

LIBORI SUMMER SCHOOL 2025

# THE EARLY WORKS OF

08-12 SEPTEMBER

# ÉMILIE DU CHÂTELET



UNIVERSITÄT  
PADERBORN



History of Women  
Philosophers and Scientists  
[historyofwomenphilosophers.org](http://historyofwomenphilosophers.org)  
directed by Ruth E. Hagengruber

Organized by Ruth E.  
Hagengruber and Jil Muller

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“Émilie Du Châtelet’s early works offer us an unparalleled insight into how a woman of the Enlightenment shaped – and was shaped by – the great metaphysical debates of her time.”

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The Center for the History of Women Philosophers and Scientists, directed by Prof. Dr. Ruth Edith Hagengruber at Paderborn University, is dedicated to the research, preservation, and dissemination of women’s contributions to the history of philosophy and science. The Libori Summer School is one of its key educational formats and fosters international exchange among emerging scholars in philosophy, history of science, intellectual history and gender studies.

Monday,  
08.09.2025

The nature of liberty and free will:  
Chapter 5 On Liberty

Ruth E. Hagengruber, Julia Jorati,  
Eszter Kovács

Tuesday,  
09.09.2025

Enlightenment perspectives on ethics  
and moral theory: Commentary on  
Mandeville's Fable of the Bees

Judith Zinsser, Ana Rodrigues

Wednesday,  
10.09.2025

The foundations of natural philosophy:  
Chapter 4 On the Formation of Colours

Bryce Gessell, Fritz Nagel, Andrew Janiak

Thursday,  
11.09.2025

On language and ontology:  
Chapter 6 On Grammar

Pedro Prikladnitzky, Katarina Peixoto,  
Viridiana Platas Benitez

Friday,  
12.09.2025

Treatise on Metaphysics

Ulla Kölving



## 8 September 2025: Chapter 5 On Liberty

The question of free will stands at the beginning and prominently within Du Châtelet's philosophical development. She discusses the challenge of formulating freedom in the context of physical laws in her letters and in this essay, which was conceived as chapter five of the *Institutions de physiques*. Her references to the tradition of the French and English doctrine of the will show Du Châtelet's struggle for a fundamental and independent answer. She develops her argument by rejecting the objections, which results in an interesting spectrum of the literature she draws on. References to the chapter that was ultimately not included can nevertheless be found in the *Institutions*.

## 9 September 2025: Commentary on Mandeville's Fable of the Bees

Émilie Du Châtelet's translation and commentary on selected parts of Bernard de Mandeville's *The Fable of the Bees: or, Private Vices, Publick Benefits* marks her first independent scholarly endeavor. Likely written between 1734 and 1738, the work defies conventional genre classifications. Du Châtelet presents a strikingly original form of intellectual engagement: a creative appropriation of Mandeville's ideas that she reframes within her own philosophical framework. What begins as a supposed translation becomes a vehicle for formulating foundational aspects of her own moral and social philosophy—elements that diverge significantly from Mandeville's account of the origins of social sentiment and the moral order of emerging commercial society.



## 10 September 2025: Chapter 4 On the Formation of Colours

Émilie du Châtelet's *Essai sur l'optique* is a recently rediscovered early work of natural philosophy that sheds light on her evolving scientific thought before her more famous *Institutions de physique*. Written in the late 1730s, chapter 4 of the *Essai* is a strikingly Newtonian text that explores the behavior of light and color. Drawing from Newton's *Opticks*, Du Châtelet not only engages with cutting-edge optical theory of her day but also begins to question its foundations. Thus this text offers a fascinating glimpse into the experimental and methodological commitments that shaped her path as a natural philosopher.



## 11 September 2025: Chapter 6 On Grammar



The Grammaire is a striking and underexplored component of Du Châtelet's philosophical project. Conceived to clarify the logical and linguistic foundations of the scientific thought, it shows how deeply language is tied to epistemology and metaphysics developed in her works, such as *Institutions de Physique*. Although the original text appears to have been more extensive, with explicit references to chapters 2 and 3, only chapters 6, 7, and 8 have been preserved. The surviving material reveals a structure deeply influenced by the *Grammaire générale et raisonnée* and the *Logique de Port-Royal*, while also engaging critically with the philosophy of John Locke, a recurring interlocutor in her *Institutions*.

## Friday, 12 September 2025: Treatise on Metaphysics

Often attributed to Voltaire, the Treatise on Metaphysics is arguably one of the most intriguing works in the St Petersburg collection, although it is also possible to attribute authorship to du Châtelet. As this work was not originally intended for publication, the author is very open with his/her ideas on metaphysics, religion and morality. However, the identity of the author remains a subject of interest. The Saint Petersburg manuscript, transcribed by a copyist on half of the page, was intended to be revised and/or annotated. All subsequent revisions and annotations are attributed to Émilie Du Châtelet, with none ascribed to Voltaire. One hypothesis to be considered is that Voltaire was indeed the author of the original text and that he invited Émilie Du Châtelet to comment on the draft. A more tenable hypothesis is that both individuals were engaged in the collaborative editing of the text, either concurrently or in a successive manner.



## Application Details

We welcome applications from scholars with a keen interest in early modern philosophy, Enlightenment thought, or the history of science. To apply, please submit:

- An updated CV (max. 1 pages)
- A committed analysis of 1000 words on at least **one** of the above mentioned topics (Liberty / Mandeville / Colours / Grammar / Metaphysics). This paper will be discussed during the Libori Summer school's students session.

Please submit your documents via our mail:

**[contact@historyofwomenphilosophers.org](mailto:contact@historyofwomenphilosophers.org)**



- Hagenruber, R. E. (Ed.). (2022). *Époque Émilienne: Philosophy and science in the age of Émilie Du Châtelet (1706–1749)*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-030-89921-9>
- Hagenruber, R. E. (Ed.). (2019). *Émilie Du Châtelet und die deutsche Aufklärung*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-658-26137-6>
- Hagenruber, R. E. (Ed.). (2011). *Émilie Du Châtelet between Leibniz and Newton*. Springer. <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-94-007-4129-1>

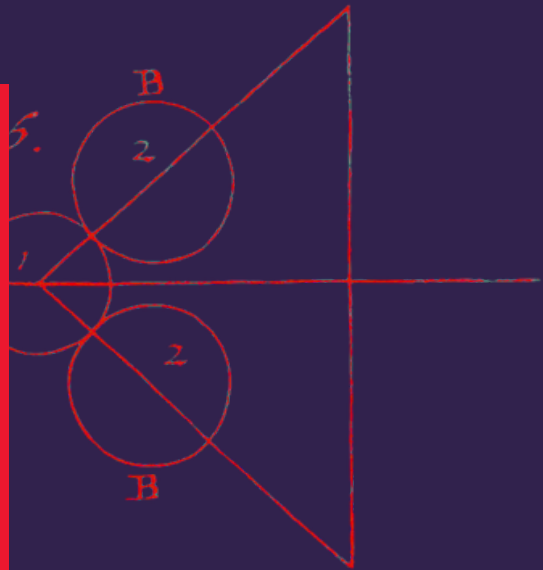




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*Fig. 75.*

