

“Galileo's O: Circular Arguments”

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Abstract: Galileo’s contributions to natural philosophy have increasingly been framed within the contexts of literature, music and the visual arts. One site from which the most recent iteration of this trend, known as visual epistemology, emerged is Erwin Panofsky’s dazzling ‘Galileo as a Critic of the Arts’ (1954). This groundbreaking essay may be read as a moving plea to heal the rift between Science and Art in the post-war world by deploying an irenic methodology to recreate, in Renaissance Humanism, a last universal common ancestor of the disciplines. Revisiting the evidence upon which Panofsky’s utopian case rests, however, leads to some inconvenient conclusions: his two central Galilean documents, a letter to the painter Cigoli and the ‘Considerations on Tasso’ are, I hope to demonstrate, respectively an early forgery and a late misattribution. This talk will present the evidence for deauthenticating these sources and offer some preliminary thoughts on what effect, if any, such evidentiary collapse may have on current and future scholarly practices.