *mécanique* (lawful) to *mechanice* (intelligible) – up until the 1660s, when Robert Boyle turned the "mechanical philosophy" into the rallying cry of Christian *novatores* against the Aristotelian-minded philosophy of the university establishment. By considering these various, competing connotations, the paper intends to reappraise the "mechanical philosophy" as an actors' category – indeed, as a cluster of categories pursuing quite different agenda.



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