

THE DAWN OF ASTROLOGY

CHAPTER 10

Greece: The Platonic Revolution

*Wherefore we ought to fly away from earth to heaven as quickly as we can; and to fly away is to become like God, as far as this is possible; and to become like him, is to become holy, just, and wise.*¹

By the beginning of the fourth century BCE a series of significant currents in Greek cosmology were being pulled together by the Athenian philosopher Plato, the towering figure in western thought until modern times. Even in the twenty-first century Plato's philosophy overshadows western thought from political theory to pure mathematics, abstract art and New Age mysticism. It has been said that all western philosophy is a footnote to the work of the great Athenian philosopher Plato and his equally famous student, Aristotle. Whatever the truth of this, and a strong case can be made, Plato is certainly the formative influence in western attitudes to the heavens. He decisively shaped astronomy, in terms of an understanding of the physical nature of the sky, and all subsequent debates about astrology's validity have taken place in the context of the arguments he outlined the nature of knowledge, and the difficulty of knowing anything for certain. He determined the shape of European cosmology, establishing a dogma that was only finally shattered when Galileo peered through his telescope in 1609, but has echoes down to the present day. One thing, though, needs to be understood about Plato's cosmos; it was moral. It was embedded in psyche. It had soul and personality.² And it is this that provided a, if not the, rationale for astrology as it left behind the capricious world of the Babylonian pantheon. Plato laid the foundations for a universe which could be trusted.

Plato was born into an aristocratic Athenian family around the year 428 BCE, and died around the age of eighty in 348. His school in Athens, the Academy, survived, with interruptions, for a thousand years, until the year 529 CE. It was closed, not because there was a lack of demand for its teachings, but because the emperor Justinian was seized by a righteous, if futile, desire to bring an end to all pagan learning. The Christian monarch's attempt to suppress Platonism was, though, too little, too late, for Plato's ideas had long since penetrated Christian theology. They were present at the new religion's foundation and many of the most influential Christian church fathers, including St Augustine who laid the foundations for medieval attitudes to astrology in the early fourth century CE, had received a classical education, including instruction in Platonic thought. Augustine famously said that the Platonists were the only pagans with whom one could have an intelligent conversation.³

Plato's world view was profoundly shaped by his despair at the collapse of an imagined perfect old order - Hesiod's golden age. Dismayed by the wars between the city states - he was born during the first Peloponnesian war of 431 to 421 - and was a teenager during the second war, from 414 to 404 - and hostile to the two most familiar political alternatives, tyranny and democracy, he advocated

1 Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1949, 176, p. 41.

2 'The Greek word *psyche* is conventionally and misleadingly translated by "soul". It is rather life, or the cause of life, and in a human being sensation and perception, emotion and thought are all part of life if it is fully present. Sandbach, F.H., *The Stoics*, Bristol: The Bristol Press 1975, p. 82.

3 Augustine, *City of God*, book VIII, esp. chapters 5-12.

the creation of a new form of state which was to be based on the harmonisation of the social and political order with the laws discerned in the cosmos by Pythagoras. His goal was to import the Babylonian cosmic state, but remodel it in line with the dominant trends in Greek cosmology, a cosmos which was alive, intelligent, ordered and mathematical. His vision was all-embracing. He imagined a Utopia in which there would be no room for error, in which the sun, as Parmenides warned, would never exceed its limits and the full moon, as the Babylonian astrologers feared, would never fall on the wrong day. It was not as if he was starting from scratch. There appears to have been a general orientation of temples from east to west, with the rising and setting sun, though there are notable exceptions, such as the temple of Apollo at Bassae which faces north-south, and the measurements are loose.⁴ But, either way, the notion that one should align one's earthly state with the celestial was not unknown.

Plato was profoundly influenced by his teacher, Socrates in a number of crucial respects.⁵ Most important, perhaps was the ethical argument that went as follows: the soul is more important than the body and individual actions should therefore be designed to benefit the soul; the happy life is a fulfilled life, the fulfilled life is a virtuous life and the virtuous life benefits the soul. Therefore morality emphasises shuns revenge, emphasises non-violence, elevates service to one's fellows and depends on a cosmically-sanctified self-interest rather than worship of capricious gods. For this radical break with tradition, Socrates was put to death. However, as we shall see, concern with the well-being of the soul was, from the third century onwards, to be one of the central features of Greek astrology.

Plato's cosmology was set out primarily in two of his most important dialogues, the *Timaeus*, in which he outlined the creation and structure of the cosmos, and the *Republic*, which formulated the rules for the perfect cosmic state. Supporting material for correct governance was provided in the *Laws*, while one shorter text, the *Epinomis*, provided additional astronomical material.⁶ Other dialogues, including the *Symposium*, *Phaedo* and *Phaedrus*, discussed the theory of knowledge, vital if one was to know one's place in the cosmos, and explored the soul's relationship with the stars. All Plato's works were written down as dialogues between two or more characters, who debated the finer points of cosmology, the soul, the state and the stars. It is often difficult to disentangle his own ideas from the general debate and we can never be sure if we have identified

4 See Dinsmoor, William Bell, *The Architecture of Ancient Greece: An Account of Its Historic Development*, New York: 1975.

5 Socrates' thought is scattered throughout Plato's dialogues. His discussion of the immortality of the soul is relevant for the development of Greek cosmology; see Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914. For a good recent discussion see Taylor, C.C.W., R.M. Hare, and J. Barnes, J., *Greek Philosophers — Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999.

6 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R.G.Bury, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1931, esp. chapters 27-60; *Republic*, 2 Vols, trans. Paul Shorey, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1937, esp. X, see also VIII *Laws*, 2 Vols, trans. R.G.Bury, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1934, V.737-8, VI.771; Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914; Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914; Plato, *Symposium*, trans. W.R.M.Lamb, Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1914; *Epinomis*, trans. W.R.M.Lamb, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1929. There is some argument about the authorship of the *Epinomis*, which may have been written by Plato's secretary and student, Philip of Opus. However, the text is still included in editions of Plato's work and reflects his thought. See Tarán, Leonardo, *Academica: Plato: Philip of Opus, and the Pseudo-Platonic Epinomis*, Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society 1975. For the purposes of the development of Platonic cosmology from the fourth century BCE onwards, though, it makes no difference whether Plato or his student was the author. For a seminal and influential account of Plato's cosmology see Cornford, F.M., *Plato's Cosmology: The Timaeus*, London: Routledge 2001 [1937].

his 'real' thoughts. Where Plato was trying out ideas, his followers saw a system and 'Platonism', which itself comes in different varieties, was created. However, that said, there is a broad consensus as to the nature of Platonic thought. Simply, he believed that the material, phenomenal world inhabited by humanity may be seen as an illusion resting in a real world consisting of 'soul', conceived as thoughtful, intelligent, benevolent reason, and emanating from the mind of a creator best imagined as a supreme Mind, a remote, impersonal God, best conceived of as a Creative Intelligence, a Mind and the source of Reason and Good (itself defined as stability and order) and referred to as 'Father' described by words such as Father or Maker and Constructor of the Universe.⁷ The Platonic God did not answer prayer or intervene on the world on a whim; he (although we should probably avoid gender stereotypes) was a remote, rational, and benevolent creator. This is a generalisation and we struggle to find the right words, and separate later traditions from what Plato himself meant; to say that the physical world is an illusion does not mean that it is not 'real', for we quite clearly experience it as such and, in the *Timaeus*, the body of the world is created before its soul. The stars and planets assumed importance because they revealed the creator. It was not quite as the Psalmist put it ('The heavens are telling the glory of God, and the firmament proclaims his handiwork'.⁸), but it was similar. For Plato, the planets had been placed in the sky for the 'determining and preserving of the numbers of Time', to identify the creator's unfolding Ideas.⁹ Time in the Platonic cosmos was, in a sense familiar to our modern Einsteinian world, less a means of measuring the passage of events than an organising principle. For Plato the order of the heavens was a mirror of divine reason, an assumption which made the study of astronomy so important. His God was almost Zurvanite in his distance from humanity and the argument may be made that his new cosmology hinged around the importation of Persian theology. The Persian conquest of Greece had failed but the Zoroastrian God of time proved irresistible. And, while Platonists were not star-worshippers, at least not until the late Roman Empire, they did worship mathematical beauty of the regular movements.

There is some anecdotal evidence that Babylonian astrologers were visiting Greece by the late fifth century, and that Greek scholars were interested in Babylonian astrology, as one would expect from such inquisitive individuals.¹⁰ Plato observed the way in which Babylonian astrology was applied to political problems and realised that, in simple practical terms, the Babylonians had far more knowledge of the heavens than the Greeks. For this reason he recommended the introduction into Greece of Egyptian and Babylonian planetary deities.¹¹ But, even though he thought that astrology was, in principle, a valuable aid to the management of the state, his attitude to contemporary Babylonian astrology itself was quite dismissive, mainly because he thought it lacked the mathematical models which, he believed, were essential if it was to be genuinely useful. Plato was no fan of the PCP paradigm. He saw no point in empirically correlating celestial patterns with events and expecting a pattern to be identified from the data. He was an exponent of the EAE paradigm; theory was everything. Without theoretical models, Plato believed, astrology could only provide alarming predictions of the things to come:

7 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R.G.Bury, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1931, 28C-29A, 41B, 42E.

8 Psalms, 19.1.

9 Plato, *Timaeus* 38C.

10. Waterfield, Robin, 'The Evidence for Astrology in Classical Greece', *Culture and Cosmos*, Autumn/Winter 1999, Vol. 3 no 2, pp. 3-15.

11 Plato, *Epinomis*, trans. W.R.M.Lamb, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1929, 987 A-B.

But the choric dances of these same stars and their crossings one of another, and the relative reversals and progressions of their orbits, and which of the gods meet in their conjunctions, and how many are in opposition, and behind which and at what times they severally pass behind one another and are hidden from our view, and again re-appearing send upon men unable to calculate alarming portents of the things which shall come to pass hereafter, - to describe all this without an inspection of models of these movements would be labour in vain.¹²

But, in theory, he regarded it as important that a true understanding of the cosmos was vital to the wise ruler. Using a nautical analogy, he wrote that 'the true pilot must give his attention to the time of the year, the seasons, the sky, the winds, the stars, and all that pertains to the art, if he is to be a true ruler of a ship'.¹³ In the same passage he laughed at people who just gaze at the stars, by which he means the unthinking observation of which he thought the Babylonians were guilty. Plato's anger at the deficiencies of Babylonian astrology was not unprecedented. It appears to have been part of an irritation felt by the Athenian elite against the ignorance of those who lived in fear of celestial omens, illustrated by a story told about Pericles, the Athenian leader, by his former rival, the historian Thucydides. At the outbreak of the Peloponnesian War in 431, Pericles was preparing to set sail with a vast fleet of 150 ships when, the Roman biographer Plutarch tells us, a solar eclipse took place. 'The sudden darkness', he reports, 'was looked upon as an unfavourable omen, and threw [the Athenian troops] into the greatest consternation'.¹⁴ Pericles took his cloak, used it to shield his pilot from the sun and then asked why this should be any more threatening than the eclipse. Reassured by their leader's wisdom, the Athenian fleet set sail. Plato may not have shared Pericles' position exactly, for he valued the oracle as both a traditional Greek institution and path to truth. But he undoubtedly regarded Babylonian astrology as worthless.

Plato's attack was mirrored by his students. Eudoxus, the most brilliant astronomer of his time, attacked the Babylonians for casting birth-charts; he had been born in 408 BCE, two years after the earliest known example.¹⁵ Significantly, neither Plato nor Eudoxus not attacked astrology as such, only its practice. But that is a minor consideration. Plato's words, tucked away in the *Timaeus* and rarely noticed by historians, are a triumphal assertion of the belief that the universe can be explained within abstract frameworks. They constitute the core statement in all subsequent European astronomy, down to the seventeenth century, and much of the science. They assert the primacy of theory over observation, claiming that what is observed and experienced – that, as the Babylonians thought, certain celestial movements coincide with alarming events – cannot be trusted. No evidence, no data can make sense without a philosophically correct explanation and, if a phenomenon does not fit the expected mathematical formula, it should be disregarded. The Platonic project was therefore clear - to create a mathematical astronomy which could provide an accurate basis for astrology, predict 'better' and 'worse' births, stave off social decline and postpone political collapse for as long as possible. Plato's grand task was nothing less than to manage world history.

12 Plato *Timaeus*, 40 C-D.

13 Plato, *Republic*, 2 Vols., trans. Paul Shorey, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1937, VI.488.D.

14 Plutarch, 'Pericles', in *Lives*, Langhorne Translation, 2 Vols. London and New York: Frederick Warne and co., 1890, p. 172. See also Munro, J.A.R., 'Thucydides on the Third of August, 431 B.C.', *The Classical Quarterly*, Vol. 13, No. 3/4 (July 1919), pp. 127-128.

15 See the discussion in Cramer, Frederick H., *Astrology in Roman Law and Politics*, Chicago; Ares Publishers 1996, p. 9.

There's no doubt that Babylonian astrology was reaching Plato and his students. For a start, the *Epinomis* was the first Greek text we know of to relate the Babylonian deities to their equivalent Greek planets. Prior to Plato, only Venus had a standard name; Homer called it Eosphoros when it was the morning star, visible just before dawn, and Hesperos when it was an evening star, visible just after dusk. In Hesiod's *Theogony*, only Helios (the sun), Selene (the moon) and Eosphoros were named.¹⁶ In the *Timaeus*, the planets were placed in the following order: moon, sun, 'Morning Star' (Eosphoros, or Venus), 'the star called Sacred to Hermes' or 'Star of Hermes' (Mercury), and, by inference (they were not named) Mars, Jupiter and Saturn; only one planet, Mercury, was given a divine association.¹⁷ The precise matching of Greek planets to Babylonian deities occurred first in the *Epinomos* so, depending on that work's authorship, may have been due to Plato's student Philip of Opus rather than the master himself, though is also attributed to the Pythagoreans.¹⁸ Saturn, the planet special to Ninurta, became the 'star of Kronos', while Jupiter, sacred to Marduk, the tutelary deity of Babylon, became the star of Zeus, the king of the Greek gods. The warlike Nergal was a natural equivalent to the Greek Ares and so the planet Mars became the 'star of Ares'. Aphrodite, he concluded, was naturally the Greek equivalent of Ishtar, so was given the planet Venus, while Nabu, the Babylonian scribe, was an obvious fit for Hermes, the messenger of the Greek pantheon, who was allocated the planet Mercury. All these connections are obvious except for the link of Ninurta, 'the trustworthy farmer of Enlil', to Kronos, lord of the golden race.¹⁹ The *Epinomis* also paid explicit tribute to the Syrian and also, incidentally, Egyptian, origins of astronomy and strongly advocated the introduction of their planetary deities. This was a risky enterprise and he exposed himself to a serious charge of atheism on the grounds that he failed to honour the traditional gods and instead focused on the divinity of the stars. He believed, though, that the Greeks would naturally improve whatever the foreigners had started.²⁰

However, the Babylonian astrologers were, ironically, working hard to create just such a framework, the evidence for which is found in their systematic division of the sky into twelve equal sections and the instruction of degrees to measure celestial positions. Nevertheless, Plato's effective provision of a comprehensive cosmological and philosophical manifesto for astrology provided the gateway for its wholesale introduction into the Greek world. So great was his impact on both astronomy and astrology that we should talk of a Platonic Revolution to rival the Copernican Revolution which, in the sixteenth century, was to set the scene for the modern world by placing the sun, rather than the earth, at the centre of the universe. That the cosmos was regulated by divinely determined, perfect mathematical and geometrical ratios dictated the course of European astronomy until Newton. Plato's cosmos was a single, living, divine entity, in which all parts were

16 Hesiod, *Theogony*, 371-3, 381.

17 Plato, *Timaeus* 38 C-D.

18. Plato, *Epinomis* 987 B-C. The question of Greek naming of the planets was dealt with exhaustively in Cumont Franz, 'Les noms des planètes et l'astrolatrie chez les Grecs', *L'Antiquité Classique*, 1935, Tome IV, 1, pp. 5-43. The Platonic conversion of Babylonian to Greek deities became the standard, but there were other versions; see Long, Charlotte, *The Twelve Gods of Greece and Rome*, Leiden and New York, Brill 1987. By the first half of the third century BCE, the planets appear to have also all been given non-divine names, such as Phainon (Saturn), Phaeton (Jupiter), Pyroeis (Mars), Eosphoros or Phosphoros (Venus) and Stilbon (Mercury). See the discussion in Condos, Theony, *Star Myths of the Greeks and Romans: A Sourcebook*, Grand Rapids MI, Phanes Press 1997, pp. 167-9.

19 Kramer, Samuel, Noah, *The Sumerians, Their History, Culture and Character*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press 1963, p. 108.

20. Plato, *Epinomis* 987A - B, E..

inextricably linked to all others. That it was, in itself, divine, rather than created by God as a purely external agent was to provide Christian theology with a crucial dimension from classical times onwards, one in which the world's problems were no longer a product of the Fall, of Adam and Eve's original sin, but of its distance from the perfect, divine source. The path to salvation therefore lay not necessarily through faith alone, but through reason and, in terms of cosmic geography, the way to heaven was charted via the stars. At one level astronomers might peer into the mind of God, or initiates plot a path to heaven while, at the other, astrologers could make statements of astonishing detail about the nature and course of the individual life. Plato was actually the first in a long line of western astrological reformers, of whom the last was Johannes Kepler in the seventeenth century, who reacted against what they saw as the chaos of the astrology inherited from the east. The result of every phase of astrological reform except for the most recent, in the twentieth century, was a massive boost in astronomical research, the purpose of which was to refine and hone the practical application of astrology to daily concerns.

In his quest for universal truth, Plato drew together all the previous philosophical currents except those which regarded matter as the primary cause of everything. He had no time for the atomists, for example, who thought that, once they'd established what the smallest particle of matter was, the world's existence might be explained. By contrast, he was deeply influenced by Heracleitus and Parmenides, borrowing the sceptical notion that no significant knowledge could come from direct observation of the natural world, leaving abstract thought as the only path to wisdom. He was to formalise what the Babylonian astrologers had always known – that absolute knowledge is available, but human fallibility means that their forecasts are often technically wrong. From Pythagoras he adopted reincarnation and the mathematical universe arranged in musical harmonies. From his teacher Socrates, he learnt that philosophy should concern itself with values and with the nature of the cosmos rather than with its physical composition; it followed, and this was a cardinal tenet of Platonic cosmology, that every man and woman are ultimately responsible for their own actions. Also embedded within Plato's cosmogony was a notion which it is now easy to take for granted, but was a revolutionary shift away from the conventions of Hesiodic, Babylonian and Egyptian creation myths. Life no longer emerged out of a primeval chaos, or water, or egg, but from Xenophon's supreme creator, the creative mind and father of all. But this was not the external creator God of later Christian theology. The entire universe was itself alive, divine and intelligent as, therefore, were individual parts of it, including the planets. In a sense, the cosmos was God.

And from these core beliefs are drawn the fundamental features of Plato's political theology. Firstly, if the universe is governed by mathematical laws, then it functions like a vast machine which, like Newton's some two thousand years later, is essentially deterministic. Freedom, then, is essentially a state of mind. It's for this reason that Karl Popper, in the latter part of the twentieth-century, berated Plato as the intellectual ancestor of modern authoritarianism, especially Marxism. He identified Political Platonism, the belief in the benevolent dictatorship of the philosopher, as the source of tyranny in the modern world. There are ambiguities in Plato's thought, though, and his counter statement, drawn from his teacher, Socrates, that we are all responsible for our own lives, exists alongside the predetermined universe as a permanent paradox which Popper termed historicism; most theories that the future is broadly predetermined, Popper noticed, require the believer to actively strive to create that future, a philosophy which he termed activism. As the Marxist prepares for the inevitable revolution by forming a revolutionary vanguard, he argued, the Platonic philosopher rides the predetermined cycles of politics and history by administering the state in perfect accord with celestial harmonies. The astrologer, having predicted the future, can influence its outcome; 'all astrology', Popper wrote (meaning Platonic astrology), 'involves the apparently somewhat contradictory conception that the knowledge of our fate may help us

influence this fate'.²¹ From Plato onwards, the Babylonian notion of an astrology of signs, in which the onus is on the astrologer to read divine messages, can be distinguished from an astrology of celestial order, in which astrology becomes a means of describing the processes to which all people, from kings to the lowliest peasant, are subject. Although their ideologies differ, both approaches to astrology were designed to manage the state. Plato would not necessarily have recognised the two as distinct, for he regarded oracles as a vital means of reading the divine will. But the distinction between the two theoretical models was later to be increasingly important in arguments over astrology's validity. The Platonic model, with its assumption of universal order, was no more nor less free than the conventional Greek cosmos, with its pantheon of competing gods and goddesses, and the astrology it spawned was to allow for human participation as did the Babylonian. As Popper argued, Platonism made human participation in the cosmic drama a necessity. The Platonic cosmos actually enhanced human freedom in that one's destiny was to be influenced by one's own actions rather than by the whims of deities who were under no obligation to accept the sacrifices and offerings made to them.

For Plato, the stars and planets represented the world soul, the universal intelligence. Astrology as astro-logos became, in the hands of his successors, a rational construct for interpreting the mind of the universe, or divine providence. There was a shift of emphasis from the Babylonian concept of multiple deities, but only a slight one. Plato's reverence for the universe as a single entity did not blind him to the power of individual gods and goddesses speaking through the stars. His system may have been monist in that it emerged from a single creator, but the world itself was pluralist.

Platonism was to infuse Christianity, offering an alternative perspective on the human relationship with the divine which was somewhat more optimistic than the gloomy view, derived from pessimistic readings of the expulsion of Adam and Eve from Eden, in which humanity was alienated from God and mired in sin. Plato had no problem with Greek tradition. He accepted the standard cosmogony set out by Hesiod, including the birth of the gods and goddesses within a framework in which chaos gave way to ordered cosmos.²² But, into the picture came Xenophon's God, and the gods and goddesses of the Greek pantheon were allocated a reduced status as his agents.

As creator, God doesn't create matter *ex nihilo*, out of nothing, but brings order to existing chaos. Rather, he doesn't create a universe outside himself, like the God of Genesis. Instead the universe emanates out of him, as Mind, as he thinks. First the world soul, universal consciousness, emerges and then physical existence materialises out of soul. If God is reason, and the whole universe shares in his divine nature, then it follows both that we contain a little of this original divine nature, even if enclosed in a body driven by raw passion and gut instinct, and that our path back to God is therefore through the use of reason and philosophical contemplation and, and this is critical for the history of both astronomy and astrology, through the stars.

And this is the essential point – that the mathematical motion of the universe is predetermined, but the motion of the soul; the psyche is not. It can choose. It is in a participatory relationship with the Divine. The cosmos is a moral as well as mathematical entity, and the order evident in the regular patterns of sun, moon and stars is matched by disorder and variety. Cosmos never entirely does away with chaos. But while, Plato, like the Jewish prophets, fears chaos, the randomness which

21. Popper, Karl, *The Open Society and its Enemies*, 2 Vols., London and New York: Routledge, 1945 Vol. 1., p. 244, n. 1; see also p. 210, n. 5; *The Poverty of Historicism*, London and New York: Routledge, 1986,

22 *Timaeus* 40E.

allows for ecstatic contact with the Divine is of enormous value. So is the indeterminacy which allows the individual to make moral choices.

From Heracleitus Plato adopted two modes of existence, Being (influenced by Parmenides' Way of Truth) and Becoming (influenced by Parmenides' Way of Seeming). God himself inhabits the condition of Being, in which everything is eternal, perfect, motionless, good and true. Being contains the models (like every architect, God needs a set of plans) on which everything we know is based. Plato called these Ideas, though they are also known as 'Ideal Forms', or 'Types' or 'Archetypes'. His Ideas precede action; the belief that consciousness precedes matter is the origin of idealism, the belief in a perfect world. As a Pythagorean, Plato believed that such Ideas could only be expressed as numbers, or as geometrical forms. A Platonic "idea" is not a mental construct as we would have it, but a pre-existent essence, that which makes a thing exactly what it is as opposed to something else. The basic concept is that the essences which define things pre-exist any instances of the things themselves. Thus the essence of 'treeness' pre-exists any actual tree. The terms 'essence' and 'substance' are variously used to describe the idea that there is a layer of reality underlying the visible world. So Plato's philosophy provides the foundation for the still-influential 'essentialist' or 'substantialist' strand in western thought.

As soon as God begins the creation, Becoming comes into existence. In Becoming everything is in Heracleitus' state of constant flux, literally always becoming something else, while remaining as a copy of the original Idea. Plato is replicating, in different language, the distinction between the sacred and the profane that Eliade has argued is fundamental to the religious experience.²³ Without necessarily agreeing with the idea, Heracleitus and Plato were sufficiently close to the Indian notion that the material world is essentially an illusion for us to suspect that both were influenced by earlier contacts between Greece and India at the Persian court. As Plato put it, 'You must suppose, then,' I went on, 'that there are these two powers of which I have spoken, and that one of them is supreme over everything in the intelligible world, the other over everything in the visible world - I won't say in the physical universe or you will think I'm playing with words. At any rate you understand there are these two orders of things, the visible and the intelligible'.²⁴ There was an unchangeable world you can't see, and a changeable one you can.

There is undeniably a form of dualism in Plato's thought, but we need to understand that his is not the absolute mind/body split that entered western thought with Descartes. He was, instead, concerned with the interplay of interlinked poles of existence. Mind is real for Plato, but so is body. Platonic dualism is written into the fabric of the universe. While he believed that movement was necessarily a bad thing because it resulted in change, decline and falsehood, and that perfect bodies remained utterly motionless, less movement was better still than more. The stars, which appeared to hold exactly the same position in relation to each other, even though they appeared to rotate around the earth once a day, were representatives of cosmic order, as was their daily movement from east to west. The planets also moved from east to west every day, so shared in some of that stellar perfection, but over longer periods of anything from a month in the case of the moon to twenty-nine years for Saturn, they wandered (the Greek word planet literally means wanderer) north and south, slowed down, stopped and even appeared to travel backwards. Even the sun, which has the most predictable motion, was constantly changing colour. It was these variations which formed the bridge between heavenly order and terrestrial chaos.

23 Eliade, Mircea. *The Sacred and the Profane*, New York: Harcourt Brace 1959.

24 Plato, *Republic*, trans. H.D.P. Lee, Harmondsworth, Middlesex: Penguin 1971, 509, p. 275.

Plato is insistent that naturalistic causes do not explain the ordering and motions of the planets.²⁵ Instead, and in spite of appearances, he claimed that the planets moved according to perfect circular patterns, based on geometrical structures. He later added that the fact that the planets follow such erratic courses reinforces the need to understand celestial motions, pray reverently at the proper times and avoid blasphemy.²⁶ The Hebrew Prophets would have agreed.

Plato believed that all physical things were made of mixtures of the four Empedoclean solids, fire, air, earth and water, structured according to the four physical solids that could be created from triangles.²⁷ Plato also adopted the Pythagorean doctrine that the distances between the planets and the earth are musical sequences. Each of the planetary spheres has a siren who is borne round on the sphere and sings one note as she does so, the total of eight notes blending into a single harmony.²⁸ Mathematically, then the Platonic cosmos is geometrical and musical. But there is more.

The moral structure of the universe was based on the premise that the world emanated from the mind of God. The initial phase involved the development of the world soul, out of which matter itself was created. In spatial terms, the cosmos, though inherently perfect, therefore became ever more degenerate as it became more distant from the creator. The fixed stars, whose appearance never changed were most divine, being closest to God, while the planets become steadily less divine as the crystal spheres on which they revolved moved closer to the earth in the order Saturn, Jupiter, Mars, Mercury, Venus the sun and, lastly, the moon, whose rapidly changing appearance was proof of its profound imperfection. Eventually we arrive on the earth which is round and held at the centre of the universe by the whole system.²⁹ The earth is perfectly still, but everything is in a constant state of decline, as witnessed by both individual disease and death and the sickness which Plato saw all around him in the body politic; only the soul retains a link with God. But the situation was not as bad as it seemed. Even corrupt matter was an emanation of the Nous, the divine mind. As such it partook of the Good. The assumption of an essentially good universe was to shape Christian cosmology and eventually was to find echoes in eighteenth century notions of the perfectibility of man.

The planetary spheres themselves revolved on the Spindle of Necessity, which extended from the poles up through the planetary spheres to the stars. Around the spindle were clustered the three *Moirae*, the 'Destinies and ruthless avenging Fates', who, according to Hesiod, 'give men at their birth both evil and good to have; and they pursue the transgressions of men and of gods'.³⁰ Plato had them singing as they spun fate; Lachesis sang of the past, Clotho of the present and Atropos of the

25 Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 98A.

26 *Laws* VII.821B-D.

27 *Timaeus* 39E-40A, 55A-C. The structure was, Fire = tetradhedron (pyramid), gods; Air = octahedron, birds; Water = icosahedron, fish; Earth = cube, animals, including humans. A fifth solid, the twelve-sided dodecahedron, was considered to be the most perfect because it was closest to the sphere and used by God used it to decorate the 'Universe', perhaps a reference to the Zodiac.

28 *Timaeus* 35, *Republic* 617B.

29 Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 108E-109A, 110B.

30 Hesiod, 'Theogony' in *The Homeric Hymns and Homerica, including 'Works and Days' and 'Theogonis'*, trans. Hugh G. Evelyn-White, Cambridge Mass.: Harvard University Press 1917, l. 216-20, p. 95.

things still to come. The task of the musician, a profession Plato deeply admired, was to bring that harmony alive.³¹

The whole structure could also account for all events on earth. Everything that takes place must have a cause but these were arranged in a hierarchy. God, the Good, is the 'first', or 'final' cause, which initiated all change in the cosmos, while the motions of the stars and planets, were 'auxiliary' or 'secondary' causes which 'God employs as his ministers in perfecting, so far as possible, the Form of the Most Good'.³² Therefore, while the planets act as physical causes in terms of the manipulation of the four elements, this process is subordinate to the metaphysical causes emanating from God and the universe's divine, intelligent, rational nature. As expressed by the Stoics in the following centuries, 'the orderly succession of causes wherein cause is linked to cause and each cause of itself produces an effect'.³³ The implication was that astrology could reveal, via the planets, God's will. However, nothing was so simple.

Plato's theory of knowledge is critical for a proper understanding of his attitudes to astrology. There's a clear paradox in his attitude to knowledge gained from the sky, which is underpinned by the contrast between Being and Becoming. The former, which is eternal and true, is perceived through reason, meaning the study of theoretical and abstract principles, while the latter, which can yield only opinion, can never yield reliable information.³⁴ In the world of Becoming everything is in a state of change. We change from minute to minute, physically and psychologically. Our knowledge also changes. We forget some things and learn others. The Divine by contrast is unchanging.³⁵ Plato formalised what the diviners had always known – that absolute knowledge is available, but human fallibility means that their forecasts are often technically wrong.

On the one hand the stars were part of the changing, visible, universe and so astrology could never provide accurate information by tracking their movements, which was the Babylonians fundamental error. As Plato put it, 'the region above the heaven was never worthily sung by any poet'.³⁶ This cosmic dualism led direct to a schism in human knowledge. For those who could not see beyond their own senses, and were trapped in the world of Becoming, there was no possibility of truth.³⁷ And here lies another of Plato's contributions to western thought – scepticism. Under ordinary circumstances, in this material world, there could be no true knowledge, and the only respectable position was doubt. The consequence, in following centuries, was that the most serious attacks on astrology were launched by Platonists. Plato himself explained human ignorance though one of his best known myths, in which human beings are likened to cave dwellers who are gazing at the wall, imagining that their shadows, cast by a fire on the wall, are reality.³⁸ However,

31 *Republic* X.617C.

32 *Timaeus* 46D, 47A.

33 Cicero, *De Divinatione*, I.lv.125. See also the criticisms of the Stoic concept of Fate in II.viii.20-ix.24.

34 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R.G.Bury, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1931, 28A; Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 66A, 83A; Plato, *Theaetetus*, trans. Benjamin Jowett, Indianapolis: The Library of Liberal Arts, 1949, 157, p. 20.

35 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. W.R.M.Lamb, Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1914, 207C – 208B.

36 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 247C.

37 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R.G.Bury, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1931, 28A.

38 Plato, *Republic*, trans. Paul Shorey, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1937. VI.I.1.

ignorance is not unavoidable and, once the individual has emerged from the cave, he will begin to 'contemplate the appearances of heavens and heaven itself' – the night sky. Progressively the soul begins to turn away from darkness and to learn to see the shining truth, the essence, the good, that is the true nature of the cosmos.³⁹ Literally, the cycles of the stars and planets from day to day and year to year reveal the revolutions of 'Reason in the Heaven', teaching humanity not just about the external heavens, but themselves as embodiments of the cosmos.⁴⁰ Taken together Plato's description of the stars as markers of time, causes, paths to God and sources of information about humanity provide a persuasive rationale for astrology.

Even so, Plato never directly says what astrology he is proposing to replace what he sees as the chaotic Babylonian version. He is clear that, as with all forms of knowledge, it must employ absolute reason, not rely only on observation.⁴¹ But the clues are contained throughout his texts. The collective astrology which had been used to manage the Mesopotamian cosmic state was now to be used as an organising framework rather than a predictive tool. The individual astrology which had recently emerged in Babylon was to be used not for working out one's destiny. In fact, one shouldn't even use it all. Instead by studying the mathematical principles, geometrical forms and musical harmonises, and by gazing at the sky, one would take one's soul closer to god, to the divine mind and, in the process, distinguish between reality and the shadows on the cave wall.⁴²

In spite of Plato's respect for the east, there was a certain nationalism in his position, and his rejection of Babylonian astrology was contradicted by a respect for native Greek oracles, which he saw as vital to the smooth running of the state, as well as a powerful source of truth. He had the highest respect for the political advice received from the great oracles, mentioning specifically Delphi, Dodona or Ammon (note the Egyptian influence - Ammon was the Egyptian solar deity Amon or Amun, equated by the Greeks with Zeus: his oracle was in Egypt). He argued that such advice, whether from 'visions' or 'inspiration from heaven' should no more be altered than should rules derived from sacred numbers.⁴³ He was the first thinker we know of to introduce a typology of divination, dividing it into two forms, which he attributed to Socrates.⁴⁴ The first, mantic prophecy, was the product of frenzy or inspired madness, as found in the oracles, such as Delphi. He preferred to call this variety manic, rather than mantic, on the grounds that true madness could take one close to the divine. From this he distinguished augury, based on rational methods, such as the observation of birds and signs and their interpretation in line with established rules. Why he could not include Babylonian astrology within such rational divination is not clear.

Given Plato's concern with the theory of astrology and his rejection of the practice, at least as it was known in Babylon, it was down to later generations to adapt these arguments to take positions either for or against the kind of detailed astrology which claimed to make precise prognostications.

39 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 250 B-251B; Plato, *Republic*, 2 Vols, trans. Paul Shorey, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1937, 518 C-D, 519D.

40 Timaeus 42 C-D, 47B-C, Epinomis 978D, Republic 529.C-D, Laws XII.966E-967C.

41 Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 66A.

42 Plato, *Republic*, 2 Vols, trans. Paul Shorey, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1937, 517B; Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 250 A-B.

43 Plato, *Laws* V.737E-738A.

44 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 244-5.

It was also left to future philosophers to draw out of his teachings certain principles which were to be crucial to the practice of magic down to the Renaissance. The first of these was the idea that knowledge is possessed by the soul before birth and that the educational process therefore depends on 'remembering' what has been forgotten. The child's mind is not a *tabula rasa*, an empty space to be filled with knowledge, but a soul to be awakened.⁴⁵ Crucially, images could be used as an *aide memoire*, to recover this lost knowledge and enable the soul to, once again, see God.⁴⁶ The magical image then becomes an icon, less a portrayal of a divine figure, than a gateway to it. And here, to contradict earlier assertions about the Platonic theory of knowledge, we have to add that events in the temporal world may help the soul recollect knowledge of the divine. The second of Plato's contributions to the later development of magic was that the magician, as a philosopher, must lead a good, moral, ascetic life, in which physical passions are curbed and pleasurable indulgence rejected.⁴⁷ Not only does this path lead to happiness, but it enables the soul to see the good, the eternal truth. Without this, magic could not work. Simply, the cosmos was essentially good, magic depended on manipulating the cosmos and this could only be achieved by good people for good ends. This was a matter of simple fact. Piety was essential. As *Timaeus* records, 'all men who possess even a small share of good sense call upon God always at the outset of every undertaking'.⁴⁸ To be sure, we have many examples of magic being used to curse one's neighbours, rivals or enemies, at least to judge from the talismans thrown into such sites as the hot springs at Bath. But, as a tradition of high magic developed, Platonic theory dictated that to inflict a curse was, as a matter of principle, impossible. It was from this notion of magic as a means of liberating the soul that a tradition developed in the classical world known as theurgy – god work – as opposed to theology – god-study. When the Greek world wholeheartedly adopted astrology in the second century BCE, it was to take two forms. One, inherited from Babylon was to concentrate on the management and prediction of Becoming via the use of horoscopes. The other, theurgical, was to concentrate on enabling the soul to reconnect with the divine. This was no less practical in intent than horoscopic astrology, but its goal was different.

Observation of the sacred calendar was central to the secure and ordered functioning of the state. Plato set down the perfect education for the good citizen. This included enough mathematics to understand the motions of the sun, moon and stars in order to calculate the calendar 'so that the seasons, with their respective sacrifices and feasts, may each be assigned its due position by being held as nature dictates, and that they may create fresh liveliness and alertness in the State, and may pay their due honours to the gods, and may render the citizen more intelligent about these matters'.⁴⁹

Plato's political astrology was to be applied to the service of the state with authoritarian rigour. The entire organisation of the state and politics should, he insisted, be deliberately arranged to conform to the same mathematical principles which regulated the motions of the stars and planets. Solar and lunar cycles, rounded to 360 and thirty days respectively (perhaps borrowed from the Egyptian calendar, or from the *Mul Apin*), were critical: the state was to be governed by a Council of 360

45 Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 75C-E p. 263-5.

46 Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 67A. See also 74A, 76A

47 Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 66C, 67A, 73B-74A, 83A; Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 240, 256 A-B.

48 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R.G.Bury, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1931, 27C.

49 *Laws* VII.809C-D.

members, of whom thirty should govern for a month of thirty days at a time.⁵⁰ In the *Laws* the state was a microcosm of the celestial order and, in the *Republic*, the soul was a microcosm of the ideal political system. This was not an astrology of prediction but of political control, closer to the Egyptian model than the Babylonian. But, as a Heracleitian, Plato knew that perfection was a state to be aspired to rather than attained. Life was rhythmic and, if perfection could ever be achieved, it would be instantly lost. He dealt with such problems in his analysis of political and historical patterns, the cyclical rise and fall of states and the birth and decay of societies. All such cycles were contained within a cosmic cycle, which he adapted from Empedocles, in which when the planets and stars all returned to the location they occupied at their creation. When then this happened one 'Great Year' would end and other begin.⁵¹ The cosmos would come to an end and be reborn. He offered no other details. Later commentators assumed that the apocalyptic moment would arrive when all the planets occupied the first degree of Aries, the beginning of the zodiac. But all Plato did was set out in his typically obscure manner an elaborate code, the so called 'nuptial number', which specified the length of time it took for the whole cycle to take place. From the fifth-century CE philosopher Proclus onwards, this number has been given as 36,000 years, although it wasn't until the 1890s that the figure was actually justified on the basis of Plato's text.⁵² Of what Plato really thought, or even whether he believed that the number could be specified, we have no idea. What we do know, is that the doctrine which came to be known as *apokatastasis*, the period destruction of the world, was to justify the subsequent development of astrology as a means of forecasting global crises including, in the Christian world, the second coming. As Paul Ricoeur put it, the beginning and the end are tied together in a manner which suggests to the collective imagination, a triumph of concordance over discordance.⁵³

Plato's view of the afterlife was a compromise between Greek and Egyptian beliefs. He retained Hades, the subterranean world of shades, allowed the good to ascend to the stars. The virtuous and those who have loved the philosophical life go to heaven after death, 'raised up into a heavenly place by justice', while the others go to the 'places of correction under the earth'.⁵⁴ As the Vedas put it 'the seers, thinking holy thoughts, mount him (Time)'.⁵⁵ The shift of the immortal soul's home from the underworld to heaven has survived in writing for the first time in Plato's works and represents one of the most dramatic innovations of Greek philosophy. As Plato, said, the 'soul...traverses the whole heaven'.⁵⁶ This is plausibly a democratisation of Egyptian cosmology in which only the Pharaoh and his queen had a guaranteed spiritual presence in the stars; for Plato, in spite of his elitist instincts, every soul belonged in the starry heavens. There may also be some

50. Plato, *Laws* V.737 E - 738 A, VI 771 A-C, *Epinomis* 978E - 979A. For the possible influence of 360 day years on the Greeks see Hannah, Robert, *Greek and Roman Calendars: Constructions of Time in the Classical World*, London: Duckworth 2005, pp. 25, 83-6.

51 Plato, *Timaeus*, trans. R.G.Bury, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1931, 22D, 39D. See Callatay, Godefroid de, *Annus Platonicus: a study of world cycles in Greek, Latin and Arabic sources*, Louvain-la-Neuve, Universite Catholique de Louvain 1996.

52 Plato, *Republic* VIII.546 A-B. See also Adam, James, *The Nuptial Number of Plato*, London 1891 and *The Republic of Plato*, Cambridge 1902; Campion, Nicholas, *The Great Year*, p. 242-6.

53 Ricoeur, Paul, *Time and Narrative*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1985, Vol 2, p. 23.

54 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 249 A-B.

55 Bloomberg, Maurice (trans.), *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000 [1897], XIX.53, p. 224.

56 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 246 b-c.

correspondence with Indian beliefs about salvation in the sky: 'That I do know of thee', the Atharva-Veda intones, 'O immortal, where thy march is upon the sky, where thy habitation is in the highest heaven'.⁵⁷ Along with Pythagoras' articulation of the mathematically ordered universe, this also represents the most significant Greek contribution to astrology, distinguishing it from its Babylonian origins. The descent of the soul from the stars leads naturally to an astrology that is designed to analyse one's moral character and spiritual destiny.⁵⁸ In terms of human freedom, the universe was polarised between Reason, which might lead humanity back to God, and Necessity, the passions, instincts, desires and needs which are part and parcel of physical existence. In the coming centuries, astrology developed as the practical tool which might make this possible.

Plato's spiritual cosmology, set out in the so-called myth of Er in book X of the *Republic*, established a model for the relationship between the soul and the stars which was to become one of the mainsprings of religious arguments in the Roman world, provided a huge problem for medieval theologians and provided a rationale for astrology which is still evident in the number of New Age astrology books which include the words 'spirit' and 'soul' in their titles. It also established a literary tradition in which it is taken for granted that, whether literally or metaphorically, the soul descends from and will ascend to, the stars.⁵⁹ The moral, and this is vital to understanding Plato's views on the correct life style, was that the just soul benefits after death, and that a virtuous life, lived in harmony with the cosmos as part of the divine, therefore brings rewards. Er himself, the central character in the story, was a soldier who was killed in battle and later revived, but not before surviving in the afterlife for the cosmologically significant period of twelve days.

In the *Timaeus* we read that, when, God made the stars he fashioned a soul for each one and so the eighth sphere, that of the stars, is the natural home of humanity in its original, perfect condition. When the cosmos was created God had made a soul for each star - there were the same number of souls as stars and each soul was linked to one star; 'he showed them [the souls] the nature of the Universe, and declared unto them the laws of destiny'.⁶⁰ When each soul was implanted in a star it grew into the most god-fearing of living creatures, but, when implanted into a human body, a struggle began in which each soul was tasked to overcome the body's physical passions.

The Myth of Er fleshes out this model. Before birth, Plato tells us, each soul is paraded before Lachesis to choose from a number of lots, or 'patterns of lives', which are taken from her lap and scattered on the ground. Each soul then chooses a life and it's in this act that all future responsibility lies; once the life has been chosen, nobody and nothing else, neither the gods nor any fate, can be blamed for any misfortune that the individual suffers. The souls are then taken before Lachesis again, where each chose its 'genius' or 'daimon', defined as 'the guardian of his life and the fulfiller of his choice'.⁶¹ Guardian angel might be a modern equivalent. But, we have to understand, the

57 Bloomberg, Maurice (trans.), *Hymns of the Atharva-Veda*, Delhi: Motilal Banarsidass, 2000 [1897], XIII.40, p. 212. For discussion of links between Platonic philosophy and India in general, see McEvilley, Thomas, *The Shape of Ancient Thought*. New York: Allsworth Press, 2002.

58 See the discussion in Van der Waerden, Bartel, *Science Awakening*, Vol. II, The Birth of Astronomy, Leyden and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 147.

59 Culianu, Ioan Petru, *Psychnodia I: a survey of the evidence concerning the ascension of the soul and its relevance*, Leiden: E.J. Brill 1983.

60 Plato, *Timaeus* 41E-42A.

61 Plato, *Republic* X.620 D-E. For a very useful discussion of the daimon see Betz, Hans Dieter, 'The Delphic Maxim "Know Yourself" in the Greek Magical Papyri', *History of Religions*, Vol. 21 no 2 (Nov 1981) pp. 156-171.

element of choice was crucial; no matter how far life's circumstances might seem to be fated, they were the consequence of a voluntary act.

Plato was issuing a direct challenge to the view, common in literal readings of Homer, that individuals often cannot be held responsible for what they do, that whatever goes right or wrong is ultimately the fault of some god or goddess who is toying with them for their own amusement.⁶² Now, the daimon is a spiritual entity but, in the myth of Er it becomes bound up with the choice of one's life on earth, which explains the word's translation as 'personal destiny'.⁶³ If the daimon determined the individual character, then we do have some control over our moral choices, independent of external, and often capricious powers, acting through chance or fate. Whereas the heroic mentality, as conventionally portrayed by Homer, was morally helpless and often the architect of its own tragedy, for Plato, moral or prudent behaviour might lead to a fortunate future. The two positions are not mutually exclusive, but we can discern a difference of emphasis. The Platonic view embedded into the emerging cosmological discourse a philosophical basis for the view that, in the astrological universe, the future depends on the individual's successful negotiation with the universe rather than as in Mesopotamia, one's obedience to individual deities. The notion was found much later in the words Shakespeare put into the mouth of Julius Caesar; 'The fault, dear Brutus, is not in our stars, but in ourselves, that we are underlings'.⁶⁴ Although the gods had been removed from the equation, the principle was Babylonian. As Heracleitus had said of the greatest oracle in the Greek world, that 'The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither speaks out nor conceals, but gives a sign'.⁶⁵ That is, there is no direct instruction to be followed but a sign to read. The Babylonian hypothesis is maintained – the wise individual can read the signs and steer themselves to a successful future – but the cosmos itself, rather than Marduk, say, or Ishtar, becomes the 'thou', the entity with whom individual dialogue takes place.

Back to the Myth of Er, the daemon then leads the soul to Clotho, who ratifies the chosen life, and finally to Atropos, who spins the web of the chosen destiny. And, when its destiny has been finally sealed, the soul passes under the throne of Necessity and is escorted to the arid heat of the Plain of Oblivion, where it drinks the water of the River of Forgetfulness and promptly falls asleep. Then, in the middle of the night, each soul wafts upward to its birth, falling to earth like a shooting star. It followed that each soul had to descend to the earth through the planets, a point of immense significance for both the astrology and religion of the classical world. As Er's journey showed, the route back to the stars was also through the planetary spheres. Now, Plato never developed the implication of this but if, as he argued, the soul travelled to and from heaven via the planetary spheres, the position of the planets at such moments, should indicate the nature of the enterprise. This was to be the model developed by his successors.

Plato's ideas on the soul changed in his various writings. However, as with his cosmology, we can generalise. The human being consisted of four different parts, the body and a soul divided into

62 This is not a view which would have been held by the Neoplatonic Philosophers of the third century CE onwards, who read Homer allegorically and referred to him as the 'divine theologian'. See Addey, Crystal, 'Oracles and Divination in Late Antiquity: the development and integration of religious phenomena in Late Platonist Philosophy', PhD Thesis, University of Bristol, 2008.

63 Kirk, G.S, J.E., Raven, M.Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983, fr. 247, p. 211.

64 *Julius Caesar*, I, ii, 140-141.

65 Kirk, G.S, J.E., Raven, M.Schofield, *The Presocratic Philosophers*, 2nd edition, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1983p. 209, fragment 93.

three; the divine unfolded in stages, first through soul and mind, and finally through its self-realisation in physical form. In the *Phaedrus* Plato attributed to Socrates a three-fold structure metaphorically represented by a charioteer and his two horses.⁶⁶ The highest part was the rational soul, mind or intellect, which discerns what is true, judges what is real and makes rational decisions. Next was the spirited soul, the active part, the will, whose function was to carry out what reason has decided. Last, and lowest, was the appetitive soul, the seat of emotion and desire, which needed to be restrained by the higher, rational soul. The division of the soul into different functions was to have immense consequences for the future of classical and medieval cosmology for, it was concluded by Plato's successors, if the soul came from the stars, and was ultimately, like all things in the cosmos, divine, then different types of soul would have distinct relationships both with God and the stars. Later forms of Platonic philosophy generally held that there were two types of soul, but the question about their connection with the stars remained. Again, without making any statements of detail, Plato argued that, in general, if the body and all three parts of the soul are balanced in each individual, then the state will function smoothly.⁶⁷ For the Platonic astrologer, political stability therefore follows on directly from individual harmony which, in turn, might in theory be deduced from knowledge of the heavens. Plato's theory of soul takes us to the heart of the development of astrology in the Greek world.⁶⁸ The concept of the entire universe as alive and resting in soul, or psyche, enabled Plato to see the cosmos as psychological in the modern sense, as having personality, driven by manners, habits, opinions, desires, pleasures, pains or fears.⁶⁹ But then this, of course, was how the megalith builders or Palaeolithic calendar makers would also have understood it.

Plato himself was deeply concerned by the whole question of what he called 'better' and 'worse' births. He believed that children born at the appropriate season and phase of the planetary cycles would be 'better' and more likely to grow into upright, virtuous citizens and hinted that it would be possible to breed such people, a matter which could be achieved if couples married and hence conceived at the right time.⁷⁰ Those who weren't would be more likely to grow into selfish, decadent adults and, as their number grew, society would slip into terminal decline. However, he never actually specified when children should be born and when they shouldn't. He set out a theoretical framework, but made no steps to elaborate it.

Every human being both contains something of the divine, is made of the same stuff as the rest of the universe, and is linked to a star. The task of the incarnated soul is then to lead a just and righteous life. Those who succumb to the passions of the flesh, to greed, jealousy, lust and anger are condemned to be reincarnated as women. And, if they still give in to their baser instincts, they will be reincarnated as whatever sort of animal best reflects their bestial behaviour.

66 Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N. Fowler (Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1914) 246A, 253 C-D..

67 Plato, *Republic* 443D.

68 See Van der Waerden, Bartel, *Science Awakening*, Vol II, The Birth of Astronomy, Leyden and New York: Oxford University Press, 1974, p. 147; 'It seems to me that we are here touching upon the deepest religious root of horoscope astrology. The soul comes from the heavens, where it partook of the circulation of the stars. It unites itself with a body and forms with it a living being. This explains how human character comes to be determined by the heavens'

69 Plato, *Symposium*, trans. W.R.M.Lamb, Cambridge, Mass., London: Harvard University Press 1914, 207E.

70 Plato *Republic* VIII, 546 A.

The question, then was how the individual could avoid this fate. Plato explained this clearly. The Universe had come into existence as a compound of 'Reason', the attribute of God, and 'Necessity', the attribute of physical existence.⁷¹ To give in to physical passion is to be subject to Necessity. To control such passions helps the individual return to Reason. It's clear the incarnated souls choose their own lives and therefore cannot blame God, fortune or the gods for their misfortunes: 'The blame is he who chooses: God is blameless.'⁷² Those who care for their souls and turn their backs on the demands of the body gain communion with the gods after death.⁷³

For the Babylonians what we would understand as fate, as an external ordering principle, appears to have been expressed primarily through the needs and desires of the gods and goddesses, though we may, perhaps, perceive a hint of a sense of personal destiny in *nam* and *šimtu*.⁷⁴ In Greece, in spite of the continued importance attached to the dialogue with the divine through oracles, the balance tilted towards the sense of fate as an organising principle - although in different forms. The concept first appears with Hesiod, who personified *Moirai* as a goddess and the word could mean one's share or portion; after a battle, for example, a soldier would receive his *moira* of the booty. It might also mean one's life-span, and hence the individual's relationship with fate as a metaphysical concept in which one life might be fortunate, another less so. Typically a temple of Zeus would have two urns outside it, one with good *moira* and one with bad. Only the gods were entitled to a life of exclusively good *moira*, while humans were dealt good and bad in arbitrary mixtures. The three *moirai* appeared at a child's birth and an adult's marriage and death and, in that even the gods were subject to *moira*, the decrees of the three *moirai* were more powerful than those of Zeus himself.

All living creatures are subject to *ananke*, or Necessity, broadly speaking the unavoidable laws of physical existence. How far this extends into the events of our lives though, is another matter. *Ananke* may oblige us to eat and drink, but does it force us to go to war? This is where *pronoia*, or foreknowledge, comes in, for if we are capable of perceiving the future then we can negotiate with it. The key was to avoid *agnoia*, or ignorance. From a Platonic perspective, divination was a means of breaking through the confusion inherent in Becoming, and perceiving the truths contained within Being. By the first century BCE, and perhaps earlier, degrees of the zodiac were known as *moirai*, so the world which had formerly denoted one's fate as in one's share or portion of land, one's physical circumstances, described one's share of the heavens - or the share that the heavens had in the individual's fate. The virtue of astrology is that, if the planets are recognised as the agents both of providence, *heimarmene*, and *ananke*, as they become when the soul descends through the planetary spheres, then knowledge of their movements naturally enables the astrologer to anticipate future possibilities and evade or enhance them, depending on preference. Only the third form of fate, *tyche* or chance, was unpredictable, a wild card in the pack. Greek astrology may have been more complex technically than Babylonian but the negotiation with destiny remained its primary ideological inspiration.

⁷¹ *Timaeus* 47E-48A.

⁷² *Republic* X.617E; see also 619D; Plato, *Phaedrus*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 249 B.

⁷³ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans H.N.Fowler, Cambridge Mass., London: Harvard University Press, 1914, 82B-D.

⁷⁴ *Nam* has been compared to Necessity, although it has been suggested that the Greek words *moira* and *physis* are the only natural equivalents. For this discussion see Oppenheim, A. Leo, *Ancient Mesopotamia: Portrait of a Dead Civilisation*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1977, pp. 201-8.

The Platonic cosmos was considered to be in itself intelligent, as a manifestation of the divine mind. Thus, while the existence of a fate determined before birth could not be denied, one's relationship to it might be modified precisely because the entire edifice is rational. This model of human affairs was to pervade Hellenistic thought. The complications were spelt out by Julius Firmicus Maternus in the fourth century, almost eight hundred years after Plato, as the classical world was drawing to its close.

But there are some who agree with us to a certain extent and admit that Fate and Fortune have a certain power, which they call *heimarmene*. But they attribute to it a different character which contradicts the law of the necessity of Fate. Thus they appear to maintain which is possible and not possible at the same time.

They claim that this thing which they call *heimarmene* is connected to mankind and all living things by a certain relationship... They claim that we are subject to Fate, that is, to Chance, for attaining the end of life. Thus by the law of Fate they claim one end -- that is, dissolution -- destroys us and all living beings. But all the things that pertain to our daily lives they say are in our power. What we do while we are alive belongs to us; only our death belongs to Chance or Fate.⁷⁵

There's a logic in the Platonic cosmology which leads direct to a theory of education, which runs like this. If human beings emanate out of the divine then they are themselves divine, even if enclosed in matter, and the rational soul is the means by which the relationship between human and divine can be maintained. Learning then becomes a matter of remembering what one once knew, but have forgotten.⁷⁶ True, the notion that true knowledge is only possible by access to the world of Being did confirm Heraclitus' and Parmenides' perception that true knowledge of the here-and-now phenomenal world of Becoming - the world of material phenomena that we inhabit - is impossible. Plato is therefore the patron saint of scepticism; the present may be manageable but the future is essentially unknowable. The first major assault on astrology in the ancient world was to be come from within Platonism and was penned by Carneades, head of the academy in the second century BCE. Yet, the parallel belief - that, if we only search hard enough, Being will reveal the perfect order which underlies, and is obscured by, the apparent confusion of Becoming - still provides the quasi-religious motive for much modern science: every psychologist engaged in the search for the laws of human behaviour and every cosmologist who dreams of discovering the grand single unifying theory if everything is, without even recognising it, a worshipper at the Platonic shrine. If most modern astrologers are Plato's children, they are hardly alone. In Plato's moral universe the entire cosmos is 'alive' in the sense that it's an extension of God's mind - and when Stephen Hawking famously said that his goal was to know the mind of God he was part of a noble tradition. The distinction is that in Plato's cosmology, which remained the dominant model in Europe until the seventeenth century, the universe was held together by the world soul, the Latin *Anima Mundi*, as a living organising principle. In the disenchanted, de-animated mythology of

75 Maternus, Julius Firmicus, *Mathesis*, translated as *Ancient Astrology: Theory and Practice*, Jean Rhys Bram, Park Ridge, New Jersey: Noyes Press 1975, I.VIII.2-3.

76 The fourth century CE astrologer Julius Firmicus Maternus wrote, 'Mind settles into the frail earthly body and, thanks to its fleeting memory of sovereign soul, recognises what is taught and hands down to us all knowledge'. See *Ancient Astrology: Theory and Practice*, Jean Rhys Bram, Park Ridge, New Jersey: Noyes Press 1975, I.IV.5. The theory of memory was influential in the Renaissance (see Yates, Frances, *The Art of Memory*, London: Peregrine, 1978) and remains a basis of progressive educational theory (see, for example, Steiner Rudolf, *Human Values in Education*, London: Rudolf Steiner Press, 1971).

modern astronomy the world soul has been replaced by the unified field theory, the supposed principle which underpins the known nuclear and electro-magnetic forces and reconciles classical and quantum physics.

If, in political terms, Plato's dualism was represented by the conflict between the virtues of order and the perils of disintegration, which brings him into line with near-eastern cosmology as applied in Egypt, Palestine and Mesopotamia. The fundamental formula was that celestial order equals political order. If there's a different between them it's that, while the equation must be inferred from Babylonian tablets and Egyptian hieroglyphs, Plato goes to great lengths to make it absolutely explicit. Whereas the Babylonian astrologers of the previous centuries appear never to have faced the paradox of a universe in which, on the one hand the planets were being manipulated by their gods and goddesses while, on the other, it was clearly subject to identifiable and regular patterns, Plato shifted the cosmos decisively towards universal laws. He retained space for divination based on both dramatic portents sent by the gods and traditional methods of inquiry, such as the casting of lots or the inspiration oracles of Delphi and other cult centres. Yet, nowhere did he allow for the gods to speak individually through the stars or planets.

The decisive step from theoretical principles to causal mechanics was taken by Plato's most eminent student, Aristotle. He did though preserve the divine universe and anima mundi as organising principles. Whereas for Plato the mathematical nature of the cosmos could only be understood through pure number and musical harmonies, Aristotle, with convincing prose and great detail, added the mechanics without which Plato's cosmology was too heavily reliant on speculation. He was not the only student of Plato to do this: the brilliant mathematician Eudoxus of Cnidus (c.400-c.347 BCE) did the same, but his writings have been lost while Aristotle's survived.

However, both Eudoxus and Aristotle continued and developed Plato's fundamental errors concerning the physical structure of the cosmos. Plato, having little regard for material evidence as opposed to theoretical principles, insisted that all celestial motion was fundamentally cyclical on the grounds that perfect objects, such as planets, could only move in a perfect direction - in a circle. While this insight did lead to the correct assumption that the earth is not flat but spherical, and that no sailor would ever fall off the edge, it led to the fundamental problem of how to explain the erratic motions of the planets which, only a small amount of observation reveals, speed up, slow down, reverse their direction and wobble from high in the sky to low. Plato had already suggested that each planet moved through its own circular sphere, but his explanation of their movements was confined to their musical ratios. Yet, he did issue a call to arms to those who might perfect his system.

It was Eudoxus who saved Plato's system by devising a complex system of twenty-seven spheres; one for the stars, three each for the sun and moon and four for each of the five planets. The planets' erratic motions could therefore be shown to be evidence of a perfect order which only became apparent when one had established the correct, perfect, model. The system still failed to satisfy, though, and Callippus of Cyzicus (c. 370-300) increased the number of spheres to thirty-four while Aristotle brought the total up to fifty-five.⁷⁷ Even though Heraclides of Pontus (c.388-c.315) tried to abandon the spherical system by proposing that it was the Earth that rotated, not the stars, and that Venus and Mercury orbited the sun rather than the earth, the symmetry of Plato's perfectly harmonious universe proved irresistible. Even when the brilliant Aristarchus of Samos (c.310-230) went further and argued, correctly, that the earth not only rotates but orbits the sun, the tide of

⁷⁷ Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1074a: after reviewing the theories of Eudoxus and Callippus, Aristotle defines a total of 55 'movers' (i.e., spheres) on which the planets rotate. See also *De Caelo*, trans. Guthrie, 292a and the discussion on p. 208.

Platonic orthodoxy was unstoppable. Apollonius of Perga (c.240-c.190) refined the spheres into the so-called epicycle-deferent system, in which larger spheres were mixed with epicycles, or smaller wheels which would spin the planets around. Hipparchus of Nicaea (c.190-c.120), the author of the earliest surviving Greek star catalogue, gave the system his blessing and Claudius Ptolemy (c.100-c.178 CE), the Alexandrian geographer, astronomer and astrologer, included the model in his *Mathematike Syntaxis* (System of Mathematics), the book which was to become the canonical text of Medieval European astronomy. This Platonic-Ptolemaic cosmology was accepted without question in medieval and Renaissance Europe where it became the principal rationale for astrology and a causal mechanism by which God's divine will might influence human life.

Aristotle himself refined Plato's concept of causes, retaining the idea that, while God, as First Mover, initiated the entire creation the planets, played the role of Platonic 'secondary' causes, mediating and qualifying his ideas as they moved through the planetary spheres to the earth. Aristotle talks of the creator, God, as the Prime Mover, the being who initiates all motion and hence creation. Describing God is the Pythagorean number One, he declared that, 'The prime mover, which is immovable, is one both in formula and number', and 'The first principle and primary reality [God] is immovable, both essentially and accidentally, but it excites the primary form of motion, which is one and eternal', by which he meant the circular motion of the stars.⁷⁸ Soul itself was a means not just of cognition but of movement.⁷⁹ That the cosmos is intelligent is therefore an essential part of understanding the mechanics of planetary movement. And, if motion is the primary cause of change in earthly things, then the Sun's movement through the sky was the immediate cause of the origination and destruction of earthly things.⁸⁰

Crucially for astrology, following Plato, the Aristotelian planets are secondary causes, transmitting the will, reason, or mathematical logic of the Prime Mover to earth, via the influence of the planets. In spite of his failure ever to mention astrology, there could be no better justification of its use to work back up the planetary spheres and examine the disposition of the planets at any given moment to gain insights into God's greater plan. In Aristotle's cosmos, just as in Plato's, space as well as time possessed a moral quality. Again, following his teacher, Aristotle equated goodness with stillness, while motion, leading to change, was always related to decline and the loss of perfection. Motion was the Greek equivalent of the Fall in Jewish mythology, the force which kept man from God, the cause of all human ills. Essentially God, the good, inhabited the space beyond the fixed stars and was absolutely motionless. The stars, moving yet keeping their fixed order, were almost perfect, but not quite. The five planets, beginning with Saturn, the slowest moving and hence most perfect, then became progressively more degenerate until Venus and Mercury, and were analogous to man in that they only needed a limited number of improvements to return to the good. The sun and moon, being farthest from God, were most imperfect, while the earth, the home of corruption and decay, lay inert at the centre of the whole system. The three bodies, sun, moon and earth, were analogous to plants and animals in that they had no hope whatsoever of returning to God. Aristotle's reworking of Plato was equally moral. Like Plato he identified the universe as alive, divine in some readings of his work, and the ultimate application of his astronomical theories, at least as far as humans are concerned, in the correct management of politics. However, technical

78 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1074a, 1073a. Aristotle, was, though, critical of the Platonic theory of Ideas, or Forms; see *Metaphysics* 1084.

79 Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hugh Lawson-Tancred, London: Penguin 1986, I.2,404b, p. 135.

80 Aristotle, *On Generation and Corruption*, Kila MT: Kessinger Publishing, 2004.

questions remained. The immediately obvious problem with this apparently pleasing system is that, if the earth is motionless, it must be perfect, which was the complete opposite of what Aristotle believed. However, this did not become a serious issue for philosophers until the thirteenth-century, when it became one piece on the intellectual jig-saw that eventually persuaded Nicolas Copernicus that the sun, rather than the earth, is the true heart of the cosmos.

The whole equation of descent through the planetary spheres with moral decline was, though, to chime with Plato's concerns about over social and political degeneration and a profound pessimism concerning the rottenness of physical life which was a distinctive feature of the Hermetic and Gnostic cosmologies which were soon to gestate in Egypt. In this sense Aristotle provided the justification for what was to be a profound religious opposition to astrology. However, his positive impact on astrology's future development was immense. His writings were discovered by Islamic scholars in the tenth century and then transmitted to medieval Europe in the twelfth and thirteenth, where they provided a challenge to the established intellectual order not unlike that of Marxism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. They also established the notion that physical and moral existence was intricately connected with the cosmos and provided a rationale for astrology which persisted until the seventeenth century. It is often said that Sir Isaac Newton ushered in the modern era with his discovery that the universe is a vast clockwork machine, a model in the heavens for industrialisation on earth. Yet, over two-thousand years earlier, Aristotle had given the mechanical universe its most polished form. For both men the universe was created by a God who gave it its initial impetus and then waited for it to unfold. The difference between the two was that, in Newton's cosmos, God withdrew beyond the stars and in Aristotle's he was inseparable from it, threaded throughout its entire fabric.

One of the most appealing features of Aristotle's cosmology was his creation of a coherent system of causation which for the first time provided a convincing alternative to the Homeric pantheon. The constant interference of capricious gods and goddesses in human existence was replaced by the actual underlying processes which Aristotle believed accounted for the emergence of Plato's Ideals into physical existence. Nothing, he argued happened at random, except for meaningless coincidence.⁸¹ Aristotle classified causes into four categories which he believed could answer the 'why' of an object's existence: the formal was an object's form, Idea or archetype; the material cause was the matter from which an object is made; the efficient cause was the object's maker, ultimately God, and the final cause was its use or purpose.

God, in Aristotle's scheme could be the 'efficient' cause, or the maker of an object. Normally this might be a potter, carpenter or stonemason - but what was God except the divine architect? The 'formal' cause was the Ideal Form, in Plato's cosmology, which was the object's essence. Thus, the formal cause of a tree is the tree's essential idea, in other words 'treeness'. If we extend this to the planets then the formal cause of the moon is 'moon-ness'. That 'moon-ness' may also be the formal cause of everything else with which the moon is linked which, in the middle ages, came to include fleshy fruits, people with round faces, women, fishermen, ports, crystals, silver and Mondays. The movement of the planets were therefore to provide a comprehensive explanatory model for, literally, everything, although many preferred to make exceptions for all affairs deemed properly covered by religion. The material cause, although being essentially the matter from which the object is made, was essentially dynamic. If everything, according to Empedocles, was made of either fire, air, water or earth, and if, as Heracleitus said, all was in a constant state of flux then, matter was always moving. However such motion was never random - there was always a natural

⁸¹ Aristotle, *Physics*, trans. F.M.Cornford and P.H.Wickstead, Cambridge Mass., London, 1930, I.v.188a.

place for each piece of matter to end up. Fire goes up because its natural function is to return to heaven, Air goes up, but not as high as fire, while water goes down, as is evident from rain, but always rests on earth, which sinks to the bottom of water. This sense of the entire world being on a journey to somewhere else leads us to Aristotle's final cause - the object's purpose, the thing that it is growing into. It's actually a simple concept when applied to plants where the simplest example is that an acorn always, if it grows, becomes an oak tree, never an elephant. This has become a remarkably enduring metaphor, proving a rationale for medieval astrology and still informing esoteric thought.⁸² As Aristotle put it, animals do not see in order that they may have sight, but they have sight that they may see.⁸³ The universe is essentially purposeful. As far as people are concerned the issue is more complex. A baby grows into an adult, but what is the adult's final cause. We can generalise and say that human beings naturally want to be healthy, but what of individuals? Does a poor man have the same final cause as a king? The key, for astrologers, as we shall see, was to adapt the concept of the daemon, link it to the stars, as Plato had done and, over the next two centuries, develop an astrology which dealt with what we might be rather than what we must be. In fact, the notion that the planets at birth denote not what we are but who we might be is an essential part of modern popular astrology.⁸⁴ The modern human potential movement, with its doctrine that human beings are all in the process of becoming something else, a something which, in a sense they were born with, is essentially an Aristotelian phenomenon.

Aristotle's four distinct causes provided a theoretical framework for astrology, one in which the planets could be used to describe an individual's life in terms of their purpose and function, rather than as signs of divine pleasure or anger. The two philosophies, Babylonian and Aristotelian, might overlap, and frequently did, but the concept of astrology as a means of communicating with the divine was henceforth always to be contrasted with an astrology which dealt with real, natural processes, seen as integral to the physical universe. In medieval and Renaissance terms, Aristotelian astrology was to be a part of Natural Philosophy and, in modern terms, we might consider it to be a fit subject of scientific enquiry. However, what made it particularly appealing to the European Middle Ages was the fact that it always retained God as the first cause and it could therefore be successfully integrated into the Christian cosmos. It was also essentially conservative, carrying, as it did, the notion that everything, and therefore everyone, should occupy their appropriate place in the social and political hierarchy. Discussing the effect of birth on social and political status, Aristotle concluded that, 'That one should command and another obey is both necessary and expedient. Indeed some things are so divided right from birth, some to rule, some to be ruled'.⁸⁵

While modern astrology has retained some archaic concepts, its use of Aristotelian mechanics is often misunderstood. The astrological use of the word cause is derived from Aristotle, yet is rarely, if ever used, to denote 'cause and effect' in the modern sense. This is not to say that modern astrologers know what the word means when they use it, just that it doesn't mean simply that when a planet moves it necessarily exerts a direct influence on humanity. The word 'influence' is

82 See Hillman, James, *The Soul's Code: In search of Character and Calling*, London: Bantam Books 1997, esp. chap. 1, 'In a Nutshell: the acorn theory and the redemption of psychology', and chap.. 9, 'Fate'.

83 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* 1050a. 12-14, trans Tredennick.

84 'Being born under a particular sign, or having a lot of planets or the ascendant placed there, doesn't automatically show that you are those things, that you have those qualities full-blown and ready to display in the shop window. It means that there is a reservoir of potential innate in you, something to strive toward. You grow into your chart, just as a seed grows into a full plant', Liz Greene, *Astrology for Lovers*, London: Unwin Paperbacks 1986.

85 Aristotle *Republic* Book 1, v, 1254a17 (p. 67 Penguin Classic, trans T.A. Sinclair).

similarly misunderstood. Aristotle distinguished three varieties of 'influence', celestial motions, which transmitted light and heat, celestial light, which produced day and night, and *influentiae*, which explained terrestrial processes such as the formation of metals in the earth, magnetism and the tides. So, while 'influence' has remained the standard astrological term for accounting for planetary relationships with the earth, it does not mean some sort of influence such as gravity entered by an individual planet on the earth. Rather, in the classical sense, it's a matter of the entire disposition of the cosmos at any one time. Like Plato, he believed that the whole cosmos is a single living unit in which the stars and planets, though not gods, are in a constant relationship with themselves and with humanity, exactly as in a human body.⁸⁶ Once this was understood he said, unexpected events should no longer be surprising. Aristotle actually opens the way to celestial determinism more completely than Plato, who insisted that the philosophical lifestyle could aid the return to God. Yet he dealt only briefly with one of Plato's major concerns - the issue of birth at the right moment. He only once stated that some people are born to rule, others to obey yet, given the state of the world at the time, this was hardly a controversial statement.

Aristotle himself had always mixed at the highest level. His father was personal physician to Amyntas II of Macedon and in 342, when he was fifty-two, he returned to become tutor to the future Alexander the Great; Alexander's father Philip dominated Athens for most of the 340s, finally conquering it in 338 and, when Alexander ascended the Macedonian throne in 336, Aristotle returned to Athens in a position of considerable influence. The medieval belief that Aristotle was Alexander's astrologer was a myth, though one with significance for European monarchs. He was thought to have been the author of the most popular book of advice for kings, the so called *Secret of Secrets*, which included recommendations on the use of astrology. Such assumptions were perfectly understandable, for Aristotle generally used the term astrology to describe what Socrates, Plato and other cosmologists were defining as astronomy - the strict measurement of the positions and motions and the stars and planets. However, evidence of some astrological interest on Aristotle's part is suggested by the fact that, after Alexander conquered Babylon in 336, his gift to this old teacher was a set of Babylonian eclipse records. And this was as powerful a symbol as we could have of the coming marriage of two traditions which had for so long flirted with each other, but were about to blend into an entirely new set of teachings about the relationship between humanity and the stars.

86 Aristotle, *Metaphysics* XII.1074b; *On the Heavens* I.270b, 1-12, II.292a.