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Module code: HPCA7015 Module title: Foundations in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology	Student ID number:	Educational support needs:
Assignment title: A 3,500 word essay written on a topic within the subject area : A. Discuss how classical notions of soul are reflected in astrology		
Assignment due date: 5/01/2026		
This assignment is for the 1 st ☐ 2 nd ☐ 3 rd ☐ 4 th ☐ 5 th ☐ 6 th ☐ module of the degree		
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A discussion on the classical notions of soul as they are presented in modern astrological teachings.

I: Introduction

This paper examines how classical philosophical notions of soul are reflected in modern astrological thought. Drawing on the teachings of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, it establishes a working definition of soul as a preliminary framework for understanding its relationship to astrological thought. The paper then turns to the work of astrologers Alan Leo and Dane Rudhyar, whose psychological and evolutionary approaches were influenced by the theosophical ideas of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky. Considering astrology's cyclical structure and its use as a system for pattern recognition and intrapersonal reflection, this essay argues that astrology may be understood as a tool for the development of the soul and cultivating self-awareness over time.

II: What is "soul"?

The concept of the soul, as it is understood in contemporary Western thought, is deeply shaped by the teachings and traditions of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle. Though their views differ in different respects, due to their educational lineage their works form a conceptual lineage through which the soul is able to be understood as an animating and organizing principle of life.¹ Across their teachings, several key themes emerge, which will help our further understanding of the ties to astrological thought: the soul's independence from the body, the soul's connection to virtue and development of morality, its relationship to time and change, and its role in self-awareness. Together, these concepts provide the necessary framework for examining how the classical notion of soul have informed astrological theory and practice.

Socrates (Immortality & Virtue)

In Socrates' teachings, the soul is not systematically defined under a clear metaphysical framework, but rather through philosophical questioning of ethics and moral persuasion. Socrates repeatedly notes that the soul is a distinct entity from the body, describing the soul as "most like, and most akin to, intelligible being, and that body is most like perceptible and perishable being."² Meaning that while the soul exists in relation to the body during life, it is not reducible to the body, and that death often marks a transition for the soul, rather than an end.²

Another central pillar of Socrates' teaching is a belief that the soul is immortal and has the capacity to "contemplate truths after its separation from the body at the time of death."² By maintaining the argument that death of the perishable body is when the soul separates from said body, Socrates is able to affirm immortality, and imply sentience, with the souls post-death cognitive capabilities.³ He, extends this understanding of soul to more than just human life, but all living things stating,

"Do not, then, consider this for humans only," he said, "if you wish to learn more easily, but also for all animals and plants, and in general anything whatever that has a coming to be."³

¹ Irwin, T. (2007). *The development of ethics : a historical and critical study. Volume 1, From Socrates to the Reformation*. Oxford University Press.

² Lorenz, Hendrik, "Ancient Theories of Soul", The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy (Summer 2024 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL =<<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2024/entries/ancient-soul/>>.

³ Buttaci, J. A. (2025). Colloquium 1: οὐδὲν κωλύει: Cebes, Socrates, and Aristotle on the Imperishability of the (Human) Soul. *Proceedings of the Boston Area Colloquium in Ancient Philosophy*, 39(1), 1–41. <https://doi.org/10.1163/22134417-00391p02>

It is important to note that, according to Socrates, the soul is inseparable from virtuous and ethical practices. Socrates held a firm stance that virtue is a form of knowledge, rather than a set of outward, observable behaviours.¹ His justification for this is that moral failures are often a result of ignorance, and an underdeveloped (unembodied) soul, rather than willful wrongdoing.¹ Inherently, the health of the soul depends on one's ability to cultivate virtuous behaviors, namely justice, and ideologies during their life, which Socrates' regards as essential to genuine happiness.⁴ To live unjustly, he claims, is to damage the soul in a manner similar to live in a diseased body.¹ His teachings were often a projection of his societal views, and an encouragement to citizens to do good onto yourself, others, and act rationally and in opposition to harm done upon yourself and your neighbor.⁵

Through his teachings, Socrates presents that soul as an immortal object of self-care and moral concern. Although he does not provide a clear definition of justice, his emphasis on self-reflection and a moral responsibility to the wellbeing of others implies that the soul possesses some form of individual consciousness. This conception of the soul as an enduring, morally accountable principle lays the groundwork for later philosophical developments concerning its structure, cosmic role, and relationship to time.

Plato (Immortality and Passage of Time)

Plato expands upon Socrates' ideas by relating the soul to a broader metaphysical and cosmological framework, in relation to the ethical framework previously established. In *The Republic*, he describes the embodied human soul as consisting of three parts: reason, spirit, and appetite.⁶ Reason is oriented toward rational truth and knowledge, appetite governs bodily desires, and spirit functions as a mediator between the other two forces, which often supports reason in its governance over appetite.⁶ This tripartite structure of the soul allows Plato to explain the interplay between inner psychological conflict, while maintaining the soul's inherent rational and moral orientation.

Plato also characterizes the soul as a source of motion, order, and life itself, which branches its understanding beyond a purely ethical function. He argues that the soul is the cause of embodiment, rather than the formerly understood result of embodiment.⁷ While this supports Socrates' claims that the soul is immortal, Plato's understanding of the soul is that it belongs to an intelligible realm, even as it animates the physical world.⁷ Plato thus deviates from an anthropological assumption of the soul by extending it to the cosmos as a whole.

In *The Laws* and *Timaeus*, Plato plainly states that there is a "soul" which drives the heavens, and asserts that the planets and stars are animated by individual souls which are then governed by a world soul.⁸ This world soul acts as an intermediary reality, ensuring the order and coherence of the cosmos as established by the Demiurge.⁹ This framework establishes an understanding that beyond the perishable

⁴ Woodruff, Paul, *'The Spirit of Socrates', Living Toward Virtue: Practical Ethics in the Spirit of Socrates* (New York, 2023; online edn, Oxford Academic, 15 Dec. 2022), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780197672129.003.0002>, accessed 30 Dec. 2025.

⁵ Brown, Eric, "Plato's Ethics and Politics in *The Republic*", *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Fall 2017 Edition), Edward N. Zalta (ed.), URL = <<https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/fall2017/entries/plato-ethics-politics/>>.

⁶ Ferrari, G. R. F. (2000). Plato: *The Republic*.

⁷ Kamtekar, Rachana, *'Doctrine and Dialectic in Plato's Dialogues', Plato's Moral Psychology: Intellectualism, the Divided Soul, and the Desire for Good* (Oxford, 2017; online edn, Oxford Academic, 18 Jan. 2018), <https://doi.org/10.1093/oso/9780198798446.003.0002>, accessed 29 Dec. 2025.

⁸ Plato. (1952). *Plato's Cosmology : The Timaeus of Plato translated and with a running commentary* /. Routledge,.

⁹ Chad Jorgenson, Filip Karfik, & Štěpán Špinka. (2020). *Plato's Timaeus : Proceedings of the Tenth Symposium Platonicum Pragense* (Vol. 00005). Brill.

life on earth, the universe itself is a living, ensouled system that human souls participate in.⁹ Plato essentially argues the interconnectedness of all things, living and celestial, through this world soul.⁹

Plato further links the soul to the passage of time, and how the regular motion of planets offered humans the ability to measure time and engage in philosophical reflection. In *Timaeus*, he suggests that due to observation of celestial cycles humans were able to understand numerical order, inquire into natural processes, and pursue philosophical wisdom.⁸ Because of planetary motion, time was able to be understood as an intelligible structure rather than a purely mechanical processes.⁸ The cyclical nature of time, as seen through the recurring planetary patterns and motions, reinforces the soul's immortality and situates human moral and intellectual development as part of a large cosmic structure.⁹ This concept allowed for further philosophical discussions to expand the understanding of a soul's development in the teachings of Aristotle.

Aristotle (Passage of Time & Self-awareness)

Aristotle discusses a more immanent and biologically grounded function of the soul, emphasizing its role as the organizing force of all living beings. In *De Anima*, he defines the soul as a set of capacities, including nutrition, perception, and thought, which together constitute the unity of a living organism.² Lower capacities, such as nutrition, may exist without the higher ones, but the higher capacities depend on the presence of the lower ones.¹⁰ By creating this hierarchy, Aristotle extends the concept of soul to plants and animals while distinguishing human beings with their capacity of rational thought and self-awareness.¹⁰

Essential to Aristotle's teachings is the relationship between soul and time. He defines time as "a number of change in respect to the before and after."¹¹ He establishes an argument that it is the soul, not an organ of thought, that perceives and distinguishes the change in time.¹⁰ Awareness of time implies a subject that is capable of recognizing change, which as stated is attributed to a function of the soul.¹¹ Through this temporal awareness, the soul becomes conscious of itself as enduring across moments of transformation.¹¹ Thus, the intentional observation of celestial phenomena can be clearly linked to progress and development of a soul, if connected to personal reflection.

Unlike Plato, however, Aristotle rejects the notion that the human soul can exist independently of the body.² He maintains the belief that thought is not a function of the body, but rather the soul, and without embodiment it cannot occur.¹⁰ The soul, for Aristotle, is not a separable substance but the form of a living body.¹⁰ This emphasis on embodiment situates the soul firmly within lived experience, grounding self-awareness, perception, and development in the concrete realities of physical life.¹¹

Synthesis of the Soul

Given the accounts of Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle, several principles emerge that are essential for understanding the influence of classical notions of soul on astrological thought. First, the soul functions as an animating and organizing body presence in conscious and non-conscious life, including humans, animals, plants, and in the heavens themselves. Second, the cosmos is governed by the world soul, which mediates between the intelligible and perishable realities, as a higher ordering force. Finally,

¹⁰ Sorabji, R. 1974. "Body and Soul in Aristotle," *Philosophy* (London, England), 49.187, pp. 63–89, doi:10.1017/s0031819100047884

¹¹ Johannes Zachhuber. (2022). *Time and Soul : From Aristotle to St. Augustine* (Vol. 00006). De Gruyter.

the human soul possesses the capacity for self-awareness through the perception of time and change, allowing for moral reflection and development across the passage of time.

Given these classical notions, the soul occupies an intermediary position which is divine in origin and function, yet is shaped through embodied experiences. Astrology, with its emphasis on cyclical time, planetary motion, and symbolism, can therefore be interpreted as a framework through which the soul engages with patterns of change. Transits and planetary configurations do not determine the soul's fate, but rather reveal the context by which a soul can develop through self-awareness and psychological reflection.

III: What is Astrology

Celestial observations have been at the center of man world belief systems, and the development of astrological teachings and practices.¹² While there are many definitions of "what is astrology," simply put astrology is a "foundational concept that is of the correspondence between the heavens above and the earth below."¹³ Central to astrological thought is the connection between above (the heavens) and below (the earth), linking together spiritual and cosmological micro and macrocosms.¹³ According to the Campion, "all phenomena, both divine and material, were essentially connected by 'sympathetic' powers or energies."¹³ This gives us a dual understanding of astrology as a predictive discipline through the observation of past, present and future celestial movements, and as a funnel for self-reflection.¹²

Essential to astrological teachings is the notion of a horoscope, which is a map of the heavens for a particular time and place, often illustrated as a circular diagram showing the position of the Sun, Moon, and planets, viewed from Earth.¹⁴ The horoscope is divided into by the twelve zodiac signs, and divisions known as houses, to signify different areas of life such as partnerships, home, and career.¹² Natal astrology draws conclusions on the nature of a person's life and character by casting a horoscope for the planet's position at the time of their birth, using it as a symbolic language connecting the heavens to the human condition.¹² Thus, with these ideas, astrology can be understood as "the practical implementation of of cosmological ideas in order to understand the past, manage the present, and forecast the future, in a range of cultures, past and present."¹⁵

IV: Classical ideas of soul presented in astrology

The established working definition of both astrology and the soul allows for clear synchronicities to emerge between classical philosophical notions of soul and modern astrological theory. Among the most influential astrological figures, Alan Leo & Dane Rudhyar stand out as two individuals who shifted astrology away from a purely predictive model to one that incorporates self-reflection and spirituality for soul development. Their teachings transformed astrology as a tool for inner development rather than mere-fortune telling.

Both Leo and Rudhyar were strongly influenced by the Theosophical writings of Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, particularly her works in *Isis Unveiled* and *The Secret Doctrine*.¹² Blavatsky described astrology

¹² Andrikopoulos, L. (2023). *The psychologisation of natal astrology in the twentieth century*. University of Wales Trinity Saint David.

¹³ Nicholas Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology* (London: Continuum, 2008)

¹⁴ John Filbey, *Natal Charting* (London: Faculty of Astrological Studies, 1981)

¹⁵ Nicholas Campion, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (London: New York University Press, 2012)

as a precise science concerned with not only external events but with spiritual and psychological meaning.¹² She frequently referred to the works of Plato, advancing the idea that the cosmos is ensouled and governed by an omnipresent, eternal, and immutable principle that goes beyond human cognition, while guiding humans towards “freedom and self-consciousness.”¹⁶ This conception closely parallels the Platonic world soul and provides a metaphysical foundation for Leo’s and Rudhyar’s view of astrology as a symbolic system through which the soul may be understood and developed.

Alan Leo

Leo argues that there are three levels to astrological interpretation, the inner, the outer, and the body.¹² While his work is often described as psychological, he did not conceive astrology as a singularly psychological tool, but rather an additive to psychological practices. He emphasized astrology’s capacity to illuminate the multifaceted nature of the human experience, relating facets of the chart to areas of life like relationships, career, and character.¹⁷ He adopts an approach that attributes the planetary symbols with psychological qualities and states of being, reorienting astrology toward the inner life of an individual.¹⁷

One of Alan Leo’s greatest contributions to astrological thought is the central importance of the Sun in the horoscope.¹⁸ He expanded Blavatsky’s teachings about the indivisible spiritual Sun to view it as the embodiment of divinity, and as the placement in the natal chart that had the greatest potency for navigating one’s inner journey.¹⁸ With regard to classical notions of the soul, the Sun in a natal chart can be viewed as the essence of the soul, according to Leo. His theosophical inspired focus on the soul viewed the natal chart as a progression of the soul, and had ties to reincarnation and karma.¹²

Leo maintained that a fundamental connection exists between the stars and the souls of human beings.¹² He argued that souls originate from a divine source, return it at death, and pass through successive reincarnations in a process of spiritual development.¹⁹ This view aligns closely with the classical conception of the soul’s immortality, particularly those found in Platonic and Neoplatonic traditions. Based on the views of Leo, the moral and psychological condition of the soul in any given life, shaped by past actions and karmic patterns, determines the circumstances and potential challenges of the future.

Through this lens, Leo understood the horoscope as revealing the quality and level of a development of the soul.¹⁹ He argued that the underdeveloped and untrained souls would exhibit less rational self-control, causing them to exhibit less virtuous actions, and conversely the more developed a soul the more restraint was exhibited during times of conflict, an idea that parallels Socrates’ accounts of virtue as a product of moral knowledge.¹⁹ Astrology thus becomes a reflective tool through which individuals may anticipate and consciously navigate life’s tensions by aligning themselves and their responses to celestial patterns.

¹⁶ Rudbøg, T. (2025). *Helena Petrovna Blavatsky: Blavatsky’s Place in the History of Philosophy*. In L. Moland & A. Stone (Eds.), *The Oxford Handbook of American and British Women Philosophers in the Nineteenth Century*. Oxford University Press. <https://doi.org/10.1093/oxfordhb/9780197558898.013.21>

¹⁷ Leo, Alan, *Astrology for All* (London: Forgotten Books, 2013 [1899]).

¹⁸ Liz Greene. (2018). *Jung’s Studies in Astrology : Prophecy, Magic, and the Qualities of Time*. Routledge.

¹⁹ Leo, Alan. 2022. *The Progressed Horoscope: A Sequel to How to Judge a Nativity, Wherein the Progression of the Horoscope Is Exhaustively Considered, to Which Is Added “the Art and Practice of Directing,” a Complete Treatise on Primary Directions* (Legare Street Press)

Leo's integration of classical notions of soul allowed him to develop an astrological practice that is grounded in psychological and spiritual transformation. His emphasis of self-reflection and conscious engagement with planetary symbolism, he was able to situate the soul within the intermediary space between intelligible and perceptible realities. With consistent reflection, the individual, under Leo's teachings, is able to gain increased awareness of both inner and outer influences, which allows for the soul's gradual evolution over time.¹²

Dane Rudhyar

Dane Rudhyar found astrology after emigrating to the United States, later describing it as an "unsought avenue of contact with the American consciousness."²⁰ This characterization reflects Rudhyar's tendency to situate astrology within a broader framework of collective and transpersonal awareness, which resonates with classical notions of a world soul. Like Leo, Rudhyar adopted the traditional technical structure of astrology, regarding the planets, signs, and houses, while rejecting the predictive determinism present at the time of his work.²⁰

Rudhyar argued astrology's primary function lies in fostering self-awareness rather than forecasting external events, and that the symbolism of astrology can be related back to inner and outer experiences.²¹ He views the horoscope as an archetypal structure of the unconscious, and embeds planetary symbolism within the individual psyche.²² Rudhyar is arguing for astrology to be used as a symbolic framework to understand the influences of the heavens on earth. In this sense, the horoscope functions not as a causal mechanism but as a symbolic map through which the individual may interpret and integrate life experiences.

Central to his philosophy, Rudhyar claims that there is a "life substance circulating and differentiated within both macrocosm and microcosm" that is one in the same.²³ Rudhyar understands that there is a larger force at play uniting human consciousness with the rhythms of the cosmos.¹² This idea echoes the classic views of a world soul and cosmic ensoulment, particularly that humans are a part of a larger living order. Astrology, in Rudhyar's view, provides a formal system through which these micro and macro experiences can be consciously understood by the individual.

Rudhyar further emphasizes psychological reflection as an essential facet of astrological practice.¹² He argues that awareness of change, both internal and external, drives personal and spiritual development.²¹ Rudhyar discusses how the horoscope reveals the potential of a soul, rather than a set of fixed outcomes, offering insight into what an individual may become rather than what must occur to them.²¹ In this way, astrology supports an evolutionary understanding of the soul, grounded in self-awareness and progressive development.

For Rudhyar, psychological growth and soul development are ultimately inseparable.¹² Through reflexive engagement with astrological symbolism, individuals are able to cultivate an ongoing practice of self observation and make meaning of their outer experiences. Because the horoscope symbolizes the form and potential of the soul, sustained psychological reflection enables the soul's evolution over time, aligning personal development with the larger cycles of cosmic order. This notion ties back to classical

²⁰ Leyla Raël, 'The Essential Rudhyar' www.khaldea.com/rudhyar/ess.

²¹ Rudhyar, Dane. 1980. *The Astrology of Transformation* (Quest Books)

²² William E. Burns. (2018). *Astrology Through History : Interpreting the Stars From Ancient Mesopotamia to the Present*. ABC-CLIO.

²³ Rudhyar, Dane. 2023. *Astrology of Personality: A Re-Formulation of Astrological Concepts & Ideals, in Terms of Contemporary Psychology & Philosophy* (Aurora Press)

notions of the soul, particularly Aristotle's, belief that self-awareness is imperative for not just the existence of but development of the soul through its immortality.

V: Conclusion

This essay has argued that modern psychological astrology presupposes a classical conception of the soul as an intermediary and developmental principle. Through a more succinct focus on the Platonic and Aristotelian discussions of soul, an understanding of how modern astrology embeds the development of a soul by using astrological observation and psychological reflection. It is clear that the classical notions of soul have sustained themselves, and evolved by way of astrological teaching.

Starting with the introduction of soul, presented by Socrates, that it is an immortal moral subject influenced by self and community care, and contingent on knowledge based virtues for development. Plato was then able to expand the understanding of soul as a cosmic intermediary, introducing the idea of a governing world soul, and how the cyclical nature of the planets gave rise to an understanding of time and change. Finally, Aristotle gave rise to awareness of change as the basis for development, and that the soul's capacities extend beyond just cognitive function. Together, these views establish the conceptual precondition for astrology, by viewing the soul as immortal, embedded in cosmic order, capable of development, and situated within the confines of time and change.

When looking at Leo and Rudhyar, they can be viewed as modern heirs to the classical philosophers. Leo's teachings emphasize the Platonic and Socratic teachings, focusing on the immortality of the soul and a karmic conditioning to a horoscope. He uses this to describe astrology as a reflective tool for ethical self-regulation, and to be able to consciously navigate outer experiences. Rudhyar, on the other hand, aligns more closely with the Aristotelian and Platonic views, that the soul is embodied, and able to develop through lived experiences, but only through awareness of change. For Rudhyar, astrology becomes a symbolic language for understanding the self, and a framework for psychological development. Leo tends toward a karmic model of soul evolution, while Rudhyar advances a more process-oriented understanding, yet both preserve the classical notion of soul as an intermediary between cosmic order and human consciousness.

Given the classic notions of soul, and the integration of these teachings by Leo and Rudhyar, it can be said that astrology cannot function without a concept of soul. Without soul, planetary symbolism becomes irrelevant, personal and mundane cycles become devoid of psychological meaning, and astrological interpretation of a horoscope becomes mechanical rather than reflective. With a concept of soul, however, astrology becomes a modern expression of classical metaphysics, and through time and reflection it also becomes a tool where the soul is able to evolve into meaningful change rather than arbitrary reaction.

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