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*When is a Negative Really a Negative?*

Well into the 17th century, works in algebra commonly gave the rules for arithmetic involving negatives but did not allow negative solutions to equations. This paradoxical situation signals a less than full acceptance of negative numbers. I believe that the arithmetic rules, especially for multiplication, were intended for polynomial multiplication involving subtracted terms. I will speak of long term developments in this line of thought, from Brahmagupta and Islamic writers up to John Wallis.