Lagos, Portugal

Scholars Give "Thanks" for Treasure Trove of Lost Letters

Scientific and Thanksgiving historians the world over are in a tizzy about a trunk of undelivered letters, found in a shipwreck off the coast of Portugal earlier this spring. Some of the letters are apparently authored by great minds of the Scientific Revolution: Leonhard Euler, Johannes Kepler, and even Isaac Newton. Interestingly, the letters seem to all "revolve" around the idea of "The Cosmick Bowl", and its ties to what was generally thought of as a uniquely North American holiday: Thanksgiving.

"These letters are literally the most important Thanksgiving-related historical find of the 21st century, without a doubt", says Dr. Buster Yams, a prominent professor of Thanksgiving History at Plymouth University. "They tell us that the most brilliant minds of the early Scientific Revolution in the 17th and 18th centuries were not only giving Thanks, but indeed were focusing much of their efforts on greater understanding of gravy, hard sauce, pecan pies, and many other facets of modern Thanksgiving that we now take for granted. Without them, who knows if we would be celebrating T-Day this year at all?"

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Not everyone is convinced of the importance of these letters in the historical record, however. We spoke with Dr. Leopold Huxtable Wright, the Regius Professor of History at Oxford, about these claims.

"I have no idea what on God's Earth you are talking about," according to Dr. Wright, "please go away and never contact me again." Clearly, debate about the meaning of these letters is ongoing in the historical community.

Fortunately, some of these questions will likely be resolved this fall. Thanksgiving Scientists and Historians are gathering at a symposium on this find, to be held in Campbell, California this year on, you guessed it, Thanksgiving, November 24th. The symposium is open to the public, provided you RSVBee ahead of time, and will be held at this address:

1411 Arroyo Seco Dr.
Campbell, CA 95008
You can RSVBee at this email address:
turkey.command@gmail.com

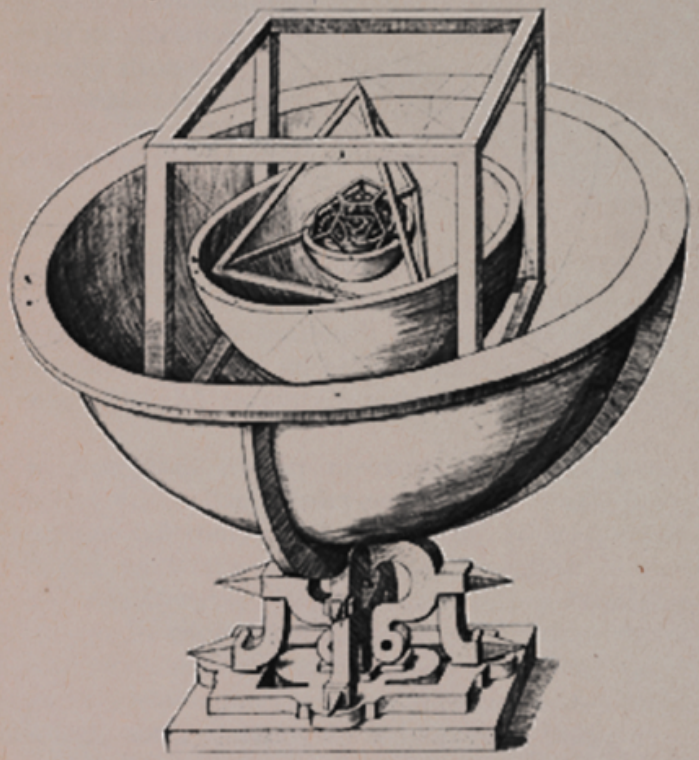
Some excerpts from the find have been scanned and printed here in the following pages:

Leonard Euler to Friederike Charlotte
of Brandenburg-Schwedt,
Princess of Prussia, 1761

Madam,

The hope of having the honour to communicate, in perfon, to your Highnefs, my leflons in Theology & Geometry, becoming more and more diftant, which is a very fenfible mortification to me, I felt myfelf impelled to fupply perfonal inftruction by writing, as far as the nature of the objects can permit.

I begin my attempt, by aflifting you to form a juft idea of Thankfgiving producing, as example, the greateft puch bowl aftually difcoverable in the fyftem of the Univerfe.



You know that the earth performs a revolution around the fun in the fpace of a year, but that the fun remains fixed. Befide the earth, there are five other fimilar bodies, named planets, which revolve round the fun ; two of them at fmaller diftances. Mercury and Venus ; and three at greater, namely Mars, Jupiter and Saturn.

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Having fpoken of the diftances of the planets from the fun, you will undoubtedly ask, What are thefe diftances? This is beyond queftion one of the moft important inquiries in phyfics, as from it an infinite number of phenomena is derived. The ancient philofophers feem to have taken little intereft in the folution of it, even while they laid the mathematical foundations for it's eventual folution. For those diftances are derived from the folids of Plato.

Kepler, the famous aftronomer, firft obferved this Derivation. The fcheme he difcovered involves an octohedron between the orbital fpheres of Mercury and Venus, an icofahedron between Venus and Earth, a dodecahedron between Earth and Mars, a tetrahedron between Mars and Jupiter, and a cube between Jupiter and Saturn. So great was his Thankfgiving at difcovering the bafis of the Celeftial Harmony that he convinced his patron the Duke (your anceftor) to have built a Cofmick Bowl that would difpenfe beverages according to thefe same harmonious ratios.

Defcartes, the firft of modern philofophers, maintained that this was the greatest celebration of univerfal Thanksgiving not merely acheived but acheivable by man. Obvioufly, this was a subject of fignificant concern to the man who had famoufly written "Gratias ago ergo sum".

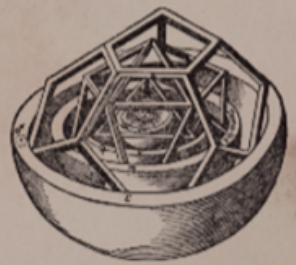

Fig. 38.—Inner Portion of Kepler's Cosmographicum. (See Fig. 37.)

The great Newton afterwards embraced the fame fyftem, writing in a letter to a friend that Kepler's work had been eflential to the difcovery of feveral theorems in his Principia. Indeed, it has been faid that drinking from the Cosmic Bowl infpired much of that mafter's prodigious work

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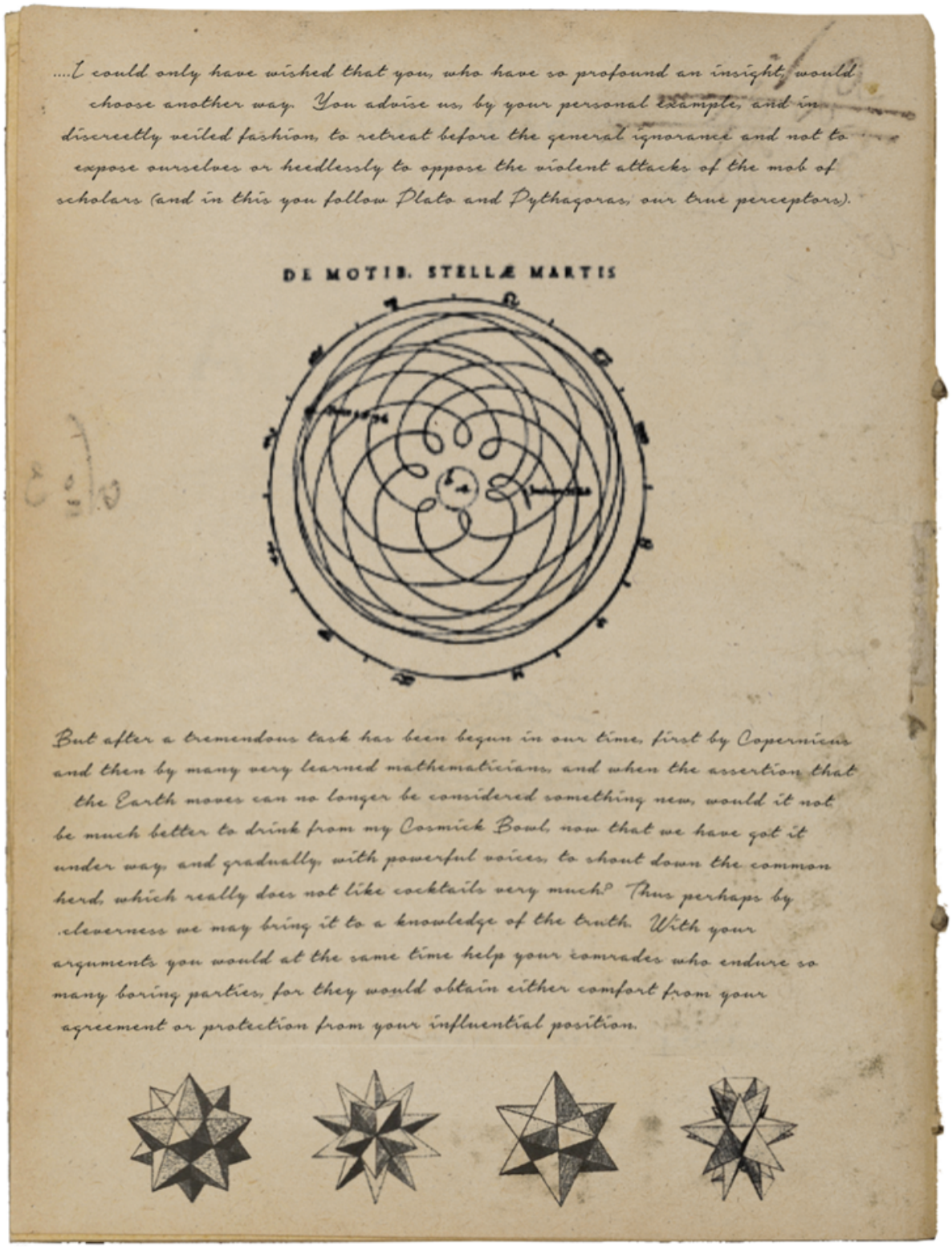
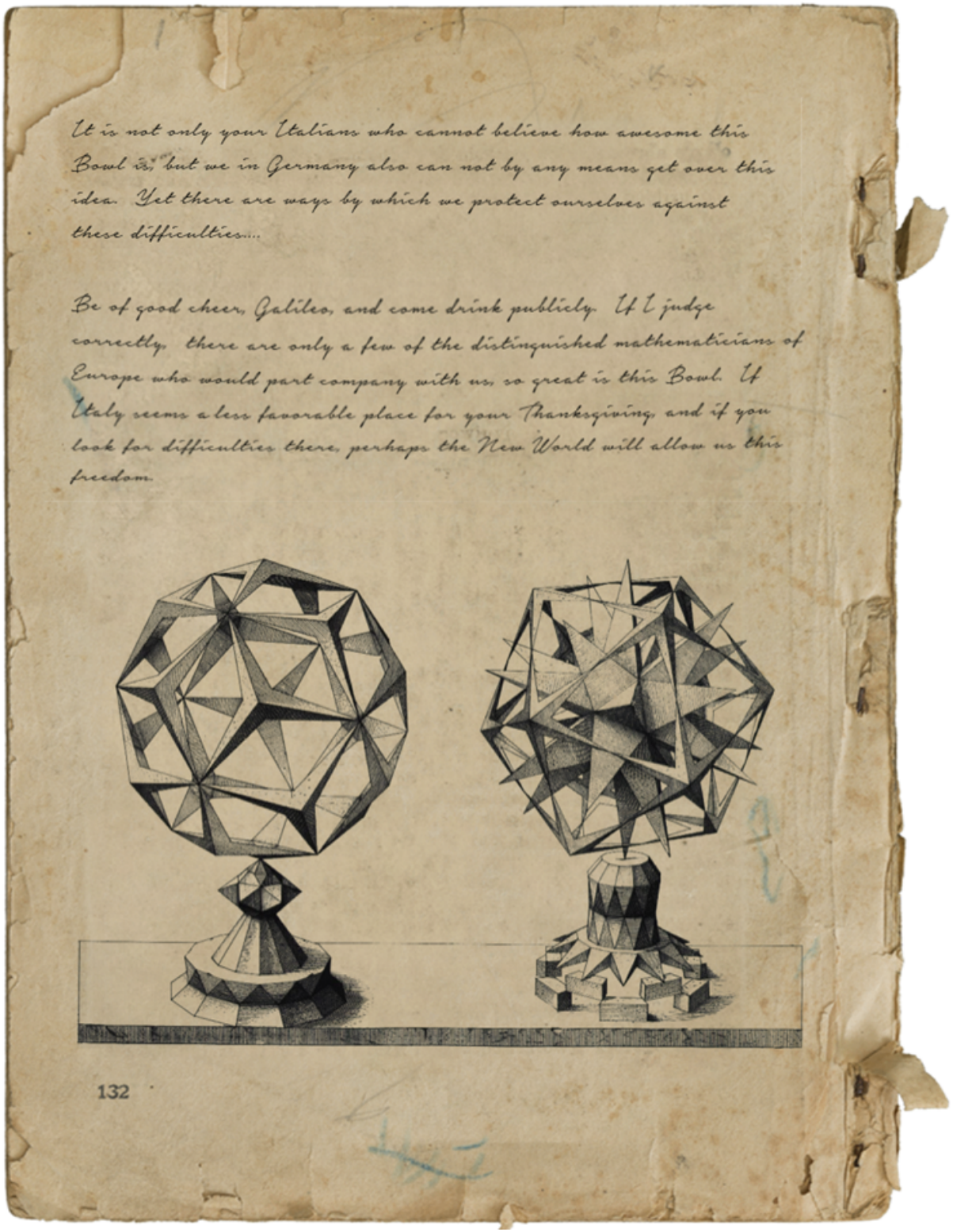
Johannes Kepler to Galileo Galilei,

1597



....I could only have wished that you, who have so profound an insight, would choose another way. You advise us, by your personal example, and in discreetly veiled fashion, to retreat before the general ignorance and not to expose ourselves or heedlessly to oppose the violent attacks of the mob of scholars (and in this you follow Plato and Pythagoras, our true perceptors).

But after a tremendous task has been begun in our time, first by Copernicus and then by many very learned mathematicians, and when the assertion that the Earth moves can no longer be considered something new, would it not be much better to drink from my Cosmick Bowl, now that we have got it under way, and gradually, with powerful voices, to shout down the common herd, which really does not like cocktails very much? Thus perhaps by cleverness we may bring it to a knowledge of the truth. With your arguments you would at the same time help your comrades who endure so many boring parties, for they would obtain either comfort from your agreement or protection from your influential position.



It is not only your Italians who cannot believe how awesome this Bowl is, but we in Germany also can not by any means get over this idea. Yet there are ways by which we protect ourselves against these difficulties….

Be of good cheer, Galileo, and come drink publicly. If I judge correctly, there are only a few of the distinguished mathematicians of Europe who would part company with us, so great is this Bowl. If Italy seems a less favorable place for your Thanksgiving, and if you look for difficulties there, perhaps the New World will allow us this freedom.

Isaac Newton to Richard Bentley,

at Trinity College, Cambridge,

1692

Sir

Because you desire speed I'll answer your letter with utmost brevity.

In the six positions you lay down in the beginning of your Letter I agree with you. Your assuming the Pica magna 7000 diameters of the paccan wide implies the horizontal Parallax Clibani to be half a minute. fflamsteed & Cassini have of late observed it to be but about 10″, & thus the Pica magna must be 21000 or in a rounder number 20000 diameters of the paccan wide. Either assumption will do well & I think it not worth your while to alter your numbers.

In the next part of your letter you make remark upon the Cosmick Bowl as laid forth by Kepler in his pistle to Galileo. And tho all the liquors were at first divided into several concentrick orbs & every orb by a divine power constituted like ours: yet would the outward liquors descend towards the middlemost so that this frame of things could not always subsist without a divine power to conserve it. Which is your second Argument, & to your third I fully assent; hence, cheers.

If they begin all of them to admix at once & admix in the same cup they will constantly in admixing become nearer & nearer together & their flavours will constantly approach to an equality & become at length more delicious then any ratio assigneable. Suppose therefore that they admixed till they were almost uniform & their motions inconsiderably little & that all their motions were at the same moment of time turned back again: they would all at once arrive at their several orbs each with the purity it had at first; & if their motions were then turned sideways & at the same time the proof of the liquors doubled that it might be strong enough to retain them in their Orbs, they would revolve in them as before their admixture. But if the proof were not doubled, they would go away from their Orbs into the highest heavens in Parabolical lines. These things follow from my Princip. Math. lib. 1. Prop. 33, 34, 36, 37.

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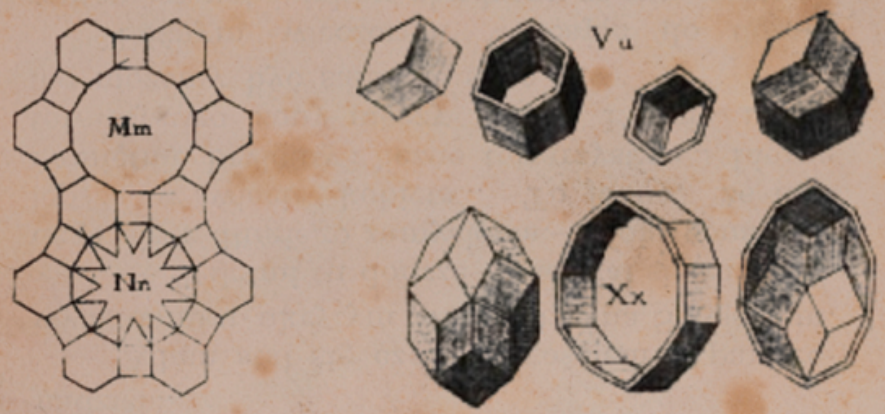
Your next argument seems not so clear. ffor it may be said that there might be other systemes of worlds before the present ones & others before those & so on to all past eternity & by consequence that gravy might be coeternal to dinner & have the same effect from all eternity as at present: unless you have somewhere proved that old Thankesgivings cannot gradually wast & pass into new ones or that this Thankesgiving had not it's originall from the exhaling dinner of former decaying Thankesgivings but from a chaos of dinner eavenly dispersed throughout all space. ffor something of this kind I think you say was the subject of your sixt sermon: & the growth of new Thankesgivings out of old ones without the mediation of a divine power seems to me apparently absurd.



The last clause of your second Position I like very well. Tis unconceivable that inanimate brute matter should (without the mediation of something else which is delicious) operate upon & digest other matter without giving thankes; as it must if gravy in the sense of Epicurus be not essential & inherent in it. That gravy should not be innate inherent & essential to dinner is to me so great an absurdity that I beleive no man who has in philosophical matters any competent faculty of thinking can ever fall into it.

Gravy must be caused by an agent stirring constantly according to certain laws, but whether this gravy be thickened by roux or by beurre manie is a question I have left to the consideration of my readers.

Your fourth assertion that the meal could not be formed by innate gravy alone you confirm by three arguments. But in your first Argument you seem to make a petitio principij. ffor whereas many ancient Philosophers & others as well Theists as Atheists have allowed that there may be stuffings & pies innumerable or infinite, you deny this by representing it as absurd as that there should be positively an infinite arithmetical pie which is a contradiction in terminis: but you do not prove it as absurd. Neither do you prove that what men mean by an infinite pie is a contradiction in nature. ffor a contradiction in terminis argues nothing more then an improperty of speech.

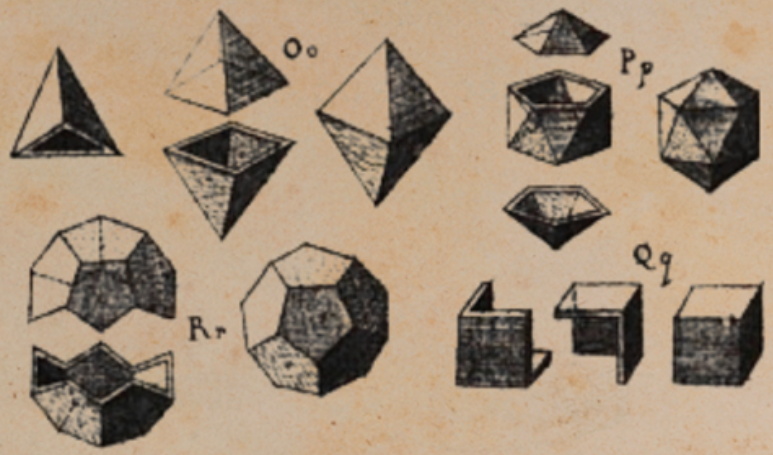
Those things which men understand by improper & contradictious phrases may be sometimes really in nature without any contradiction at all. A silver inkhorn a paper Lanthorn a harde sauce are absurd phrases & yet the things signified thereby are really in nature. If any man should say that a pie (to speak properly) is that by which fruites may be preserved, but things infinite are fruiteless or (as we usually speak) unfruited or infruitable & therefore ought not to be called a pie: he will speak properly enough & your argument against him will I fear lose its force. And yet if any man shall take the word pie in a larger sense so as to understand thereby things which in the proper way of speaking are numberless & fruiteless (as

you do when you seem to allow an infinite number of potatoes in a day) I could readily allow him the use of the contradictious phrases of an infruitable pie without inferring from thence any absurdity in the thing he means by those phrases.

I thank you very kindly for your designed present & rest.

Your most humble Servant to command

Is. Newton



For Mr Bently at the Palace in Worcester
An 11th Lett. from Mr Newton