



SUMMARY

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**Isaac Newton's Hermeneutical Methods in his Light of
Natural Philosophy**

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Summery

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Isaac Newton, the world-famous English scientist, was a genuine polyhistor of his age who was at home not only in physics, mathematics, and astronomy, but also in geography, history, chemistry (alchemy), and theology. Newton lived a zealous religious life for most of his life and read the Bible daily due to his puritan background. The scholar began to show a keen interest in religious matters, especially from the 1670s. The result of his years of theological research at home is the thousands of pages of theological manuscript that goes far beyond the scope of his scientific work. Although none of these papers were published during his lifetime, he was nevertheless regarded by his students and colleagues as a remarkable theologian. In my dissertation, I present the alternatives of early modern England in relation to the dialogue between natural philosophy and theology with a partial description of the theology of the believing scholar.

In Amos Funkenstein, Newton's theology can be called *secular theology*, since Newton himself received a basic theological education but did not become a consecrated priest, but developed in other areas of natural philosophy. For this reason, his religious interest did not fall into the category of *sacred theology*, but in the category of *natural theology*. In my dissertation, I examine the quality of this theology, and my interest is mostly methodological. Newton's *secular theology* focused primarily on independence. In his ecclesiastical critique, he has repeatedly criticized the influence of human and religious interests that he was able to get rid of with his own theology. In the 17th century secular theology re-emphasized Homogeneous divine presence, admitting the physical, equal, homogeneous presence of God everywhere — with or without a material substrate — could amount to a relativization of Christology and make the sacraments and the hierarchical Church superfluous. For Newton, the methodology was a secular tool by which he was able to decouple himself from religious commitments and the historical approach in his day was one of the most modern and secular tools for exploring the message of scripture.

As we know, the most important philosophical question of the 17th century was, what is the way we can work? This is why Newton's work has become the most suitable "case-study" for me to get answers to the mainly hermeneutical questions that concern me. On the one hand, according to Wilhelm Dilthey's suggestion, can we or should we distinguish between science and the humanities? When we study Scripture or nature, do we derive the truth through hard work by reasoning, or do we suddenly become enlightened through revelation? Further analyzing the same problem, we can ask Gadamer's question of whether truth is possible beyond methodological boundaries. In the England of the age, the experimental method involved the conscious use of controlled observations combined with accurate measurements, and the question was whether Newton and his followers could apply this methodological thinking to other areas such as theology. The big question in the early modern age is whether we are working in a good way and can the tools of one scientific subject be used in another? In this dissertation, the relationship between philosophy, the natural sciences and theology is relevant solely from this point of view, as this is the only way to interpret the questions of Newton's age. Newton's work provides an excellent solution to that.

The aim of the dissertation:

One of the aims of my dissertation was to correct the portrait of Newton living in Hungary and to clarify the portrait of his religion abroad. To do this, on the one hand, we had to cast off the notion of a lone genius that emerged from Newton. On the other hand, we had to dissolve him from the myth of the creator of the mechanical worldview. Third, we had to face the deep faith motivations of the religious scholar. At the same time, our thinking about the relationship between science and theology may change and we may raise new methodological issues in relation to the so-called human and real disciplines. Based on these, I would like Newton's reception in Hungary to be supplemented with a portrait of Newton, the believer which, despite the foreign presentations, has not really prevailed in Hungary yet. In addition to expanding Newton's reception in Hungary, I would supplement with my studies the foreign reception on Newton, the believer: Whether Newton's faith is integrated into the evaluation of his scholarly work or not. Instead of the two extreme approaches of either completely ignoring Newton's religion from his scientific accomplishments or associating it entirely with his faith, I recommend a third path. Keeping in mind the scholar's *ars poetica* that he does not confuse theology with philosophy, while showing when he does this I assume the anomaly that strains Newton's oeuvre in this regard.

My theses in chronological order:

In the second chapter, (*The Relationship between Natural Philosophy, Science, Philosophy, and Theology*), after presenting Newton's oeuvre in the broader historical and philosophical context of the development of the disciplines, I presented Newton's anti-mechanics philosophy and secular theology. Finally, I illustrated his working method through his text-critical work.

I have shown that in Newton's time, in addition to mechanical philosophy, a new alternative, the so-called experimental philosophy appeared. Newton joined the ranks of English scientists who accused Descartes of atheism, and argued for his own law of gravity that even if the cause of gravity was unknown, it was certain that the cause could not be mechanical. Despite all subsequent interpretations, Newton did not want to create an automatic mechanical world in his *Principia*. Newton's universe does not function forever by natural laws alone, and is sometimes slowed down or corrected by the friction of motion, so the Creator must sometimes intervene directly in the flow of the world until the end of history as prophesied in Scripture.

2. According to Amos Funkenstein, Newton's theology can be called *secular theology*, since Newton himself received a basic theological education but did not become a consecrated priest, but rather composed in other fields of natural philosophy. For this reason, his religious interest does not fall into the category of theology called *sacred*, but in the category of *natural theology*. This does not mean, however, that Newton developed simply natural theology. Although his focus is indeed on the study of nature and his approach is reasonable, revelation is still an important basis for his research. He does not devote his research to the making of god arguments, for him the existence of God is a starting point. The adjective "secular" refers to Newton's intellectual independence. In his critique of the Church, he has repeatedly criticized the influence of human and religious interests that he wanted to get rid of in his own theology.

3. Moreover, secular theology was not only important in terms of scientific neutrality, but, on the contrary, was a kind of political position in a Europe laden with a religious war. Newton did not interfere in the doctrines that demanded exclusivity for themselves. Therefore, Newton considered the religious debates to be the poisonous effects of philosophy or the imaginative questions of ignorant people that were not originally inherent in Christianity.

4. Newton practices a minimalist theology that is not just about knowing God but about limiting human pride. He also uses this minimalism in his philosophical works insofar as he ignores his hypotheses. Our author was not interested in what we do not know about God, but in what we know. And the activity of God can be quantified, grasped, and described in the language of mathematics. The attitude of the philosophy of nature to the divine questions thus benefited him in any case.

5. Newton examined the nature of God according to the rules of natural philosophy. As he argues in his *General Scholium*, to discuss God on the basis of phenomena is certainly a matter of natural philosophy. Although we do not know the essence of the Lord, we perceive it through its active activity, just as we perceive the effect of gravity in physics.

6. Newton practiced his methods of explanatory writing under the influence of the scientific methodologies used in the philosophy of his age and in the spirit of the idea of "reasonableness". He supplemented the questions of authorship the correct timekeeping and correct observance of the chronological order. Newton also added to the text of Scripture because to reach out, and as I illustrated in *Two Notable...*, subsequent insertions can be accurately detected based on a careful examination of the manuscripts. Because Newton used the scientific tools of the age that were considered canonical, his hermeneutics was scientifically demanding in light of his age, leading to a number of results that are still valid today.

7. The third chapter (*Regulae philosophandi*) was a description of the four *rules for reasoning* named in the Principia, an interpretation of their general philosophical and historical history, and a discussion of the main problems associated with them. I then demonstrated the use of the four rules in Newton's religious texts so Newton also applied the four *rules for reasoning* (regulae philosophandi) in his interpretation of the scriptures. My thesis was inspired by the observation in the literature that there is a close connection between Newton's rules *for reasoning* and his theological methods, but despite raising foreign studies, their detailed explanation, review or revision has been done only in part, in my opinion.

8. My aim was to point out that the *rules for reasoning* are applied not only in the context of the Principia and more narrowly the law of gravity, but were the general guiding principle of Newton's thinking. Newton predominantly used on the "tools" of *simplicity, analogy, induction, non-hypothesis, and consistency* in his natural philosophy. These methods were common and canonized methods of the age in experimental philosophy. Since all of these are not special methods of a discipline, but elements of our general thinking, the same tools appear in

his religious writings. In a longer theological-hermeneutic *Excursus*, I pointed out that methods such as analogy or induction have always been present in the written texts, including the interpretive processes of the Bible, despite the fact that these procedures are common in the natural sciences tools as well.

9. In the fourth chapter, "*Hypotheses non fingo*," I argued that, contrary to other observations in the literature, changes in Newton's use of the hypothesis are not due to the author's tactics, nor do they suggest inconsistencies. In my opinion, Newton consciously clarified his notion of the hypothesis, especially after apostrophizing his own philosophy as an experimental philosophy.

10. I then examined Newton's religious writings, where I demonstrated that the theology of distinguishing between certain and only hypothetical truths was central to his philosophy. Newton, as he distinguishes between verifiable and conditional statements in philosophy, makes a distinction in theology between the explicit statements of Scripture and the possible conclusion that arises beyond that. Although philosophical or religious hypotheses are always accompanied by the temptation of imagination, they can also have benefits. In philosophy, the scientist can prescribe a further research program with his assumptions, and in religion he can enjoy the joy of questioning and inference, while avoiding accusations of the heretic, thus creating the conditions for a dogma-free, free-thinking.

11. My final *Conclusion* is that Newton has no single method, only methods. He fished his techniques from the deep sea of the history of philosophy, from the methods of the ancient philosophers to the most fashionable means of his time. Newton always used the strategies he needed. He had no methodological commitments and alternated between different methods. Newton's methods were therefore not final commitments but presentational possibilities.

12. Newton states that he does not confuse methodologies and that the methods of scriptural interpretation differ from, for example, mathematical proofs, but in practice he often combines his tools. Newton, therefore, at the level of formulation, in accordance with the requirements of the age, wants to distinguish between theological and scientific methodology. The setting of disciplinary boundaries, however, is just as characteristic of Newton's work as it is of its synthesis. In my dissertation I point out that the constant tension between Newton's statements gives rise to completely different interpretations of the literature.

13. I think Newton was forced to name methods because of the compelling power of his own age, even in situations where his discoveries came to him in a much more intuitive way, just like most discoveries by most scientists.