



Optics in the Age of Euler: Conceptions of the Nature of Light, 1700-1795

Casper Hakfoort

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This book studies the eighteenth-century origins and early phase of a fundamental debate in optics: whether light is a particle or wave. Specifically, it is the first in-depth study of the contents and reception of Leonhard Euler's wave theory of light. The author shows that contrary to what has been assumed, the debate did not start in 1672 with Newton's particle theory of light. Rather, it only really got under way after Euler published his wave theory in 1746. He also corrects the misapprehension that Newton's theory was prevalently held in Germany in the early years of the debate, but really only became dominant around 1795. In his discussion, Professor Hakfoort demonstrates in dramatic fashion the relevance of chemical experiments on physical optics. Finally, in the epilogue, the author reflects on the mathematical, experimental, and metaphysical aspects of physical optics that shaped early modern science.

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