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The Assayer Assayed

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Galileo's *Saggiatore* has the reputation of a pioneering work in the methodology of science. It no doubt contains scattered remarks that, when assembled, support an alternative to the school philosophy as taught in Jesuit colleges. Most of the book, however, is devoted not to promoting a new methodology but to obfuscating what little science it presents. It was a clever, tedious, unfair, inconclusive polemic in an argument of interest primarily to a narrow circle of Roman savants and literary men who liked clever word play and disliked the Jesuits. I shall try to explain why Galileo wrote in this way and to locate where, in its literary history, the *Saggiatore* gained the reputation it now bears and may deserve.

Primary author: HEILBRON, John (University of California, Berkeley)

Presenter: HEILBRON, John (University of California, Berkeley)

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