
Historians of philosophy have become increasingly cautious about using the labels ‘rationalism’ and ‘empiricism’ to describe trends in seventeenth and early eighteenth century thought. Such locutions may be helpful heuristic devices (when, for instance, teaching an undergraduate survey course), but as scholars are now quick to point out, these labels ultimately fail to capture the novelty and nuance of early modern philosophies. Andrew Janiak brings the fruits of this trend in the history of philosophy to bear on Isaac Newton in his recent *Newton as Philosopher*. For, while it has long been commonplace to dub Newton as the champion of late seventeenth century empirical natural science and make him an emblem of empiricism’s philosophical success in the Enlightenment, Janiak offers a deep and far-reaching challenge to strict empiricist readings of Newton’s natural philosophical outlook and examines just how far Newton’s empiricist commitments extend. Janiak’s specific targets, as laid out in chapter 2, are two empiricist readings of Newton that have dominated recent scholarship: The first, which stretches back to the eighteenth century, renders Newton anti-metaphysical, that is, as a natural scientist ultimately opposed to addressing metaphysical questions; the second, forwarded more recently by Howard Stein and Robert DiSalle, claims that Newton’s empiricism spilled into metaphysics, such that Newton transformed metaphysics itself into a domain of empirical investigation. On both accounts, the very empiricism that brought Newton success in the domain of physics stands at the heart of his general philosophical commitments and ultimately shapes his views on metaphysics.

As an alternative, Janiak forwards an account that highlights the complicated interplay of metaphysics and physics in Newton’s thought and, specifically, stresses the complexity of Newton’s metaphysics. On his score, Newton adopts two types of metaphysics: ‘divine metaphysics’ and ‘mundane metaphysics.’ The latter is the metaphysics that bears the most conspicuous relationship to the investigation of nature Newton presents in his *Principia mathematica* (1687); it deals with questions of the nature of motion, the existence of various types of forces, and the type of causation involved in natural change (p. 45). However, divine metaphysics, while less conspicuous in the context of the *Principia*, serves a more central role in Newton’s thinking; it offers a fundamental conception of God’s nature and God’s relation to the natural world and is, for Janiak’s Newton, logically prior to the study of the natural world (pp. 47-48). In other words, whereas Janiak agrees with Stein and DiSalle that the physics of the *Principia* served as a guide for answering the questions of mundane metaphysics, Janiak proposes that Newton’s divine metaphysics ultimately shaped his physics. We thus have from Janiak a model for understanding the relationship between Newton’s physics and metaphysics that is more complicated and nuanced than what has been adopted by previous scholars and one which places Newton’s views about God at the very heart of his empirical study of nature.
To argue for the foundational role of God in Newton’s thinking and also his general account of how physics and metaphysics intersect in Newton’s thought, Janiak examines Newton’s apparent denial of action at a distance forces, his natural ontology (and specifically, the inclusion of mass in this ontology), and his account of God’s relationship to space. The basic aim of chapters 3-5 is to show that we cannot adequately understand Newton’s stance on these issues or his relationship to mechanist trends in the early modern period unless we take seriously the foundational role of divine metaphysics in Newton’s thought. And in the course of his examination, Janiak carves an impressively clear and thoughtful path through texts that are notoriously difficult to understand—such as the General Scholium of the *Principia*, the unpublished *De Gravitatione*, and letters included in Newton’s correspondence—and reconciles Newton’s seemingly contradictory and inconsistent claims. I cannot, without loss of complexity and detail, cover all of Janiak’s arguments here, but there are at least two achievements worth noting: (1) Janiak’s ability to shed light on the significance of mass for Newton’s ontology and the ways in which this enhanced ontology allowed Newton to distance himself from his mechanist contemporaries, most notably Descartes and Leibniz; and (2) Janiak’s novel reading of the different ways in which Newton treats God’s relationship to space in the General Scholium of the *Principia* and the unpublished *De Gravitatione*. These two treatments alone will make this book a centerpiece of discussion in Newton scholarship for years to come.

There are two further, more general issues that will also likely draw attention to Janiak’s work, which I will touch on briefly: The Kantian historiography that underwrites Janiak’s examination of Newton’s thought and a lingering question about the philosophical grounds of Newton’s divine metaphysics. When I say that Janiak adopts a Kantian historiography, I have in mind here his implicit commitment to the notion of the ‘regulative a priori’ (famously developed by Reichenbach and more recently by Friedman). In this particular case, it is Newton’s unrevisable, and in this narrow sense, ‘a priori’ divine metaphysics that serves the regulative role in his thought. One could, of course, make sense of Janiak’s interpretation by appeal to other models (say, a Lakatosian ‘research programme’ with God at Newton’s ‘core’), but the scattered references to Kant in the body of the text, the citations to several key pieces of recent Kant scholarship (primarily by Friedman), and especially Janiak’s treatment of absolute and relative space in chapter 5 indicate that the Kantian notion of regulative ideas of reason plays a defining role in Janiak’s treatment.

Unto itself, the Kantian flavor of Janiak’s account raises no serious problems, for Janiak has backed up his model with enough evidence to show that, however Kantian it might be, it is at the same time viable and well-grounded. However, the Kantianism of Janiak’s account does lead to another issue, namely, Newton’s justification for the regulative principles—the divine metaphysics—that guided his natural philosophical investigations. As I indicated above, Janiak separates divine metaphysics from mundane metaphysics based in part on the subject matter of each. Broadly speaking, the former treats God’s fundamental qualities and God’s general relationship to nature, while the latter treats motions, forces, and causation. However, there is something more essential that Janiak claims separates these domains: the claims of mundane metaphysics