



The Noether Theorems: Invariance and Conservation Laws in the Twentieth Century (Sources and Studies in the History of Mathematics and Physical Sciences)

Yvette Kosmann-Schwarzbach

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In 1915 and 1916 Emmy Noether was asked by Felix Klein and David Hilbert to assist them in understanding issues involved in any attempt to formulate a general theory of relativity, in particular the new ideas of Einstein. She was consulted particularly over the difficult issue of the form a law of conservation of energy could take in the new theory, and she succeeded brilliantly, finding two deep theorems.

But between 1916 and 1950, the theorem was poorly understood and Noether's name disappeared almost entirely. People like Klein and Einstein did little more than mention her name in the various popular or historical accounts they wrote. Worse, earlier attempts which had been eclipsed by Noether's achievements were remembered, and sometimes figure in quick historical accounts of the time.

This book carries a translation of Noether's original paper into English, and then describes the strange history of its reception and the responses to her work. Ultimately the theorems became decisive in a shift from basing fundamental physics on conservation laws to basing it on symmetries, or at the very least, in thoroughly explaining the connection between these two families of ideas. The real significance of this book is that it shows very clearly how long it took before mathematicians and physicists began to recognize the seminal importance of Noether's results. This book is thoroughly researched and provides careful documentation of the textbook literature. Kosmann-Schwarzbach has thus thrown considerable light on this slow dance in which the mathematical tools necessary to study symmetry properties and conservation laws were apparently provided long before the orchestra arrives and the party begins.

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