

MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

Introduction to Cultural Astronomy and Astrology

Astrology

Weekly Introduction, Nick Campion

Purpose of the week

Nobody can agree exactly how astrology is defined. Loosely, it is the quest for meaning in the universe and the resulting practices. Most cultures have a version of it. The purpose of this class is to become familiar with the various debates concerning the nature and definition of astrology.

We will also introduce the polemics in astrology: arguments in western astrology between practitioners of astrology on the one hand, and between practitioner and their critics on the other.

The course material focuses on western astrology because almost all the scholarship does. However you are free to take other traditions into account.

Tasks this week

- Do the required reading, check some of the recommended reading.
- Begin to plan your 1500 word essay.
- Pace yourself and don't take on too much.

Class Description

The starting point for this week's class is a quote by Ann Geneva: '...it is first necessary to locate astrology within its own universe of discourse before historians can attempt to compare it with other explanatory systems'.^{1[1]} So, the question before us is, what is 'astrology's universe of discourse'?

This week's material examines the narratives astrologers construct about the cosmos. Astrology has no single definition. It has been defined as a science (a word whose meaning varies), a religion, an art, a means of personal development and a form of divination. Some astrologers emphasise technique, others intuition, some see it as an essentially passive form of interpretation, others see it as a path to action; in the past, or in modern India, active uses of astrology might be considered magical or religious in nature, in the modern west the means for change might be psychotherapeutic. Some contrast 'esoteric' or 'inner' astrology, which deals with the soul, with 'exoteric' or 'outer' which concerns daily affairs. There is also a variety of explanations: the stars and planets are a form of celestial writing revealing divine or cosmic intention, or providing a means for human beings to reflect on their lives; they are links in a causal chain; they send influences, perhaps on behalf of the divine; they coincide or correlate with events on earth as different kinds of time cycles interact.

^{1[1]} Geneva, Ann, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press 1995, p. xiv.

The course material for this week is designed to focus on the relationship of astrology to these discourses and thus how it has come to be defined. The variety of definitions gives rise to the possibility that there is no such thing as astrology, in the singular, but rather astrologies, in the plural. We will also consider such questions as whether its practice is a matter of reading or analysing external laws or influences, or whether the astrologer's subjective participation is essential, and whether it can be seen as a means of predicting the future, analysing character, or encouraging spiritual development. Other issues to consider include: what (if anything) do different astrologies have in common?; has astrology changed radically since its origins or later, or is it somehow the same practice as ever; and, if so, how has it maintained its identity across a long history which encompasses so many changes?

As an exercise you may wish to propose and justify a definition of astrology, drawing on evidence, whether historical or recent, literary, empirical or personal. It may be tempting to answer this from your personal experience alone ('In my opinion.....', 'I think.....'). Now, as we shall see next term, personal experience can be an important part of the academic process, but this term, try to stand back and focus on the evidence. For example, does Patrick Curry's definition stand scrutiny? If you were to read Dane Rudhyar, what would you think astrology is? You do not need to pretend you have no personal experience, but try to draw your ideas from evidence which may be outside your experience. Also, be critical. It might sound simple to say astrology is an art, a science, a psychological tool or a form of divination, but can such single definitions be sustained? Are there counter-examples?

Reading

The reading for this week includes material by astrologers, ancient and modern, and historians, and other commentators. Most astrology texts, and this is true going back to the earliest cuneiform records, are technical, offering guidelines or rules for interpretation. Discussions of what astrology or how and why it works by astrologers are therefore limited and, in recent literature, outnumbered by sometimes hostile accounts by outsider critics. This week's reading can be expanded by using any astrology book or web site, as long as you realise that such material constitutes the primary source material that you should be subjecting to a critical, scholarly eye. This week's reading includes work by Patrick Curry an academic and 'insider' whose body of work analysing astrology's nature is small but significant, Charles Carter, one of the major astrologers of the English-speaking world in the mid 20th century, Dane Rudhyar, who pioneered the concepts of 'Transpersonal' and 'Humanistic' astrology.

A note on Primary Sources

It is important to distinguish between the secondary, scholarly, material, which is scarce, and the primary source material, which is extensive (less so for old print material, excessively so for current web-based material). It is necessary in academic work to use primary sources. This week the primary sources – the raw data – consists of any material, texts or artefacts, produced by astrologers. We have made a few suggestions but you should also conduct your own search.

For this week, astrological texts are the primary raw material, like fragments of pottery to archaeologists, price-date to economists or laboratory results to chemists: they provide the source evidence on the basis of which academic theories about astrology's nature and function can be proposed and contested. We have separated the required reading into primary and secondary sources in order to make the distinction clear.

Because the modern web-based material is so extensive and accessible, particular discipline may be required to avoid too much reading. After the required reading, we suggest you confine yourself to checking out some of the sources in case you need to come back to them at a later stage.

However, a quick search of almost any link will reveal competing stories about the nature of the cosmos, the way astrology works, destiny and determinism, and so on.

As an example, relevant to early 2011, look at this discussion of the supposed birth time of Julian Assange, the founder of Wikileaks:

<http://mountainastrologer.com/tma/birth-time-for-julian-assange#comments>

One last word on the week's reading: it tends to be Eurocentric, with the exception of the two pieces by Kemper. This, again, reflects the fact that we are working in what is essentially a new academic area.

Required Reading: Secondary Sources

Nick Campion's notes: 'Definitions of Astrology'.

Campion, Nicholas, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), chapter 2.

Campion, Nicholas, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 2, The Medieval and Modern Worlds, London: Continuum, 2009, chapter 20.

Curry, Patrick, 'An Aporia for Astrology', *Radical Astrology, A Set of Discussion Papers: Astrology and Theory*, London, privately published 1983, pp. 5.1-5.15.

The Radical Astrology papers were the first attempt by 'insiders' (all the authors were astrologers (a term we have to define!)) to take a critical, academically-inspired, examination of astrology. Curry's paper is the first attempt to create a typology of astrology, using modern concepts. That several of Curry's pieces are recommended in this module, reflects his role as a pioneering academic in this area.

Curry, Patrick, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 1-15.

PDF ON MOODLE

Curry establishes his social-class based typology of high, middling and low astrology

Required Reading: Primary Sources

Addey, John, *A New Study of Astrology* (London: Urania Trust 1996, pp. 1-9).

PDF ON MOODLE

John Addey was an enthusiastic astrological moderniser who believed that scientific research, combined with an understanding of Platonic philosophy, would lead to astrology's wide acceptance and restoration as a respectable part of western learning. As such, his writing is characteristic of a particular 20th century view.

Rudhyar, Dane, 'The Birth Chart as a Celestial Message', An Address to the 1976 Convention of the American Federation of Astrologers',

<http://www.khaldea.com/rudhyar/astroarticles/celestialmessage.shtml>

Dane Rudhyar was one of the most influential of 20th century American astrologers, and was the first to effectively combine theosophy with depth psychology. This document summarises his views on the value of astrology.

Rudhyar's original manifesto of astrology's nature and function was set out in his *The Astrology of Personality*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, Chap 1, originally published in 1936.

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=dApyUYhq4-4C&pg=PA37&source=gbs_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false

Recommended Reading

JSTOR: we suggest a quick search for 'astrology' on JSTOR, to see what kinds of material are found.

Adorno, Theodor, *The Stars Down to Earth*, London: Routledge 1994 [1953].

This is one of the most influential attacks on astrology of the twentieth century. Sections are on Google Books at

http://books.google.co.uk/books/about/The_Stars_Down_to_Earth_and_Other_Essays.html?id=STuD7NFAYy8C

Brady, Bernadette, 'The Horoscope as a Cosmological Map', in *Astrologies*, Proceedings of the eighth Sophia Centre Conference, Bath, July 2010, Nicholas Campion and Liz Greene (eds.), Sophia Centre Press, 2011.

Campion, Nicholas, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 1. The Ancient World, London: Continuum, 2009, Introduction.

Campion, Nicholas, 'A Review of Academic Literature on Astrology: 1. The Ancient World', *Alternative Spirituality and Religion Review*, Vol. 1 no 2, 2010.
<http://www.academicpublishing.org/Journals.html>

Curry, Patrick and Roy Willis, *Astrology, Science and Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).

Any section of this book can be relevant to this week. Curry and Willis argue that astrology is a form of divination.

Curry, Patrick, 'Grounding the Stars: towards an ecological theory', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 2007, Vol 1 no 2, pp. 210-9.

Available at

<http://www.patrickcurry.co.uk/papers/GroundingtheStars.pdf>

Dawkins, Richard, 'The Real Romance in the Stars', *Independent on Sunday*, 31 December 1995.

<http://www.independent.co.uk/opinion/the-real-romance-in-the-stars-1527970.html>

This attack on astrology by the now famous geneticist and leading atheist caused much controversy when it was published in 1995

Jones, Marc Edmund, *Astrology: How and Why it Works*, London: RKP 1977, Chap 1, (pp. 3-35).

We are not recommending this because it is an authoritative statement of 'why astrology works', but because it is an example of an astrologer writing on 'why astrology works' for a modern audience.

We do not have Jones work on PDF and it is not available on-line, but Jones, an American theosophist, was very highly regarded in his lifetime, and his books are available second-hand.

Kelly, Ivan W., 'The Concepts of Modern Astrology: a Critique', *Psychological Reports*, 1997, Vol. 81, pp. 1035-1066, expanded and revised, www.astrology-and-science.com,

http://www.astrosurf.com/nitschelm/Modern_criticism.pdf

Kelly is a sceptic and hostile to the notion of astrology, but draws for his evidence on statements by astrologers.

Kemper, Steven, 'Sinhalese Astrology, South Asian Caste Systems, and the Notion of Individuality', *Journal of South Asian Studies*, vol. 38, no. 3, (May 1979), pp. 477-97.

JSTOR

Kemper, Steven, 'Time, Person, and Gender in Sinhalese Astrology', *American Ethnologist*, vol. 7, no. 4, (Nov. 1980), pp. 744-58.

JSTOR

Kochunas, Brad, 'Why Astrology Works'.

http://www.mountainastrologer.com/standards/editor's%20choice/articles/why_ast.html

As with Jones, we are not recommending this because it is an authoritative statement of 'why astrology works', but because it is an example of an astrologer writing on 'why astrology works' for a modern audience.

North, John, 'Celestial Influence – the major premises of astrology', North, John, *Stars, Minds and Fate: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Cosmology*, London, The Hambledon Press 1989, pp. 243-298.

John North was one of the foremost historians of medieval astrology. In this chapter he sets out the theory of celestial influence from medieval sources.

All but pp 252-3 is on Google Books

http://books.google.co.uk/books?id=PHdKtsVb_X4C&pg=PA243&source=gbv_toc_r&cad=4#v=onepage&q&f=false

Phillipson, Garry, *Astrology in the Year Zero*, London: Flare Publications 2000, chap XII (pp. 182-197).

PDF ON MOODLE

Ptolemy, Claudius, *Tetrabiblos*, Book 1.

<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Ptolemy/Tetrabiblos/home.html>

This is a text of immense importance. It is a rare example of a discussion of astrological theory from the ancient world, and the seminal statement of the natural foundation of astrology.

Ptolemy, Claudius, *Centiloquium*, transcribed and annotated by Deborah Houlding from Henry Coley, *Clavis Astrologiae Elimata*, London 1669, aphorisms 1-14.

<http://skyscript.co.uk/centiloquium1.html>

This text is almost certainly from the 8th century Islamic world, but achieved immense importance because of its attribution to Ptolemy. The early passages are of great significance for the philosophy of astrology.

Schoener*, Gustav-Adolf, 'Astrology: Between Religion and the Empirical', trans. Shane Denson, *Esoterica* Vol. 4.

<http://www.esoteric.msu.edu/VolumeIV/astrology.htm>.

*Institut für Theologie und Religionswissenschaft, Leibniz Universität, Hannover.

Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture*, 3 Vols., (London: John Murray 1920 [1871]), Vol. I, pp. 112-137.

PDF ON MOODLE

This is the classic statement of astrology as a hang-over from a previous, lower, level of evolutionary development. In a sense this material is both 'secondary' and 'primary'. It is secondary because it is academic and scholarly, but primary because it is now raw evidence for our understanding of the formulation of the theory that astrology represents a primitive level of intellectual evolution.

Web

This is one class when students can make free use of the web. Any web site may indicate contemporary attitudes to astrology. Your critical eye, though, should be attuned to the sense that the mass of astrology you find on the web is *indicative*, not *authoritative*. That is, such sites are evidence which may *indicate* something about the nature, function, role or appeal of astrology, but nothing they contain can be regarded as authoritative.

<http://www.astrozero.co.uk/articles/articles.htm>

This is Garry Phillipson's web site, an evolution from his book, *Astrology in the Year Zero*. Scroll down this page and you will find a series of interviews. If you are to prioritise your reading, Dennis Elwell, Mike Harding, Rob Hand and Bernard Eccles may be most immediately relevant.

<http://www.skyscript.co.uk/books.html>

<http://www.skyscript.co.uk/texts.html>

These two URLs are pages within Deborah Houlding's Skyscript site. The emphasis is on technical astrology, but there is much information of relevance to discussions on the nature of astrology. Most of the older texts listed are not directly relevant to this module, but low down the 'books' page is a list of interviews, some of which are duplicated on the Astrozero page.

<http://rudolfhsmi.nl/index.html>

Astrology-and-science.com is a comprehensive reference area for links and information related to the scientific investigation of astrology in the late twentieth century. You should NOT become sidetracked into questions of whether astrology is true or false. We are concerned about the phenomenon and, in this sense, for the purposes of the MA, scientific investigations of astrology exist within a cultural framework.

<http://www.planetos.info/>

Contains material on Michel Gauquelin

<http://www.mountainastrologer.com>

The Mountain Astrologer is unusual in that it is a commercially successful magazine which carries material aimed at educated astrologers. The website carries a range of articles which are primary source material for any analysis of how astrological reasoning works. If we want to examine the nature of astrological narratives, such modern material is vital.