

John Mayow Encyclopedia Article

John Mayow

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John Mayow

1641-1679

British chemist and physiologist and early advocate of seventeenth century corpuscular theories of matter. His theory of a "nitro-aerial spirit" as a distinct reactive component of atmospheric air offered an early explanation for chemical and biological processes of combustion, fermentation, and respiration. Mayow's possible anticipation of aspects of combustion theories proposed a century later by Cavendish, Priestley, and Lavoisier remains a subject of scholarly controversy.