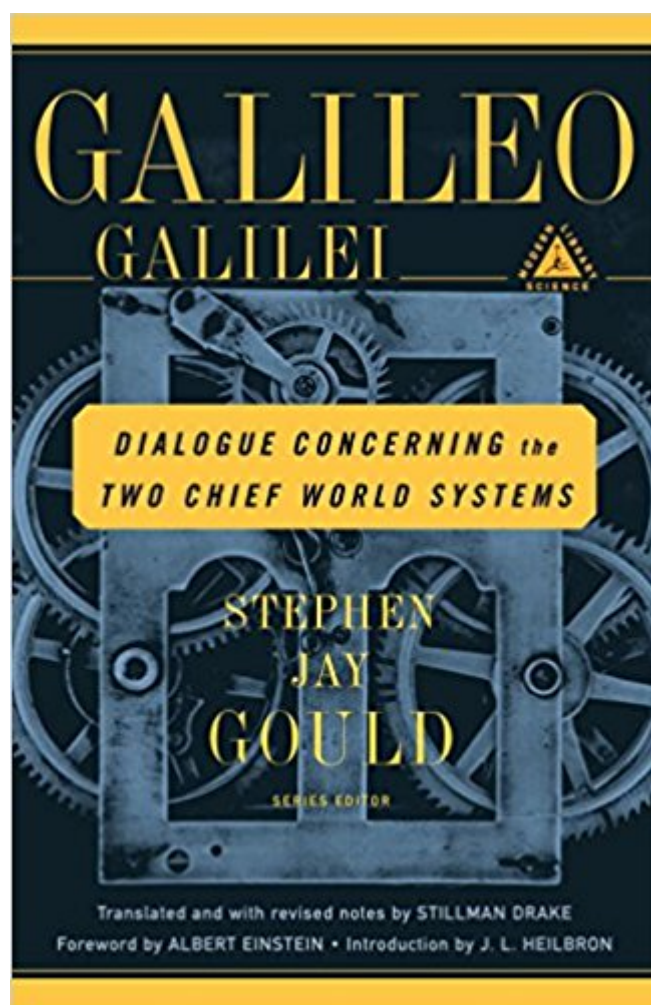


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Dialogue Concerning The Two Chief World Systems: Ptolemaic And Copernican



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

Paperback: 586 pages

Publisher: Modern Library; New edition edition (October 2, 2001)

Language: English

ISBN-10: 037575766X

ISBN-13: 978-0375757662

Product Dimensions: 5.2 x 1.3 x 8 inches

Shipping Weight: 13.4 ounces (View shipping rates and policies)

Average Customer Review: 4.9 out of 5 stars 19 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #262,700 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #126 in Books > Science & Math > Essays & Commentary #633 in Books > Politics & Social Sciences > Philosophy > History & Surveys #652 in Books > Science & Math > Astronomy & Space Science > Astronomy

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Text: English (translation) Original Language: Italian

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University of California Press, in Stillman Drake's translation, and includes a Foreword by Albert Einstein and a new Introduction by J. L. Heilbron.

Excelent

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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. It seemed to be a catalog of medieval-style bad logic, almost a parody of medieval thinking. Then I started to notice that many of the arguments against the mobile Earth were pretty strong. Faced with some of these arguments, even in the 21st century it would be difficult for a physicist to counter them. I tried some examples on some well educated friends, and they could not think of counter-arguments. For example, why is that we don't experience an 800 kilometre per hour wind if the Earth is rotating that fast? Galileo doesn't answer this very well, and no one in the 21st century has been able to explain this to me either! I can see from this book why the mobile Earth was so strongly resisted by religious authorities. Galileo was proposing that the laws of physics in the heavens are the same as on Earth. That was challenging the idea that heaven and Earth are different. The heaven is perfect and eternal, while the Earth is corruptible and ephemeral. If heaven obeys the Earthly laws of physics, where do good pious people go after they die? So there was much more at stake here (if you'll forgive the unintentional pun) than just the double mobility of the whirling Earth. I won't list the areas of physics and astronomy which are discussed in this book. There are too many. However, you should be aware that this book discusses new ideas in a very wide range of astronomical and physical subjects. This book is also a summary of the wide range of literature at that time with implications both for and against the Copernican theory. We tend to think of Galileo in his role as a contributor to the progress of knowledge. However, this book is also a "State of the Art" summary which documents the entire way of scientific thinking in his time, the controversies, the technological achievements, and the intellectual ferment that was clearly gaining momentum, which we now know led to the rapid explosion of science in the following decades.

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