

Please Post

---

# Physics Colloquium

---

## “Newton’s Diagrams”

**Philip Catton**  
**Philosophy Department**  
**University of Canterbury**  
**Christ Church, New Zealand**

**Monday, April 19, 2010**  
**4:10 PM – 113 Roberts Hall**

Abstract: To fathom well why diagrams are for Newton no mere aids to pedagogy but rather fully essential to his reasoning in the Principia is to begin to comprehend Newton not in pieces but rather as one whole. Genius is epoch-making, so one looks back to genius always across a divide and thus with potential confusion. To understand Newton we need to appreciate our separation from him and in that, a connection. Newton towers as he does millennially (it is not hero-worship but simply good history to say). Therefore, in order to understand him, we must especially well understand where we ourselves are coming from. Heterogeneous by present-day lights, the many sides of Newton pose a challenge to us. Alchemist, theologian, magician, raging recluse, icon, mathematician, practical man, progenitor of physics as exact science, why must we struggle so, simply to understand the sides of this singular genius as forming one magnificent (if solitary) self? The key to solving this dilemma is the diagram. For to appreciate the diagram is to fathom many points all at once of separation of us from Newton. To appreciate the diagram is thus to be reminded of many points all at once of how Newton has affected our thought. The diagram therefore potentially steps us towards connecting with Newton comprehendingly, of him not in pieces but as one whole.

Host: John Neumeier/Jim Allard

This is a joint Physics/Philosophy colloquium.

Please Post