Henry Pemberton's summary of Newton's theological ideas in the General Scholium and the Queries to the *Opticks* in *A view of Newton's philosophy* (1728)

CONCLUSION.

SIR ISAAC NEWTON having concluded each of his philosophical treatises with some general reflections, I shall now take leave of my readers with a short account of what he has there delivered. At the end of his mathematical principles of natural philosophy he has given us his thoughts concerning the Deity. Wherein he first observes, that the similitude found in all parts of universe makes it undoubted, that the whole is governed by one supreme being, to whom the original is owing of the frame of nature, which evidently is the effect of choice and design. He then proceeds briefly to state the best metaphysical notions concerning God. In short, we cannot conceive either of space or time otherwise than as neces[406]sarily 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.

2. AT the end of his treatise of optics he has proposed some thoughts concerning other parts of nature, which he had not distinctly searched into. He begins with some farther reflections concerning light, which he had not fully examined. In particular he declares his sentiments at large concerning the power, whereby bodies and light act on each other. In some parts of his book he had given short hints at his opinion concerning this [a], but here he expressly declares his conjecture, which we have already mentioned [b], that this power is lodged in a very subtle spirit of a great elastic force diffused thro' the universe, producing not only this, but many other natural operations. He thinks it not impossible, that the power of gravity itself should be owing to it. On this occasion he enumerates many natural appearances, the chief of which are produced by chymical experiments. From numerous observations of this kind he makes no doubt, that the smallest parts of matter, when near contact, act strongly on each other, sometimes being mutually attracted, at other times repelled.

3. THE attractive power is more manifest than the other, for the parts of all bodies adhere by this principle. And the [407] name of attraction, which our author has given to it, has been very freely

[a] Opt. pag. 255.
[b] Ch. 3. §18.

made use of by many writers, and as much objected to by others. He has often complained to me of having been misunderstood in this matter. What he says upon this head was not intended by him as a philosophical explanation of any appearances, but only to point out a power in nature not hitherto distinctly observed, the cause of which, and the manner of its acting, he thought was worthy of a diligent enquiry. To acquiesce in the explanation of any appearance by asserting it to be a general power of attraction, is not to improve our knowledge in philosophy, but rather to put a stop to our farther search.

F I N I S.

Bibliographic details

Henry Pemberton, *A view of Sir Isaac Newton's philosophy*. London: Printed by S. Palmer, 1728, pp. 405-7.

Commentary

Pemberton's *View* provides a popular account of Newton's physics and optics. Unsatisfied with what he saw as the limited coverage of theological themes of Newton's writings in Pemberton's book, William Whiston published his sixteen-page quarto pamphlet *Sir Isaac Newton's corollaries from his philosophy and chronology, in his own words* [London, 1728], with the intent that it be bound at the end of Pemberton's *View*. Some booksellers and/or book owners evidently followed Whiston's recommendation, as some extant copies of the *View* have Whiston's *Corollaries* bound at the end.