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ÉMILIE DU CHÂTELET  
AND THE FOUNDATIONS  
OF PHYSICAL SCIENCE

Katherine Brading

ROUTLEDGE  
Focus



# Émilie Du Châtelet and the Foundations of Physical Science

The centerpiece of Émilie Du Châtelet's philosophy of science is her *Foundations of Physics*, first published in 1740. The *Foundations* contains epistemology, metaphysics, methodology, mechanics, and physics, including such pressing issues of the time as whether there are atoms, the appropriate roles of God and of hypotheses in scientific theorizing, how (if at all) bodies are capable of acting on one another, and whether gravity is an action-at-a-distance force. Du Châtelet sought to resolve these issues within a single philosophical framework that builds on her critique and appraisal of all the leading alternatives (Cartesian, Newtonian, Leibnizian, and so forth) of the period. The text is remarkable for being the first to attempt such a synthetic project, and even more so for the accessibility and clarity of the writing. This book argues that Du Châtelet put her finger on the central problems that lay at the intersection of physics and metaphysics at the time, and tackled them drawing on the most up-to-date resources available. It will be a useful source for students and scholars interested in the history and philosophy of science, and in the impact of women philosophers in the early modern period.

**Katherine Brading** is Professor of Philosophy at Duke University. She works primarily on philosophy of physics from the late 16th century to the present day. She is coeditor of *Symmetries in Physics: Philosophical Reflections* (2003).

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# **Émilie Du Châtelet and the Foundations of Physical Science**

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**Routledge**  
Taylor & Francis Group

NEW YORK AND LONDON

First published 2019  
by Routledge  
52 Vanderbilt Avenue, New York, NY 10017

and by Routledge  
2 Park Square, Milton Park, Abingdon, Oxon OX14 4RN

*Routledge is an imprint of the Taylor & Francis Group, an informa business*

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*Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data*

Names: Brading, Katherine, 1970– author.

Title: Émilie du Châtelet and the foundations of physical science / Katherine Brading.

Description: New York: Routledge, 2019. | Series: Routledge focus on philosophy | Includes bibliographical references and index.

Identifiers: LCCN 2018051315 | ISBN 9781138351653 (hardback)

Subjects: LCSH: Du Châtelet, Gabrielle Emilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, marquise, 1706–1749. | Women physicists—France—Biography. | Physicists—France—Biography. | Women mathematicians—France—Biography. | Mathematicians—France—Biography. | Physics—Early works to 1800. | Mathematics—Early works to 1800. | Du Châtelet, Gabrielle Emilie Le Tonnelier de Breteuil, marquise, 1706–1749. Institutions de physique.

Classification: LCC QC16.D86 B73 2019 | DDC 530.092 [B]—dc23  
LC record available at <https://lccn.loc.gov/2018051315>

ISBN: 978-1-138-35165-3 (hbk)

ISBN: 978-0-429-43517-1 (ebk)

Typeset in Times New Roman  
by codeMantra

**To my family**  
**Mark, Thomas, and Matthew**  
**Peter, Penelope, and Liz**



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