

From R. Boyle, *Experiments and considerations touching colours*, London 1664

11. And, *Pyrophilus*, that you may not think me altogether extravagant in what I have said of the Possibility, (for I speak of no more) of discerning the differing forms of [pg 42]

Asperity in the Surfaces of Bodies of several Colours, I'll here set down a Memorable particular that chanc'd to come to my Knowledge, since I write a good part of this *Essay*; and it is this. Meeting casually the other Day with the deservedly Famous⁴ Dr. *J. Finch*, Extraordinary *Anatomist* to that Great Patron of the *Virtuosi*, the now Great Duke of *Toscany*, and enquiring of this Ingenious Person, what might be the chief Rarity he had seen in his late return out of *Italy* into *England*, he told me, it was a Man at *Maestricht* in the Low-Countrys, who at certain times can discern and *distinguish Colours by the Touch* with his Fingers. You'll easily Conclude, that this is far more strange, than what I propos'd but as *not Impossible*; since the Sense of the *Retina* seeming to be much more Tender and quick than that of those Grosser Filaments, Nerves or Membranes of our Fingers, wherewith we use to handle Gross and Hard Bodies, it seems scarce credible, that any Accustomance, or Diet, or peculiarity of Constitution, should enable a Man to distinguish with such Gross and Unsuitable Organs, such Nice and Subtile Differences as those of the forms of Asperity, that belong to differing Colours, to receive whose Languid and Delicate Impressions by the Intervention of Light, Nature seems to have appointed and contexted into the [pg 43]

Retina the tender and delicate Pith of the Optick Nerve. Wherefore I confess, I propos'd divers Scruples, and particularly whether the Doctor had taken care to bind a Napkin or Hankerchief over his Eyes so carefully, as to be sure he could make no use of his Sight, though he had but Counterfeited the want of it, to which I added divers other Questions, to satisfie my Self, whether there were any Likelihood of Collusion or other Tricks. But I found that the Judicious Doctor having gone farr out of his way, purposely to satisfie Himself and his Learned Prince about this Wonder, had been very Watchfull and Circumspect to keep *Himself* from being Impos'd upon. And that he might not through any mistake in point of Memory mis-inform *Me*, he did me the Favour at my Request, to look out the Notes he had Written for his

~~Companion, Dr. Finch, touching the same Subject, Memorably, &c.~~ That the Doctor having been inform'd at *Utrecht*, that there Lived one at some Miles distance from *Maestricht*, who could distinguish Colours by the Touch, when he came to the last nam'd Town, he sent a Messenger for him, and having Examin'd him, was told upon Enquiry these Particulars: [pg 44]

That the Man's name was *John Vermaasen*, at that time about 33 Years of Age; that when he was but two years Old, he had the Small Pox, which rendred him absolutely Blind: That at this present he is an *Organist*, and serves that Office in a publick Quire.

That the Doctor discoursing with him over Night, the Blind man affirm'd, that he could distinguish Colours by the Touch, but that he could not do it, unless he were Fasting; Any quantity of Drink taking from him that Exquisite of Touch, which is requisite to so Nice a Sensation.

That hereupon the Doctor provided against the next Morning seven pieces of Ribbon, of these seven Colours, Black, White, Red, Blew, Green, Yellow, and Gray, but as for mingled Colours, this *Vermaasen* would not undertake to discern them, though if offer'd, he would tell that they were *Mix'd*.

That to discern the Colour of the Ribbon, he places it betwixt the Thumb and the Fore-finger, but his most exquisite perception was in his Thumb, and much better in the right Thumb than in the left. [pg 45]

~~That after the Blind man had several times told the Doctor the several Colours, (though Blinded with a Napkin, so that he might have some Sight) the Doctor found he was twice mistaken, for he call'd the White Black, and the Red Blew, but still, he, before his Errour, would lay them by in Pairs, saying, that though he could easily distinguish them from all others, yet those two Pairs were not easily distinguish'd amongst themselves, whereupon the Doctor desir'd to be told by him what kind of~~