

**Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement:
The Extent and Nature of Contemporary Belief in Astrology**

Part 1

Chapter 2

Millenarianism

Chapter Description

It is widely argued that the New Age movement is millenarian in character (see for example Miller 1990: 27; Hanegraaff 1996: 96, 98-103; Sutcliffe 2003:9. 11. 17), and forms part of a broader cultural tradition which extends from the modern west back through Christian millenarianism to the ancient near east. In this chapter it will be argued that astrology has been closely linked to millenarian prophecies, both in terms of bringing warning signs of the coming of the millennium and of measuring the length of historical epochs - and hence of predicting the date of the millennium. The origins and main relevant features of millenarianism will also be discussed. Karl Popper's theory of historicism and activism will be introduced as a means of reconciling the paradox inherent in the astrological view of history; that, although the future is as predetermined as are the stellar and planetary motions which measure and punctuate historical change, individual action, freely and voluntarily made, is essential to the fulfilment of that future.

Millenarianism

The word millenarianism, first used in the fifth century CE by St. Augustine (1972: XX.7), is derived from the Latin millennium, a thousand, and refers to the Persian (Boyce 1987, 1983, 1984, Hultgard 1989) and, subsequently, Christian belief that world history is divided into periods of one, two or three thousand years (Cohn 1957, 1993; Campion 1994). The classic text of Christian millenarianism is the Revelation of St. John, which sets out a historical template in which moral collapse climaxes in political and military strife, accompanied by the *parousia* (literally 'arrival' or 'presence'), that is

Christ' s return. In the first century CE this was believed to be imminent (Mark 13.30, Revelation 22.12). Christ, it was believed, was then due to triumph over Satan and reign in splendour for a thousand years, that is, the millennium (Revelation 20.2-7), described elsewhere as the ' age to come' (Matthew 12.32). This period, the prophecy continues, will culminate with Satan' s release and the final battle between good and evil, God' s victory and the inauguration of a ' new heaven' , ' new earth' and ' new Jerusalem' (Revelation 21.1-2). This final state would then complete the prophecy set out in Isaiah 66.22-23: ' For as the new heavens and the new earth which I will make shall remain before me' . Some Christian theologians retrospectively refer to this new era as ' the New Age' (see for example Chance 1988; Ziesler 1991: 65).

There is an additional terminology associated with millenarianism (Ziesler 1991: 65-6). From the Greek word *eschaton*, the end, derives eschatology, which literally means the study of ends, but is also used to imply actual belief in the end of the world. From *apocalypse*, the Greek for revelation, is derived the word apocalyptic to describe the vision of the end of the world which was revealed to St. John. Traditions of apocalyptic thought can be traced back to late third millennium BCE Mesopotamia (Ringgren 1989). In the first centuries BCE and CE, apocalyptic ideas permeated the Hellenistic world and formed a part of Gnostic (MacRae 1989), Jewish (Collins 1989; Lebram 1989; Sanders 1989) and Christian (Fiorenza 1989; Meeks 1989) historical theory. All partook of a common tradition, shared with the Greek-speaking world (Hengel 1989: 2).

Even though they may have specific connotations, and some argue that the distinctions are important (see for example Hanegraaff 1996: 98), the terms millenarian, eschatological and apocalyptic may also be used interchangeably. Although the term millenarian has strictly Christian connotations, it may be applied to all beliefs that the world is about to enter a major new phase. In its looser definition, therefore, any

political or religious movement or ideology which expects, prophesies, or fights for, an imminent historical crisis and return to, or inauguration of, a golden age or state of purity may be described as millenarian (Wilson, 1975; Daniels 1992; Robbins and Palmer 1997; Hall *et al.* 2000; Stone 2000).

In Revelation, St. John combined the supernatural eschatology and millenarian chronology of the Persians with an existing Jewish eschatological tradition (see Russell 1964, Hanson 1983) which had itself provided a powerful foundation to the prophetic literature of the Old Testament and envisaged an eschaton that could be either naturalistic and local (Ezekiel 38.19), anticipating a restored earthly Kingdom of David (Amos 9.11), or supernatural, prophesying a new heaven and new earth. It was certain, though that the promised ' Day of Yahweh' , when the crisis eventually erupted, would be terrible (Isaiah 2.12-22). In Jewish eschatology, then, the promise of a wonderful new era was inextricably bound up with the threat of a cataclysm: salvation and punishment were inseparable in a formula inherited by Christianity.

Astrology in Jewish and Christian Apocalyptic Literature

The astrology of Mesopotamia, from which modern western astrology is ultimately derived, is distinguished by its reliance on celestial signs or omens (Reiner 1985), which provided the means for the pantheon of divinities to communicate with humanity, as a form of ' writing in the sky' (Gadd 1980: 57). The Jews never developed an indigenous astrology comparable to that in Mesopotamia which, however, they became aware of by the eighth-century BCE (McKay 1973: 45-59) and imported by the first century BCE (Greenfield and Sokoloff 1989). A simple astrology of celestial signs did, though, exist in the Old Testament and may relate to a pre-Akkadian astrology in Mesopotamia (see Koch-Westenholtz 1995: 15), that is, prior to 2,200 BCE. Isaiah (13.10; see also 61.19-20; Amos 8.9; Jeremiah 4.23; Habakkuk 3.3-6), for example, forecast that, at the Day of Yahweh,

...the stars of the Heavens
and their constellations will not give their light;
The Sun will be dark at its rising
And the Moon will not shed its light' (Isaiah 13.10)

Such prophecies were repeated or paraphrased in the New Testament, carrying basic near-eastern celestial divination into Christianity. Mark (13. 24-26) prophesies that

in those days, after that tribulation, the sun will be darkened, and the moon will not give its light, and the stars will be falling from heaven, and the powers in the heavens will be shaken. And then they will see the Son of man, coming in clouds with great power and glory.

In Luke' s gospel (21.10-11) Jesus predicts that

Nation will rise against nation, and kingdom against kingdom; there will be great earthquakes and pestilences; and there will be terrors and great signs from heaven.

Greek Apocalyptic Thought: the Golden Age

The earliest indications of apocalyptic thought in the Greek world occur in the *Works and Days*, the major historical work attributed to the eighth-century BCE poet Hesiod, though, it has been argued, with influences from wider near-eastern apocalyptic traditions (Baldry 1956; Lambert and Walcot). Hesiod set out a five-fold scheme of historical periodisation which involved a progressive decline through the successive ages of gold, silver, bronze, heroes and iron (1917: 89-201). Although the notion of a primeval paradise is found in both the Jewish Garden of Eden (Genesis 2.8) and the Sumerian Dilmun or Shubur (Kramer 1943), Hesiod' s story of a golden race has become the model for the nostalgic western longing for a lost golden age. Although Hesiod' s hint that the golden race would return suggested a repletion of the five-race model, what Eliade (1954) was to call ' the eternal return' first appears in the work of Empedocles (c.495 BCE), who postulated a dualistic, cyclical process according to which first love and then strife in turn reached a position of dominance in the cosmos. At each extreme the wild world dissolved into its constituent elements, only to reform and initiate another cycle of experience (O' Brien 1969).

Apocalyptic Astrology in Greek and Medieval Thought

The simple astrology of the Old Testament prophets relied exclusively on unexpected events in the sky as warnings that God' s divine order was about to break down. The alternative system, which appeared in Greece by the fourth century BCE, saw political or global collapse as integral to the divine order as expressed through predictable, mathematically ordered planetary cycles. Plato developed Empedocles' model of periodic destruction in the early fourth-century BCE, borrowing from the Egyptians the concept of periodic global conflagrations (*Timaeus* 22B-D) and formulating the period known as a ' complete' or ' great' year, the period of time which separates the beginning of the world from its end. At that point the sun, moon, stars and planets all return to the point of their creation (*Timaeus* 39D). In his account of around 280 BCE, the Babylonian astrologer Berossus developed Plato' s scheme, arguing that, when the sun, moon and planets formed a conjunction at 0° Cancer the world would be destroyed by fire and when the conjunction took place at 0° Capricorn the destruction was to be by water (Berossus 1978). Berossus' theory was accepted by most classical authors (see for example Seneca 1971: III.c29); it retained wide currency in Medieval and Renaissance Europe and was repeated as late as the world history composed by Louis Le Roy, Regius Professor of Greek at the Collège de France in the 1590s (Le Roy 1594: 1-2). For Le Roy Platonic and Berossian astrology provided the measurable framework within which God' s plan unfolded. In his eschatology, though, the end was final. Even though apocalyptic Christianity formalised Berossus' eternally alternating destructions into one in the past, the great deluge (Genesis 6-9), and one in the future, the global conflagration (I. Peter 4.12), the cyclical theories of the classical writers survived as a permissible heresy.

In the first centuries CE the Sassanian Persians noticed that the total sequence of possible Jupiter-Saturn conjunctions took 960 years, just forty years short of the

significant thousand year periods which were the basis of Zoroastrian historical periodisation (Pingree 1997). After this work entered medieval Europe in 1140 when Herman of Carinthia translated Abu Ma'shar's ninth-century work the *Maius Introductorum* (Tester 1987: 160-1), there were two principle astrological means of predicting the coming of the millennium. On the one hand, there were signs and wonders, the disorderly events of the Old Testament such as comets and, on the other, the predictable, orderly sequence of planetary conjunctions which could be predicted hundreds of years in advance. Combining Jewish and Greek cosmologies and demonstrating their application to eschatology, Nicole Oresme (c.1320-1382), bishop of Lisieux, wrote,

Again, this lower world is governed by the heavenly bodies and their movement, as Aristotle says, for they are the instruments of God, by means of which he governs nature, and which incline the hearts of men to various fortunes, without violence of necessity, and to know these bodies and these movements, astrology has been especially ordained, that great science which would be, as it were useless, unless by its aid we could know the things of the future. And of these the sun, moon and stars, are signs as our Lord said when he made them, according to the exposition of St. Augustine on Genesis (Coopland 1952: 67).

Notable examples of predictable planetary patterns occurred in 1484 (Thorndike 1923-58: IV.438-484), when it was predicted that the Jupiter-Saturn conjunction in Scorpio would bring the demise of Christianity, and the conjunction of 1523 in Pisces which, coming during the first revolutionary wave of the Reformation, was widely used to predict a repetition of the great flood (Thorndike 1923-58: V.178-233). The closeness of astrology and apocalyptic thought in the sixteenth-century was best indicated by the fact that Philip Melanchthon, Luther's deputy, was one of the leading astrologers in Europe (Thorndike 1923-58: V.378-405; Maxwell-Stuart 1999: 93-4). The search for celestial signs and wonders continued to be a major feature of millenarian Christianity up to the nineteenth-century (see for example Brooke 1996).

The Main Features of Millenarian Thought

In addition to catastrophism, astrological timing and golden age nostalgia, there were a number of other features of millenarian thought in the Hellenistic world.

Education

Plato's concern was not solely with the measurement and analysis of history, but with the active integration of the individual with the historical process. This proposition he elaborated in the *Republic* (esp. Bks. VI-VIII) and *Laws* (esp. Bk. VI). Following Hesiod, he believed that the current phase of history, through which he was living, represented a tragic collapse of civilised values, that a major cataclysm was approaching, that the golden age would then return and that it was the duty of every citizen to encourage this preordained plan to fulfil itself. The prerequisites for a return to the Golden Age, Plato specified as a disciplined lifestyle combined with a rigorous programme of education. According to Plato the philosophical man lived an austere life and dedicated himself to the pursuit of truth via the study of the abstract arts; chiefly music, mathematics, geometry and astronomy. The insistence in Platonic eschatology that an educational programme was central to individual participation in the historical process was echoed in what Ziesler (1991) has argued was the Hellenised Christianity of St. Paul. Paul wrote in relation to the historical shift of his time that,

Yet among the mature we do impart wisdom, although it is not a wisdom of this age or of the rulers of this age, who are doomed to pass away. But we impart a secret and hidden wisdom of God, which God decreed before the ages for our glorification (I Corinthians 2.6-7).

Moral Collapse and Nostalgia

It has been remarked that both Hesiod and Plato believed that they lived in the most decadent period of history. The prophets who laid the basis of Jewish apocalyptic thought likewise condemned the corruption of their society. As Isaiah (1.10) proclaimed, 'Hear the word of the Lord, you rulers of Sodom! Give ear to the teaching of

our God, you people of Gomorrah' . This sense of widespread moral collapse which Herman (1997) argues distinguishes the millenarian from their society. For at least four thousand years, since the Sumerian ' Golden Age' tablet (Kramer 1943), people have been looking back to the past as a time of bliss, and complaining about the standards and morals of the people around them. This endless repetition of regrets, fears and complaints was noted by Nicolo Machiavelli over five hundred years ago,

Men always, but not always with good reason, praise bygone days and criticise the present, and so partial are they to the past that they not only admire past ages, the knowledge of which has come down to them in written records, but also, when they grow old, what they remember having seen in their youth (Machievelli 1970: 265).

Cyclical Time

A commonly expressed view on the classical world, one closely associated with the Stoics and with astrology, of which Stoics were generally keen supporters, was that time is cyclical, always returning to the same point and usually at regular intervals (Eliade 1954, Trompf 1979). This, it is said, contrasts with the linear view supposedly pioneered by Jewish historiography, in which the world moves from a single creation to a once-and-for-all destruction. Most beliefs about the nature of time are a combination of the linear and cyclical, in which time operates according to an underlying cyclical law, but is simultaneously moving forward (Gould 1987). The result may be rhythms, waves or spirals. According to the Orphic tradition recalled by Plato, God completes his cyclical course in a straight line (*Laws* 715E-716E). The effect of the survival of Greek and Babylonian eschatology alongside Christian millenarianism in the European Renaissance was to maintain awareness of the doctrine of a perpetually recurring cycle of creation and destruction as an alternative to the standard Christian version in which history was framed by a unique creation and a once-and-for-all destruction. Stanley Frost identified the root of this compromise in two distinct strands in Jewish eschatology: one prophesied the complete end of the world, the other its renewal. He described Jewish eschatology as,

a congress of beliefs and ideas which are marked by the expectation of a future event which is the effective End in the mind of the one using the term. There is an eschatology which is concerned with an eschaton in history, rather than of history; there is an eschaton which is conceived to be the end of history altogether' (Frost 1952: 32).

Perpetual recurrence found a common expression in a diluted form in the concept of the seasonal rise and fall of states and, sometimes religions, within the overall well defined construct provided by Genesis and Revelation. Such ideas experienced a revival in Europe in the wake of the translations of the Platonic texts in the fifteenth-century. In the words of the Elizabethan poet Fulke Greville in his 'A Treatise of Warres' (see Manuel 1965: 52),

Needfull it therefore is, and clearly true,
That all great Empires, Cities, Seats of Power,
Must rise and fall, waxe old, and not renew...
States have degrees, as human bodies have
Springs, Summer, Autumn, Winter and the grave.

Historical and Astrological Theory

Theories which assume a purpose in history tend to be bound up with concepts of order in nature and the cosmos. From this simple assumption it follows that if this order can be understood, history's purpose will become clear. Once its purpose is revealed, the future can be prophesied. There is a persuasive argument that the discipline of history emerged in Mesopotamia as an adjunct to astrology's role on the harmonious regulation of the state (Dentan 1983; Van Seters 1983; see also Finkelstein 1963, 1981). The origin of historiography, literally the writing of history, is deeply bound up with political imperatives and religious devotion, as is clear from the historical texts of the Old Testament. The future then, can only be understood by reference to the past, and study of the past is necessary in order to know the future. According to this argument astrology shares common roots with eschatology.

The relationship between historical and astrological thought was encouraged in the fifteenth century by the translation of the Platonic corpus. One common view was put forward by Eugenio Garin, who considered that Renaissance astrology constituted ' a precise philosophy of history based on a conception of the universe, and characterised by a consistent naturalism and a rigid determinism' (Garin 1976: 16). He added,

As one can see, the theme of ' newness' , of a new life, a new age, new worlds, new heavens, new earths - which would run so eloquently through the centuries of the Renaissance...was originally nothing more than an astrological commonplace (Garin 1976: 18).

Keith Thomas also considered whether astrology had a function in the development of historical thought. He concluded that it did, adding that the sociological world view has at least partial roots in the astrological,

During the Italian Renaissance astrological doctrines about the recurrence of planetary conjunctions had helped to form the concept of a historical ' period...In their [the astrologers] confident assumption that the principles of human society were capable of human explanation, we can detect the germ of modern sociology (Thomas 1971: 386-7).

Ernst Cassirer concurred in this. He compared some modern historical literature, such as Oswald Spengler's *The Decline of the West* to Renaissance astrological theories (Cassirer 1967: 291 - 4). David Spangler, one of the most prolific of late-twentieth century British New Age writers, acknowledged astrology's role as the basis for belief in the coming New Age: ' as the term Age of Aquarius suggests, one source was astrology.' (Spangler 1984: 18).

Modern and Ancient Historical Thought

It has been persuasively argued that there is a direct continuity between ancient and modern eschatology. Norman Cohn (1970: 108-9; see also St. Clair, 1992: 223-337) argued for a direct continuity between ancient, medieval and modern millenarianism and hence that Marxism and Nazism, the most powerful political ideologies of twentieth century Europe were both secular forms of millenarianism. For Schwartz

(1980) and Godwin (1994) the revolutionary and esoteric millenarianism of the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries provided the link between the medieval and modern worlds. The most pervasive form of secular millenarianism in the modern world, though, according to Baillie (1951: 64-5) is belief in progress. This was first set out by the Marquis de Condorcet in 1795 in the optimistic view that the condition of the world must necessarily improve (Condorcet 1955). Baillie's argument, though, is that progress theory evolved directly out of Jewish and Christian millenarianism's message of hope that a new world will be born. Bury (1932: 1-36) made a similar argument but put forward Platonic apocalyptic thought as the basis of progress theory.

R.G Collingwood: Substantialism

In the 1940s R.G. Collingwood, considering the close links between ancient and modern historiography, wrote that,

We have so far gone back to the medieval view of history that we think of nations and civilisations as rising and falling in obedience to a law that has little to do with the purpose of human beings that compose them, and we are perhaps not altogether ill-disposed to theories which teach that large scale historical changes are due to some kind of dialectic working objectively and shaping the historical process by a necessity that does not depend on the human will. This brings us into somewhat close contact with the Medieval historians (Collingwood 1946: 56).

Collingwood had in mind the cyclical theories of two twentieth century historians Oswald Spengler and Arnold Toynbee, but his main target was Karl Marx, the giant of nineteenth century historical theory. Marx's theories, he believed, were deeply indebted to the ancient Greeks, especially to Plato and the Platonists, by common devotion to a philosophy of history which he defined as substantialism. Yet he appears to have been unaware of the Platonism which underpinned theosophy and the New Age movement. According to the theory of substantialism, the superficial events of history - its wars, battles and revolutions - are governed by an underlying reality, which he named the substance. The laws which derive from the substance are then manifested in historical patterns or cycles, and these in turn are generally seen to be gradually pushing the

world towards the fulfilment of a long-term purpose (Collingwood 1946: 42-5, 47-8; Löwith 1965: 1). Collingwood identified three forms of history, two of which he defined as 'quashistory', and only one of which was true history (1946: 145, 18). Quasi-history came in two forms; firstly, theocratic history, in which the record of events reveals the manifestation of God, or the gods, in nature and, secondly myth, in which the characters are often divine and the events take place outside the normal flow of time. Proper, 'scientific' history, on the other hand, seeks to understand humanity by asking rational questions about its past actions, seeking the answers in verifiable evidence.

Karl Popper: Historicism and Activism

Collingwood's definition of substantialism was published one year after Karl Popper's *The Open Society and its Enemies* in which Popper developed a similar idea which he defined as historicism, and which, agreeing with Collingwood, he saw manifested primarily through the historical theories of Plato and Marx. Popper's historicism was similar in its broad characteristics to Collingwood's substantialism: the belief that the events of history were arranged into patterns and regulated by laws according to a deeper unfolding purpose. According to Popper (1957) historicist theories have two central characteristics. They all take it for granted that historical change develops according to underlying laws, which suggest in turn a broadly predetermined pattern and a purposeful goal. However, while history is predetermined, human beings paradoxically possess the capacity to make free choices. The only free choice to be made in relation to history is to help it on its way and serve its greater purpose. This active participation he termed activism. Thus, Christian activism demands that the faithful evangelise the gospels to prepare for the second coming, while Marxism requires the politically aware to form a revolutionary vanguard and prepare for the revolution. The New Age movement, it may be argued, exhibits the same paradox: while, in the form of the Age of Aquarius, the New Age is inevitable, just as the

movement of the vernal point into Aquarius must happen, still it is necessary to prepare for the Age. As Louis Le Roy wrote, in relation to Platonic millenarianism,

As character potential comes from the stars, so does collective potential. It is possible to deviate from destiny, but the cause of events will automatically revert to it. The best thing is to wisely help destiny run its course (Le Roy 1594: 11).

Pre and Post-millenarianism

The failure of apocalyptic prophecies is a major problem for millenarian groups, as discussed in Stone (2000), and is a factor in the development of Desroche's (1979: 93-4) identification of two forms of Christian millenarianism. The first, 'premillenarianism', or 'premillennialism' (Wessinger 1997: 48), argues that Christ will come before the millennium, typically accompanied by the violent upheavals prophesied in Revelation. This may also be commonly referred to as catastrophic millenarianism. The second form, postmillennialism, assumes that the 'kingdom of God is progressively installed by an evolutive process' (Desroche 1979: 93). Wessinger (1997: 50-1) uses the alternative 'progressive' millenarianism. However, strict typologies are sometimes difficult to sustain when the phenomenological perspective is considered. As Ninian Smart (1973a: 93) put it,

The authority of the original event helps to explain why it is that so many myths look back to primordial or founding events. But there is no reason in principle why the same 'real presence' should not flow from the future as well as from the past. Indeed this is the function of eschatological myths. The final overcoming of evil by God for example, is a future event in which we can participate now.

The paradox inherent in such statements is one of a series which pervade millenarian thought. Schwartz (1980: 5) sums these up as 'active-passive, rational-irrational, premillennial-postmillennial, prepolitical-political, conservative-radical'. Post-millennialism, though, may be seen as a direct reaction to the failure of pre-millennial prophecies for, by shifting part of the responsibility for the *parousia* on to human activism, humanity rather than divinity can take the blame for the continued delay of the kingdom of God. This point was examined in the 1950s by Festinger (1964) who, by extending his theory of cognitive dissonance, showed that 'disconfirmation' of the

prophecy could actually deepen the faith of the millenarian believer. This is a critical problem for those modern groups whose teachings predict a specific, tangible salvation (Robbins and Palmer 1999; Hall 2000; Stone 2000).

Given that no millennial movement may include the same combination of beliefs in the same balance as any other, it is often impossible to define such movements, except by acknowledging the paradoxes they contain and the tensions these generate. In addition, like any other cultural, social or political force, millenarianism constantly adapts to changing circumstances. As Schwartz (1980: 6) put it, ' millenarian moods and perceptions change as believers battle to keep their footing' . Moreover, as Desroche (1979: 99) argued, ' the millenarian tradition is cumulative' , with later forms both arising out of earlier ones and looking back to them for authority. If the New Age is to be considered as a millenarian movement, it may be possible to identify internal coherence in aspects of it over short periods of time but, if it is examined in its totality or over larger periods of time, diversity, incoherence and contradictions may be anticipated.

Astrology

Hilary Carey posed two questions in her study of medieval astrology (1992); firstly what motivates and sustains belief in astrology and, secondly, what intellectual function does it serve? A possible answer was suggested by Karl Popper who noted that astrology's practice is based around the paradox that, although the future is predetermined, knowledge of what is to come enables human beings to amend it. He argued that,

Astrology, it should be realised, shares with historicism the belief in a predeterminate destiny which can be predicted: and it shares with some important versions of historicism (especially with Platonism and Marxism) the belief that, notwithstanding the possibility of predicting the future, we have some influence upon it, especially if we know what is coming...All astrology, for instance, involves the apparently somewhat contradictory conception that the knowledge of our fate may help us to influence this fate (Popper 1986: I.210, 244).

In this scheme astrology is sustained by the need for security and order in a world beset by potentially threatening change and instability, a fact on which academics and critics agree with astrologers working within the theosophical tradition, though the latter would add the quest for personal meaning as an important additional motive. Security is to be obtained through the manipulation of a future which, once forecast, can be turned to human advantage. The fundamental political-astrological belief that the futures of heavenly cosmos and terrestrial state are equally fated, can be contrasted with astrology's attempt, via the detailed examination of horoscopes to manipulate the future. It is the astrologer's task to enhance human freedom of choice as much as possible within the limits set by historical and cosmic law. Carey (1992: 3-5) suggested a similar conclusion. Citing Malinowski's theory (1954: 236) that one of magic's primary functions is to provide a means of influencing forces and events normally outside human control, she raises the question as to whether astrological forecasting, combined with the rituals which often accompanied it, may be seen as ways of intervening in historical order. Astrology's function, as a particular application of activist divination to the cosmic state, may therefore be understood within the differing frameworks of competing historicist narratives. If the underlying purpose of historicism is to control change then astrology, within the terms set by Karl Popper, may be seen, within the millenarian framework, as a principal activist discipline.

Millenarianism: Summary

It has been argued that the millenarian tradition, as currently represented in the New Age movement is not only rooted in Judeo-Christian thought, but also in Greek, especially Platonic historical theory, and may be traced back to Persian and Mesopotamian sources. It has also been argued, from the existing literature, that the legacy of the millenarian tradition is expressed in such diverse political and ideological movements as nineteenth-century esotericism, Marxism, Fascism and the theory of progress. There has also been a close relationship between millenarian thought and

astrology, the latter acting either as a warning system, enabling God or the gods to speak to humanity, or a measuring device, using planetary cycles to predict the *parousia*.

Combining the Greek, Jewish and Christian systems, and adapting Cohn' s summary (1970: 13), the following main characteristics of European millenarianism are:

1. Prior to the beginning of the next phase of history human society will have reached a state of terminal decline. This will culminate in a global trauma, either man-made, natural, divinely inspired, or a combination of the three.
2. That this trauma is imminent is self-evident from the moral and political decay of the current period. That is to say, the approaching historical trauma and the consequent return to the golden age must take place during the lifetime of the believer.
3. The coming age, which follows the trauma, will be a distinct improvement on the present one, although in some theories it is forecast that decline will eventually return.
4. In the Judaeo-Christian version and, in some pagan accounts, such as Virgil' s fourth ' messianic' eclogue (1916: 414), the coming phase will be inaugurated by the appearance of a world saviour, messiah or son of God.
5. The entire historical process moves forward according to a plan that is in outline preordained, in some cases divinely inspired. The coming salvation is collective but there is a tension between the Judeo-Christian belief, on the one hand, that only the faithful will collectively enjoy the millennium and, on the other, that the whole world will benefit.

6. It is the duty of every citizen of the world to actively prepare for the next phase of history. Thus Christians must prepare for the second coming of Christ through a combination of devout lifestyle and the conversion of unbelievers.

7. The coming age will, in large measure, restore desirable features of the past, which predated the present state of decline.

8. The coming crisis is imminent.

However, while such themes are clearly evident, it would be a mistake to identify any single pattern that combines all forms of millenarian belief. It is clear that some are more violent, others more peaceful, some envisage an earthly golden age, others a heavenly paradise. A general belief in an inevitable improvement in the condition of the world in the near future, though, is universal.

Chapter Summary

It has been argued that millenarian beliefs, postulating an imminent upheaval in world history, make use of two astrological timing mechanisms. The first, the sending of celestial warnings by God, or the gods, is evident in ancient near-eastern historiography and was encapsulated in the scriptural tradition. The second, the projection of measurable planetary cycles into the future in order to anticipate the crucial moment, is contained in the Greek tradition and was summarised by Plato in the fourth-century BCE. The European millenarian tradition later relied on both timing mechanisms. In later chapters it will be argued that belief in the Age of Aquarius is a new variation in the tradition of millenarian astrology. Karl Popper's model of historicism and activism has also been established and a recurring theme in future chapters will be the development of astrology as an activist discipline, within the overall context of Aquarian Age historicism.