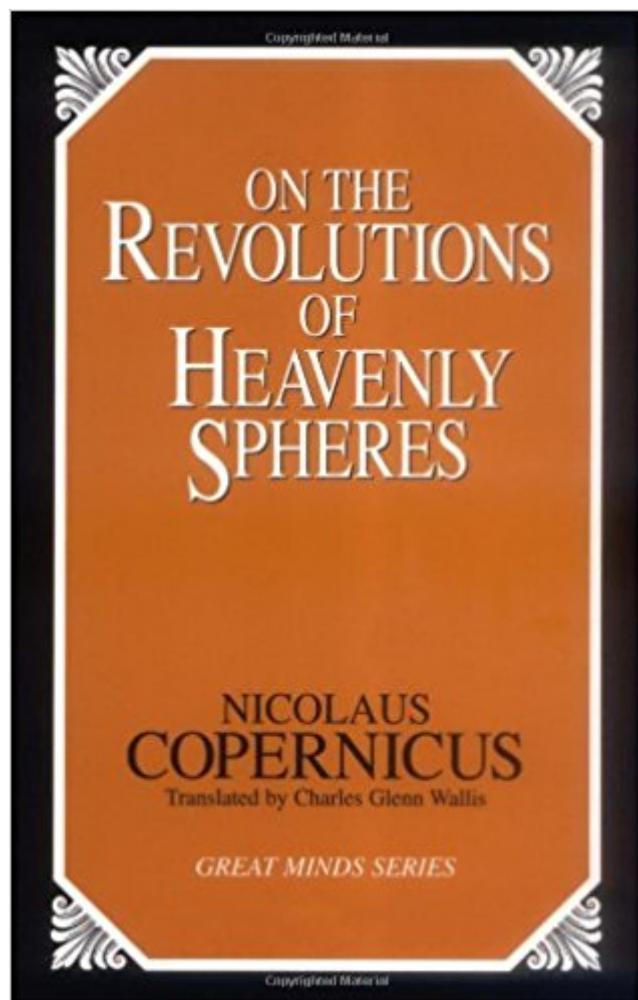


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On The Revolutions Of Heavenly Spheres (Great Minds Series)



Synopsis

The Ptolemaic system of the universe, with the earth at the center, had held sway since antiquity as authoritative in philosophy, science, and church teaching. Following his observations of the heavenly bodies, Nicolaus Copernicus (1473-1543) abandoned the geocentric system for a heliocentric model, with the sun at the center. His remarkable work, *On the Revolutions of Heavenly Spheres*, stands as one of the greatest intellectual revolutions of all time, and profoundly influenced, among others, Galileo and Sir Isaac Newton.

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

OK, first of all, "GangstaLawya" seems to not be taking into account the fine work of Kepler, Newton, and Einstein when he suggests that we "remain agnostic" on the issue of heliocentrism. True, Copernicus himself does not exactly refute Ptolemy here (he actually was more worried about how other astronomers and Protestant theologians would react to his heliocentric system than how the Catholic church would see it... and his model wasn't fully accepted until over a hundred years after his death), but this model was later augmented by Kepler and Newton to the point where it does work better than Ptolemy's. And with all due respect, the Ptolemaic system is extremely convoluted, needlessly complicated, and downright ugly at times... so even if there's a simpler way of looking at things that works just as well, that's still a conceptual improvement. Occam's razor, y'know? But I digress. As with most of my reviews of books like this, my concern isn't necessarily the

actual book (which is usually self-evidently worthwhile), but with the presentation. I must say that it's a little awkward to see Stephen Hawking's name appear on the cover in larger type than Copernicus' and not get anything more than a very short introduction by him that doesn't say very much. In fact, there is not very much of a difference between this edition and the one published by Prometheus Books; the text is exactly the same and contains all the same diagrams. The cover is flashier (and says "Stephen Hawking!") and the type is cleaner. That's it. Those are the only real differences. In fact, the only reason I can see for this edition existing is Running Press (and Stephen Hawking) making a few bucks. Despite all this, there isn't really anything here that detracts from the work.

Nicolaus Copernicus (1473- 1543) was a Renaissance mathematician and astronomer who formulated a heliocentric model of the universe. He speaks highly of Ptolemy, "who stands far in front of all the others no account of his wonderful care and industry, with the help of more than forty years of observations brought this art to such a high point that there seemed to be nothing left which he had not touched on." (I, preface) He begins by arguing for the sphericity of the earth: "the world is globe-shaped... this form belongs to the heavenly bodies... But it is not perceived straightway to be a perfect sphere, on account of the great height of its mountains and the lowness of its valleys, though they modify its universal roundness to only a very small extent. That is made clear in this way. For when people journey northward from anywhere, the northern vertex of the axis of daily revolution gradually moves overhead, and the other moves downward to the same extent; and many stars situated to the north are not to set, and many to the south are seen not to rise any more. So Italy does not see Canopus, which is visible to Egypt. And Italy sees the last star of Fluvius, which is not visible to this region situated in a more frigid zone... Moreover, the inclinations of the poles have everywhere the same ration with places at equal distances from the poles of the Earth and that happens in no other figure except the spherical. Whence it is manifest that the earth itself is contained between the vertices and is therefore a globe. Add to this the fact that the inhabitants of the east do not perceive the evening eclipses of the sun and moon; nor the inhabitants of the West, the morning eclipses... Furthermore, voyagers perceive ...

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