

Translation of Isaac Newton's General Scholium to the *Principia* in *The Grub-street Journal* (1731)

*Let Reason then at her own quarry fly:
But how can finite grasp infinity?*

DRYDEN's Hind and Panther.

THE unwearied Pains, which a laborious Writer has taken to illustrate and explain to his Country-men, the Philosophy of the late incomparable Sir ISAAC NEWTON, having been rewarded by the Publick; in a manner so much beyond what he could ever hope; the least which the World my expect from this worthy Gentleman is, that if Sir ISAAC should yet remain obscure and unintelligible in any fundamental point, he would be pleased to oblige it with further explanations of his principles. And as it is of the highest importance to mankind, to have clear and distinct notions of the LORD GOD, his perfections, and providence, we beg of the Doctor, in the name of the Publick, to explain by a short comment, the meaning of the following *Creed*; which, it is imagined; was written by Sir ISAAC NEWTON, in imitation of S. ATHANASIUS's *Creed*, to convince the world, that his Religion was as much above that of the vulgar, as his Philosophy.

The NEWTONIAN CREED.

THIS Being governs all things, not as a soul of the world, but as Lord of the universe; and upon account of his dominion, he is stiled *Lord God*, supreme over all. For the word *God* is a relative term, and has reference to servants; and Deity is the dominion of God, not (such as a soul has) over a body of his own, which is the notion of those, who make God the soul of the world; but (such as a Governor has) over servants. The supreme GOD is an eternal, infinite, absolutely perfect Being: but a Being, how perfect soever,

without dominion, is not *Lord God*. For we say, *my God, your God, the God of Israel, the God of Gods, and Lord of Lords*. But we do not say, my Eternal, your Eternal, the Eternal of Israel, the Eternal of the Gods; we do not say, my Infinite, your Infinite, the Infinite of Israel; we do not say, my Perfect, your Perfect, the Perfect of Israel: for these terms have no relation to servants. The term GOD very frequently signifies *Lord*; but every *Lord* is not GOD. The dominion of a spiritual Being constitutes him GOD; true dominion, true GOD; supreme dominion, supreme GOD; imaginary dominion, imaginary GOD. And from his having true dominion, it follows, that the true GOD is living, intelligent, and powerful; from his other perfections it follows, that he is supreme, or most perfect. He is eternal and infinite, omnipotent and omniscient: that is, he continues from eternity to eternity; and is present from infinity to infinity: he governs all things, and knows all things which are done, or can be done, (known). He is not eternity and infinity, but eternal and infinite: He is not duration and space, but he has duration of existence, and is present. He continues always, and is present every where; and by existing always, and every where, he constitutes duration and space, (eternity and infinity). Since every part of space always is, and every indivisible moment of duration is everywhere; certainly the maker and Lord of all things cannot be said to be in no time, and no place. Every soul that hath perception at different times, and in different organs of the senses and motions, is the same individual Person. There are parts, successive in duration, co-existing in space, but neither of them in the person of a man, or his principle of cogitation: and much less are there any in the thinking substance of GOD. Every man,

as he is a Being that has perception, is one and the same man during his whole life, in all and every one of the organs of his senses. GOD is one and the same *God*, always, and every where. He is omnipresent, not by his power only, but in his very substance; for power cannot subsist without substance. In him all things are contained and move, but without any mutual affecting of each other: for GOD is not at all affected with the motions of bodies, neither do they find any resistance from the omnipresence of GOD. 'Tis agreed on all hands, that the supreme GOD necessarily exists; and by the same necessity, he exists always, and every where. Whence also it follows, that he is all similar, all eye, all ear, all brain, all arm, all sensation, all understanding, all active power: but this not after a human manner, not after a corporal manner; but after a manner wholly unknown to us. As a blind man has no idea of colours; so have we no notion of the ways, by which the most wise GOD perceives and understands all things. He is intirely without body

or bodily figure; and therefore can neither be seen, nor heard, nor touched: neither ought he to be worshipped under the representation of any corporeal thing.

P.S. We beg of the Doctor, that he would at the same time condescend to let us know, whether he had any, and what meaning, in the following words. * 'In short, we cannot conceive either of *space or time otherwise, than as necessarily existing*: this Being therefore, on whom all others depend, *must certainly exist by the same necessity of nature*. Consequently *wherever space and time is found, there GOD must also be*. And as it appears impossible to us, *that space should be limited, or that time should have had a beginning*, the Deity must be both immense and eternal.

*P 403 and 404 of Dr. PEMBERTON's *View of Sir ISAAC NEWTON's Philosophy*



Bibliographic details

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Correction

The page numbers in Henry Pemberton's *A view of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy* (1728) are 405-6, not 403-4.

Commentary

The Grub-Street Journal was a London satirical journal edited mostly by Richard Russel and John Martyn (the latter also known as a botanist). Its contributors included Alexander Pope. It ran from 1730 to 1738. It is possible that the editors were aware of rumours about Newton's unorthodoxy and thus chose to present this portion of the theological section of the General Scholium to draw attention to its potentially heretical elements. The editors appeal to Henry Pemberton, whose popularisation of Newton's *Principia* and *Opticks* appeared in his *A view of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy*. Pemberton (who may not have been privy to Newton's doctrinal heresies) only included a brief and not very revealing summary of the General Scholium in the conclusion of this book. Whiston complained about this, producing his *Corollaries* (1728), complete with English-language translation of most of the theological portion of the General Scholium, with the express purpose that it might bound at the end of Pemberton's volume—and indeed some surviving copies of Pemberton's *View* do have Whiston's *Corollaries* bound at the end. This added clue from a known antitrinitarian supporter of Newton may be one of the reasons why the editors of *The Grub-street Journal* made the provocative move

of publishing much of the theological portion of the General Scholium with the appeal to Pemberton. The translation used by the editors of the journal is the one that appears in Whiston's *Corollaries* (1728).