

# Kant's dynamic theory of matter in 1755, and its debt to speculative Newtonian experimentalism

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## Abstract

This paper explores the scientific sources behind Kant's early dynamic theory of matter in 1755, with a focus on two main Kant's writings: *Universal Natural History and Theory of the Heavens* and *On Fire*. The year 1755 has often been portrayed by Kantian scholars as a turning point in the intellectual career of the young Kant, with his much debated conversion to Newton. Via a careful analysis of some salient themes in the two aforementioned works, and a reconstruction of the scientific sources behind them, this paper shows Kant's debt to an often overlooked scientific tradition, i.e. speculative Newtonian experimentalism. The paper argues that more than the *Principia*, it was the speculative experimentalism that goes from Newton's *Opticks* to Herman Boerhaave's *Elementa chemiae* via Stephen Hales' *Vegetable Staticks* that played a central role in the elaboration of Kant's early dynamic theory of matter in 1755.

**Keywords:** Kant, repulsive force, ether, Newton, Hales, Boerhaave

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