

# BARNABY R. HUTCHINS

Department of Philosophy and Moral Science  
Ghent University  
Blandijnberg 2, 9000 Gent, Belgium  
[bhutchins@gmail.com](mailto:bhutchins@gmail.com) | [brhutchins.com](http://brhutchins.com)

## Current position

**Research Fellow**, Department of Humanities and Arts, Technion, Israel (2021–)

## Areas of specialisation

Early modern philosophy, metaphysics, history and philosophy of science

## Areas of competence

Philosophy of biology, continental philosophy

## Previous academic appointments

- **BOF Postdoctoral Fellow**, Philosophy, Ghent University, Belgium (2017–2018/2019–2021)
- **Visiting Lecturer**, History and Philosophy of Science, Technion, Israel (2020–2021)
- **Postdoctoral Researcher**, Institut für Philosophie, Alpen-Adria University, Klagenfurt, Austria. 2016–2017/2018–2019. (Project: ‘Spinoza on the Concept of the Human Life Form’, PI: Ursula Renz.)
- **Research Fellow**, Department of Philosophy, Bar-Ilan University, Israel. 2015–2016. (Project: ‘Leibniz and the Life Sciences in Early Modern Philosophy’, PI: Ohad Nachtom.)
- **Visiting Scholar**, Center for Philosophy of Biology, Duke University, USA. Spring 2014.
- **BOF Doctoral Fellow**, Ghent University, Belgium. 2011–2015.
- **Visiting Lecturer**, Centre for Research in Modern European Philosophy, Middlesex University, London, UK. 2008–9.
- **Visiting Lecturer**, University of Westminster, London, UK. 2007–9.

## Education

**PhD**, Department of Philosophy and Moral Sciences, Ghent University, Belgium (BOF scholarship), 2016

Supervisor: Eric Schliesser

Examination committee: Dennis Des Chene (WashU, St Louis), Alison Simmons (Harvard), Sophie Roux (École normale supérieure, Paris), Charles Wolfe (Ghent), Maarten Van Dyck (Ghent)

Dissertation title: *Obscurity and confusion: Nonreductionism in Descartes's biology and philosophy*

ABSTRACT: I argue that Descartes is a nonreductionist in certain areas of his philosophy and natural philosophy (biology and the mind–body union in particular). Descartes is usually taken to be a strict reductionist, and he frequently describes his work in reductionist terms. This might seem like simple inconsistency, or a mismatch between Descartes’s ambitions and his achievements. I argue that it is more than this: nonreductionism is compatible with his wider commitments; moreover, allowing for irreducibles increases the explanatory power of his system.

**MA Continental Philosophy**, University of Warwick, UK

**BA Philosophy**, University of Warwick, UK

## Papers

### Articles

- ‘Descartes, corpuscles and reductionism: Mechanism and systems in Descartes’s physiology’, *The Philosophical Quarterly*, 2015.
- ‘Does Descartes have a principle of life? Hierarchy and interdependence in Descartes’s physiology’, *Perspectives on Science*, 2016.
- ‘Descartes and the dissolution of life’, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, 2016.

### Solicited book chapters

- ‘The embodied Descartes: Contemporary readings of *L’Homme*’, in *Descartes’ Treatise on Man and its Reception*, eds Delphine Antoine-Mahut and Stephen Gaukroger, 2016 (New York: Springer) (with Charles T. Wolfe and Christoffer Basse Eriksen)
- ‘Spinoza on Human and Divine Knowledge’, in *A Companion to Spinoza*, ed. Yitzhak Melamed, 2021 (Oxford: Blackwell) (with Ursula Renz)
- “‘Everyone knows what life is’: Life as an irreducible in and outside of Descartes’s metaphysics and biology”, in *Life and Death in Early Modern Philosophy*, ed. Susan James, forthcoming 2021 (Oxford: Oxford University Press)
- ‘Descartes on Psychology and Cognitive Science’, in *The Cartesian Mind*, eds Jorge Secada and Cecilia Wee, forthcoming (New York: Routledge)
- ‘Non-essentialist, activity-grounded lifeforms’, in *Spinoza and the Human Perspective*, eds. Ursula Renz, Barnaby R. Hutchins, Sarah Tropper, Olivér István Tóth, Philip Waldner.

### Encyclopaedia articles

- ‘Life, Mechanization of’, in *The Springer Encyclopedia of Early Modern Philosophy and the Sciences*, eds Dana Jalobeanu and Charles T. Wolfe, forthcoming (New York: Springer)

## Edited volumes

- *Spinoza and the Human Perspective*, ed. with Ursula Renz, Sarah Tropper, Olivér István Tóth, and Philip Walder (under review at Oxford University Press)

## Translations

- Maurice Halbwachs, *The Social Frameworks of Memory [Les Cadres sociaux de la mémoire]*, forthcoming (Oxford: Oxford University Press) (with Charles T. Wolfe)

## Book reviews

- Richard F. Hassing, *Cartesian Psychophysics and the Whole Nature of Man: On Descartes’s Passions of the Soul* (London: Lexington Books), in *Journal of Early Modern Studies* 6/2, 2017
- Eric Watkins (ed.), *The Divine Order, the Human Order, and the Order of Nature: Historical Perspectives* (New York: Oxford University Press), in *Isis* 106/3, 2015

## Short pieces

- ‘Antagonising the canon’, *Groningen Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Thought Blog* [[www.rug.nl/filosofie/organization/history/gcmemt/blog/antagonising-the-canon-16-11-2018](http://www.rug.nl/filosofie/organization/history/gcmemt/blog/antagonising-the-canon-16-11-2018)]

## Selected talks

1. June 2021, ‘Non-essentialist, activity-grounded lifeforms’, *Spinoza and the Human Lifeform*, University of Graz, Austria (online)
2. December 2020, *New York City Workshop in Early Modern Philosophy*, Fordham University (online): ‘Cavendish on the social dynamics of physics’
3. November 2020, *Ghent University Canguilhem Cartel*, Ghent University (online): ‘Canguilhem on mechanism’
4. July 2020, *Princeton–Bucharest Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy*, Princeton/Bucharest (online): ‘Metaphysical gap-patching: Descartes on why there is no mind–body problem’
5. December 2019, *Rethinking Early Modern Vitalism*, Ca’ Foscari University of Venice: ‘Life hurts: Living things in dead ontologies’

6. November 2019, *The Concept of Life: A Philosophical Workshop*, Ghent University: 'Attitudinal vitalism, physicalism, and supplementary metaphysics'
7. October 2019, *London Spinoza Circle*, Birkbeck College, University of London: 'Spinoza on Human Subjectivity and the Notion of God's Intellect' (with Ursula Renz)
8. August 2019, *The Modal-Explanatory Nexus: A Dialogue between the Contemporary and the Early Modern Era*, Humboldt University Berlin: 'Full explainability and standpoint relativity: Spinoza's anti-essentialist rationalism' (with Ursula Renz)
9. July 2019, *Collegium Spinozanum III*, University of Groningen, the Netherlands: 'Spinoza and the attributes: The standpoint interpretation'
10. June 2019, *Spinoza on essence, politics and being human*, Alpen-Adria University, Klagenfurt: 'Reversing the grounding relations: Some half-thought-out remarks on action, lifeform, and essence in Spinoza'
11. April 2019, *Mechanism, Life and Mind in the 'Modern' Era*, Roma Tre, Rome: 'Mechanism as a non-exhaustive ontology: Descartes and irreducibles'
12. January 2019, *Mind and Body Across Time and Discipline*, IEA Paris: 'Descartes, Spinoza, and Embodied Metaphysics'
13. June 2018, *Teleological Explanation between Leibniz and Kant*, The Van Leer Jerusalem Institute, Israel: 'Descartes and the very possibility of natural teleology'
14. May 2018, *The Fifth Finnish-Hungarian Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy*, CEU, Hungary: 'Spinoza and the attributes: The standpoint interpretation'
15. April 2018, *The Concept of Life: From Descartes to Contemporary Biophilosophy*, University of Ljubljana, Slovenia: 'Mechanising life: Descartes, reductionism, eliminativism, and beyond'
16. March 2018, Antwerp University, Belgium: 'Spinoza, attributes, and standpoint metaphysics'
17. December 2017, *Research methods in philosophy and history of science*, Ghent, Belgium: 'Anti-objectivity: Metametaphysical pluralism and the early modern canon'
18. June 2017, *Spinoza and Metaphysics*, Klagenfurt, Austria: 'The attributes: Perspectives and standpoints' (invited)
19. April 2016, *British Society for the History of Philosophy/European Society for Early Modern Philosophy*, London, UK: 'Descartes's "vitalism"'
20. March 2016, Turin University, Italy: 'Descartes on life: Eliminativism and vitalism' (invited)
21. February 2016, *Israeli Philosophical Association Conference*, The Hebrew University, Jerusalem, Israel: 'Descartes on life: Eliminativism and vitalism'
22. July 2015, *International Society for the History, Philosophy, and Social Studies of Biology (ISHPSSB) Annual Conference*, Montreal, Canada: 'Activities vs. ontological parsimony in Descartes's biological mechanisms'
23. November 2014, *The Philosophy of Science Association (PSA) Biennial Meeting*, Chicago: 'Reduction, integration and mechanism in Descartes's biology'
24. October 2014, *Machines of life, development and assimilation: Vitalist themes*, Ghent University, Belgium: '"Everyone knows what life is": Reductionism and indefinability in Descartes's biology' (invited)
25. July 2014, *History of Philosophy of Science (HOPOS) Biennial Meeting*, Ghent University, Belgium: 'Reduction, integration and mechanism in Descartes's biology'
26. July 2013, *ISHPSSB*, Montpellier, France: 'Reductionism, eliminativism, and the concept of life in Descartes' biology'
27. June 2013, *Canadian Society for the History and Philosophy of Science Annual Meeting*, Victoria, BC, Canada: 'The fire without light and interdependence in Descartes' physiology'
28. February 2013, *New York City Seminar in Early Modern Philosophy*, Fordham University, New York, USA: 'The (missing) foundation of life in Descartes' physiology'
29. July 2012, *3 Societies Meeting* (History of Science Society, Canadian Society for the History and Philosophy of Science, and British Society for the History of Science), University of Pennsylvania, Philadelphia, USA: 'Descartes' principle of life (and how doesn't have one)'
30. June 2012, *HOPOS*, Dalhousie University, Halifax, NS, Canada: 'Descartes' principle of life (and how doesn't have one)' & 'Descartes and the dissolution of life'

## Teaching

### Full teaching responsibility

*Issues in History and Philosophy of Science: Mechanisms, Technion, Israel*

- History and philosophy of mechanisms for STEM students, covering the recent literature on mechanisms in philosophy of science, history of mechanistic explanation from antiquity to C20th, and alternatives to mechanism (Cavendish (C17th), Bennett (C21st)).

*Early Modern Philosophy, Bar-Ilan University, Israel (mixed undergraduate and postgraduate)*

- Covering Descartes, Spinoza, Leibniz, Locke, Berkeley, Hume, and Kant.

*History of Ideas (penultimate-year undergraduate), University of Westminster, UK*

- Covering pre-Socratics, Plato, Aristotle, Descartes, Hobbes, Locke, Hume, Kant, Rousseau, Voltaire, Hegel, and Marx.

*Twentieth-Century Thought (final-year undergraduate), University of Westminster, UK*

- Covering Russell, Wittgenstein, Ayer, Heidegger, Sartre, Beauvoir, Levinas, Foucault, Irigaray, and Derrida.

*Existentialism (final-year undergraduate), Middlesex University, UK*

- Covering Sartre, Beauvoir, and Fanon.

### Guest teaching

*Wijgerige vraagstukken in de Levenswetenschappen [Philosophical issues in the life sciences] (postgraduate), Ghent University [March 2020]*

- Matters of life and desire in Descartes

*History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences (postgraduate), Ghent University [February 2018]*

- Descartes and teleology

*Philosophy for Biochemists (undergraduate), Ghent University [February 2015]*

- Philosophy of mechanisms

*Capita Selecta From the Scientific Revolution to the Enlightenment (postgraduate), Ghent University [December 2014]*

- Function in biology

*Capita Selecta From the Scientific Revolution to the Enlightenment (postgraduate), Ghent University [October 2013]*

- Mechanism and the embodied Descartes

## Academic awards

- BOF (Special Research Fund) postdoctoral fellowship, Ghent University, Belgium, 2016
- Postdoctoral Fellowship, Jacques Loeb Centre for the History and Philosophy of the Life Sciences, Ben-Gurion University of the Negev, Israel, 2016–2017 (declined)
- BOF PhD bursary, Ghent University, Belgium, 2011–2015

## Service

### Refereeing and conferences

- Referee for *Philosophical Quarterly*, *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, *Synthese*, *Journal of Modern Philosophy*, *Early Science and Medicine*, *Biological Theory*, *The Southern Journal of Philosophy*, *HOPOS*, *Dialogue*, *Centaurus*, *Springer History*, *Philosophy and Theory of the Life Sciences* series, and *Society and Politics*
- Referee for various workshops
- Local organising committee, website, and graphic design for *HOPOS 2014*, Ghent University
- Organisation of various workshops

### Admin

- Editorial board of *Centaurus* (the journal of the European Society for the History of Science)
- Organisational committee of the *Sarton Centre for History of Science*, Ghent University (2017–2018, 2019–)

- Website, administration, and communications for the *Sarton Centre for History of Science*, Ghent University (2011–2015, 2017–2018, 2019–)
- Administration and website for *Mephisto Joint Programme in Philosophy of Science* collaborative funding bid (UGent, University of Groningen, University of Bucharest, University of Kent, Paris 7, Complutense University of Madrid, LMU Munich) for *Erasmus Mundus* (2011)

## **Languages**

English (native), French (very good reading knowledge), German (GCSE), Latin (fair reading knowledge), Ancient Greek (basic reading knowledge)

## **Nationality**

British

## **Contact**

Email: [bhutchins@gmail.com](mailto:bhutchins@gmail.com)

Website: [brhutchins.com](http://brhutchins.com)