

Chapter 8

The notes from the astrological practitioners

This chapter reports on the comments and notes from the 902 astrologers who included additional responses with their completed surveys. These non-structured, freely given thoughts on fate and astrology offer insight into the life of an astrologer and are potentially what Clifford Geertz refers to as a 'thick description'.⁷⁸⁸ 'Thick' data, according to Geertz, is that which can reveal a deeper level of what it means to live within a particular culture, data which contains subtle nuances of phrases or snippets of conversations that pile up and slowly reveal the nature of participation within a community. With reference to a particular piece of 'thick' data collected by fellow anthropologist Gilbert Ryle, Geertz spoke of this as 'notes in a bottle'.⁷⁸⁹ Such a term, 'notes in a bottle', captures the random and unexpected nature of the arrival of the comments onto the shores of my research project. Each comment is an isolated and self-contained 'note in a bottle' but slowly they have piled up on each other to form a picture of life within the community of astrologers. These notes, contrasting in their method of collection from the interviews discussed in chapter 9, warrant consideration in their own right.

Method of collecting the material

These notes returned far more qualitative data than expected. The comment section at the end of the questionnaire was intended to address what Thomas points out is a potential weakness of an inventory survey — that it can fail to allow the individual to give their opinion independent of the imposed assumptions and structure of a survey.⁷⁹⁰ After completing the questionnaire each astrologer was asked what they liked about astrology and what they disliked, and whether they wished to make any other comments. It was

⁷⁸⁸ Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures* (New York: Basic books, 1973), p.6.

⁷⁸⁹ Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures*: p.9.

⁷⁹⁰ Thomas, *Blending Qualitative & Quantitative Research Methods in Theses and Dissertations*: p.69.

made clear in the instructions that they could choose not to answer these questions or, if they did, then to write as little or as much as they liked.

In building the data base to handle the quantitative data collected, I did not plan to take into consideration these additional comments as I believed that they would be only small in number, brief in length and probably not contribute any new information to the project. However, what quickly became apparent was that the reverse was true. These showed a diversity of thoughts and opinions associated with their thoughts on fate and life as an astrologer.

Some astrologers submitted three sets of comments consisting of replies of up to 400-to-500 words, while other astrologers simply added a few words of thanks for the chance to do the questionnaire. By the time the survey closed over 77,000 words from 902 astrologers had been collected. It became apparent that the best approach to handling this volume of qualitative data was to treat all the notes as 902 separate interviews. Thus all of these notes were entered into Nvivo for coding. Additionally the astrologer's unique survey code number was linked to their individual comments in Nvivo in order to maintain the link between each individual's comments and the rest of their survey responses.

Anthropological considerations

In 2004 Nicholas Campion researched beliefs held by astrologers in the context of the New Age. He used a phenomenological approach to his raw data and, coming from a historical and cultural perspective, he collected this data by survey and semi-structured interviews.⁷⁹¹

In contrast anthropologist Alison Bird, in her doctoral work of 2006 focused on how astrology was handed on through astrological education systems chose to use the ethnographical technique of participant observation.⁷⁹² This technique involves the collection of field notes based on a prolonged interaction with the researched community,

⁷⁹¹ Campion, "Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement. The Extent and Nature of Contemporary Belief in Astrology," p.8.

⁷⁹² Bird, "Astrology in Education: An Ethnography," pp.17-18.

with the primary data comprising narrative descriptions, observations and informal conversations.⁷⁹³

The planned methodology for the project was, like Campion's, to use the instruments of survey and oral interviews for fieldwork. However, as the field work became flooded with these 'notes in a bottle', I recognised them, as Thomas points out, as a different form of interview collected in writing rather than face to face.⁷⁹⁴ The responses were free of the formal structure of an interview with all its paraphernalia: recording equipment; the necessary range of questions that needed to be covered, no matter how broadly; the desire of the interviewer to collect useful material; and the formality imposed on the interviewee. In contrast these 'notes in a bottle' represented unsolicited thoughts about the social world in which the astrologers acted. As Matthews comments, data collected with no questions and free from any influences represents the best chance to collect 'information that makes it possible to see the world through informants' eyes.'⁷⁹⁵ In this way they are technically unstructured, informal interviews and as such constitute, according to Paul Atkinson and Martin Hammersley, one of the products of participatory observation.⁷⁹⁶ In this instance the role of the 'observer' was filled by the survey itself which offered a blank canvas for the astrologers to anonymously scribble their thoughts.

These messages covered a vast range of subjects, from personal stories to criticism of the survey's focus. They included poetry, worries, personal techniques, different spiritual views, different non-spiritual views, likes and dislikes of some branches of astrology, fatalism, comments on astrological techniques, views that expressed undiluted natural libertarianism, others that expressed views of the dominance of God's providence. Often the notes were written using astrological jargon and terms and incorporating astrological

⁷⁹³ Harold G. Levine et al., "Teaching Participant-Observation Research Methods: A Skills-Building Approach," *Anthropology & Education Quarterly* 11, no. 1 (1980): p.38.

⁷⁹⁴ Thomas, *Blending Qualitative & Quantitative Research Methods in Theses and Dissertations*: p.63.

⁷⁹⁵ Sarah H. Matthews, "Crafting Qualitative Research Articles on Marriages and Families," *Journal of Marriage and Family* 67, no. 4 (2005): p.800.

⁷⁹⁶ P Atkinson and M Hammersley, "Ethnography and participant observation," in *Handbook of Qualitative Research*, ed. N. Denzin and Y. Lincoln (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage, 1994), p.248.

short hand, reflecting the fact that they were using the colloquial language of one astrologer to another.

In discussing these anonymous notes I have used pseudonyms which reflect the gender of the astrologer rather than using survey codes. This allows for a more natural discussion of the individual's thoughts. Geertz comments that, with any ethnographic research into a community, 'The trick is to figure out what the devil they think they are up to.'⁷⁹⁷ These 'notes in a bottle' offer an insight into what astrologers' 'think they are up to'.

Reflections of theories of fate

Amongst the notes were threads of different classical theories of fate cited in chapter 2 and examples of these now follows, words in capitals or italics are the way the astrologer has present their comments.

Homer's necessity

Although, according to the survey results in the chapter 7, only a small minority of astrologers supported Homer's mechanical-like and/or logical necessity discussed in chapter 2, some of these messages in a bottle captured this necessity and such a group make up part of the overview of the community of astrologers.

From the USA, 'Megan' is a sixty-four year old woman who has been studying astrology for the last thirty years. She describes astrology thus: 'It is like an equation in calculus. It does nothing, but "DESCRIBE" the past, present and future. Just as algebra works so beautifully — so does the astrology that I practice.'⁷⁹⁸ She has faith that astrology will give her clear exoteric information about her daily life, saying that it allows her to feel confident in believing people when they say that 'the check is REALLY in the mail'. She also uses it to make judgments of her relationship to others: 'I also like the fact, I can avoid people that have really negative aspects to my own chart.' Megan does not see astrology as an expression of the divine in her life and showed in her survey responses that she denies the existence of soul, or divinity of any description. Indeed, what she dislikes in astrology are,

⁷⁹⁷ Geertz, *Local Knowledge*: p.58.

⁷⁹⁸ Survey code 20081213.

'the crazy religious nutters in some groups...' Additionally she dislikes the contemporary practice of medieval astrology, saying of astrological authors who use medieval astrology that, 'They have castrated a very complex linguistic system since he [she names a well-known astrologer] started learning medieval astrology.' Megan sees herself as a modern astrologer, defining the idea of modern by the large number of different astrological techniques that she uses. However, she appears to lack ways of accommodating her notion of fate, which implies natural hard incompatibilism, for her survey responses show that she deals with the varying emotional situations of life by 'bracing' for the forthcoming events, considering herself as powerless before them.

Also adopting a version of fate which seems to be consistent with hard incompatibilism is 'Michael', a forty-five year old American male who has worked with astrology for ten years. He talks of his thoughts on the role of fate in his life:

I am completely deterministic in my outlook because after watching myself and others for the last 10 years I can't find anything or anyone whose actions are not completely determined by their natal chart. ... Others may reach other conclusions, but for myself, the universe is nothing more than a series of wheels spinning out series of unchanging fated events.⁷⁹⁹

Michael's focus is on financial astrology. For him the source of fate is God's providence, and he feels that life is to embrace this, accepting it unquestioningly. Astrology, for him, should produce an inevitable future and his drive is to seek consistent and reliable prediction with his astrology. Although fate derives from God's will, this is directed solely at human endeavours, for he does not accept that it also applies to other life forms, such as pets. Michael's attitude is one of acceptance of the inevitability of the life planned for him by God. He writes, 'I am a curious person and astrology lets me understand things like why evil occurs. I worry less.' Given his interest in financial astrology he may, like Sepharial discussed in chapter 4, seek to profit from his knowledge of these mechanical 'spinning' wheels. His preferred astrological authors are classical and medieval astrologers, such as the Roman Julius Firmicus Maternus (c.330), the Persian astrologer and astronomer Abū Ma'shar (787—886), and the contemporary US medieval astrology author Robert Zoller.

⁷⁹⁹ Survey code 20081044

These astrologers do not promote the natural hard incompatibilism of Michael's astrology but they do lend support to a more pragmatic exoteric astrology. He does not accept the psychological developments in astrology predominant in the second half of the twentieth century and writes, 'I think most psychological astrologers delude themselves in thinking that clients evolve'. With his strong monotheism, selecting the survey option of 'strongly agreed' to all questions about the efficacy of God's will, and his reference to 'evil' in the world, his astrology is almost Augustinian, using the horoscope to show God's providence at work in his life, although it should be noted, discussed in chapter 2, that Augustine was intolerant of astrology.

Both Megan and Michael believe in the inevitability of the horoscope but both support very different theories of fate. Megan sees fate as the expression of the beautiful algebra of a cosmic order and speaks as an opinionated secular astrologer who dislikes spirituality and the modern use of the techniques of medieval astrology, seeing them as blight on her idea of this non-divine algebra. Michael is less rigid but is deeply religious. Fate for him is an expression of God's providence and he embraces the ways of medieval astrology to help him understand God's plan for his life. He considers the modern notion of psychological astrology as 'delusional'. These two astrologers represent the 7% to 8% of astrologers that accepted a version of fate which accepts Cicero's assumptions that the horoscope indicated an inevitable future, but their shared natural hard incompatibilism is contained within very different theories of fate. Megan's and Michael's notes reveal a diversity of views at one of the edges of the bell curve of all the survey results, the views which are consistent with natural hard incompatibilism.

Astrologers and 'fate as an illusion'

In contrast to Megan's and Michael's views is the natural libertarianism of 'James', a thirty-seven year old man from Ireland who has been working with astrology for fifteen years.⁸⁰⁰ He comments that, '... astrology is a thing unto itself that is largely a human imaginal process using the heavens as a guide to chart and map the human condition using cycles, mythology and archetypal patterns to elucidate meaning. ...'

⁸⁰⁰ Survey code 20081307

For James, astrology is about patterns and is concerned not with certainty but with relationships. He defines himself as a psychological and humanist astrologer, indicating that he is more concerned with the world of the human mind than the exoteric world of events. James' astrology is secular; he states that he, 'no longer believes in god as a figure...' and feels that astrology does not require a divine cosmos:

[I do not] believe that to believe in something [divine] is required of astrologers. Astrology reflects the human experience and the rhythmic unfoldment of life, of which there is an intrinsic fate (whether chosen or random) — the fate of the initial conditions of life.

Thus for James fate is nothing more than being born into a material life, and the consequences of that materialism; astrology can be used as an imaginal tool, to help understand the complexities of this life. James indicated that he read Dane Rudhyar and Alan Leo, and although not following their Platonist dualist arguments requiring free will to be located in the human soul, he appears to adopt a Cartesian view that one's free will is totally separated from the influenced of fate. James appears to be that other form of incompatibilist, the libertarian. For him astrology is simply a tool that can help with the personal mystery of life.

Similarly 'Betty', a fifty-six year old Canadian woman who is a professional astrologer seeing clients and who has been involved with astrology for thirty-eight years, also adopts a natural libertarianism. In her survey results she 'strongly agreed' that fate is only a human illusion. For her, astrology is an:

...archetypal language ... Although there are other symbolic languages, astrology is one that can be viewed from both a "fixed" and "relative" perspective, due to its mathematical nature and its adaptability to the reader's viewpoint and belief system.⁸⁰¹

For Betty, astrology is a way of gaining a perspective on life, and as such she 'strongly disagreed' in her survey results with any suggestion that the future is inevitable, and even rejects one of the almost universal tenets of astrology, that of its ability to give the timing

⁸⁰¹ Survey code 20081357

of events, (see the survey results given in chapter 7, *figure 8*) if not the event itself. Betty considers astrology to be a 'neutral medium' that can be used to facilitate an externalization of issues, like a blank screen that can be painted upon by the astrologer. She sees its true value in its ability to have 'the power of suggestion' which professional astrologers should use to help their clients. Within her own spiritual beliefs she reveals a Thomist or Cartesian philosophy as she sees the human soul as an independent entity not touched by the fate or determinism of the material life. However according to her replies to the questionnaire she does not extend her spiritual views to her astrology, seeing it as a neutral medium and secular.

From the entire matrix produced by the questionnaire 37 astrologers (3.5%) held similar views to James and Betty. That is that fate was an illusion and the purpose of astrology was to provide comfort or to help find harmony in life (see chapter 7, *figure 12*). On the bell-curve of beliefs about fate, these astrologers represent the other extreme to Michael and Megan.

Stoicism and Spinozian thought — fate and acceptance

In the first century Claudius Ptolemy argued for the value of knowing the future. As discussed in chapter 5, he suggested that the purpose of astrology was to gain knowledge of the future to enable mental preparation for maintaining a more harmonious disposition through life, rather than to lead one into futilism. He wrote of this in his defence of astrology:

... if, however, such events should have been foreknown, the mind will have been previously prepared for their reception, and will preserve an equable calmness, by having been accustomed to contemplate the approaching event as though it were present, so that, on its actual arrival, it will be sustained with tranquillity and constancy.⁸⁰²

This idea of acceptance and consequent mental calm facilitated by the predictive power of astrology was one of the themes in these notes from the astrologers.

⁸⁰² Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos*: Book I, Ch.III on p.13.

Ptolemy's words can be seen reflected in the note from 'Jane', a fifty-one year old US woman who has been working with astrology for ten years. She talks of her resignation to an inevitable future and her personal struggle with what she sees as her 'fate'. Unlike Michael earlier who accepted his fate as God's will, or Megan who consider it a beautiful algebra Jane took a Stoic position and following Ptolemy's advice found comfort in the acceptance of her fate:

Yes. I would like to change events that you know are coming... but you really can't. And I knew that terrible things were coming for me in the past few years, and I tried to use the energies in positive ways, but in the end, it was just as bad as I thought. The difference however was that by expecting troubles, I was able to reserve more patience and understanding and not resort to anger, and limit my frustration. Maybe that in itself was "easier", BUT I now believe there is NO escaping your chart, just enduring and preparing and learning to take the high road.⁸⁰³

According to her questionnaire answers, Jane sees herself as living in a sympathetic cosmos which seeks harmony. In this view of cosmos Jane acknowledges the importance of patterns and sees all life involved in the patterns of the cosmos. She does not believe in God or even gods, and is neutral on matters to do with the existence of the human soul; however, she does believe in the importance of gaining rapport with the harmony of the cosmos. Her words are reminiscent of those of the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (55—135) who wrote, 'I must die. But must I die groaning? I must be imprisoned. But must I whine as well? I must suffer exile. Can anyone then hinder me from going with a smile, and good courage, and at peace?'⁸⁰⁴ Indeed, Jane continues to talk of her own impending death:

It [astrology] has given me a comfort of dying and moving on, not that I want to. I was not sure about fate or total free choice/blank slate theories, but now I believe that astrology is fate based, and to me the lesson is about how you handle the difficult patches that are coming whether you like it or not, with grace and humility and patience, not becoming bitter and resentful and bringing that energy forward. My chart has been horrible for the past seven years and I only have 6-8 months or so left, so I've given this thought.

⁸⁰³ Survey code 20080680

⁸⁰⁴ Epictetus, *Discourses Books 1 and 2*: Book I, ch. 1 on p.5.

Another example of this Stoic attitude to fate is seen in a note from a forty year old American woman. New to astrology — she has only been studying it for two years — she writes, 'I like to believe I have more of a say in how my life unfolds, but astrology shows me that some things are out of my control.'⁸⁰⁵

Different to these Stoic themes of resignation was the Spinozian-like attitude to fate of 'Sophie', a thirty-eight year old, American astrologer who has been working with the subject for seven years, comments on what it is like if one accepts fate through the detached vehicle of the horoscope. She writes:

[It] helps you and the client to accept your life for what it is – determinism can be a fairly optimistic outlook or at least one that does not blame the subject for the bad things that happen. I think free will plays a somewhat limited role in what happens to us. You work as much as you can or make the effort that you are satisfied with, and you will still fulfil a pre-destined framework to a large degree. There can be a lot of acceptance and compassion built into this outlook. You stop judging others as severely (they are dealing with limitations that won't change significantly despite awareness and efforts to change in some cases). You also stop judging yourself as severely for the same reasons. You do whatever you define as "your best" and try to accept predestined limitations that same way.⁸⁰⁶

Time — cycles and *kairos* time

Another feature of the fate in astrology is its link to time. The Stoic view of time was that it was closed. The Christian philosopher Nemesius (c.390) wrote of Stoic time as follows, '... when the stars are moving again in the same way, each thing which occurred in the previous period will come to pass... The periodic return of everything occurs not once but many times.'⁸⁰⁷ This concept of repeating time, although somewhat different within astrology as it is based on the cycles of the planets rather than the Stoic notion of the conflagrations. It was Dane Rudhyar with his notion of emergent spiral time, discussed in chapter 4, who emphasised in contemporary astrology the use of planetary cycles that returned similar but not identical events, this thinking was evident in many of the notes received.

⁸⁰⁵ Survey code 20080935

⁸⁰⁶ Survey code 20080750

⁸⁰⁷ Quoted from Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic philosophers*, 1: p.309.

A forty-four year old Australian woman, who took up astrology in 1992, writes of one of the most important concepts that astrology has given her: 'It taught me about cycles, hard times do pass as do happy ones. It gives us the opportunity to make the most/best of any situation.'⁸⁰⁸ A forty-two year old Norwegian woman who has been doing astrology for twelve years writes, 'When life is difficult, astrology gives it meaning and hope, even in the darkest hours. You know that soon this too will pass.'⁸⁰⁹ This theme is repeated by many astrologers. 'John', a thirty-one year old male astrologer from the US who has only been studying astrology for five years, writes that what he likes about astrology is both the *kairos*-like version of time and the Spinozian detachment that his horoscope offers him:

The mental preparation it gives me; even when I'm on the lookout for the expression of an upcoming transit, I sometimes don't see the event as that expression until it has passed. Even so, acceptance comes so much more easily; Acceptance of my level (without judgment) of awareness with that particular part of life.⁸¹⁰

An example which captured Rudhyar's emergent cycles, representative of many others received, comes from 'Nancy', a fifty-nine year old woman from the USA who became involved with astrology in the mid-1970s. Drawing on her thirty-four years living an astrological life, she offers this comment about one of the ways that she uses astrology: 'The cyclical quality that it presents to us. If you live long enough, you see those cycles coming back. If you've learned anything at all, then when the tough ones come back, you handle them better and when the great ones come back, you appreciate them more.'⁸¹¹ Her selections on the survey show an embracing of fate, which has its sources in God's Will and her soul's relationship with that Will. For her, astrology is a way of life and it gives meaning to her daily ups and downs.

⁸⁰⁸ Survey code 20080614

⁸⁰⁹ Survey code 20080633

⁸¹⁰ Survey code 20081028

⁸¹¹ Survey code 20081245

'Grace', a sixty-seven year old British woman who has been involved with astrology for thirty-four years, describes a participation emergentism theory of fate which draws together acceptance, emergent cycles, and living in a virtuous cosmos:

I believe there is an order in the cosmos, unfolding in time cycles that are predetermined. But the universe is also in a state of flux, a continuous state of becoming. So the future is also open-ended. Our fate is limited by its patterning, but as we participate in the universe's creative consciousness, so we can also be inventive and transform. Thus on one level we have free will, and on a deeper level we don't, and on one level we are governed by cosmic laws, and on another the human spirit is free.⁸¹²

Grace's theory of fate embraces both the idea of cycles and an emergent cosmos. For her, as in Stoic philosophy, God is emerging in the on-going act of creation, evolving via union with all of life and matter.⁸¹³ Her notion of free will lays in her ability to be inventive in the expression of the future patterns.

The astrologers also talked of how they used *kairos* time to create personal calendars. Such calendars, Anthony Giddens argues are a feature of creating a life-style which contains a life-plan, he talks of this plan as:

... the reflexively organised trajectory of the self. [The self is located in time and space and] Life-planning is a means of preparing a course of future actions mobilised in terms of the self's biography. We may also speak here of the existence of personal calendars or *life-plan calendars*, in relation to which the personal time of the lifespan is handled.⁸¹⁴

This concept of using the horoscope to plan the life through the timing of future events was the theme of many notes and the implications of this will be discussed later in this chapter.

An American astrologer who sums this up as, 'It [astrology] gives me the ability to see how things work together and why, as well as the opportunity to plan ahead to make the

⁸¹² Survey code 20080627

⁸¹³ Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic philosophers*, 1: p.227.

⁸¹⁴ Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age* (Cambridge Polity Press, 1991), p.85.

best use of whatever transits are available at any given time.'⁸¹⁵ A forty-two year old Australian astrologer writes of what he gains from astrology by stating that it is its 'ability to see timing which few other systems can do well.'⁸¹⁶ Locating oneself in time and space is the focus of 'Molly's' comments. A sixty-two year old American astrologer of some forty years' experience, she writes that astrology provides a map of where she is in her life:

It's one of the mathematical systems of the universe and simply tells you where you are in time and space and what is likely to happen and how you are likely to deal with the situations in your life. I believe everything is there in the map [horoscope] mistakes are made not because the information isn't there but because, like a doctor, we don't always understand what we are seeing.⁸¹⁷

Molly also uses Ptolemy's argument that any errors in reading the horoscope are due to lack of knowledge by the astrologer, not the lack of efficacy of the horoscope. For Ptolemy wrote of the astrologer that, 'although he may have attained to the greatest possible accuracy in the science, must still be liable to frequent error, arising out of the very nature of his undertaking, and from the weakness of his limited capacity in comparison with the magnitude of his object.'⁸¹⁸ Molly's note with her paraphrasing of Ptolemy's words is an example of the 'traditions' of astrological belief which dates back to the first century.

Plato — natural libertarianism

Another classical position that is well represented by these 'notes in a bottle' is the dualist theory of fate implied by Plato, discussed in chapter 2. He taught that the more we reached for our divine spark and drew closer to the divine, the freer we could become of the necessity produced by the planets.⁸¹⁹ This view was promoted by astrologer Alan Leo, discussed in chapter 4, who in the early twentieth century taught that one could free oneself from the world of 'fated matter' by self-knowledge.

⁸¹⁵ Survey code 20081203

⁸¹⁶ Survey code 20080979

⁸¹⁷ Survey code 20081168

⁸¹⁸ Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos*: Book I, Chapter II p.8.

⁸¹⁹ Plotinus, *The Enneads*: II.3.9.

This life-philosophy is seen in a note from 'Rachel', a forty-six year old English woman who has been involved with astrology for twenty-three years. Fate, for her, is produced, by the law of karma, the actions of her immortal soul in her previous lives, and the purpose of this life is as Plato pointed out, to improve the soul and help it in its journey back to the divine.⁸²⁰ She mirrors Alan Leo's views, cited in chapter 4, when she comments:

Yes, my experience is that the more spiritually evolved/conscious a person is the less likely it is their life can be predicted. In any case I don't think it's possible to predict actual events in someone's life, although you can make estimated guesses, just the quality of experience of events.⁸²¹

A female South African astrologer echoing Plato's philosophy comments that, 'I see our ultimate soul purpose as seeking a return to the wholeness (purity) of the divine circle (God); to me our natal astrology chart represents the point where our soul is on that evolutionary journey back to God.'⁸²² Another South African woman who has been working with astrology for forty years sums up Alan Leo's argument by stating, 'Your horoscope is your fate ONLY if you don't use your free will to guide your own life.'⁸²³ A thirty-nine year old American woman capturing the notion of self-agency and Rudhyar's views on the ideal form of 'self' wrote that: 'I love the free will that astrology provides. The chart provides you with possibilities; it's up to you to recognize and take advantage of them. Your chart is a fail proof tool for living up to your full potential — not a map to your destiny.'⁸²⁴ Unlike James and Betty discussed earlier who dismissed the very existence of fate, these astrologers accept fate but consider, for dualist reasons, that fate does not impinge on the freedom of their will.

Suggestions of Calcidius' theory of fate

Calcidius postulated fate both as a cosmic force and the consequences of one's own actions. As cited in chapter 2, he wrote:

⁸²⁰ Plato, *Laws*: 903c.

⁸²¹ Survey code 20080656

⁸²² Survey code 20081170

⁸²³ Survey code 20080969

⁸²⁴ Survey code 20081287

Now the preceding merit [fate] which can take one of two directions is caused by a motion of our mind and a judgment and an agreement and desire or avoidance, things put within our power, because these things as well as their contraries are for us to choose. So in this ordinance of things and according to a most ancient law some things are said to result from a preceding decision and are in our power; what comes after them, however, is the result, bound by necessity.⁸²⁵

Calcidius words were captured by a female Australian astrologer who has been studying astrology for twelve years who wrote, 'The answer to the argument of Fate versus Freewill lies in a view that it is not one or the other, but rather it is both together. Our fate creates the opportunity to use our freewill which in turn creates our fate.'⁸²⁶ A female lecturer in classics from the USA, almost paraphrasing Calcidius, writes, 'Your "fate" is what happens to you when you exercise your free will.'⁸²⁷ A fifty-three year old British woman, an astrologer of twenty years, writes a more intuitive personal note, saying,

I do believe that some things are fated and beyond my control. ... I don't know how one would reconcile it but I do believe in the chart's potential and us creating our own fate, so to speak, together with a belief that some things are fated. I have seen both these things happening in my own life.⁸²⁸

In this way, according to Calcidius and for these astrologers, one's actions were thus descriptive of one's fate and thus also description of one's self. J.R Lucas argues that this view of free will is also part of the contemporary notion of self-agency, which is central to beliefs around free will.⁸²⁹ Additionally Wolf talks of being an 'autonomous agent' which enables a unique view of the world, a view which reinforces moral responsibility.⁸³⁰

The self seen through a Spinozian lens of detachment, the horoscope

The comments of many of the notes from astrologers described how astrology provided them with a sense of self, remarking on the way it allowed them to understand their history

⁸²⁵ den Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate*: paragraph 151.

⁸²⁶ Survey code 20080936

⁸²⁷ Survey code 20080919

⁸²⁸ Survey code 20081167

⁸²⁹ Lucas, *The Freedom of the Will*: p.63.

⁸³⁰ Wolf, *Freedom within Reason*: pp.44-45.

while at the same time giving them greater compassion towards those around them. Indeed this was one of the major themes of the notes with over 25% of the notes making reference to this feature of astrology.

The Western view of self, according to Hazel Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, is an '...independent, self-contained, autonomous entity who (a) comprises a unique configuration of internal attributes... and (b) behaves primarily as a consequence of these internal attributes.'⁸³¹ For an astrologer, some of these attributes of self, as referred to by Markus and Kitayama, consist of their personal unique combination of zodiac signs, planets, aspects, and so forth, which make up their horoscope. These cosmic attributes allocated at birth inject a form of fate into the astrologer's view of self while at the same time provide a view of an autonomous self through the uniqueness of their horoscope.

In addition to these 'unique attributes' and autonomy defined by Markus and Kitayama, Giddens considers that the individual needs to understand themselves in 'terms of her or his biography...[and]... across time and space...' and that the individual needs to have a concept of themselves as well as of others.⁸³² Spinoza had argued, cited in chapter 3, that a method of gaining a concept of self was to use a form of detachment which could facilitate a deeper understanding of the self and allowed for the removing of the ignorance which he saw as the 'chains that bind us' and thus finding a form of freedom that was worth having.⁸³³

Giddens' notion of being able to see oneself while 'seeing' others is reinforced for the astrologer by their unique personal horoscope as the view of self, for it not only provides a form of Spinozian detachment but it provides a difference to others while at the same time binds the individual to the outer world of the cosmos. In this way the astrologer's view of self is personal, contains fate, provides boundaries and awareness of others, and is holistic

⁸³¹ Hazel Rose Markus and Shinobu Kitayama, "Culture and the Self. Implications for Cognition, Emotion, and Motivation," *Psychological Review* Vol 98, no. 2 (1991): p.224; See also Clifford Geertz, "On the nature of anthropological understanding," *American Scientist* 63 (1975): pp.47-53.

⁸³² Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*: p.53.

⁸³³ Scruton, "Spinoza," p.156.

in that it provides a unique membership to a sympathetic cosmos. This view of self was seen in many of the notes.

'Emily', a fifty-nine year old British woman who has been working with astrology for twenty years, captures both Giddens' idea of a personal biography and the Spinozian concept of detachment, she writes, 'What I love about astrology is its ability to show me that life is a journey not just a destination. As a developmental tool it gives meaning to life. It gives me insights, tolerance and understanding into my own predispositions and behaviours and those of others.'⁸³⁴ Emily believes in a secular astrology, with a life philosophy that enables her to see '...that the bad times won't last forever and the ability to make "lemonade out of lemons" and to make the most of the good times when they are here.'

Similarly, another British woman who has practiced astrology for over forty years comments that, 'Astrology has given me confidence to be who I am, and accept myself. It guides me through life, with the transits and gives purpose to my journey. I have more compassion and understanding of others, and am less judgemental because of astrology.'⁸³⁵ From the USA, a forty year old male astrologer says of astrology, 'It is a wonderful tool to assist you in gathering more information about who you are and why you may tend to behave in the manner in which you do. As such, it offers a means to make you a better, more actualized person.'⁸³⁶ A forty year old Australian woman who has been doing astrology for eight years writes, 'It has allowed me to see other people as different from me, with different ways of thinking and being.'⁸³⁷ For these astrologers, their astrology provides them with not only their concept of 'self' via the Spinozian therapy of detachment provided by their horoscope but also Giddens' concept of a 'self' in relationship with a larger whole.

⁸³⁴ Survey code 20081667

⁸³⁵ Survey code 20081396

⁸³⁶ Survey code 20081079

⁸³⁷ Survey code 20080702

While 'Paul', an American astrologer in his early thirties who has been study astrology for nine years, appears to be more deeply embedded in Stoic themes as well as Spinoza's detachment when he writes of what astrology adds to his life:

The sense of connectedness primarily, the depth and fullness of a meaningful religious (spiritual) connection. An ability to see the challenging and invigorating parts of my life from a larger perspective and the ability to experience meaning beyond the secular experience. Also the realization that extremely personal aspects are able to be understood by virtue of their being parts of larger historic and collective patterns experienced by others in different but related ways.⁸³⁸

Other astrologers reflect Paul's Stoic and Spinoza-like comments. The order of the cosmos which gives them their notions of fate also provides them with a sense of belonging to a rational ordered world. A fifty-eight year old Canadian man writes that astrology provides the '...capacity to illuminate human behaviour within the context of a larger natural order.'⁸³⁹ A forty-seven year old American woman, who has been working with astrology for twenty years, speaks of this order in a way that transcends any of her other beliefs:

It gives me a deep, peaceful sense of order in a world that often seems chaotic. It anchors me. It is the one thing I always fall back on when things are tough in my life. Religious and spiritual beliefs have changed throughout my life, but never my connection with astrology. It meets all challenges and I always come out a winner.⁸⁴⁰

One astrologer from the USA focused on this notion of detachment that the horoscope provided stating that it enabled her to deal with her life:

I like the idea that astrology allows me to dissociate from the events and feelings that I am experiencing - and see them from a broader - more cosmic perspective. It allows me to let go of the past, and prepare myself more fully for the future.⁸⁴¹

This is also the concept behind the comments of a Canadian astrologer of some twenty years of experience. She writes of her clients, saying, 'Astrology provides a splendid framework for people to explore their inner hopes, desires and fears. ... I find it interesting that many people are resistant to change and will cheerfully repeat unproductive ways of

⁸³⁸ Survey code 20081074

⁸³⁹ Survey code 20080686

⁸⁴⁰ Survey code 20080909

⁸⁴¹ Survey code 20081027

being....until provided with a chart which notes [their] areas of difficulty.'⁸⁴² For this consulting astrologer the capacity of astrology to provide a detached view of life for a client has a positive effect on the client, enabling them, she believes, to break a repeating pattern of behaviour.

All of these notes show astrologers seeking personal definition either for themselves or for their clients. In this pursuit they reach for Giddens' concept of the self, seen as both unique as well as in relationship to others, and they use the Spinozian concept of detachment provided by the horoscope to help them gain this personal perspective.

Living as an astrologer in a sympathetic cosmos

Among all the notes are also insights into the daily life of the astrologers. These comments are not concerned with their philosophy but with what they do, on a daily basis, with their astrology. From the USA 'Lucy', a forty-eight year old who has been involved with astrology for ten years, writes:

Just because something is in the stars, free will can change the outcome. An example is Mercury retro[grade], during the transit I pay close attention to my car, computer, finances, relationships, not sign any contracts etc... [these are objects ruled by Mercury] I also maintain a very positive attitude during the transit, because how I perceive the transit (gloom & doom versus time to revisit and learn) has a tremendous effect on my experiences during that time. I don't boldly challenge the retrograde, I honor Mercury with respect, so my lessons are easier.⁸⁴³

Lucy's note reveals a practice common within astrology. At times when it is believed that a planet is dominating one's daily activity, in this instance when Mercury appears to moving backwards through the heavens, Lucy believes that by focusing on those areas of her life which she considers linked to that planet, and paying attention to them — she calls this honouring the planet — then she can influence the external events which happen around her. This idea echoes the work of C.C.Zain with his Law of Affinity, cited in chapter 5, where he believed that by maintaining harmony with the planets then one could change the

⁸⁴² Survey code 20080907

⁸⁴³ Survey code 20081153

external events 'attracted' into one's life — Lucy's note shows the daily reality of living in a participatory sympathetic cosmos.

Another sixty year old woman from the USA seems to take Ptolemy's approach to the purpose of seeing the future by commenting, 'That it helps me have an understanding of events in the past which allows me to take proper preparations and actions in order to go with the flow of energy (hopefully) in a positive way — now, in the present and in the future.'⁸⁴⁴

Along with using astrology for planning, there are also notes which express fear of the future. These astrologers appeared to accept Schopenhauer's pessimistic view described by Gupta as the forces of fate, for Schopenhauer the 'Will' was not rational but rather irrational, a blind and involuntary force.⁸⁴⁵ With this view of fate as irrational then no comfort is found through the predictions of astrology. 'Margaret' is a thirty-four year old British astrologer who has been working with astrology for last ten years. She states that she reads mainly psychological astrology authors but she does not seem to have accepted the natural compatibilist position promoted by Hone and Greene, in chapter 6, that of the ambiguousness of symbols. She is instead filled with apprehension in the way she lives with astrology, not finding any solace in its messages of the future. Her comments are more of a personal narrative:

I struggle with the whole fate aspect. I don't like the way that working with future planetary transits and progressions [predictive astrology techniques] you can see tough times ahead, and this makes you 'dread' them, you then start looking at difficulties and negativity — does this mean you create it as you expect it?? I have a [transiting] Pluto conj [my natal] Moon coming in a year or so — and although I have heard all the positive manifestations of this — I have also been (at lectures / classes etc) told how awful it can be. To be honest this has made me wary of astrology — which has made me question it. Having said that even when I have a break for a while from working with it and checking my ephemeris [table of planetary movements] — when I have had a rough time and I do look what's been happening I ALWAYS find its reflected in the astrology!! So am I kidding myself that there's any way of avoiding the events /energies? And should I at least go in to

⁸⁴⁴ Survey code 20080663

⁸⁴⁵ Gupta, "Freud and Schopenhauer," p.722.

them with awareness? But if so how do I avoid going into it loading my belief with negativity? I am struggling with these questions massively right now.⁸⁴⁶

There is much in this story of doubt and fear. Margaret is using her astrology to look ahead, in the nature of Giddens' argument about life-style and the production of personal calendars, cited earlier in this chapter, but what she sees worries her. Without any apparent surrounding philosophy to her knowledge of astrology such as the dualism of Rudhyar's humanism or finding comfort through Ptolemy's Stoicism her knowledge of the future does not give her control, facilitate harmony, or enable her to understand a personal journey, but instead produces apprehension. She is concerned about the power of her own thoughts to influence the future but does not take the mental step to understand that this implies, within her natural beliefs, that the future is not fixed. She tries to step back from the astrology but in times of difficulty she returns to the mechanical order of the ephemeris and, almost as a self-fulfilling prophecy, finds confirmation of the validity of the subject.

This doubt and confusion is also reflected in another personal story. 'Olivia', like Margaret, is thirty-four years old, British psychological astrologer who has been studying astrology for four years. Her story is similar to Margaret's but seems to have moved one small step closer to a personal theory of fate:

Paradoxically, I dislike the fact that astrology seems so accurate, every time I look in the paper there are often deaths or incidents happening to or around people in their first or second Saturn return years, for example. Seeing these things and the patterns at work takes away the feeling of having some control over your life that 'ignorance is bliss' feeling. Instead, I sometimes feel that we are all interconnected and my fate is not just a matter of cause and effect — the consequences of choices that I make, but I see that it is interlinked with my children and their development needs — and the same with my father. He died when Saturn transited my [natal] sun (immediately after my Saturn return), and that had a huge effect of change upon me and my siblings and our relationship with each other. So, it left me thinking, 'would he have died if Saturn wasn't transiting my Sun?' I saw him out of the blue on the day he died, I was the last to speak with him on the phone — an hour before he killed himself. It raises a lot of questions for me that I wish I didn't

⁸⁴⁶ Survey code 20080609

have to consider. You can't un-know what you come to know from learning astrology.⁸⁴⁷

Olivia is struggling with her perception of the fate of astrology; she has accepted it but it clashes with her culture's beliefs about the inherent free will of the individual. Additionally, like Margaret she encounters this fate from her classes in astrology but, with fate being commonly confused with determinism, argued in chapters 1 and 3, and its different philosophical positions thus undefined and unclear, she flounders in a sea of doubt and confusion. Somehow the synchronicity of the movement of the planet Saturn over the zodiacal location of her natal Sun — both these planets in astrology are symbolic of the father⁸⁴⁸ — linked with her 'out of the blue' encounter with her father only an hour before his suicide produced for her an astrological epiphany. But such an epiphany seems to be located outside her established belief systems. Olivia is left to either abandon the implications of this epiphany or abandon her previous world view. Her narrative captures the making of an astrologer; if she steps into the new landscape of a sympathetic cosmology which is occupied by the epiphany then it is more than likely that she will never return to her old way of seeing the world. Olivia's story may offer a clue as to why astrologers tend to stay in the subject, as revealed by the survey in the previous chapter, for the adoption of astrology into one's life requires a shift in one's thinking about the nature of the universe, a shift that alters one's expectations of the world, and once having made that shift it places the astrologer in a different 'landscape', and thus many are reluctant to shift back.

The astrologer's taboo

As cited in chapter 1, astrologers have a taboo around fatalism. This taboo is expressed in the code of ethics of many astrological organisations and was apparent in these 'notes in a bottle'. A twenty-nine year old Canadian astrologer expressed her distaste for her version of fatalism by commenting that what she disliked most about astrology was, 'Negative predictions. I don't believe in fatalistic negativity. We still have a choice to handle the

⁸⁴⁷ Survey code 20080676

⁸⁴⁸ Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos*: Book III, ch.V on p.114; Greene, *The Horoscope in Manifestation, Psychology and Prediction*: p.12; Sue Tompkins, *The Contemporary Astrologer's Handbook* (London, UK: Flare Publications, 2006), p.73 and p.157.

difficult times in our lives in a positive way. I do not like astrological readings that focus on predetermined negative struggles or events.'⁸⁴⁹ A fifty-seven year old American male expressed his disdain for some astrologers by writing, '...some other people use it as a weapon to criticize and caricaturize and put "final" limits to other people's personalities or destiny. They play God.'⁸⁵⁰ But it is probably the short note from another fifty-eight year old American astrologer who has been a practitioner for thirty years that sums up this position. She writes, 'It's not the astrology I DISLIKE, it's the fatalism of some of its proponents.'⁸⁵¹ Indeed about 10% of all 'notes in a bottle' received from the astrologers have contained comments about their rejection of any astrology that promotes, or astrologer who practises, what they define as fatalism. Fatalism, discussed in chapter 2, is the belief in the inevitability of an event regardless of the causal path that is taken by the individual to reach that event.⁸⁵² However, the definition of fatalism that is implied by the astrologers is a belief in the inevitability of the horoscope and could be more correctly defined as natural hard incompatibilism.

One thirty-two year old female Canadian astrologer railed at this taboo, writing:

When my local astrological society tells me I must agree that nothing is carved in stone, and I must sign an agreement to the effect that I am in no way qualified to predict the future with clients, well — I'm not a member of the local astrological society. As the late Charles EO Carter once pointed out, the nativity works even if the native is an idiot (his word).⁸⁵³

Such a taboo needs to be considered whenever a researcher asks an astrologer about their practice of astrology and predictions. As already discussed in chapter 7, prediction for astrologers is focused on time and quality, rather than the more widely held view by non-astrologers that prediction produces both exact time and event. This astrological view of prediction linked with the taboo on any perception of fatalism in their individual astrology

⁸⁴⁹ Survey code 20080679

⁸⁵⁰ Survey code 20080963

⁸⁵¹ Survey code 20081268

⁸⁵² Massie, *Contingency, Time and Possibility, an essay on Aristotle and Duns Scotus*: p.52.

⁸⁵³ Survey code 20081480

means that any research in this area of astrologers' beliefs or practices has to be undertaken with an awareness of these issues.

The view of astrology by society in general is the other major concern of astrologers. They experience the double-edged position of, on the one hand, being judged as fatalist while, on the other, being requested to be fatalistic in their work. Thus they seek to voice strong objections to what they define as assumed fatalism within astrology and complain about the decimation against astrology which is based on these assumptions. A fifty-five year old Australian woman who has only been studying astrology for four years is clearly dealing with such issues, for she writes, 'Astrology causes isolation due to the discrimination.'⁸⁵⁴ This isolation is also mentioned by a thirty-eight year old Swiss astrologer, writing about her problem in being an astrologer as, 'the fact that it [astrology] has to fight so many preconceptions and that I can only share my thought and ideas with a very small group of people.'⁸⁵⁵ A fifty-eight year old American astrologer muses on what she does not like about being an astrologer: 'I guess its people that confront me about astrology and always having to defend it.'⁸⁵⁶

Finally, to complete this analysis of the 'thick' data which, in its diversity and density, exposes facets of how astrologers think and live with fate, comes this note from a fifty-six year old Canadian astrologer, who has been practicing for twenty-five years, which seems to embrace the vast majority of opinions:

So here's what I think about fate, just so you're clear: I believe the course of our lives is largely, and possibly entirely, predetermined from the moment we're born. I'm not sure to what extent we have free choice in small events, but certainly in large ones I think we have none. Though I believe in reincarnation, I have no idea if the soul chooses the moment it is born, or what kind of life it will take on in a particular incarnation. I do feel the following is an appropriate metaphor for how astrology works: 'We cannot direct the wind, but we can adjust our sails.' i.e., we have no control over what events happen to us, but we have some control over HOW we respond in any given situation – I think!⁸⁵⁷

⁸⁵⁴ Survey code 20080638

⁸⁵⁵ Survey code 20081172

⁸⁵⁶ Survey code 20081164

⁸⁵⁷ Survey code 20081123

These 'notes in a bottle' reveal a personal or intimate view from inside the astrological community. They expose thinking that many critics of astrology could attack, yet the candid nature of these notes paints an image of a community that is actively concerned with the problems of free will and fate. Their thoughts lack the structure of philosophical language and are wrapped in personal doubts and worries. However, the very fate which is the cause of their worries, along with their feelings of social isolation also provides their sense of self, their personal calendars and gives a meaning to their lives by ascribing them membership to a sympathetic cosmos.

Astrology and culture

Astrology and its association with culture can be considered from two different perspectives. One such perspective is that of Terry Eagleton who defined culture as a place where nature meets humanity. Eagleton suggests that culture is a tension, 'a dialectic between the artificial and the natural, what we do to the world and what the world does to us.'⁸⁵⁸ He points out how the word itself has its etymological roots in agriculture, the union of the human spirit with the land and the determinism of the seasonal cycles. For Eagleton, the idea of culture embraces a tension between 'freedom and determinism, agency and endurance, change and identity, the given and the created...'⁸⁵⁹, thereby suggesting that culture is an inevitable result of the tension between the determinism of the laws of nature and the autonomy of the human spirit. Eagleton argues that this tension between spirit and the determinism of nature adds a vitality and robustness to the culture it creates.⁸⁶⁰

If one accepts Eagleton's argument, then astrology's long and robust presence within society can be understood by its ability to create itself as or become an integral part of a society's culture. For, based on Eagleton's thinking, astrology can be considered a cultural product grown out of the union of the human spirit with the heavens, the other part of nature which contained its own mechanical deterministic laws of planetary movements. In this regard the determinism contained within the mechanics of the horoscope does not

⁸⁵⁸ Terry Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture* (London: Blackwell Publishers Ltd, 2000), p. 2.

⁸⁵⁹ Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*: p.4.

⁸⁶⁰ Eagleton, *The Idea of Culture*: p.4.

diminish astrology's appeal but rather provides a vitality that allows it to adapt, alter and possibly even contribute to the expression of the contemporary culture in which it finds itself.

This ability to adapt can be seen in the changing role of the horoscope. These 'notes in a bottle' reveal that the majority of contemporary astrologers viewed the horoscope as an objective reflection of a unique self. This link between self and horoscope was reflected in the astrologers who reported how they pursued a lifelong journey of understanding their own personal and unique map. For example many astrologers regarded their horoscope as an image of their perfect self — Aristotelian *teleos* —and used it as a guide to help achieve this perfection. For many of the astrologers who added comments at the end of the questionnaire the horoscope was viewed as an encyclopaedia of the self, written at birth but never finished being read.

Yet this view of the horoscope was not always the case. At the turn of the twentieth century, as shown in the literature review of chapter four, Alan Leo's writings portrayed the horoscope as separate to the idea of self and the purpose of life was to try and break one's association with the fated horoscope.⁸⁶¹ Similarly Sepharial, Leo's contemporary, advocated that the horoscope was merely a set of external signals that one could choose to consider or not.⁸⁶² However, by the second half of the twentieth century this view of the horoscope began to shift. In 1951, as discussed in chapter six, Margaret Hone had redefined the horoscope as a total expression of the self.⁸⁶³ Hone's work was then followed some twenty five years later by that of Liz Greene and Michael Meyer in mid 1970s who both, independently, put forward views that the horoscope was a reflection of a complete unique self.⁸⁶⁴ Today, as evident in the majority of comments from the astrologers who emailed me, the horoscope provides a view of the autonomous self, not to be transcended or diminished but to be embraced and lived. Thus the present-day astrologer tends to use

⁸⁶¹ Leo, *Astrology for all*.

⁸⁶² Sepharial, *Directional Astrology* p.42.

⁸⁶³ Hone, *The Modern Text-Book of Astrology*: p.151.

⁸⁶⁴ Greene, *Saturn, a new look at an old devil*: pp.10-11; Meyer, *A Handbook for the Humanistic Astrologer*: p.13.

their horoscope and its personal calendar as a way of strengthening their notion of a unique self with a unique life plan and a unique set of life-style choices.

This view of a unique self is, however, not isolated to present day astrologers. Anthony Giddens' work can also provide another argument for placing astrology within a cultural framework. He argues that the idea of the uniqueness of self is a feature of contemporary culture. Giddens comments that the 'post-traditional' view of self is one where the individual has the ability and freedom to be concerned with such questions as 'What to do? How to act? Who to be? These are focal questions for everyone living in circumstances of late modernity.'⁸⁶⁵ Giddens expands on this argument by stating that this contemporary view of self-identify is also embedded in a personal on-going biography:

A person's identity is not to be found in behaviour nor — important though this is — in the reactions of others, but in the capacity *to keep a particular narrative going*. ... It must continually integrate events which occur in the external world and sort them into the ongoing 'story' about self.⁸⁶⁶ [Giddens' italics]

It so happens that astrology has always provided its users with a notion of times past and times future based in planetary cycles. Avraham ibn Ezra, the twelfth century Rabbi and Jewish astrologer discussed in chapter one, commented on how the horoscope defined the individual's place within a nation as well as family based on the planetary cycles.⁸⁶⁷ This placement was for ibn Ezra, and still is for contemporary astrologers, dynamic with the planetary cycles describing the lived life.⁸⁶⁸ However, with the shift to a more personally-supportive horoscope these planetary cycles are now considered by astrologers to produce a personal life-narrative which is a part of the unique view of self and its relationship to the cosmos. Thus for many astrologers these planetary events have become internalised, forming what Giddens referred to as the 'ongoing "story" about self'.

Additionally Giddens argues that such a 'story of self' provides a 'stable' identity, a strengthening of the sense of self:

⁸⁶⁵ Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*: p.70.

⁸⁶⁶ Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*: p.54.

⁸⁶⁷ Ibn Ezra, *The Book of Nativities and Revolutions*: pp.1-3.

⁸⁶⁸ For one example of this see Ibn Ezra, *The Book of Nativities and Revolutions*: pp.75-78.

A person with a reasonably stable sense of self-identity has a feeling of biographical continuity which she is able to grasp reflexively and, to a greater or lesser degree, communicate to other people. ... self-identity is bound up with the fragile nature of the biography which the individual 'supplies' about herself.⁸⁶⁹

One can argue therefore that, based on Giddens' argument, the practice of contemporary astrology, with its emphasis on the uniqueness of self and personal life narrative can be viewed as encouraging a stable sense of self-identity. This is a small point but it does provide further insight into the questionnaire findings of the phenomena that once a person engages with astrology they tend to maintain their interest for the rest of their life. Independent of this point, however, when astrologers in the late twentieth century redefined the role of the horoscope to become an objective but supportive view of the whole 'self' they instinctively maintained their rapport with shifts in the contemporary culture as defined by Giddens' view of the post-traditional individual.

Hence using Eagleton's ideas, it can be argued that astrology generates culture while using Giddens' concepts, astrology's present-day practices are a reflection of contemporary post-traditional culture. Whether astrology informs or reflects culture is a point for debate. However, these 'notes in a bottle' show that, although astrology has deep classical roots and may be considered by some to be a left over from a bygone era, it is also firmly centred in the present, reflecting in its practice Giddens' views on the nature of a contemporary individual.

Chapter summary

This chapter has reported on the comments from 902 astrologers. These comments have been considered as 'notes in a bottle', thick data that reveal thoughts, emotions, fears and concerns about fate within their personal lives. The notes were divided into themes and as such their different theories of fate were discussed. Two opposing notions of fate were given from two astrologers both of whom appeared to be in opposition with each other's view, yet both embraced Homer's view of necessity in the *Iliad*. These were contrasted with notes from astrologers who adopted a natural libertarian position seeing fate as simply

⁸⁶⁹ Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*: p.54.

an illusion and astrology as a useful instrument which could be picked up or put down as required. Platonist dualist themes were also present in their views of fate, soul, spirit, and the libertarianism which acknowledged fate but did not consider that it influenced the ability of the will to be free. The notes also revealed a large number of astrologers whose personal views demonstrated rapport with Stoic and/or Spinozian principles where peace was gained via an acceptance of a fated life and knowledge of the self gained by detachment. These views supported the monist arguments as promoted by Hone and Greene in chapter 6. Calcidius' model of fate was also represented, with its emphasis on the individual's actions as the source of fate, while the self-agency of the Calcidius' model also supported the idea of a unique and autonomous sense of self, which was discussed in horary astrology in chapter 5.

The notes also showed what it was like to live as an astrologer. Three narratives were selected for their representation of the doubts and the tensions that were experienced by astrologers as they grappled with living with fate. Astrologers appear to struggle with a tension between what they believe about fate and what they accept about fate. This struggle appeared to be exacerbated by a taboo held by many astrologers, and their organisations, against support for natural hard incompatibilism, which they defined as fatalism. The notes also revealed statements of isolation, felt by astrologers as a result of the conflict of their beliefs with those of their larger social groups.

The chapter then concluded with a consideration of Giddens' thoughts on features of contemporary culture regarding the shaping of self-identity and Eagleton's thoughts on how culture is generated out of the union of spirit and determinism. Based on their arguments and my findings within the field work, this chapter then argued that the practice of astrology is sensitive to cultural pressure and thus culturally it has both contemporary and classical credentials.

The next chapter continues investigating these themes through the interviews with the astrological theorist — the writers and teachers of astrology.