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faculty of philosophy

Mini-Colloquium on Early Modern Philosophy

with

Emily Thomas (Durham) and **Anik Waldow** (Sydney)

Friday, 10 January 2020, 3-7 pm

University of Groningen, Faculty of Philosophy, Room Beta
Organised by The Groningen Centre for Medieval and Early Modern Thought

All welcome!

Emily Thomas (Durham)

Philosophy and Joseph Priestley's Timeline A Chart of Biography

In 1765, polymath Joseph Priestly published A Chart of Biography, plotting human lives through history. Some scholars have hailed the Chart as the world's first timeline. In the companion piece published alongside it, A Description of a Chart of Biography, Priestley connects some of the Chart's innovations to his views on time. Historians of philosophy have explored many aspects of Priestley's work and the Chart has been studied by historians and visual theorists. However, there is no philosophical literature on the Chart, or on Priestley's views about time.

This paper takes the scholarship in a new direction, enquiring into the philosophy underpinning the innovations of Priestley's timeline. I argue Priestley rejected Newtonian absolutism about time; and was pushed towards representing times as lines by his Locke-inspired, pictorial view of time as an abstract idea. Finally, I'll show that Priestley's conception of time as a line made its way into a diverse set of later philosophers, from Immanuel Kant to Henri Bergson.

Anik Waldow (Sydney)

How not to be an uncouth monster? Hume on reflective pleasures

In this paper I argue that for Hume the acceptance of the other as a cognitive equal stands at the beginning of a process of reflection that generates a specific form of epistemic pleasure. This pleasure neutralises the experience of monstrous deformity Hume encounters at the end of Book I of the Treatise of Human Nature as a result of his sceptical doubts. It does so by placing the subject of experience into a community of like-minded creatures, and through this makes a rational engagement with the world possible. To substantiate this interpretation, I examine Claude Buffier, a French Jesuit writer whose works on common sense were available and widely read during the time Hume wrote his Treatise at La Flèche. I demonstrate that Hume's account of reflective judgement in Book III resonates with central aspects of Buffier's conception of agreement and concord, thereby inspiring a new understanding of the epistemic function of the feeling of humanity.