

The Crisis in Mathematical Astronomy

The sky and the stars have been moving for three thousand years; everybody had so believed, until it occurred to Cleanthes of Samos or (according to Theophrastus) to Nicetas of Syracuse, to maintain that it was the earth that moved, through the oblique circle of the Zodiac, turning about its axis; and in our day Copernicus has grounded this doctrine so well that he uses it very systematically for all astronomical deductions. What are we to get out of that, unless that we should not bother which of the two is so? And who knows whether a third opinion, a thousand years from now, will not overthrow the preceding two?

Montaigne, "Apology for Raymond Sebond", p. 429, (ca. 1580)