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978-0-521-10734-1 - Ideas, Qualities and Corpuscles: Locke and Boyle on the External World

Peter Alexander

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## IDEAS, QUALITIES AND CORPUSCLES

LOCKE AND BOYLE ON THE EXTERNAL WORLD

This study presents a substantial and often radical reinterpretation of some of the central themes of Locke's thought. Professor Alexander concentrates on the *Essay Concerning Human Understanding* and aims to restore that to its proper historical context. In Part I he gives a clear exposition of some of the scientific theories of Robert Boyle, which, he argues, heavily influenced Locke in employing similar concepts and a similar world-picture. Against this background, he goes on in Part II to provide an account of Locke's views on the external world and our knowledge of it. He shows those views to be more consistent and plausible than is generally allowed, demonstrating how they make sense of and enable scientific explanations of nature. In examining the views of Locke and Boyle together, the book throws new light both on the development of philosophy and the beginnings of modern science, and in particular it makes a considerable and original contribution to our understanding of Locke's philosophy.

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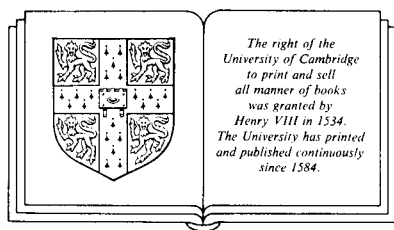
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‘Curley on Locke and Boyle’, *The Philosophical Review*, LXXXIII, 1974;

‘The names of secondary qualities’, *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society*, LXXVII, 1977;

‘Boyle and Locke on primary and secondary qualities’, *Ratio*, XVI, 1974; and

‘Locke on substance-in-general, I and II’, *Ratio*, XXII, 1980, and *Ratio*, XXIII, 1981.

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## PREFACE

In the course of preparing this book I have had helpful criticisms and suggestions from colleagues and students, too numerous to mention individually, in British, Irish and American universities. I have been particularly helped by my colleagues at the University of Bristol, who have remained unfailingly cheerful and stimulating through my many assaults on their time and patience and my frequent insistence on turning the conversation to Locke. I am grateful to Yvonne Kaye and Doreen Harding for typing, advice, moral support and equanimity in the face of my many changes of mind; to my wife for putting up with it all for so long; and to two anonymous publisher's readers who helped me to improve the final version, even if less than they hoped. My thanks to all these.

P.A.

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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

- E*: Everyman Edition of *S.C.* (see below), ed. Pattison Muir. p.310, note 8.
- E.C.T.C.*: Boyle, *Experiments and Considerations Touching Colours* in *Works* 1772. p.309, note 5.
- E.G.*: Boyle, *About the Excellency & Grounds of the Mechanical Hypothesis*, in *Works* 1772. p.312, note 3.
- F*: Facsimile of *first* edition of *E.C.T.C.* p.309, note 5.
- L.S.*: Locke, Letters to Stillingfleet in *Works* 1823. p.315, note 1.
- O.F.Q.*: Boyle, *The Origin of Forms & Qualities* in *Works* 1772. p.310, note 1.
- S.*: Extracts from Boyle's works in Stewart, *Philosophical Papers*.
- S.C.*: Boyle, *The Sceptical Chymist* in *Works* 1772. p.310, note 8.