THE JESUITS AND GALILEO’S IDEAS OF SCIENCE AND OF NATURE

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The subject of this paper is the relation of the ideas developed by Galileo of science and of nature to the scholastic revival of Aristotelianism and Thomism, promoted by the Council of Trent and articulated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the Jesuits. The question arose out of our discovery some years ago that the sources of Galileo’s misnamed Juventia were three well-known Jesuit professors at the Collegio Romano. In the present paper, we have brought together some of our independent researches into a coherent argument in which we reexamine the whole question of the dating of Galileo’s writings and the development of his interests and philosophical strategy for science.

1. Let us begin by saying first what is not the subject of this paper. We will not discuss the personal relations between Galileo and the Jesuits, because these have already been adequately discussed by the Jesuit Fathers Adolf Müller (1909) and Bellino Carrara (1914). Nor are we concerned with any questions about the relation of the medieval

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1 A. MÜLLER, Galileo Galilei und das Kopernikanische Weltsystem (Freiburg im Breisgau, 1909); B. CARRARA, La S. Scrittura, i SS. Padri e Galilei sopra il moto della terra (Verona, 1914), I Gesuiti e Galilei (Verona, 1914).
philosophical tradition to sixteenth and seventeenth century natural science.

Our subject is the relation of the ideas developed by Galileo of science and of nature to the scholastic revival of Aristotelianism and Thomism, promoted by the Council of Trent and articulated in the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries by the Jesuits. It is one of the main subjects treated in our forthcoming book on Galileo’s natural philosophy. The policy of this scholastic revival was to defend a rational philosophy of science and of nature, and with this to establish the possibility of rational knowledge for men both of God and of nature, against what were perceived as two current threats from within the Catholic world. One threat was seen to come from the conglomerate of Neoplatonism, Hermeticism and magic launched especially into Italian philosophy mainly by Marsilio Ficino and Giovanni Pico della Mirandola and sustained more recently in different ways by Francesco Patrizi and Giordano Bruno. Their aim was to bring about a truly Christian reform of education and religion through the knowledge and cultivation of occult harmonies believed to exist between the creation and the human soul. The whole of existence was a pattern of occult powers, and through these man could know God. The other threat

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3 Cf. Benedictus Pererius, Adversus fallaces et superstitionis artes, id est, de magia, de observatione somniornum et de divinitione astrologica, libri tres (Ingolstadt, 1591); D. P. Walker, Spiritual and Demoniac Magic from Ficino to Campanella (London, 1938), The Ancient Theology: Studies in Christian Platonism (London, 1972); F. Yates,