

Phil. 401: Discussion Questions

January 26th, 2017

1 Galileo and the Church

Debate: I will divide you into two groups. One group will defend the claim that the passages of the Bible concerning the Earth's (lack of motion) ought to be interpreted literally. Your job is to debunk Galileo's arguments. The other group ought to anticipate criticisms of Galileo's arguments and think of how Galileo might respond. Before anticipating how the other group might argue, please review your answers to the following questions from last night's reading assignment.

1. According to Galileo, what properties does the Bible, if interpreted literally, attribute to God? Why does Galileo discuss whether the Bible ought to be interpreted literally or figuratively?
2. In your own words, explain one of Galileo's arguments that "nothing physical which sense-experience sets before our eyes, or which necessary demonstrations prove to us, ought to be called in question . . . upon the testimony of biblical passages."
3. In his letter to Paolo Foscarini, why does Cardinal Bellarmine claim that Foscarini and Galileo spoke "prudently" about heliocentrism?

Debate Format: Each group will have five minutes to make their opening arguments. I will flip a coin to decide who goes first. Then you will have two minutes to consult with your group members and prepare a list of at most three questions to ask your opponents; questions should be used to clarify your opponent's position. Finally, after five to ten minutes of preparation, I will ask a different speaker from each group to present a five-minute rebuttal.

2 Galileo and Descartes on Motion

In groups of five students, please review your answers to last night's reading assignments. Then answer the following questions. The questions are open-ended and do not have a single, correct answer. Do your best.

1. In Galileo's dialogues, Simplicio represents Aristotle. Simplicio ultimately agrees with Salvedo that a heavy stone dropped from a ship's mast will land next to the mast. Does Salvedo get Simplicio to abandon any principles of Aristotelian physics? Or does Salvedo argue, using principles that even Aristotle would accept, that the stone will land next to the mast?
2. Galileo and Descartes both defend hypotheses (or laws) that describe how bodies move without interference. But such situations never arise naturally.
 - What objections might a committed Aristotelian raise in response to such *counterfactual* laws?
 - How might Galileo and Descartes respond to those objections?
 - Why are such hypotheses useful, if they describe circumstances that never arise?