

CARLETON UNIVERSITY

DEPARTMENT OF PHILOSOPHY



# WINTER 2026 *Colloquium*

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## "Madness and dreaming in and beyond the Meditations"

In his first Meditation, in which he advances a variety of sceptical hypotheses in order to determine whether or how one can obtain knowledge, Descartes briefly considers – but seems quickly to abandon – the concern that he may, in fact, be mad. Some commentators have argued that this 'madness hypothesis' must be abandoned because it threatens the very basis of rationality; others have argued that the hypothesis is never truly abandoned, but is merely replaced with later sceptical hypotheses such as the dream hypothesis. In this paper I revisit this debate, primarily by looking beyond Descartes, both to other philosophical accounts of madness in the early modern period, as well as to the medical accounts of madness that these philosophers may have been drawing on. I suggest that a consideration of some of the recurring themes in these accounts will not only help shed light on the place of madness in early modern accounts of cognition, but will also enable us to return to and reassess Descartes's concerns about madness and dreaming, as well as his ultimate resolutions of such concerns at the end of the Meditations.

FRIDAY, JANUARY 30

2:30 P.M.

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