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Newtonian Emanation, Spinozism, Measurement, and the Baconian Origins of the Laws of Nature

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Abstract

This paper investigates what Newton could have meant in a now famous passage from *De Gravitatione* (hereafter "DeGrav") that "space is as it were an emanative effect of God" (21). First I offer a careful examination of the four key passages within DeGrav that bear on this. I argue that the logic of Newton's argument permits several interpretations (section I). Second I sketch four options: i) one approach associated with the Cambridge Platonist, Thomas More, recently investigated by Dana Jalobeanu and Ed Slowik; ii) one traditional neo-Platonic approach; iii) a necessitarian approach associated with Howard Stein's interpretation, recently reaffirmed by Andrew Janiak; iv) an approach connected with Bacon's efforts to reformulate a useful notion of form and laws of nature. Hitherto only the first and third options have received scholarly attention. I offer arguments to treat Newtonian emanation as a species of Baconian formal causation and in this way to combine some of the most attractive elements of the first three options (section II). Finally in Section III, I suggest that the recent scholarly focus on emanation has obscured the importance of Newton's very interesting claims about existence and measurement in the same passage(s).

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