

Samuel Clarke
(1675-1729)

PREFACE TO HIS LATIN TRANSLATION OF
ROHAULT'S *PHYSICS*
[1697]

(This book was the official physics text in use at Cambridge until 1718)

I have two reasons for undertaking this translation: first the usefulness of the book; second, the incompetence of the Latin translation in common use (i. e. that of Bonet).

As far as the usefulness of this book is concerned, I am not one to treat the teachings of my author as if they had the undoubted truth of an oracle of Apollo. And I have never agreed with that wonderfully observant person who was convinced that he saw clearly in the word, [ὐρανός] (Heaven, cf. *Genesis* I, 8) the fine particles of the first element, and the globular particles of the second (i. e. air and water). By their impact, some modern experiments have shown that certain ideas have to be changed; and by their perceptive work, some modern philosophers have given us cause to correct certain things, as we shall see further in the notes. But, even if they do it unwillingly, our adversaries must admit that most of what our author says is true, or at least, seems to be as conclusively proved as possible. And the elegance of concept and statement, and brevity and pithiness of exposition, will hardly escape them, especially in the last eight chapters of the first part which deal with Optics and the physics of Reflection and Refraction, which are by far the richest parts of Physics. But of that, let the reader judge for himself.

As far as the published version is concerned, the following examples will show how

gravely the ignorance of the translator has wronged our author...: Part I. chapter 15. Article 13: “And the same thing is to be seen in stones which children throw into the water”. This is not what the author was getting at. He wrote: “On observe aussi la mesme chose dans ces pierres, que les enfants jettent sur l’eau, avec lesquels [*sic*] ils font des ricochets.” This should be: “The same thing can be seen in the stones which children send skimming over water, and which skip over the surface...”

I need few words to introduce this edition. I was not overscrupulous about words because I tried to render the sense of the author faithfully and clearly. Technical terms, even those with little authority in the language, I have kept where necessary to make my version clearer and have it conform to the most recent usage among philosophers, but what seemed absolutely barbarous, I thought better to eliminate. I am not one to believe that good latinity is worlds away from philosophy.

In the notes, I have tried to soften what many have rightly objected to in our author; and what the more fortunate work of modern philosophers has recently brought from darkness into light, I have excerpted from the best authors. I have also added certain observations from ancient physicists and writers on Natural History when they seemed relevant to the matter in hand. Part IV is a little shorter and not entirely satisfactory. Hence I have thought it enough to refer the reader to more recent anatomists who have treated the subject clearly and fully, rather than to transcribe too much.