

MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Introduction to Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Week 4: Cosmology and Culture
Required Reading
Nick Campion

Note on reading

Nick's notes for this week raise the question of the appropriation of cosmological ideas by astrologers. This was an issue raised by Freud in 1921 in his one study of astrology. He thought that recent scientific discoveries and theories were stimulating public interest in the occult by confusing publicly accepted beliefs on the nature of the universe, or by undermining belief in the objective trustworthiness of science. He cited the discovery of radium and the theory of relativity as two examples.¹

Regarding this week's reading, it is difficult to offer clear priorities, so dip in and use your discretion. I have selected reading which will enable you to approach question such as whether modern cosmology contains order or meaning. My impression of the field is that, although the dominant public discourse of scientific cosmologists is materialistic, atheistic and anti-meaning, there is a more discreet group who may be Christian and hence see meaning in the cosmos, or may espouse different varieties of order or 'design' (as opposed Darwinian style notions of open-ended evolution: one physicist, Lee Smolin, argues that the entire universe is subject to laws of natural selection).

We have suggested some material from on-line sources and JSTOR which open up different ways of thinking about cosmology – which may be encountered later in the MA. For example, how is cosmology expressed through ritual, or through architecture?

The PDFs this week focus on modern scientific cosmology, one of our questions being how it contributes to culture.

The passage from Claude Lévi-Bruhl is included because it is a seminal piece in the history of western thought about 'primitive' culture. He coined the phrase 'participation-mystique', to describe the 'primitive' belief that the individual can, through an act of will, engage with and alter the cosmos.

Don't forget to search JSTOR, and see if you can track down any other academic sources on-line.

¹ Sigmund Freud, 'Psychoanalysis and Telepathy', 1921, in James Strachey (trans.) *The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XVIII, London, 1955, pp 177-194.

It is not straightforward to recommend primary sources for this week for traditional and ancient people did not necessarily say 'this is our cosmology'. In addition there is a modern category of literature by scientists who argue the case for a particular kind of cosmology on the basis of the latest scientific theories, which may be more or less reliable. For example, Barrow and Tipler's, *The Anthropic Cosmological Principle*, took up the argument that the universe is the way it is because human beings are the way they are. Many scientists accept a 'weak' version of the Anthropic Principle, but most reject the 'strong' version. Unfortunately we are unable to supply a copy of this book within copyright law. Most of the book from chapter 5 onwards is on physics, but chapter 2 is an account of 'design' arguments, and chapter 4 is an account of the emergence of the idea of the Anthropic Principle. If you are interested in this area then it is worth getting this book either from a library or second-hand: it costs around \$9.

Required Reading Primary Sources

We suggest you read one traditional cosmogony, or account of the beginning (from cosmo-genesis – birth of the universe) of the universe. You have already encountered Plato's and Hesiod's cosmogonies in Week 2.

For example, you read lines 1-900 of the Maya creation story, the Popul Vuh. The Arthur Christenson translation is here:

<http://www.mesoweb.com/publications/Christenson/PV-Literal.pdf>

Corbin, Henri, 'Mundus Imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal', trans Ruth Horine, *Spring*, 1972, pp. 1-13 [originally published in *Cahiers Internationaux de Symbolisme*, 1964, pp. 3-26].

http://hermetic.com/bey/mundus_imaginalis.htm

<http://hermetic.com/moorish/mundus-imaginalis.html>

Corbin's concept of the Imaginal is very important. We can think of it as being both imaginary and real, in the sense that the Ideas of Platonism are real. Cornon sits on the boundary between primary and secondary sources. He was a scholar, so his work can be considered a secondary source, but he was also a keen advocate of a way of understanding and living which he found in Plato, mystical Islam and Sufism, and Jung, and so we have included this paper here as a primary source. He has become an inspiration for some mystical and esoteric groups and his ideas have been adopted by some astrologers, hence 'imaginal astrology' or 'imaginal cosmology'.

Required Reading: Secondary Sources.

Nick Campion Notes on Cosmology

Bernadette Brady Notes on Sympathetic Cosmology

Campion, Nicholas, *Astrology and Cosmology in the World's Religions* (New York: New York University Press, 2011), Chapters 7 and 8.
Hard copy or online through the University library

Campion, Nicholas, 'The Importance of Cosmology in Culture: Contexts and Consequences', in Abraao Jesse Capistrano de Souza (ed.), *Cosmology* (Rijeka: InTech Open, 2017), pp. 3-17.
<https://www.intechopen.com/chapters/54580>

Nicholas Campion, 'Cosmos and Cosmology', in Robert Segal and Kocku von Stukrad (eds), *Vocabulary for the Study of Religion* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), pp. 359-64.
<https://www.academia.edu/s/e6c95d3643?source=link>

Lévi-Bruhl, Claude, *How Natives Think*, Princeton: Princeton University Press 1985, Chapter 2 ('The Law of Participation').
CLA PDF

Lévi-Bruhl was one of the most influential anthropologists of the twentieth century. His theory of *participation-mystique* proposed that 'primitive' (a word which needs to be used cautiously) cosmologies should be understood in terms of a psychic engagement between human and cosmos.