



The Problem of the Earth's Shape from Newton to Clairaut: The Rise of Mathematical Science in Eighteenth-Century Paris and the Fall of 'Normal' Science

John L. Greenberg

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In this book, Greenberg investigates the spread of Newtonian physics in the French scientific community during the eighteenth century. His central thesis is that Newton's own publications contributed only a small part of the work done on the shape of the earth. Continental scholars, especially Leibniz, influenced developments in Paris, and other French scholars, including Bouguer and Maupertuis, all contributed work used by Alexis-Claude Clairaut in developing his mature theory of the earth's shape. The evolution of Parisian physics, then, proved to be not merely the replacement of one paradigm with another, as might be expected from Thomas Kuhn's formulations about scientific revolutions, but a long, complicated process involving many areas of research and contributions from the entire scientific world. "Normal" science contributed not only anomalies present in earlier theories, but a good part of the solution.

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