

Pierre Louis Moreau De Maupertuis

Encyclopedia Article

Pierre Louis Moreau De Maupertuis

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1698-1759

French mathematician whose Lapland expedition (1736), in conjunction with Charles La Condamine's 1735 Peru expedition, confirmed Isaac Newton's prediction that Earth is an oblate spheroid—bulging at the equator and flattened at the poles—thus helping establish Newton's theory of gravitation. Maupertuis also formulated the principle of least action (1745), which was widely influential in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century physical thinking and was later incorporated into quantum mechanics and the biological principle of homeostasis.