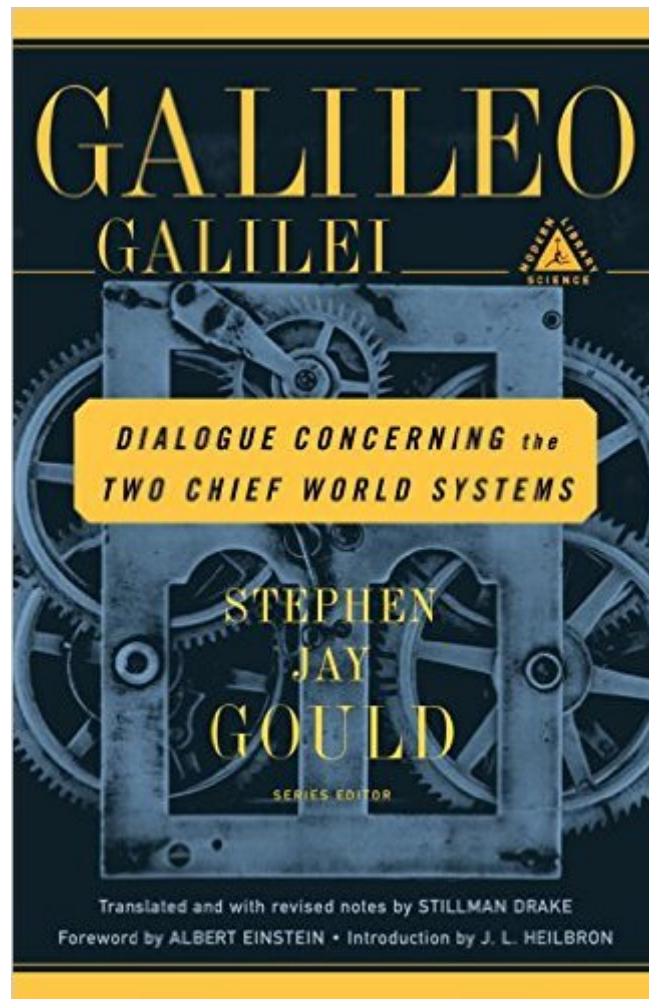


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Dialogue Concerning The Two Chief World Systems: Ptolemaic And Copernican



Synopsis

Galileo's Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems, published in Florence in 1632, was the most proximate cause of his being brought to trial before the Inquisition. Using the dialogue form, a genre common in classical philosophical works, Galileo masterfully demonstrates the truth of the Copernican system over the Ptolemaic one, proving, for the first time, that the earth revolves around the sun. Its influence is incalculable. The Dialogue is not only one of the most important scientific treatises ever written, but a work of supreme clarity and accessibility, remaining as readable now as when it was first published. This edition uses the definitive text established by the University of California Press, in Stillman Drake's translation, and includes a Foreword by Albert Einstein and a new Introduction by J. L. Heilbron.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

During the [in]famous controversy of Galileo and the Church, the actual point of contention was this very work which Galileo published. In the Dialogue, he was supposed to set forth arguments for and against the Ptolemaic worldview (the unmoving earth in the centre of the universe) and the Copernican (the earth and other planets going around the sun). This book does that, and brilliantly, showing Galileo's resourcefulness as a scientist, philosopher (at least to an extent!) and writer. The charge against him was that rather than being even-handed, the book was clear support of Copernicanism. This is a non-obvious topic but what is obvious is the importance and magnificence of the work in terms of both the subject matter (the importance of the structure of the universe) and method (a colourful dialogue containing heated debate which spans literally dozens of arguments

for and against each system). The work has 3 characters: Salviati who is a Copernican, Simplicio who is an Aristotelian and follower of the Ptolemaic system, and Sagredo, a non-affiliated but intelligent person. They meet and debate over 4 days. The first deals with the question of whether the substance of the heavens is fundamentally different to the earth as well as some other fundamental assertions of Aristotelianism. The second deals with the earth's daily rotation. The third is about the alleged yearly orbit of the earth around the sun. The fourth (considered by Galileo to be the crown of his argument - which is all the more endearing as it is wrong) is about the cause of the tides. Reading this is especially interesting because [almost!] all of us believe that the earth goes around the sun, so it's easy to just approach this simplistically.

This substantial 1632 work by Galileo was about much more than just the "two motions" of the Earth, namely the rotation on its axis and its orbit around the Sun. Galileo used the 3-person dialogue form to present his theories on many other physics and astronomy subjects too. This Modern Library edition of Galileo's "Dialogue concerning the two chief world systems" is well edited and well bound. The look-and-feel of the book is very pleasing, especially the unusually pleasant color scheme of the front cover, the light but strong paper, and the good choice of font. The introductions and end-notes give excellent context and explanation of aspects of the book which are difficult for the modern reader. The translation is of good quality, an excellent compromise between precision and comprehensibility. However, there is one thing which must be criticised in the style of this book. That is the lack of pointers to end-notes. There are no asterisks or superscript numbers to tell you where end-notes are provided. My solution was to pencil in the missing end-note references wherever required in the book. So not only did I need to use two book-marks while reading this book. I also had to mark the end-note locations in pencil in advance. Personally, I prefer foot-notes, so that I don't have to use two book-marks and flip back and forth to read the end-notes. In this book, the end-notes are really essential. Much of the book makes little sense without them. On the positive side, the end-notes are very well written. Concerning the content, at first I was very worried by the medieval argumentation in the first 100 pages or so.

Galileo Galilei (1564-1642) was an Italian physicist, mathematician, engineer, astronomer, and philosopher known as the "Father of Modern Science". Some of his "popular" writings are collected in Discoveries and Opinions of Galileo. The book is a fictional four-day series of discussions between two philosophers (Salviati, expressing Galileo's heliocentric position; and Sagredo, who is "neutral") and a layman rather insultingly named Simplicio, who represents the

Ptolemaic/â œgeocentricâ • view endorsed by Pope and the Catholic Church. [NOTE: page numbers refer to a 496-page paperback edition.]He wrote in his introduction "To the Discerning Reader," that "Three principal headings are treated. First, I shall try to show that all experiments practicable upon the earth are insufficient measures for proving its mobility... Secondly, the celestial phenomena will be examined, strengthening the Copernican hypothesis until it might seem that this must triumph absolutely... In the third place, I shall propose an ingenious speculation. It happens that long ago I said that the unsolved problem of the ocean tides might receive some light from assuming the motion of the earthâ |â • (Pg. 6)Salvitri says, â œThe moon certainly agrees with the earth in its shape, which is indubitably spherical. This follows necessarily from its disc being seen perfectly circular, and from the manner of its receiving light from the sun.

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