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Special Issue
Inside the World of Contemporary Astrology

Guest Edited by
Darrellyn Gunzburg

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**Special Issue Introduction:
Inside the World of Contemporary Astrology**

Guest Editor: Darrelyn Gunzburg

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This special issue offers an insider's perspective on the practice of astrology in the contemporary world. It builds upon the second issue of the *JSRNC* published in 2007, which focused on astrology investigating the religion-nature nexus. Bron Taylor argued that the role of the journal was a scholarly commitment to 'a wide-ranging, interdisciplinary, taboo-free inquiry' (Taylor 2007: 5) and thus accepted that the consideration of the nature of astrology was a worthwhile academic endeavour. From this second issue a question arose. The editor Michael York asked, 'In terms of religion, nature and culture, the sociologist's concern is the wish to understand how astrology is used. How does it impact on religious perceptions, on cultural institutions and on how we picture the universe?' (York 2007: 146). This special issue of the *JSRNC* picks up on

York's question and offers an insight into astrology's culture-nature-religion link through the exploration of a community that incorporates an alternative epistemology.¹

From its origins in Mesopotamia, astrology has been a product of nature and its rhythms. The patterns in the sky were thought by the Assyrians of the seventh century BCE to be significant and to offer meaning to the repeating cycles of life on earth (Hunger 1992). The way these cycles are observed and understood has gone through many changes since those early Assyrian writings; however, the idea that the natural world of the dome of heavens is reflected in some way in the flow of life on terraforma, and that hence sky and earth are united, has persisted. Indeed, today's astrologers, in both the East and West, are part of this continuous living tradition. They believe that observation of the heavens leads to an understanding of life on earth. In this regard they watch the heavens, either by standing underneath the dome of the sky or by paying attention, using books, computers or the web, to planetary movement through the zodiac signs. As a group, astrologers are defined by this common belief in the heavens and they will, like amateur astronomers, have knowledge of the current phase of the moon, the current location of the planets, and an understanding of the rotation of the earth and how this constantly changes the environment of the sky. Where they differ from other star gazers, however, is that they can work with a special zodiac: the tropical zodiac. This zodiac, made up of sun signs, is pinned to the seasons of the earth, reset anew each year at the moment of the March equinox. In this way the rhythms of life on earth—the seasons—are bound to the cycles of the sky through the zodiac signs. Daryn Lehoux captured this view of the heavens when he considered the astrology of the first-century CE Roman poet, Marcus Manilius, who wrote that,

the constellations have shapes, and the constellations have powers. Their powers are related to their shapes because the universe is rational and ordered at every level. The powers and the pictures combine into what we might profitably treat as the natural history of each constellation. They have actions and abilities in the world, they have environments (geometrical), and they have characteristic interrelationships with us and each other. (2011: 55)

1. I would like to thank and acknowledge Michael York's work both early in the development of the *JSRNC* when he guest edited a 2007 issue on Astrology (*JSRNC* 1.2) and for providing his expertise, as part of our Editorial Board, in reviewing this special issue—Bron Taylor, Editor.

Little has changed in astrologers' beliefs since Manilius, as astrologers still view the heavens as vital and alive. Unlike many people in today's modern world, astrologers live a sky-filled life. Thus as a group they hold an innate love of the sky—*caelophilia*—not so much for its beauty but for its animated nature. The sky, universe, cosmos or the heavens are, for astrologers, embodied and they believe that the sky provides their life with purpose and direction and as such needs to be honoured. As a group, they feel a sense of responsibility to maintain dark skies. These reasons may not be the same as other groups concerned with environmental issues; it is, however, fueled with a respect for the living heavens. Thus today's astrologers are a part of a continuous tradition in a culture whose members hold a personal spiritual philosophy which is tied to nature through the heavens.

Since the second half of the twentieth century there has been a growing body of literature concerning the role that astrology has played in Western culture. Otto Neugebauer (1945) first saw its place in mathematics, and then commented (1951: 111) that astrology was a conduit for cultural understanding, a cultural contributor that was as much shaped by the world in which it was held to be of value as it was a framework for understanding it. Since that time, the cultural influence of astrology has attracted various historians. Among those, Hilary Carey (2012) explored its role in the political history of Europe, Robert Hand (2014) examined its contribution to the nature of European warfare, while Tim Hegedus (2007) presented its influence on the religious discourses of early Europe. Others who have also revealed astrology's diverse cultural bases include Kristin Lippincott (1984, 1985, 1990) on its impact on art and Mark Harrison (2000) on medicine.

This growing recognition of astrology's historical role has, however, occurred in parallel to the rise in polemics against astrology's presence in the contemporary world. Arguing that astrology can condition a person to accept extreme authoritarian figures, Theodore Adorno (1994: 54) suggested that astrology's existence in popular culture served as a catalyst contributing to the rise of fascism in 1930's Germany. From that period onward, many polemics followed an *ad hominem* strategy, challenging the practitioner of astrology rather than the subject itself. For example, Richard Dawkins (1995) wrote that those who practiced astrology were maladjusted individuals who preyed upon marginalised people. Following Adorno's trajectory, Thomas Sutcliffe published in 1996 in *The Independent*, a mainstream British newspaper, that 'The habitat of the mind in which astrology and mediumship flourish is also a perfect breeding ground for intolerance and injustice—an ecology in which monsters can grow unresisted alongside those "harmless" freaks

and clowns' (Sutcliffe 1996, cited in Northcote 2007: 71). Such comments reveal how the individual astrologer in the late twentieth century could be publicly demonised and stereotyped because of his/her beliefs.

Such stereotyping, however, has not gone unchallenged. Slowly over recent years the exploration of astrology has moved from being a subject of historical interest to one of anthropological focus. Research by Alie Bird (2006) and Nicholas Campion (2012), for example, has revealed an astrology within contemporary Western culture that could be identified in everyday life, from the un-educated to the educated, from the rich to the poor, and from the marginalised to the privileged. These studies disclose a detailed view of the social settings, events, and beliefs of astrologers and place them in a contemporary rather than historical context. Employing an anthropological methodology, contemporary research observes the astrological community as populated by 'others' who hold seemingly irrational beliefs, while revealing that the 'other' could be the person next door.

Observation of a community is, however, different to dwelling. Tim Ingold commented that 'apprehending the world is not a matter of construction but of engagement, not of building but of dwelling, not of making a view of the world but of taking up a view in it' (2000: 42). It is this 'in it' approach with regard to astrology that Patrick Curry points to when he argued that

astrology too is a form of life, a way of being in the world. It is not a flawed or failed version of something else, but fully itself to the same extent, and ultimately in the same way, as being a historian, or scientist, or anything else: fully, in a word, human. (2005: 273)

It is precisely astrology as a form of lifestyle that this volume presents, taking up a view not of astrology but in astrology. Such a stance puts to the side the notion of so-called irrational beliefs and allows an exploration of living—or to use Ingold's words, dwelling—in those beliefs. To this end, this Special Issue has been written by those who teach or have graduated from the Sophia Centre for the Study of Cosmology in Culture, Faculty of Humanities and Performing Arts, at the University of Wales Trinity Saint David, Lampeter, Wales. All our contributors are practicing astrologers as well as academics, and so they can present an insider view of how contemporary astrologers live within the practice of astrology.

This particular conversation is a welcome one. It has not long been possible to discuss astrology in the academy while taking it seriously, without reducing it to a futile version of something else, usually religion or science, or a mere effect of other more fundamental causes (cognitive, social, historical, and so on). Often the strategy employed was to confine

discussion of astrology to belief, which could then be 'objectively' evaluated, found erroneous, and explained away. It is therefore encouraging that this collection of articles exists at all and it escapes the curse of the epistemological correctness by including belief in its remit, but always as part of a practice, or set of practices, constituting an astrological way of life. In our view, a way of life cannot be evaluated or explained like an object. It must be understood as an experience or set of experiences, and the only way to do that is to participate in it, whether directly or vicariously and imaginatively. Each of these articles does so in its own way and in its own area.

Garry Phillipson's essay advances two central arguments. First, that contemporary astrology is widely treated as a modern heresy in a way that draws heavily on the Christian category, secularised by scientism, but largely unchanged in mode. That treatment involves systematic distortion of what astrologers actually do. Second, that scientism itself, despite loudly disavowing its religious provenance, is undistinguishable from the latter in practice.

Bernadette Brady's contribution throws valuable new light on what astrologers believe about fate, but also, still more importantly, what they do with it in practice. Despite fate being integral to astrology throughout its history, it seems that no one previously thought to ask astrologers what living a fate-filled life means to them. She also shows how differing understandings of fate have played out for both astrologers and their critics.

Darrellyn Gunzburg, too, focuses on what astrologers do, analysed in terms of a complex interplay between practices and beliefs. The practices center on the creation of a space or (better, perhaps) place within which the astrologer interprets a horoscope for a client. The beliefs comprise a set of concepts which overlap, but whose inflections also differ, with subtly different consequences: notably the divine, the sacred, and the supernatural. Her article adds significantly to our understanding of astrologers' working practices.

Liz Hathway takes up the venerable tradition of Saturn as a touchstone of astrological interpretation in all its major recent schools, such as traditional, psychological, or divinatory. Again we find a double movement. On the one hand, Hathway reveals the way ancient cultural memory, encoded and enacted mythically, remains present in astrologers' practices; its sheer durability is striking. On the other, her auto-ethnographic methodology also brings that tradition into the early twenty-first century. It also honours, as well as develops, the emphasis on participation that recent scholarly work on astrology has found to be necessary in order to understand it.

Frances Clynes takes on the challenge offered by the relatively new world of online astrology through the internet, cyberspace, and social media. Her study explores what is genuinely new in this context and what can best be understood as variations on some extremely old astrological experiences and themes.

Taken together the contributors to this special issue have provided thoughtful and well-researched contributions to the ongoing collective conversation about astrology and human cultural life.

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Astrology as Heresy in Contemporary Belief

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Abstract

Astrology has been characterised as a heresy by many Christian thinkers, from the time of the early Church Fathers to the present day. In contemporary discourse, astrology is often treated as if it were a heresy against science. I provide examples of astrologers being treated as heretics in the name of science, and an alternative conception of astrology as a form of divination, not dependent on scientific substantiation. I argue that the 'astrology' often criticised in the name of science may be defined as much by scientism's need for a construction to define itself against, as by the actual views of horoscopic astrologers. The emerging picture is that criticisms of astrology are typically based on a mixture of legitimate objections and scientistic belief. I conclude that scientism's unspoken aspiration to orthodoxy emerges through the parallels between its approach to astrology and that of the Church.

Keywords

Astrology, cosmologies, cultural understanding.

Introduction

My central argument in this paper is that criticism of astrology often treats it not as simply wrong or mistaken, but as a heresy against science. Heresy implies orthodoxy—here I follow Jeffrey Burton Russell's description of the relationship as symbiotic, with orthodoxy and heresy

each defining the other to a certain degree (Russell 1992: 4). To the extent that astrology is treated as heretical under the authority of science, therefore, the assertion by Richard N. Williams that 'scientism is the new orthodoxy' is substantiated (Williams and Robinson 2015: 2). Williams characterises scientism as an 'over-reliance on and overconfidence in science as the source of knowledge regarding all aspects of human life and, ultimately, all human problems' (Williams and Robinson: 2-3). Whereas science is characterised by the scientific method as methodology and praxis, scientism is irrational belief in the omniscience of science. Although my analysis focuses on astrology, it could easily be applied to a number of other 'fringe' practices, and it has ramifications for the study of belief in society as a whole.

In order to develop the meaning of 'heresy' I will draw parallels with the historical treatment of astrology as heresy by the Christian Church.¹ This does not imply the persistence through centuries of a monolithic organisation in which opinions were fully consonant; it is an integral part of my argument that the ongoing dialectic between orthodoxy and heresy shows there always to have been something notional and aspirational about the term 'the Church' and its orthodoxy. Ultimately the referents of these terms are found in the aspirations of individuals, notwithstanding that those aspirations coalesce, more or less, as organisations that exercise power in the world. The parallel here between the Church and scientism is central to this paper: the pursuit of a universal orthodoxy based on science comprises many nuances and divergences of opinion, but the power of the aspiration manifests as organisations and loose associations of individuals who exercise power in the contemporary world. That exercise of power, I will argue, is seen in the condemnation of divergent views as if they are heresies against science.

This paper contributes to the study of belief, most particularly concerning astrology and scientism, but also to some degree regarding theology. In this way, it builds on Michael T. Cooper's assertion that 'Both disciplines [theology and astrology] have been marginalised by the academy...[and] there has been an intriguing relationship between the two' (Cooper 2007: 190). One facet of the 'intriguing relationship' is that both are sometimes tarred with the same brush in the name of science, as when A.C. Grayling asserted: 'Religion is exactly the same thing [as

1. For the era in which the terms could be ambiguous, 'Christian Church' and 'the Church' will refer specifically to the Roman Catholic Church. For the relationship between the Church and astrology see, for example, Hegedus 2007; Campion 2012a: 161-72.

astrology]: it is the pre-scientific, rudimentary metaphysics of our forefathers, which (mainly through the natural gullibility of proselytised children, and tragically for the world) survives into the age in which I can send this letter by electronic means' (Grayling 2006).

Precedents

Precedents for the premise that science has usurped religion's tendency to cry heresy can be found in Steve Fuller's argument that 'science has inherited and rationalised Christianity's propensity to heresy' (Fuller 2007: 19). In a similar vein, Michael Polanyi suggested that 'modern scientism fetters thought as cruelly as ever the churches had done', and Paul Feyerabend suggested that 'science has now become as oppressive as the ideologies it once had to fight' (Polanyi 1962: 265; Feyerabend 1975: 5). A similar trend of thought is reflected by the contemporary currency of the term 'secular fundamentalism' for forms of belief that reify science (for example, Conkle 1995: 348-49).

Precedents for astrology's characterisation as heresy can be found in Franz Cumont's history of astrology when, apparently without irony, he remarks: 'Under the sway of reason the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries condemned this heresy in the name of scientific orthodoxy' (Cumont 1912: xvi-xvii). Patrick Curry argued that 'for most scientists today...contemporary astrology is a reminder...of the failure of their collective mission of universal enlightenment, i.e. disenchantment. In other words...*astrology is scientific heresy*' (Willis and Curry 2004: 94 [emphasis in original]). Arthur Versluis's book *The New Inquisitions* develops ideas of heresy as a secular phenomenon with some coverage of astrology, particularly a critique of Theodor Adorno's attack on astrology (Adorno 1994 [1974]: 46-171; Versluis 2006: 95-104). Olav Hammer and Kocku von Stuckrad, writing of 'esotericists' (Hammer and von Stuckrad 2007: vi n. 1)—a group including astrologers—noted: 'The fact that Christian polemics is no longer as shrill as it once used to be, by no means implies that esotericists can ply their trade in peace. The role of prime critic has been taken over by interest groups presenting a perspective based on the natural sciences' (Hammer and von Stuckrad 2007: xix).

Heresy and its Relationship to Astrology: Brief Definition and History

The current usage of 'heresy' in the sense of deviance from an orthodox religious path emerged, under the influence of Christianity, between the end of the first century CE and the middle of the following century (Royalty 2013: 3). As Robert M. Royalty notes, before this, the Greek

word *hairesis* and its cognates carried no pejorative connotation and related to the word's etymological root, 'choice'. When 'heresy' is defined, the Catholic Catechism 2089 is often cited: 'Heresy is the obstinate post-baptismal denial of some truth which must be believed with divine and catholic faith, or it is likewise an obstinate doubt concerning the same' (Chapman 1999: 454; see also Mühlenberg 2001: 529; Doe 2013: 210).

The New Testament contains astrological themes and references that may suggest a sympathetic attitude amongst some figures in the very early Church (Campion 2012a: 165-68). This notwithstanding, the early Christian text the *Didache*, dated by Robert Aldridge to c. 70–125 CE (Aldridge 1999: 1-2), counselled against the use of astrology. *Didache* 3.4 states: 'My child, do not practice divination since this leads to idolatry; nor use incantations or astrology...' (Ehrman 2003: 421). In c. 180 CE, St. Irenaeus (c. 130–202 CE) inveighed against astrology as part of his lengthy characterisation of heresy:

Marcus, maker of idols, observer of portents,
 Skilled in astrology and in all arts of magic,
 Whereby you confirm your erroneous doctrines.
 Showing wonders to whomever you lead into error,
 Showing the works of the apostate Power,
 Marvels which Satan, your father, teaches you always...
 (Irenaeus, *Against the Heresies* 1.15.6, in Unger and Dillon 1992: 68)

Irenaeus enjoyed considerable influence over the subsequent evolution of the Church's approach to heresy, with the passage above being cited by many subsequent heresiologists including Hippolytus of Rome in the third century CE and Epiphanius of Salamis in the fourth century CE (Hegedus 2007: 146; Royalty 2013: 173). Astrology was thus tied up in the Church's characterisation of heresy from the first, serving to define the term and in turn being defined by it.

There was, however, a range of views in the early Church. Irenaeus's contemporary Tertullian (c. 155–240 CE) acknowledged that astrology was responsible for the magi being guided to Jesus's birth, but stated that its use was henceforth not permitted. He based this on an ingenious interpretation of Matthew 2.12, wherein the magi were warned in a dream not to return from Bethlehem by the way they had come. For Tertullian this did not refer to their outward itinerary, but to their use of astrology (Tertullian, *On Idolatry* 9.4-5, in Waszink, van Winden and der Nat 1987: 37; Hegedus 2007: 308-309). The gospel's message in this analysis was that the use of astrology had been both allowable and efficacious up to the birth of Jesus, but not thereafter. Origen (c. 185–255 CE) raised the question of why astrology worked sometimes and concluded, 'The cause is clear to us who have learned the secret, viz. that being free

to exercise our faculties of reason we sometimes yield to concupiscence and suffer defeat, sometimes resolve to check it, and succeed' (Origen, *Philocalia* 23.22, in Lewis 1911: 197). This is a similar position to that taken by Thomas Aquinas nearly a millennium later, as I will discuss below. In Origen's view astrology dealt with signs rather than causal factors that would compel action; he characterised it as a form of divination comparable to seeing messages in the flight of birds, or from examining animal entrails (Origen, *Philocalia* 23.16, in Lewis 1911: 189-90; Hegedus 2007: 331). For him, astrology was a viable and valid study in principle but its use was beyond the scope of humanity, suited only to angels (Origen, *Philocalia* 23.20, in Lewis 1911: 193-94). On this and many other points Origen afforded more respect to a Neoplatonic world-view than did many of his influential successors, and he and his teachings were finally condemned in 400 by Pope Theophilus of Alexandria (fl. 384–412) (referred to in a Letter of Jerome [Letter XC], in Schaff and Wallace 2007: 184; Hegedus 2007: 147).

The prevalent attitude of the Church thereafter was that astrology belonged more to the Devil than the angels, with Theophilus's contemporary St. Augustine setting in place the enduring equation of astrology with heresy: 'To whom then must we make answer first—to the heretics or to the astrologers? For both come of the serpent, and desire to corrupt the Church's virginity of heart, which she holds in undefiled faith' (Augustine, *Lectures or Tractates on the Gospel of John* 8.8, in Dods 1873: 121). Astrology, characterised as a form of divination, continues to be proscribed in the most recent recension of the Catechism:

2116 All forms of divination are to be rejected: recourse to Satan or demons, conjuring up the dead or other practices falsely supposed to 'unveil' the future. Consulting horoscopes, astrology, palm reading, interpretation of omens and lots, the phenomena of clairvoyance, and recourse to mediums all conceal a desire for power over time, history, and, in the last analysis, other human beings, as well as a wish to conciliate hidden powers. They contradict the honour, respect, and loving fear that we owe to God alone. (Chapman 1999: 460)

This notwithstanding, an accommodation between astrology and the Church is still sometimes mooted. The Catholic priest Fr. Laurence L. Cassidy (1929–2006), commenting specifically on the above passage from the Catechism, argued that it permitted 'a rational astrology, a logos of the astra', albeit 'any doctrine of astrology that so identifies body with spirit that the two become totally subject to the efficient causality of celestial bodies is incompatible with Christian teaching' (Cassidy 1994: 12, 4). Cassidy traced his position back to Aquinas's analysis, which will be discussed later in the context of a comprehensive analysis of heresy.

Kurtz's Analysis of Heresy

Lester R. Kurtz (1983: 1086) proposed a sociological 'anatomy of heresy' comprising five characteristics, and this provides a useful structure with which to discern the innate character of heresy at a remove from its historical manifestations. Five numbered sections follow, in which I deploy Kurtz's five characteristics to evaluate and show what it means to say that astrology is heresy, with reference both to the Church and to secular fundamentalism.

1. The Deviant Insider

Kurtz's first characteristic of heresy is that the heretic is 'a deviant insider'—someone 'close enough to be threatening but distant enough to be considered in error' (Kurtz 1983: 1087). In the early Church this position can be seen particularly in the thought of Irenaeus, who shifted the focus of the institution's nascent heresiology from non-believers, to those who might consider themselves to follow the teachings of Christ, but were deemed to have wrong ideas about what that entailed (Kim 2015: 57). One needed to have known the tenets of the Church and have rejected them in order to be a heretic; 'Not every error is a heresy', as Augustine put it (Augustine, *Arianism and Other Heresies* Preface: 7, in Teske 1995: 33). The concept of deviant insiderhood is precisely what is conveyed when astrology is defined, as it often is by those antagonistic toward it, as a 'pseudoscience': in this view it *should* be a science, but falls short. The term 'pseudoscience' has gained wide currency since Karl Popper coined it in 1953, using astrology as a paradigmatic example (Popper 1969: 33-44).²

The distinction between blameless error and heresy came to be codified by the Church in the distinction between, respectively, 'formal heresy' and 'material heresy' (Cross and Livingstone 1997: 758). A parallel distinction—between those who cannot be expected to know the truth, and those who can—is found in some criticisms of astrologers. Thus for instance in a newspaper article about astrology, Richard Dawkins (1995: 17, 18) suggested that 'some [people] are foolish enough to believe anything', and again that 'There are some stupid people out there, and they should be pitied not exploited'. On the other hand, he wondered 'whether the astrologers themselves believe in it' and suggested that a well-known newspaper astrologer 'may understand exactly what he is doing' (Dawkins 1995: 17). He concluded by wondering 'Why, actually,

2. The pages referred to were originally delivered as a lecture in 1953. Popper hyphenated 'pseudo-science' but subsequent usage frequently makes it a compound word.

are professional astrologers not jailed for fraud?' (1995: 18). In their critique, Bok and Jerome (1975: 10) assumed the same dichotomy between gullible innocents and guilty frauds, suggesting that the appeal of astrology lies in 'the comfort of having guidance in making decisions', whilst also attacking 'the pretentious claims of astrological charlatans'.

It seems often to be the case that the criticisms made of people interested in astrology, either as practitioners or as consumers, are not based on substantial acquaintance with the people concerned, and that judgements such as those just described are arrived at by inference; if astrologers are scientific 'insiders', it follows that they must be frauds. To redress the balance somewhat, three critics of astrology who have spent time with astrologers—Geoffrey Dean, Arthur Mather, and Rudolf Smit—reported that, in their experience, 'Astrologers were generally nice people, they seemed intelligent and well-educated, they spoke from the heart, and they based everything on practical experience' (Phillipson 2000: 125). This was despite their eventual conclusion that there is little or no scientific evidence to support astrology.

2. The Problem of Authority

Kurtz's second characteristic of heresy is that 'The problem of heresy...is essentially a problem of authority' wherein 'Authorities frequently defend, sometimes at high personal cost, what they perceive to be a genuine threat to what is considered sacred' (Kurtz 1983: 1088, 1089). Taking as an example the late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century modernist movement, which was characterised as heretical by Catholicism, Kurtz remarked that 'What is puzzling at first glance is why there was so much concern on the part of a powerful institution over the work of a few somewhat isolated scholars and their sympathizers' (Kurtz 1983: 1095). Campion (2012a: 4) has suggested that the response to astrology in the UK is similarly disproportionate: 'One may ask why, if it is drivel, it arouses such anger, and why one part of British media regulation regards it as so dangerous'.

For Kurtz (1983: 1094) the reason that modernism was seen as heretical by Catholicism was that it threatened to subvert the authority of the Church. This fits with Fuller's characterisation of heresy as a denial of the authority of those regarded by some as experts, which results in a battle between conflicting knowledge claims (Fuller 2007: 26). An example of science's authority being asserted can be seen in *Objections to Astrology*, an article and subsequent book in which Bart Bok, Lawrence Jerome, and Paul Kurtz (1975: 10) presented the signatures of the '192 leading scientists, including 19 Nobel Prize winners' of its subtitle to affirm the statement that 'those individuals who continue to have faith in astrology

do so in spite of the fact that there is no verified scientific basis for their beliefs, and indeed that there is strong evidence to the contrary'.³

The characterisation of this and similar critiques as arising from a 'problem of authority' is substantiated by the motivation professed by many critics of astrology. Thus for example Bok stated, 'During the past ten years, we have witnessed an alarming increase in the spread of astrology...most of our daily newspapers regularly carry columns about it and...some of our universities and junior colleges actually offer astrology courses' (Bok, Jerome, and Kurtz 1975: 21). In similar vein, twenty years later Richard Dawkins explained his critique of astrology as being instigated by the appearance of astrological features in the *Independent on Sunday*, *Sunday Times*, and *Guardian* newspapers (Dawkins 1995: 17). The popularity of astrology thus evokes a 'problem of authority' because it is seen as leading people away from 'true science', as encapsulated in a statement from the psychologist Gordon W. Allport that was quoted by Bok: 'It is unfortunate that in the minds of many people astrology is confused with true science. The result of this confusion is to prevent these people from developing truly scientific habits of thought...' (Bok, Jerome, and Kurtz 1975: 33).

The involvement of authority issues in *Objections to Astrology* was raised as a problem by Carl Sagan (1976) who reported that he felt unable to endorse the statement, not out of any sympathy for astrology, but 'because I felt and still feel that the tone of the statement is authoritarian'. Paul Feyerabend (1978: 19-24) also criticised the authoritarian tone of the statement, comparing it to a guidebook used during the Inquisition, the *Malleus Maleficarum*. The issue of authority, discussed as a principle in this section, will be developed in the following section where its social application is the focus.

3. *Social Control*

'Through the labelling and suppression of heresy, institutional elites can rally support for their positions through battle with a common enemy' (Kurtz 1983: 1089). Kurtz's third characteristic of heresy focuses on the social mechanisms through which authority is wielded, and the ways in which the threat of heresy 'can be used for the creation of intragroup solidarity' (1983: 1089). The phrase *coge intrare* ('compel them to come

3. The reader's attention is drawn to the appearance here, and subsequently, of a second Kurtz: Paul Kurtz was a philosopher and critic of astrology; the already cited Lester R. Kurtz is, as noted, a sociologist. I will distinguish between the two by giving Paul Kurtz's full name on each appearance, whilst 'Kurtz' simpliciter denotes Lester R. Kurtz.

in') is central to the Church's perspective. It is first found in the Gospel of Luke 14.23: 'Then the master said to the slave, "Go out into the roads and lanes, and compel people to come in, so that my house may be filled"' (Coogan 2010: 1858). Augustine applied it specifically to heretics in his *Writings in Connection with the Donatist Controversy* 6.24:

[I]f the power which the Church has received by divine appointment in its due season...be the instrument by which those who are found in the highways and hedges—that is, in heresies and schisms—are compelled to come in, then let them not find fault with being compelled... (trans J.R. King and Chester D. Hartranft 1887: 642)

Historically, this approach on the part of the Church led to the Inquisition, which will be considered below. Leaving aside such expressions of main force, the Church had other tools at its disposal, such as censorship and threats of exclusion including but not limited to excommunication. The existence of comparable forces of 'social control' within the scientific establishment was experienced by the psychologists Eysenck and Nias when they investigated astrology:

[M]any of the people in the scientific establishment would have fitted well into the panel which condemned Galileo! We have become aware of this climate of censorship and intolerance both through reports from individuals directly affected and from remarks warning us that even criticizing astrology in detail, and showing familiarity with its pronouncements, would undermine our scientific standing and reputation. So much for the religion of the open mind. (Eysenck and Nias 1982: 220)

From 1559 to 1966 the Church used the *Index Librorum Prohibitorum* to prevent the circulation of heretical texts. The advent of the internet has meant that other strategies are needed, and given the reach and influence of the internet encyclopaedia Wikipedia in the contemporary West, it might be expected that attempts to exert control could be found here. This has been the experience of Robert Currey—astrologer, entrepreneur, and proprietor of The Astrology Shop in London: 'I found Wikipedia a very harsh environment for editing "fringe topics"... Sceptical editors seemed to be working together to block any material or paper that might be favourable towards astrology.'⁴ Currey suggested that a substantial proportion of these 'sceptical editors' were members of the group 'Guerilla Skeptics'.⁵ As an example of the difficulties he encountered,

4. Email communication with Robert Currey, 10 January 2015, reproduced with permission.

5. Currey has written a full account of his experience of 'guerilla skepticism' at Currey 2014. A critique of guerilla skepticism written by a skeptic can be found in O'Neill 2014a and 2014b.

Currey cited his attempts to correct the account on Wikipedia's 'Astrology and Science' page of a study that was cited as falsifying astrology. This was a piece of research conducted in 1985 by Shawn Carlson which considered astrologers' ability to match astrological charts to personality profiles. As a way of balancing this position, Currey tried to include reference to the 2009 paper by Suitbert Ertel and found that

The anti-astrology editors went to great lengths to suppress the results from Professor Suitbert Ertel's review of the Carlson test as it included results that showed that astrologers were able to match charts with subjects in a blind test to a level that cannot be explained by chance. (Currey 2014)

The study by Ertel, a professor of psychology with a background in statistics, concluded that Carlson's study was flawed and this undermined his claim to have provided a strong case against astrology. Further, Ertel found that one of Carlson's studies actually showed astrologers achieving significant levels of success in the test (Carlson 1985: 425; Ertel 2009: 134). Currey reported that the argument used to disallow Ertel's work did not address the substance of that work. Rather, Ertel's article was disallowed because it was published in a journal (*Journal of Scientific Exploration*) that published articles favourable to astrology and which could not therefore, under Wikipedia rules, be a reliable source.⁶ In effect, therefore, publication of an article in any way supportive of astrology condemns the publishing journal as unreliable. There is here, as Currey noted, a similarity to the no-win structure in witch-swimming, wherein a favourable outcome for the victim—not drowning—was proof of their guilt (Davies 1999: 86-100). This is not to suggest that the bulk of astrological practice could be vindicated by scientific tests. The issue here is only to provide an instance of 'social control' being exerted in order to censor astrologers. I will touch on the question of whether astrology is a phenomenon that could be expected to conform to scientific principles in the next section.

4. *The Clarification (and Polarisation) of Beliefs*

Kurtz's fourth characteristic of heresy is that 'The process of defining and labelling heresy has doctrinal as well as social consequences. It is in the heat of escalating conflicts that orthodoxy is formulated, often through explicit disagreement with a position held by "heretics"' (Kurtz 1983: 1090). During conflicts between the orthodox and heretics, positions polarise (1983: 1090). Although this is not an aspect of the process to

6. The relevant Wikipedia rules are online: https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Wikipedia:Fringe_theories.

which Kurtz devotes much attention, the polarisation of positions often includes the stereotyping and even caricaturing of each side by the other. Jerry B. Pierce gives an account of such a process in his work on the medieval Order of Apostles:

[I]nquisitors and other ecclesiastical authorities essentially employed a template of 'typical' heretical depravities, including sexual licentiousness and aberrations, general immorality, seditious behavior, and, perhaps most importantly, a direct affiliation with the Devil. Taken together, these traits were made to appear to necessitate the removal of these so-called traitors to divine order and prevailing systems of justice by any means and at all costs. (Pierce 2012: 3-4)

Contemporary critics such as Dawkins often attribute traits to astrologers that sit more easily with a materialist worldview than 'affiliation with the Devil', but entail a more or less equal level of wickedness. Thus astrologers are seen as fraudulent, as seen in section 1. They are quite often assumed to have huge incomes, on the basis, as Campion notes, of little or no evidence (Campion 2012b: 4-5). They are also often characterised as exerting total, and harmful, control over their readers and clients. Dawkins, for instance, contends that under the influence of astrology, people seeking relationships errantly discard eleven twelfths of all potential partners (Dawkins 1995: 18). The assumption here seems to be that astrologers typically tell people to disregard all potential partners except those at whose birth the Sun was in a particular sign—a claim for which Dawkins offers no evidence. The primary relevance of Dawkins' assertion here, though, is that it is one example amongst many of astrologers being portrayed as exerting a malign influence. It is therefore similar to the charge levelled against astrologers by Augustine—that they are in league with evil spirits, 'whose concern is to instil and confirm in men's minds those false and baneful notions about "astral destiny"' (Augustine, *City of God* V.7, trans. Henry Bettenson 1984: 188).

I would like to dwell on Kurtz's observation that 'positions polarize' during conflict between the orthodox and 'heretics', and suggest that it is commonly the case that the beliefs of the latter group are misrepresented so as to better fulfil the function that heresiology performs for orthodoxy: defining what orthodoxy is not. This can be seen, in a situation where scientism is the orthodoxy and religion the heresy, in Dawkins' complaint: 'We were to debate against a trio of, as it turned out, rather halfhearted religious apologists ("Of course I don't believe in a God with a long white beard, but...")' (Dawkins 2007). Where religion is concerned, secular fundamentalism's battle of choice is against simplistic notions of an anthropomorphic God (Armstrong 2010: 289-96). Similarly, when astrology is attacked the battle often features a simplistic account

of astrological work with little or no acknowledgement of the degrees of complexity and plurality of belief of actual astrologers. Thus for example when Dawkins' article 'The Real Romance in the Stars' was reprinted in the UK Astrological Association's journal, he acknowledged that a joke about all Scorpios being run over by egg lorries on the same day was 'a joke against "naïve sun sign" astrology which is shunned by other astrologers' (Dawkins 1996: 141). But when he subsequently wrote *Unweaving the Rainbow*, he saw it as acceptable to reiterate the simplistic version, writing of 'the facile and potentially damaging way in which astrologers divide humans into 12 categories' (Dawkins 1998: 115).

The characterisation of astrology as a science, which is assumed by many critiques of the subject, is itself a simplification. In Champion's surveys at astrological conferences between 1999 and 2011, the percentage of astrologers who characterised it as science was as low as 24.5% in one instance, while those who saw it as a form of divination was as high as 72.9% (Champion 2012b: 178). To characterise astrology as divination is to put it on a similar footing to systems of divination such as the *I Ching* or tarot cards—to eschew, therefore, the idea of scientifically measurable influences. As was seen above, this is essentially the position taken by Origen. The crucial nature of this characterisation can be seen in a brief conversation between the astrologer Geoffrey Cornelius and Paul Kurtz, co-editor of *Objections to Astrology*. Cornelius raised the possibility that astrology might be considered to function purely on a poetic level; Paul Kurtz said that if that were the case, there would be no problem with astrology (Cornelius 1998). This supports the possibility that emerged in section 1, that many of the attacks directed towards astrology are based on a perception of astrologers as scientific insiders. Such claims *are* made by some astrologers, although they may sometimes be a function of the polarisation of views that is the theme of this section. Thus in her thesis, grounded in ethnographic research among contemporary astrologers in the UK, Alie Bird observed that 'many astrologers, if cornered by persistent sceptics at parties, will invoke science as an uncertain ally rather than admit to the divinatory nature of their practice' (Bird 2006: 104). In characterising a divinatory perspective on astrology, Cornelius argued that such claims are largely misguided:

It is disingenuous of astrologers to even hint at a scientific basis of the sort understood in physics or biology. We'd be on *so* much stronger ground if we said, 'What we do is a type of symbolic imagination. We believe it has real effect and real results. This is something you psychologists and parapsychologists ought to take a look at. What we do is actually about remarkable powers of human imagination that imply something very extraordinary about the nature of reality and the nature of mind'. (Cornelius 1998)

Questions regarding the appropriate domain of astrology such as those raised by Cornelius have long been an issue. In the second half of the thirteenth century, Aquinas effected a degree of accommodation between the Church and astrology by arguing:

[A]cts of choice and movements of the will are controlled immediately by God. And human intellectual knowledge is ordered by God through the mediation of the angels. Whereas matters pertinent to bodily things, whether they are internal or external, when they come within the use of man, are governed by God by means of the angels and the celestial bodies. (Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles* 3.91.2, trans. Vernon J. Bourke 1990 [1956]: 40)

In the analysis of Aquinas, it was not heresy to apply astrology to the material world. This has been reversed by some of astrology's contemporary scientific critics. For them, the material world is the exclusive domain of science and therefore astrology is heretical precisely to the extent that it claims purchase on materiality. An example is Paul Kurtz's willingness to tolerate an astrology that works in a similar way to poetry but finds no footing in the world of material science. A similar position, based on a dichotomy between what they term 'subjective astrology' and 'objective astrology', is taken by Dean, Ertel, Kelly, Mather, and Smit, a group of astrology's most eminent critics (Phillipson 2000: 128-30). There is almost a basis for rapprochement between some astrologers and critics of astrology here, stymied only if the astrologers insist that astrology has 'real effect and real results' (Cornelius 1998).

5. *Inquisition*

Kurtz's fifth characteristic of heresy is that 'the process of defining and denouncing heresy and heretics is a ritual' and that in the case of Christianity, these rituals 'reached their apotheosis with the formation of the Inquisition and the use of the Augustinian formula *coge intrare*, which gave infidels and heretics two choices: conversion and submission or extirpation' (Kurtz 1983: 1090, 1091). In the interests of brevity I prefer to side-step the term 'ritual', since the term is open to such a range of interpretations (Leach 1968: 526). It seems more straightforwardly explanatory to take 'inquisition' as the title for this section.

Jacques Berlinerblau summarises this facet of the treatment of heretics by saying that in it, the prevalent orthodoxy 'institutionally manages deviant individuals and groups through coercive mechanisms (e.g., physical and symbolic violence, excessive taxation, ostracism, etc.) or through "re-education", compromise, accommodation and so on' (Berlinerblau 2001: 340). For the Church, authority for violence and execution was provided by Aquinas who, in his *Summa Theologica* Part

2.2, Question 11, Article 3, a passage that helped shape the Inquisition, wrote of the heretic:

If he is yet stubborn, the Church no longer hoping for his conversion, looks to the salvation of others, by excommunicating him and separating him from the Church, and furthermore delivers him to the secular tribunal to be exterminated thereby from the world by death. (trans. The Fathers of the English Dominican Province 1922: 160-61)

It would be egregious to imply that the travails of contemporary astrologers, or other targets for secular fundamentalism, are similar in extent to the sufferings of the Inquisition's victims. That said, I want to suggest that there are 'coercive mechanisms' against astrologers that can be seen to be similar in principle.

In 2011 the professor of physics Brian Cox and comedian/science presenter Dara Ó Briain repeatedly described astrology as 'rubbish' on the BBC programme 'Stargazing Live'. The UK's Astrological Association (AA) instigated an online petition in protest.⁷ Ó Briain encouraged his Twitter followers to submit bogus signatures to this petition, effectively sabotaging it. Frances Clynes, a lecturer in computing who was on the AA's council at the time and involved in organising the petition, then found that some followers of Ó Briain had traced her email address and were emailing her directly. Concerning these emails she told me:

Most of them contained the usual accusations that we are becoming millionaires by exploiting the vulnerable, and words like 'fraud' were used. A small number of them contained threats. One of them said, 'Don't go down any dark alleys anytime soon'. Several said things like 'you're dead', or in fact 'your dead'. Many of them were grammatically incorrect. The most frightening was the one that said, 'I know where you live'. That too could easily be found if they wanted to. Writing this now four years later, it still feels threatening.⁸

I note the escalation in this sequence of events. First astrology was treated dismissively, from a position of implicit authority and orthodoxy. Then it was deemed acceptable and even humorous to deny the astrologers a voice by sabotaging their petition—which could be considered symbolic violence. Further, it seemed acceptable to a few to threaten astrologers with violence and death, in the name of science and rationality.

A salient question is whether this episode was an aberration, an isolated irruption of shadowy psychological issues on the part of a few, or whether it embodies an attitude found in the rhetoric of many secular

7. The episode is discussed in Campion 2012b: 106-7;

8. Email communication with Frances Clynes, 15 February 2015, reproduced with permission.

fundamentalists. The argument for the latter possibility might include Dawkins's suggestion, cited earlier, that astrologers should be jailed; and his statement, 'I am talking about fighting it [astrology] seriously instead of humouring it as a piece of harmless fun' (Dawkins 1995: 17). The language of armed struggle is frequently found in secular fundamentalism: at the end of 2013 a letter from D.J. Grothe, President of the James Randi Educational Foundation, asked, 'Will you join the battle against unreason?' and invited donations which would be used for this cause, including support of the 'guerilla skeptics' (Grothe 2013). Dawkins, recounting a public discussion on religion in which he, A.C. Grayling, and Christopher Hitchens faced a group of religious believers, cited with approval Grayling's remark before the discussion that 'Hitch will spray AK47 ammo at the enemy in characteristic style' (Dawkins 2007). The only thing he seemed to find worrying about the analogy is that the word 'spray' 'underestimates the deadly accuracy of his [Hitchens's] marksmanship' (Dawkins 2007). Tina Beattie, who cites this episode, refers to 'the testosterone-charged nature of this debate'—a charge she levels at both sides—and it seems difficult to disagree with that observation (Beattie 2007: 4, 10). Oestmann, Rutkin, and von Stuckrad have argued:

the question of astrology's ontological status reveals a strategy of 'othering'...[characterised by an attitude that framed] the debate polemically in terms of (e.g.) 'science' vs. 'pseudo-science' and 'rationality' vs. 'superstition'. These terms...reflect the socio-professional identities and conceptual perspectives of 'modern' people who view themselves as progressive, rational and enlightened, against which the 'other' was constructed as a necessary counterpart. (2005: 2-3)

As the 'other', astrologers are effectively characterised as 'primitive' with all the pejorative freight the term carries, so that the critic of astrology's duty would conform to Edward B. Tylor's prescription for the dutiful ethnographer: 'to expose the remains of crude old cultures which have passed into harmful superstition, and to mark these out for destruction...for the good of mankind' (Tylor 1920: 26). Darwinian evolution may have replaced the laws of God, but heretics—it seems—still must be sought out and punished.

Conclusion

The application of Kurtz's five-fold anatomy of heresy to contemporary secular criticisms of astrology has shown significant parallels to the treatment of heresy by the Church. First, astrologers are seen as 'deviant insiders' who are assumed to practise astrology as if it were a science, whilst knowing that it cannot be. Second, astrology is seen as a threat to

the authority of science with the potential to lead people away from the orthodoxy of science. Third, the views and arguments of astrologers are suppressed by groups who believe that they need to protect science, to establish or preserve its status as the prevalent orthodoxy. Fourth, when it is criticised, astrology is often taken to be exhaustively defined when considered as erroneous, discredited science. This identification of astrology as 'what science is not' is simplistic, driven more by a need to reify science as an orthodox belief-system than by genuine enquiry. Finally, astrologers are subjected to 'othering'; there is an incipient spirit of inquisition amongst some critics which is prepared to silence the astrologers by force if necessary.

In the preceding discussion, the treatment of astrology has shed light on scientism (and it may be as well to emphasise that my focus has been scientism as belief, not science as methodology). What has emerged is that the treatment of astrologers by scientism is closely analogous to the treatment of heretics by the Church with, in each case, an orthodoxy to be defended. Aside from the inherent value in disclosing and investigating prejudice, particularly when it is associated with threats and coercion, I see two issues emerging from this research. The first is that there can be contradiction between the ideals typically associated with science—the 'religion of the open mind' as Eysenck and Nias put it (1982: 220) and the positions taken by some of science's would-be guardians. The second major issue to emerge is that there is evidence here of the extent to which scientism has become the *de facto* orthodox belief system of the West. This has been exemplified in this paper through analysis of the way in which the perception of astrology as irrational belief evokes atavistic responses which mirror those seen in the persecution of heretics by the Church. There is irony as well as symmetry here. A transition from the Church to science as repository of popular faith may seem to be a move in the direction of rationality and dispassion, and yet in view of the reflections presented here it is tempting to conclude that the more belief changes, the more it stays the same.

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Living with Fate: The Lifestyle of Contemporary Astrologers

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Abstract

Astrologers are assumed to be a group of people whose lives are dictated by the stars. This position has been encouraged by *ad hominem* twentieth-century polemics where the astrologer is portrayed as a person of questionable mental ability who takes no responsibility for their life. These assumptions have been informed by the definition of fate from the Classical period of Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE). In contrast, my research among English-speaking astrologers revealed that their lifestyle was one where beliefs about the nature of fate varied considerably from Cicero's views and that they used their beliefs in three ways: as an aid for their spiritual development, as a tool for personal reflection, or as a means for life-planning. The astrologers in my research actively engaged with their lives using their beliefs about fate, understanding it like a life companion rather than a life dictator.

Keywords

Astrology, polemics, fate, determinism, horoscopes, spirituality, lifestyle.

Introduction

There are varying definitions of astrology and these all speak of a believed union between the heavens and an individual human life. Notwithstanding the validity of these definitions, a different approach

can be taken to the question of what is astrology by considering it as a lived experience. As a praxis, astrology is an attempt to view the workings of fate, a desire to bring into awareness the activity of a believed agency which directs human life. Fate is itself a central part of astrology as astrologers link their own life journey to that of the predictable movements of the celestial sphere. This union of sky and life is created by the horoscope, a diagram of the orientation of planets and zodiac signs around an individual at their time of birth and used to read the life, or mental state, of the astrologer. In this way the horoscope injects a level of predetermined statements (the position of the planets at the time of birth) and life events (the movement of the planets through time) into the holder's worldview, and thus adds a visible thread of fate into the astrologer's life. Thus, the life of an astrologer is a life engaged with a dance or a wrestle with fate.

Sarah Broadie, commenting on the popular view of fate, stated that fate was 'an agency concerning which...all we know, is that it has a certain purpose and is clever and foreknowing and powerful enough to carry out this intention no matter what' (2001: 28). It is this 'agency' that the astrologer tries to understand. The actual lifestyle the astrologer adopts as they take up a belief in fate varies depending on whether the astrologer thinks that they can avoid, negotiate, or participate with fate.

Theodore Adorno, in challenging the role of astrology in society, defined the astrological lifestyle by claiming:

While the subject [the astrologer] has to follow closely what this agency indicates, he does not really have to act on his own behalf as an autonomous human being but can content himself with relying on fate. He has to avoid things rather than do them. He is somewhat relieved of his responsibility. (1994: 54)

Adorno (1994: 64) thought that the astrologer lived their life blindly taking orders from the stars without questioning or thinking. In that light he claimed that astrologers must be maladjusted for, by accepting fate, they gave up all notions of free will, as they allowed their life to be dictated by the 'stars'. Other critics (Dawkins 1995; Dean, Kelly, and Mather 1996) followed Adorno's *ad hominem* arguments by also questioning the very intelligence or the moral character of a person who would willingly accept a fate-filled astrological lifestyle. There is, however, an untested assumption in these anti-astrology arguments: they all assume a particular understanding of fate, that fate was inevitable and thus a horoscope could only reflect a *single* life or event.

Differing Views on Fate

Robert Solomon commented, 'Today both concepts [fate and fatalism] tend to be the target of widespread philosophical disdain' (2003: 435). In the Classical period, however, fate was a valid topic of debate. At the heart of these early debates was the dilemma of how fate challenged a person's free will. Plato (c. 424–348 BCE) considered that divinely granted human reason could conquer the influence of fate (necessity) and that the use of such human reason to rise above one's animal instincts (necessity) would allow for the return of one's soul to the stars (Plato 1997b: 47b-c). The ease or stress of the soul's journey to the stars was one's fate created by choices in one's past lives (Plato 1997a: 249a). In contrast the Stoic philosophers developed the notion of fate where all that happened was dictated by fate and this fate was inevitable. In this Stoic view, however, the mind was free to choose how to react to life events, and by choosing calmness one contributed to the great good of the whole (Sharples 1986: 269; Epictetus 2004: 4). In principle Plato offered a spiritual solution to the fate/free will dilemma, with free will belonging to the soul, while the Stoic approach was that fate was inevitable but free will was located in the mind, thus a person could choose their mental attitude to a situation.

In contrast to these two positions, the Roman Senator Marcus Tullius Cicero (106–43 BCE) defined fate as 'an orderly succession of causes, wherein cause is linked to causes and each cause of itself produces an effect' (2001: I lv.125). He spoke of the working of fate as,

[t]hings which are to be do not suddenly spring into existence, but the evolution of time is like the unwinding of a cable: it creates nothing new and only unfolds each event in its order. (Cicero 2001: I lvi 127)

With this view he reflected the Stoic definition of fate as inevitable. Unlike the Stoics, however, Cicero believed that humanity was precluded from fate's influence, and in this way, he maintained humanity's free will. Nevertheless, astrologers placed fate within human life by way of the personal horoscope and thus Cicero challenged the subject of astrology claiming that it denied humanity of free will (Cicero 2001: II vii 18).

Cicero's definition of fate was developed into two major Classical arguments against astrology. The first is known as the argument of 'different destinies', where two people born at the same time lived different lives. The second is known as the argument of 'common destinies', where people with different birth times all died at the same time in an accident. Both were used as evidence of the futility of astrology (Hegedus 2007: 43). The logic of these arguments was that, according to Cicero's

definition of fate as inevitable, the horoscope could only indicate one possible life. Thus, in the first case, if two people had the same horoscope, then they should have the exact same life, or, in the second case, if two people died in the same accident, then they should have the exact same horoscope. Since neither of these cases was true, then it followed that astrology had to be a false concept. It is Cicero's version of fate—inevitable fate—that is central to Adorno and later critics of astrology and astrologers. Yet such a view of fate is rarely upheld by astrologers themselves.

Today, for most people fate appears to be an idea or a belief that can be called upon when searching for the meaning of an odd or tragic event. The popular expressions of 'he met his fate' for a life cut short, or 'it is in the hands of fate' when an outcome is beyond human control, or 'don't tempt fate' when one does not want to upset an outcome through over-expectation, or to 'tempt fate' by taking a foolish risk, all reveal the personal, organic, random, potentially flexible, although possibly capricious, nature of the idea of fate. Anthony Giddens, writing on self-identity, also offered comment on the phenomenon:

Fateful moments are times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in his existence; or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences. (1991: 113)

In this context fate acts as a marker of change, an alteration to the life path. Another view on contemporary fate was suggested by Solomon, who argued that fate had an 'otherness' to it where 'fate provides something by way of "hands" in which we can place ourselves whether or not we have the confidence in their goodness' (2003: 440). The nature of these 'hands of fate', however, is unclear. Indeed fate, as implied by Broadie and Solomon, is inherently organic in nature, suggesting both that it exists on a phenomenological level and thus it is a personal rather than a universal force, while Giddens' comment suggests one encounters what is called fate when one's life changes direction.

It is these moments of 'encounter' that cause some people to look for more understanding, and some become interested in and consumers of astrology, with many choosing a lifestyle, according to Adorno (1994: 64), which obeys 'some highly systematized orders' with a 'blindness' of obedience. This raises the question, therefore, about today's contemporary astrologers and what they actually believe about fate and why they choose to embrace fate/astrology as a lifestyle choice. To explore this question, I conducted research among astrologers in which I asked them about their views about fate, why they were willing to incorporate their understandings of it into their lives, and how their beliefs influenced their daily decision making.

Methodology

I began my research in 2008 by contacting the astrological associations of the United States, UK, Australia, South Africa, and New Zealand, telling them that I was exploring what astrologers believed about fate and requesting their members to email me their thoughts.¹ I received a positive response from the different organisations because I am a well-known professional astrologer who has been working in the global astrological community for over twenty-five years. This response consisted of 902 emails which varied from a few sentences to paragraphs of over a thousand words in length. The responses provided the individual astrologers' stories about how they lived with their belief in fate and what astrology meant to them. Since I had received so many responses, I decided to code these comments in Nvivo 8 (a QDA, Qualitative Data Analysis, software package) in order to examine them more closely for themes. These emails represented 77,000 words of personal stories and opinions about fate and astrology. The email responses were from 868 females and 194 males from 40 countries. The most typical respondent was female, living in the USA or UK, and in their mid-forties. The youngest was 20 years old and the oldest was 90. The average length of time they had been engaged with astrology was 20 years. During 2010–2011, I also conducted in-depth interviews with 22 of the astrological community's leading authors and teachers. These interviews were transcribed and also entered into Nvivo 8 for further coding and examination.²

Among the many stories collected of people's lives, their life choices, and life events, my research revealed three major themes concerning fate and lifestyle: these contemporary astrologers believe that fate is an essential part of their own spiritual beliefs, or they use it as a tool for personal reflectivity, or they use it to populate their own personal life calendars for forward planning. Any single astrologer could use it in just one of these forms or use all three approaches. I will now examine these three themes in more detail.

Astrology as a Belief in Fate to Aid Spiritual Awareness

In the early twentieth century Alan Leo (1860–1917), an English astrologer, brought the spiritualism of Theosophy into Western astrology. He taught that the horoscope reflected the mortal life and thus revealed

1. This research was conducted for my PhD dissertation. See Brady 2012.

2. For more information on the methodology of using a QDA package for the coding interviews, see Olszewski, Macey, and Lindstrom 2006.

sensual needs—needs which were a burden to the soul's desire to ascend to the heavens. Leo believed that one should avoid or suppress these needs and slowly learn to transcend one's horoscope. He believed that fate could be reduced or avoided if one 'evolved' one's soul (Leo 1929 [1905]: 350). This perspective encapsulates a Platonic astrological dualism, wherein the soul and thus free will was not tied to the material, fated realm. Given this belief about fate and life, the horoscope was useful for considering worldly events but in the final analysis the person could overpower or overcome their fate by their own spiritual awareness. Many astrologers accept this model and for these astrologers, their engagement with astrology was a spiritual practice. One professional astrologer from the United States commented on this spiritual pathway in his interview:

Free will is relative to the expansion of consciousness that the individual achieves to help to transcend his or her biology... So here is where the soul comes in. As we move into that place of free will we move into the realm of the soul.

This view of fate echoes Plato's thinking from the *Timaeus* where he averred that the soul was the holder of the human free will and, thus, one gained freedom by reaching for one's soul. These individuals adopted astrology as a way of identifying the fated character traits or fated times in their life, as shown by their horoscope. With these points identified, they sought to nullify them by meditation or other personal spiritual practices. All of this was an endeavour to resolve problems from past lives to ensure that their fate in a future life would be easier.

Other astrologers took a different approach. For them, astrology simply opened their eyes to a spiritual worldview without defining a set of spiritual beliefs. One woman from the United States wrote:

For me, it's [astrology] evidence of a divine power at work, which I really need in a world that seems to be a mass of selfish chaos, at times. I love how rich it is, in showing us how complicated and multi-faceted we are—works of art. Being able to see the intelligence of poetic mapping playing out. It's like seeing through the eyes of God, but never knowing enough to feel like you are God.

For such individuals, astrology offered a window into what they considered was a divinely informed order (defined as God) and this gave them a sense that their life was to be a part of this 'poetic mapping'. This joy of feeling that one was a part of a living cosmos was strongly supported by many astrologers. One Dutch astrologer captured this when she spoke in an interview:

It [life] is just one huge organism, so it is all connected. So if one person struggles, this is my working hypothesis at the moment, if one person struggles with their Saturn for example and makes a friend of it and learns its laws, then that is to the benefit for all of us. So we are all informing each other, we are all part of this web.

This is an altruistic spiritual view of fate. The idea that one person's awareness can help all others is reflective of the Stoic notion of fate, where, according to Susanne Bobzien (2005: 41, 169), all things are a part of the divine, a divine which is still becoming, being formed by the movement and thoughts of everything.

Alternatively, some astrologers were not focused on an altruistic motivation. For them this ordered whole was akin to Edmund Husserl's lifeworld, containing elements of their personal history as well as the world around them (Husserl 1970: 108-109). Whatever the nature of the web or pattern, the phenomenon of fate described by these astrologers and what they gained from having astrology in their lives, was a sense of membership to a living cosmos. As one male astrologer from the United States commented:

Every time you look at a chart you're orienting yourself towards the universe and you're reaffirming your place in it. To me that, that's exciting and mystical and I mean emotionally and spiritually and intellectually it satisfies all these levels. And it's a way of doing, it is not just about thinking about it, feeling about it, or intuiting about it, you're also doing it.

Such comments exemplified Sarah Broadie's thoughts on fate, discussed previously. She spoke of the essence of fate and found that the phenomenon provided a sense of the order, personal or cosmic, having 'an agency concerning which...all we know is that it has a certain purpose'. In this instance the 'certain purpose' is a divine cosmos.

For these astrologers, their glimpses into a 'certain purpose' were organised into the order of the heavens, so that a planetary movement could cause them to look for an event in their life to help them understand the divine nature of the cosmos, or an event can cause them to look for the planetary movement to help them understand or live with the event. The astrologers lived in a feedback loop involving a quest to understand the divine while seeking to understand their life in the eyes of the divine. This was put in its simplest expression by a Norwegian astrologer who commented, 'When life is difficult, astrology gives it meaning and hope, even in the darkest hours. You know that soon this too will pass.' For this astrologer, the movement of the planets informed him of the fated time of a 'darkest hour' as well as the transitory nature of the difficult events. His beliefs gave him peace of mind while adding to his sense of belonging to the cosmos.

All these astrologers believed that the knowledge they gained from their horoscope and the timing it gave for life events was a window into the divine and with that knowledge they sought to make informed life decisions in order to contribute to the good of the world or to the quality of their future lives.

Astrology as a Belief in Fate Used as Life Guide

In contrast to those who built their spiritual life around their belief in astrology, many astrologers sought to use their view of fate as a life-planning tool. Astrologers believe that as the planets move against the background of their personal horoscope then, at times of certain geometrical relationships, the planets reflect the occurrences of events in one's life. One American astrologer captured this idea when she talked of what she liked about astrology as

being able to predict my future so as to make better decisions, take best advantage of transits and progressions [astrological techniques], and therefore reduce anxiety about possible future events.

For her, as with many astrologers, the future was populated with 'encounters' that were set in time but not in nature. This idea of fate indicating an encounter rather than a fixed event was also discussed by James, an astrologer from the United States. He described a difficult time that his astrology predicted in his near future. James assessed that it could have been violence or even death and, given this, he made a series of decisions to change his living situation by relocating: 'I said OK let's get some place safe. Let's get some place safe so that that can happen in a comfort zone.' James had 'seen' his fated difficult time established by the future movement of planets. He accepted this fated encounter and decided to minimise its impact by relocating to a 'safe' place:

So I move to a very safe place because I know that that aspect will be brutal, at the very least life challenging, and maybe even be life threatening and, because I have nothing else to support Mars in my chart, 'Let's get some place where there is a lot of nurturing, let's get some place where I can be nurtured. Now let's get to a place where the dynamics of the way I nurture will be tested and it will be okay for me to be tested there.' So I did that. I moved to [another country].

James then described the string of difficulties he had in this new country: an injury to his leg, being unable to deal with stairs, being robbed, and the stress of still dealing with the American tax system while living in the new country. Nevertheless, all of this he considered was a good outcome and a successful negotiation of his fate, as he had avoided what

he saw as a life-threatening period. In James' view, fate was partly inevitable, like an incoming storm. He saw himself somewhat separated from it and used his astrological knowledge like a weather report to take measures to minimise the impact of the incoming storm. Such a view of fate served no purpose for his individual personal development. It did, however, offer explanations of his life events.

James' story is one of avoiding or running from his fate, while a different approach was expressed by Mary, another astrologer in the United States. She was planning to undertake her PhD studies but wanted to do so at the best time for her to engage in a period of hard work. She described it in this way:

When I started my PhD, Saturn was just about to go into my 10th house. So I took the energy of Saturn on the Midheaven to say 'Okay I am going to go and work on getting this degree. I am going to work very hard'... and...um...I did... [laughs].

Mary was timing her decision to engage in a PhD on the understanding that in astrology the planet Saturn is associated with hard work and respectability, and the 10th house (MC) is associated with public standing or career (Hone 1973: 30, 95). Thus, she chose to use the several years indicated by this astrological event to her advantage. The goal for Mary was not to avoid her fate but instead to channel the indicated, fated future encounter with authority issues into the workload of gaining a PhD. She accepted the inevitability of the quality of the fated time, but thought that she was free to choose the expression of this quality in her life.

This style of using astrology as an aid for future planning was common among many astrologers in my research. The astrologers created personal calendars, forward and backwards in time, so they could revisit previous decisions and plan for future actions or goals. Anthony Giddens, when writing about the modern notion of self-identity, argued that freedom to build and implement a life plan was key to a strong sense of self-identity. He wrote about this plan as

...the reflexively organised trajectory of the self. [The self is located in time and space and] Life-planning is a means of preparing a course of future actions mobilised in terms of the self's biography. We may also speak here of the existence of personal calendars or life-plan calendars, in relation to which the personal time of the lifespan is handled. (Giddens 1991: 85, brackets in original)

In this way, just like other people, as suggested by Giddens, astrologers chose to develop a life plan, the difference being that astrologers used their beliefs around the notion of fate to act as signposts in their

calendars. As Mary commented, it was her choice to undertake her PhD studies, but her astrology helped her focus on what she believed was the best time. This evidence of astrologers' life planning is in direct contrast to the common, sceptical outsider view of astrologers, which sees them as following the dictates of the 'stars' and rejecting all notions of their own free will.

Astrology as a Belief in Fate for Reflection

In some interviews and emails a different theme emerged. An interview with David, a professional astrologer from Australia, revealed Lucien Lévy-Bruhl's idea of participation. Lévy-Bruhl (1975: 62, 109) noted how the mystical world was non-hierarchical, and when encountered, it provided the person with a sense of contact with a larger whole, something bigger than the self and the current events. David began by talking about how he dealt with what his horoscope showed to be a difficult time. He had fallen into conflict with his neighbour, but by understanding the planetary events happening in his horoscope, he took a different approach to that of James cited earlier. David spoke quietly and with many pauses:

But what it [astrology] does is that, well, he is a very nasty person [the neighbour] but what it does is lessen my—...if, if...if I sit with it I feel very rage-full and I am going to go over and smash this person, but really when I reflect on it, because of what I know about it [the fated event in his horoscope], it lessens that—... There is...there is something bigger going on, and I have to find the answer to that so when I see these things and I use the astrological images, whatever they are, I am trying, as much as possible, to be alert to them, to the potentialities and possibilities of them and to be more reflective and be understanding, to try to not, in any way, circumvent life but to live it, and to live it with the knowledge of what is going on around me.

David found himself placed in a situation where he was enraged by his neighbour. At this time, he was in a period where his horoscope indicated that he would be dealing with rage. Instead of meditating or preforming some spiritual act, he chose to use the fact that his fate was speaking about a time of rage to learn to detach from his emotions. For David, another more mysterious story held his attention. His focus was on what his anger was telling him about the deeper symbolism that was being activated in his own horoscope.

From his perspective, David was standing in two worlds, the mundane anger with the neighbour and the mystical world filled with the astrological symbols of rage and frustration. By staying in his astrological

world—‘I use the astrological images, whatever they are’—he was able to *participate* as described by Lévy-Bruhl, to see another level of meaning to the situation. He may not have fully understood it, but he was sure that ‘there is something bigger going on’, hence he ‘sits with it’, he ‘reflects on it because of what I know about it’. David redirected the conflict with his neighbour into his participation with a mysterious larger whole. For him, this was of greater interest. This approach of being with fate, sitting with it, rather than observing and seeking to nullify it or redirect it, provided David with a doorway into his own mystical world, a world that offered potentialities in which he wanted to be immersed. Hence, at no stage did David consider that he had power over fate or believe he could lessen its influence. He was simply sitting with it. In his belief system, the astrological symbolism highlighted to him that if he could avoid his animal instincts, he might learn something about the mystical world he inhabited.

This notion of participation is largely missing from the astrological literature of the twentieth century. Astrologers have used the word participation before, but from an anthropocentric perspective where they were seeking, as Nicholas Campion argued, ‘the sense of being at one with the cosmos’ (2012: 16). In this use of the word, Campion suggested, the astrologer ‘set out to create choice, negotiate with nature, and enter into a dialogue with time’, hence assuming they had the ability to take some control over the expression of fate in their lives. Such a perspective is, however, not participation, it is negotiation. Furthermore, an important difference was evident in my research, that in this theme of participation the astrologer lived in a world where humanity was not viewed as the sole moral arbitrator. This view of fate, where one participated with it, as revealed in David’s astrology, can be viewed within the context of a fate that belongs more to the Stoic and pantheistic philosophy of Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677), where pantheism was the view that everyone belonged to the world and were parts of the whole, and it was the whole that was sacred.

Conclusion

My research was motivated by the views about astrology and fate promoted by astrological polemicists and generally held as a default outsider belief about astrologers. This perception was informed by Cicero’s first-century BCE critique of astrology, which argued that fate was inevitable and thus astrologers who added fate into their lives via their horoscopes must lead lives of automatons. By the twentieth century these automaton lives were judged to be void of any sense of moral

responsibility, incapable of making their own life decisions and thus, as individuals, astrologers had questionable mental states. Evidence suggests, however, that such a view is itself questionable. After engaging with astrologers from the English-speaking world, a different view of fate was revealed and in turn this showed differing ways that astrologers lived with their view of fate.

Three themes emerged. Astrologers believed that astrology and the fate that it added into their lives was a window into the mind of a divine cosmos. Some lived their lives seeking to move away from the earthly material realm occupied by fate and return their soul to the stars, while others also held their fate as evidence of their link to the divine, but saw the divine located on the earth. These astrologers sought to build harmony with themselves, others, and the environment, as a way of helping all of life move closer to the divine. In contrast, a second theme was represented by those astrologers who viewed their fate like weather forecasts and sought to use it to build a life plan based on either taking action to mitigate their fate or taking action to cooperate with fate for desired outcomes. A third theme was signified by the astrologers who used their encounters with fated times as a tool for personal reflection. These astrologers choose to participate with the event, looking for synchronicities of what they believed were astrological images as markers to help them deal with the event.

Far from the automatons envisioned by Adorno, all these astrologers presented a combination of views which showed a pro-active engagement with life. There was a universal willingness to not let life pass over or around them, but instead to engage, negotiate, or participate with what they believed was their fate. This fate, contained in astrology and expressed by the astrologers in my research, was viewed as personal, organic, variable, and divinely driven for the benefit of themselves, or their soul or the world at large. My research found that by and large the astrologers were motivated to engage with astrology as they sought a sky-filled and sky-ordered life. For them, astrology provided them with a way to understand their own life events while at the same time provided them with membership of the cosmos. Just as Campion and Greene (2011: 13) found diversity of beliefs among astrologers, so too did I. There was not one single astrological lifestyle, nor one single version of fate, but instead astrology was an umbrella for a wide cross-section of people whose common desire was to turn to the sky to help understand their lives.

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The Horoscopic Place: The Encounter between Astrologer and Client*

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Abstract

This article investigates whether astrology is an alternative spiritual practice associated with divination, an occurrence beyond normal human experience. Between July 2015 and July 2016 I conducted semi-structured interviews with seven astrologers who had each been practicing, writing, and teaching astrology for twenty-five years or more. The interviews concentrated on understanding the space set aside by the astrologers to focus on the horoscope. The results revealed that the astrologers considered the repetitive behaviour of preparation for the consultation a ritual, reflecting Emile Durkheim's views that a special place set aside and reinforced by ritual became sacralised. As the astrologers discussed the storied landscape of the horoscope, a moment of recognition by the client allowed the astrologer to see more deeply into what Henri Lefebvre called the lived space of the imagination. The ensuing conversation opened the way to a much greater depth of understanding between both astrologer and client and generated insights that did not require a connection with the supernatural.

Keywords

Astrology, horoscope, cosmology, sacred space, storied landscape, Emile Durkheim, Henri Lefebvre.

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Introduction

Astrology has often been viewed as an alternative spiritual practice, with scholars fitting it in to the surge of the New Age development that occurred in the 1960s. Susan Greenwood associated astrology with divination and equated it with 'predictions from thunder and eclipses and the flight and cries of birds to the directions of sacrificial smoke' (2009: 113). For her, it was another oracular tool that offered a route into magical consciousness or a universal process of mind, achieved through 'empathising deeply with another creature in the imagination, so much so that bodily boundaries and distinct notions of self are temporarily abandoned' (Greenwood 2009: 5-6). In considering the beliefs and practices of Americans who had moved away from the bounds of organized religion, Robert C. Fuller described astrology as an interest in the supernatural by those turned off by religion, and equated it with 'ouija boards, tarot cards, the I Ching, and even fantasy worlds of science fiction' (2001: 10, 99). Stephen J. Hunt even defined astrology as 'popular religion' (2003: 173, 234). Nevertheless, as Nicholas Campion (2012: 126) has pointed out, debates amongst sociologists and practising Christians make an assumption of agreement regarding their definition of religion and how it is used in connection with astrology, which was not borne out in his survey of practicing astrologers conducted between 1999 and 2003 with regards to their religious interests. Indeed, Campion concluded that 'many astrologers talk in terms identified by academics as both religious and New Age, while simultaneously and unequivocally rejecting any identification with either' (Campion 2012: 201).

In contrast to Greenwood, Fuller, and Hunt, Patrick Curry defined astrology as 'the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the traditions that have thus been generated' (1999: 55). He further described astrology as a culture which uses the horoscope as a map, the material document central to the practice of astrology, to ascertain a person's symbolic connection with the sky (Curry 2005: 273). He also stated that

astrology too is a form of life, a way of being in the world. It is not a flawed or failed version of something else, but fully itself to the same extent, and ultimately in the same way, as being a historian, or scientist, or anything else: fully, in a word, human. (2005: 273)

Curry advocated the idea that, in the same way that historians and scientists found meaning in life through the culture they created, so too did astrologers. To see astrology as a culture was to open a door into the human world from which it emerged. This door into astrology was via the horoscope and the way it was interpreted by the astrologer for the

client. Clifford Geertz defined culture as ‘an historically transmitted pattern of meanings embodied in symbols, a system of inherited conceptions expressed in symbolic forms by means of which men communicate, perpetuate and develop their knowledge of and attitudes toward life’ (Geertz 1973: 89). While Geertz was not referring to astrology, historically transmitted patterns have formed the basis of the study of astrology in its varying forms since the Mesopotamians (Parpola 1970; Hunger and Pingree 1989; Hunger 1992), along with the recognition that it took years of study and practice to turn that knowledge into expertise. For example, Gerolamo Cardano (1501–1576), in his commentary to *Tetrabiblos* IV, 10 (*de morte*), disapproved of ill-informed astrologers who showed no acquaintance with the Ptolemaic method of how to synthesise the symbols of a horoscope known as the *ratio commixtionis*:

Those who attempt to make predictions following general lines, as do the Arabs, Firmicus, Pontanus and others in more recent times, proceed in a way similar to the man who, wanting to build a house, arranges in order all the beams in one place, all the planks in another, in yet another all the limestone, in another, all the sand, in another the stones, in another the iron braces, and in another the tiles. This man thinks he has done well, having observed the right ordering. He has however, done nothing in order to build a house. Not unlike him, are those who say: Saturn in such and such a place signifies such and such a thing, Jupiter, something else. For this is useless and does not help prediction. Rather, it is necessary, for each thing, to know the principle of conjunction and the time, mode, order and place. It is necessary, in short, to know how to join together the individual significations. (Bezza 2014: 80)

This lost skill to which Cardano referred has a long tradition and, through study over many years, was what each astrologer brought to every chart reading.

In addition, Bernadette Brady has noted that the way the horoscope is constructed is evidence that the horoscope was never intended to be ‘a simplified piece of celestial cartography’ but rather that the astrologer was ‘seeking to create or reveal a symbolic ideal form of the individual’s relationship to the sky’ (2011: 53). Thus, Brady argued, the horoscope was more akin to a medieval *mappamundi*, a spiritual or sacred map that could be used as a guide through an individual’s life journey, an alternative way of connecting an individual to the sky where the symbols of the horoscope were meaningful for the individual (2011: 56). Through her research, Brady concluded that ‘contemporary western astrologers used the horoscope as a symbolic map which, for them, contained information about their times of joy and their times of sadness’, endeavouring to constitute itself as a non-judgemental lifelong personal guide (2011: 59).

Therefore, if astrology is to be considered an alternative spirituality, then the actual spiritual practice must include the action of reading the horoscope, a document or artefact that arguably contains the potential for personal enrichment based on celestial cartography. In a context separate to astrology, Edward S. Casey named meaningful places where personal enrichment could flourish as 'thick places' (2001: 408). These were places where a person felt connected and assured, where a densely enmeshed infrastructure offered value and relationship. Indeed, Casey defined 'place' as 'the immediate ambience of my lived body and its history, including the whole sedimented history of cultural and social influences and personal interests that compose my life history' (2001: 404). The most effective reading of a horoscope, I argue, occurs in such a thick place. For at the beginning of a reading, the astrologer only knows the astrologically symbolic representation of the client's life and its potential, not necessarily how it was lived. The client, on the other hand, brings their own knowledge of the life they are living but little, if any, knowledge of the symbols of astrology that could be linked to their life. In this way astrologer and client meet in the chart reading place for an exchange of information.

Astrologers understand, however, that the exchange that occurs in the place of the chart reading is more than just a conversation. As Cardano argued, it is something beyond the description of components. Yet this place is a powerful encounter to such an extent that some astrologers, for example Lindsay Radermacher, contend that it is an encounter with the divine, where divine was defined as 'a form of transpersonal intelligence' (2011: i). This divine encounter 'when the astrologer has a strong sense of being in touch with something outside the parameters of normal human experience', claimed authority by speaking to the astrologer and therefore such knowledge was not 'within the control of the astrologer' (Radermacher 2011: 126-27). Unlike Greenwood and Fuller, Radermacher is an astrological practitioner, teacher, and consultant as well as an English author of astrological texts, who has been practicing since the 1980s. Her argument, however, suggested that she, too, believed she was handing control to an outside source separate from her or the client when she entered the horoscopic place, the thickened place where the astrologer and client meet and speak about the horoscope.

At the heart of this struggle to define the experience was a sense of mystery. This idea of mystery is one that is connected often with craft and the production of crafts. When talking of medieval crafts, for example, Spike Bucklow identified mystery as the space between technique and practice. A craftsperson, he noted, could write books and share knowledge but until the craft was practiced, the knowledge of 'how to

combine ingredients, how to control processes and how to use products to make art' (Bucklow 2014: 19), in the case of painters, remained inert, hidden in technical manuals. Just as these medieval craftspeople had done, practicing astrologers have also written astrological texts, methodically introducing the parts—the algorithm of a planet in a sign and a house and its geometrical relationship with other planets—to give meaning to the whole and considering what the combination of parts entailed, as advised by Cardano.

The Interviewees and the Interviews

To explore the mystery of this horoscopic place and to see whether it might reveal an alternative spirituality within astrology, between July 2015 and July 2016 I interviewed seven astrologers who had each been practicing, writing, and teaching astrology for twenty-five years or more and were all active within the community of Western astrologers. Their demographics covered the UK, France, Australia, and the US, with five of the seven astrologers having been born in country different to where they then lived and practiced at the time of the interviews. Five of the seven astrologers were female. All were white and over the age of forty-seven. All interviewees defined themselves as professional astrologers in some way, as astrological consultants, teachers of astrology, authors of astrological texts, translators of astrological texts, publishers of astrological texts, publishers of astrological software, entrepreneurs, and astrological business consultants. I have known and been an astrological colleague with all seven interviewees for nearly thirty years. Thus, alongside my scholarly work, I brought insider knowledge (Pike 1967: 28) to this research as a practicing professional astrologer working in the global astrological community. This situated me in a position of trust when it came to my interlocutors sharing with me their thoughts, ideas, and feelings.

Lynn Bell, an American astrologer living in Paris and a practicing psychological astrologer who began studying astrology in 1972, described the feeling of awe when reading a horoscope:

I was interested in quite a few things but, you know, becoming an astrologer was a weird choice. (*Laughs*) It's not exactly first on your grown-up list. Maybe now it's a bit different. I had a conversation with a friend who said, 'What is it that you really love?' and I said, 'Well when I do astrology something happens'—there it is again—'something happens that doesn't happen anywhere else'. (*She pauses, then repeats it slowly*) 'Something happens that doesn't happen anywhere else. There's a kind of—...there's

an energy—...there's a, as you would say, a flow of energy and a heightened perception, a heightened awareness, an exchange with another person that is of a very different nature than anything I do in my life'. That's when I was in my twenties that I came to it. So that's how I chose.

Although Bell recognised that this was an uncommon choice as a career, not first on the list of a mature adult, nevertheless, she experienced what occurred in this space of reading a horoscope as unique. This same sense of wonder and mystery, possibly Bucklow's craft mystery, that also occurred when reading a horoscope was reflected by all seven of my interviewed astrologers, even though the other six embraced astrology as a profession after encountering a personal crisis.

Barbara Dunn, for example, is an English astrologer specialising in horary and electional astrology who began studying astrology in 1978. She came to astrology at the end of her first academic year of study after her fiancé died in an accident, as she sought answers to the emotional avalanche into which she had plunged. She told me, 'It was a terrible, terrible time and I was just struggling to know what—...make sense of what—... But I *did* make sense of it. And that's probably why I do the sort of astrology I do.' Brian Clark, a Canadian-born psychological astrologer living in Australia, who began studying astrology in 1975, also came to astrology after the death of his best friend when he was nineteen. Like Dunn, he looked for subject matter that could offer reasons for the loss. Distrustful of his heightened sense of intuition 'because I could never differentiate it from fantasy or wish fulfilment', at the age of twenty-three he found astrology, which he said offered him a way of gaining objectivity for his intuition. Meira Epstein, an Israeli born traditional-classical astrologer now living in the USA, who began studying astrology in the late 1980s, came to astrology through a personal relationship crisis in her late thirties. When Epstein visited an astrologer for a reading, she saw the astrologer turn to a book. For Epstein, this was a revelation. For her, astrology became a subject she could study. These astrologers had come to astrology through the human desire to find answers to relationships or grief. They were not seeking an alternative religion or an interest in the supernatural.

The Making of the Horoscopic Place

In his *Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, Émile Durkheim (1858–1917) differentiated between sacred and profane space. He saw sacred space as socially constructed, a special place set aside and reinforced by ritual (Durkheim 1995 [1912]: 44). This was reflected in how the astrologers I

interviewed prepared for their chart reading. All of them felt the necessity to clean the physical space of the room before the client arrived. Clark referred to it as 'creating space for the client to enter it' and added:

I call it a sacred space, but I don't mean 'sacred' in terms that you're, you know, dressing up and bowing down and doing the right thing. I just mean 'sacred' in that you've created a space that's —...a temenos. You've invited somebody into this space and in this space this is what we're going to do in this space. There's nothing else we're going to do in this space.

The word 'temenos' originally referred to a temple enclosure surrounding a sanctuary, a piece of land marked off from common uses and dedicated to a god, a sanctuary, holy grove, or garden (Ball 2000: 373). Clark likened the physical area in which he read the horoscope to a temenos because it was dedicated to only one piece of behaviour, suggestive of Durkheim's position of a special place set aside and reinforced by ritual. In this case the ritual was the reading of the chart, always the same in terms of utilising the learned technique of astrological symbolism, but always different in terms of the orientation of the horoscope symbols and the lived experience brought to the reading by the client. Clark qualified this by noting that when he first started seeing clients he would offer them a cup of tea but later recognised that this action conveyed a social layer, suggesting a leisure activity, and thus blurred the boundaries of how the space was being used. For Melanie Reinhart, a psychological astrologer, born in Zimbabwe and based in London, who was drawn to astrology at the age of ten in 1959 and then began practising as an astrologer in 1975, the physical cleaning occurred in parallel with mental preparation. Her intention in cleaning the space was 'to make myself ready, willing and able to make myself of service to this person or process, whatever that might mean'. She stated, 'I get to spend minimum one hour, sometimes way longer depending on what their issues are focusing in on that individual's life. And I take that very seriously', adding that by keeping this space free from external images, she could stay focused on the person. For these seven astrologers, the cleaning ritual shaped their chart-reading space. It was a comforting and habituated pattern of behaviour that was undertaken as a preparation, not only of the physical space but also as a way of readying themselves. In this regard they were reflecting what Kim Knott was describing when she stated that '*ritual takes place and makes place*' (Knott 2005: 43).

Knott's research focused on the ways that social, cultural, and physical space could be understood relationally through human bodies. Knott argued that 'spaces are both material and metaphorical, physical and

imagined' and that it was 'the body and its spatial logic [that was key] for the production of culture—language, space, and religion' (Knott 2005: 13, 235). For Knott, sacred space, via bodies, events, and objects, whether public or private, was not the impetus for ritual but rather that 'ritual, as sacred-making behaviour, brings about "sacred" space' (2005: 43). In agreement with Durkheim's idea of a socially created sacrality, Knott argued that it was the actions with which a person engaged, such as preparatory cleaning, that sacralised spaces, and those embodied spaces could be ordinary, such as the homes and offices in which these astrologers saw their clients. Ian B. Straughn added that sacred space 'is itself ritual practice and not simply where it happens' (2014: 167). For Straughn, sacredness was found in the practice rather than the physical surroundings and it was in the 'learning, doing, repeating, and improving' of the practice that the places in which this practice occurred became 'ongoing vehicles for practicing place-making' (2014: 166, 167). This accorded with what the astrologers whom I interviewed described as being skilful in their trade. Dunn likened it to 'being a painter or any other trade really', and she continued, 'It's like anything else. When you see it again and again you just know.'

Although Clark had referred to the chart-reading space as a *temenos*, he was adamant that he was the one who was active in creating the space, first by physically cleaning it, then by holding the space, which he defined as 'watching my own thoughts that come through' as well as by 'trying to hold the client so that they don't go all over the place because a lot of time they'll jump from story to story. I try to keep them on track [by] listening.' This responsibility for creating and holding the space was a common response from the astrologers that I interviewed, not in order to be manipulative but rather, by keeping the client focused, explanation and meaning could be gleaned from the experience.

For Bell, the space opened the moment she opened the door for the client: 'Remember, somebody's coming with an intention to be seen in a non-normal way. They are coming with an intention to be seen. They're coming with that intention for someone to give them information about themselves. So as soon as I open that door that space is opened.' Bell identified that the chart-reading space was specifically for information exchange but the information being exchanged was of a non-normal type. It was information that was predicated on her ability, as the astrologer, to reveal something new to the client and the client allowing that to happen. Bell described the shared space between her and the client as a *vesica pisces*, a space of overlap, and she noted how 'with some people you have a very small overlap and with other people you have a much

bigger overlap of...presence, let's say'. In exploring the word 'presence', I asked Bell whether, for her, the space was where the gods visited or whether it was a space for the divine. She responded:

I think it *is* something more than me in the small definition of 'me', and whatever you call that or name that, it's something that steps out of the boundary of an ego identity, and within that unbounded space, the whole astrological consultation steps out of the normally identified 'I' space.

As she worked her way through what it was she was experiencing, Bell felt she had found what best described the kernel of her experience:

The space that opens between me and the other person allows this larger self to be present and within the presence of the larger self is something larger than 'you and I' or 'us and them' and that larger space, whatever we call it, is *definitely* present in the reading. And it isn't 'me'. Yes! That's a better response, do you see? 'Divine' just isn't the right word for that. It's...it's...again it's like channelling. It has the wrong connotations for the actual experience.

Although Bell struggled to articulate the experience of doing the chart reading, nevertheless she understood that it was a combination of the two people—astrologer and client—and their willingness to engage in and comprehend the questions posed by the client. When these questions were understood by the astrologer through the symbols of the horoscope, the overlap of space between astrologer and client was greatly enlarged and felt like the presence of something bigger than both of them. Bell recognised that it was a process that could only occur by putting aside her ego identity. While what she described was of a qualitatively different experience to the energy she felt in her daily life, nevertheless it was an energy constituted between herself and the client. Wendy Stacey, a psychological astrologer born in New Zealand and based in London, who began studying astrology in 1987, responded in a similar way. When asked whether she thought reading a horoscope invited a divine process, she answered immediately with, 'No! No way!! Definitely not. It disavows the astrologer', and she qualified this by adding, 'It's knowing people'. This understanding that life experience was also part of the process in handling the clients' questions was corroborated by all of the astrologers that I interviewed.

Another View of Space

There is another way of considering this question of sacred space which makes sense of what these astrologers were re-counting. In his 1974 book *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre (1901–1991), a neo-Marxist, existential philosopher, and sociologist, argued that the creation and

meaning of urban space was a result of social processes that engaged with geography, landscape, and property and could be tracked through a history of change. Lefebvre's views were shaped by the modernisation, industrialisation, and suburbanisation of the twentieth-century France in which he lived and, in regarding history, he observed that, as Western Europe became transformed through Christianisation and the countryside became urbanised, space was its shaping factor. The growth of towns in late medieval Europe became linked with the capitalism that followed, which used urban space as a tool of power (Lefebvre 1991: 38-39). Thus he saw space as a triad of physical, mental, and social attributes (1991: 38-39). Perceived space (*le perçu*) consisted of the physical web of routes, systems, and networks of one's daily routines located within an urban setting. Conceived space (*le conçu*) was the space conceptualised by urban planners, cartographers, and social engineers. Representational space or the lived space of the imagination (*le vécu*) was fed and nourished by the arts and literature, and used the physical world of objects as its symbolic language. He proposed that the lived space of the imagination, nourished by the language of story, engaged with perceived and conceived spaces to make sense of it. This third space had the ability to give new meaning to perceived and conceived space (1991: 38-42):

Representational space is alive: it speaks. It has an affective kernel or centre: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or: square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic.

For Lefebvre, the lived space of the imagination was animated. If, as Brady (2011: 56) argued, the horoscope for astrologers was a symbolic map of a person's known environment, which flourished through action and hence through time, then one could consider the horoscope as a map of the representational space of the client, which had the capacity to weave together the elements of both physical and social space and hence was alive. I am arguing here that Lefebvre's spatial models can inform the consultation process: Lefebvre's conceived space was evident to the astrologer drawing up and constructing the horoscope, Lefebvre's perceived space equated to the lived life of the client, their physical web of routes, systems, and networks of daily routines, and Lefebvre's representational space was the meeting of astrologer and client, where horoscopic symbolism merged with client experience to produce, for both the astrologer and the client, a flourishing dynamic.

For Stacey, that aliveness defined by Lefebvre as part of representational space was catalysed by the conversation she had with her clients. Until that conversation took place, Stacey considered the horoscope as simply a photo of the person, and no matter how much she described it, it always remained a still photograph. It was the conversation with the client, 'sticking it in the darkroom and seeing it emerge', that allowed the photograph to come alive. Stacey was referring to the pre-digital procedure of processing a photograph in a chemical bath, which allowed it to become visible. She added: 'Then it starts to move and it becomes *life*. Because it's a moment that turns into life... It's like an Instagram.' Here, Stacey was referring to the social networking app made for sharing photos and videos from a smartphone. Bell also talked of how the chart became animated. When I asked her whether the chart changed when she connected with the client she replied, 'No, the chart doesn't change. The chart is the chart. But the way the chart comes alive within my ability to use it—the chart is animated.' Clark expressed it this way: 'It depends on the engagement I have with the client. If there's no engagement with the client, nothing happens. It's like a dead sheet of paper. It's two-dimensional. When the client's alive with me, it's four or five dimensional.' Roy Gillett, a London-based astrologer with a background as a Buddhist, who began studying astrology in 1977, described it as being 'in the presence of an understanding which we're sharing together'. His process was to remove himself as 'an ego-attached human being with opinions and judgements out of the story' so that the client's life patterns, reflected within the astrology, could emerge. Gillett observed that if he did his job well, then within the space of the chart reading, the client felt completely comfortable expressing their most profound secrets or anxieties or worries. For these seven astrologers, a moment of recognition occurred when a piece of information they had offered about the client from the symbols of the horoscope was understood by client through their lived experience in a way that previously had simply been information exchange. From that moment onwards, the space became a vibrant living scenario and the whole tenor of the chart-reading space changed. It was, as far as the astrologers I interviewed were concerned, still conversation, but it moved from being superficial to one that was far more meaningful.

Stacey differentiated between chat versus connection and engagement, and noted how 'a much deeper conversation happens'. Clark called it participation. Gillett described it as being 'in the presence of an understanding which we're sharing together'. What they all recognised and conveyed was the point at which the client responded and acknowledged something that previously they had not valued, appreciated, or

understood about themselves, and where, from their perspective, the client's horoscopic landscape not only matched their inner landscape, it also illuminated it. For in that matching came new insight, where fresh light was cast on the situation. At that point, these astrologers all felt that they became much more effective in their ability to offer meaningful information to the client and, as a consequence, the quality of the space of the chart reading changed.

In talking about actual landscapes, Belden Lane has written of this experience as being 'strangely welcomed by seemingly unreceptive terrain' (1998: 57) and of the huge physical reaction of recognition that followed when the external landscape matched one's internal landscape. He was writing of an actual physical landscape. Yet his response was similar to one that had been described in an earlier work by Meinrad Craighead when she found herself among the sandstone flats and underground kivas of the Pueblo Indians: 'When I came to New Mexico in 1960, I found the land which matched my interior landscape. The door separating inside and outside opened. What my eyes saw meshed with images I carried inside my body. Pictures painted on the walls of my womb began to emerge' (1986: 67). Craighead felt the separation between physical and internal landscapes meld together. As Edwin Bernbaum suggested in connection with walking amongst mountains, 'The sacred does not simply present itself to our gaze: it reaches out to seize us in its searing grasp' (1992: xvi). All seven interviewed astrologers expressed a similar recognition response, when what was meaningful to them symbolically became meaningfully translated and understood by the client and thus they felt seized by this recognition. This moment, however, was one embedded with meaning between astrologer and client, a profound cognitive connection, not through divine intervention or an interest in the supernatural.

Differentiated and Undifferentiated Spaces

There is an additional way of considering the space created by astrologers when they read horoscopes. Thomas Tweed maintained that no spaces are entirely profane or solely sacred, but rather that space is formed by a continuum from differentiated sites to undifferentiated. Differentiated sites were those that were imaginatively fleshed out or encountered through the senses in a way that made them distinct, remarkable, and separate. This encounter was multisensorial and deeply emotional. Undifferentiated sites were areas that the person could not reach via the senses and which were also far from the community's 'cognitive map' (Tweed 2015: 225). In this way sites such as the movie

theatre and the sports stadium could be included along the continuum. Tweed further argued that since spaces were processes, rather than objects, they were both affected by history and changed by it over time, echoing Lefebvre's spatial turn discussed above. Devotional spaces, continued Tweed, were generated by personal insight, metaphorical imagination, and ritual practice, but they were also generative and exerted agency, shaping the people who shaped them (2015: 227).

When trying to articulate the experience of reading a chart for someone, Bell did not reach for the easy option of relinquished responsibility by suggesting she was talking with the gods or the divine. Instead she reached for something inside herself which was best articulated as a dream:

I dreamt that I was Mozart's niece and I was giving a concert, but I didn't know how to play the piano. However, when someone else sat down with me, I played beautifully in my dream. Now I can't play the piano. I've never learned any music but in my dream I had this experience of playing but only *à quatre mains*—four hands. Only when another person played with me. And I think that my gift is a fourhanded gift [and] playing that particular music is something that only happens with the other person. So my gift is in the interaction with the other... It is an other-related art form.

For Bell, when a client came for an astrological chart reading, Bell was herself at first in an undifferentiated space. Her skill was in being able to create differentiated or devotional space with the client through what she termed this 'other-related' art form, and therefore that space became meaningful. It was, however, an engagement between Bell and her client that made it so, thus reflecting the Durkheimian perspective of participation, where non-physical reality was 'available to the individual mind only as it participates in mind both inside and outside itself' (Fields 1995: xliv). For, according to Durkheim, sacredness was inherently impermanent and had to be created and recreated anew each time through participation.

Although he did not use these terms, Clark acknowledged how difficult it was at times to step from undifferentiated space to differentiated space when the client was trying to think through issues rationally. Clark pointed out that he was 'trying to break down the rational constructs for them so that they can—...so that the symbol then can work on them'. He described it as endowing the symbols of the horoscope by allowing the client to have a relationship with the meanings the symbols implied, which evoked the client's memory of how it may have engaged them in the past, thus drawing in their lived experience. This was how Clark saw the client participating with the symbols of the horoscope. 'Once you participate with the symbol, something reveals itself that you

didn't know. Because that's what symbols do. They take you beyond where you are. So you've got to participate with it, though, in order for that to happen.' This idea of participation was the experience of all my interviewed astrologers.

Raymond Tallis used the term 'the visible invisible' and described how 'the visual field...has visible limits that indirectly reveal the invisible: things whose surfaces conceal their depths, their interiors, or which are folded over themselves' (2017: 21). Tallis was re-articulating Lefebvre's representational space. Epstein's experience mirrored this when she said that she saw the whole chart complete and alive in front of her in the same way as Michelangelo saw the complete statue in the raw material. Although Epstein still had to find ways to articulate that to the client, by relying on the technique of reading horoscopes learned over many years of hard work and study, she was able to cut away the visible and reveal the invisible to the client.

Three of the astrologers that I interviewed—Gillett, Bell, and Clark—mentioned the word 'intimacy' in connection with chart reading. Although they described the space itself as impersonal, it became deeply personal through what was being explored with the client and their issues. Yet as Bell clarified: 'It's not intimacy in the sense of "I am sharing with you something very intimate about myself". I as the astrologer am not sharing about me. I might share something about an experience of mine if I feel it's important, but I might say nothing about myself.' In thinking through this idea further Bell added:

I do think that people allow you into a place, which is reserved only for intimate relationships. And yet it's not about intimacy with you, as the reader. It's a deeply respectful place. It's access to something that's deeply respectful... I think that intimate space is a gift offered by that other person to enable the chart reading to happen and that without that the amount of concentric circle will be very small and it will therefore be more structured or technical.

What Bell was saying, and which correlated with what the other astrologers that I interviewed also said, was how the learned understanding over many years of practice of how to detach from one's own engagement with mundane issues, and set aside personal problems in order to focus on the client, created space, literally and symbolically. In that space, the clients' issues could then be carefully listened to, attended to, focused on and heard, and mapped to the patterns of the horoscope. Rather than an alternative spiritual practice, or an interest in the supernatural or a popular religion, instead the phenomenon of chart reading was described as a space that was deeply respectful, generating personal insight, metaphorical imagination, and ritual practice, as well as exerting

agency and shaping the people who shaped them. If this is considered to be a definition of sacred space, then the bonding and reverence astrologers felt in this space was constructed by them, suggesting that the sacredness of the place followed a Durkheimian perspective.

Conclusion

This research set out to understand whether astrology was an alternative spirituality by looking at the central material item of astrology—the horoscope—and acknowledging the act that made it meaningful—the reading of the horoscope by a professional astrologer with a client in a place specifically set aside for it. To explore this horoscopic place, I interviewed professional astrologers. Initially the space was prepared in readiness for the client. This occurred both physically and mentally. The astrologers termed this repetitive behaviour a ritual, reflecting Durkheim's views that a special place set aside and reinforced by ritual became sacralised. Yet all of them held the view that the initial encounter with the client occurred in the space of the ordinary. The paradox of the work was that at the beginning of every chart reading, each of them brought their knowledge and expertise from years of study and astrological practice of how to read the horoscope. They knew only the astrologically symbolic representation of the client's life and its potential, not necessarily how it was lived. The client, on the other hand, came to the reading with their own knowledge of the life they were living but with little, if any, knowledge of the symbols of astrology linked to their life. The two met in the chart-reading space—the horoscopic place—to exchange this knowledge.

Yet this knowledge exchange was more than just pieces of information. As the astrologers discussed the storied landscape of the horoscope and its implications for the client, a moment of recognition by the client allowed the astrologer to see more deeply into what Lefebvre called the lived space of the imagination, and this opened the way to a much greater depth of understanding between both astrologer and client. This was the point where life and symbols met, where the inner landscape of the life of the client met the symbolic landscape of the horoscope and created a change in understanding, uncovering what Tallis had named 'the visible invisible', and mirroring Tweed's argument that spaces were processes and changed over time. The astrologers recognised that they and their clients had moved from what Tweed identified as undifferentiated space to differentiated space and that both astrologer and client were enriched and resourced by the process as a result. They now inhabited the horoscopic place, this storied landscape

of the horoscope which had become valued, sacred, created by trust, and revealed and deepened in confidence. This clarity of understanding enabled the astrologers in this space to explore ideas at a much deeper level and with greater insight. In the case of these seven professional astrologers, then, the arguments of Greenwood, Fuller, Hunt, and Radermacher were apparently not supported. Instead my research revealed that, rather than requiring a connection with the supernatural that was not within the control of the astrologer, it was the combination of the two people—astrologer and client—that constituted the energy of the horoscopic place. Using the symbols of the horoscope, it became a thickened place, deeply respectful, generated by personal insight, metaphorical imagination, and ritual practice. From these astrologers' perspectives, it was when their client's horoscopic landscape matched their clients' inner landscape that a deeper conversation followed that generated insights that had no need for external intervention, but rather, gave insightful feedback to the client on how they had shaped their lives and thus how they might be able to change it for the better as they moved forward in time.

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Saturn: An Auto-Ethnographic Enquiry into Contemporary Astrological Practice

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Abstract

Using qualitative and reflexive research methodology I explore the cultural role that the planet Saturn plays in contemporary communities of astrologers and the astrological way of life. Through an exploration of Saturn as a mythical figure and as symbol, I first discuss astrology's cultural background and demonstrate that astrologers have a cultural memory that has remained largely loyal to its roots in the Mesopotamian and Hellenistic periods. I then illuminate the way in which for contemporary astrologers sun-sign astrology functions as a contemporary expression of ancient myth. In addition, I examine the importance of the Saturn Return, which has since become an important symbol of transition, a rite of passage, and a modern form of enchantment that not only marks a life transition but also has the potential to effect one.

Keywords

Cosmologies, cultural astronomy, astrology, history.

Introduction

Astrology is the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth in what Bernadette Brady has referred to as 'humanity's dialogue with the heavens' (Brady 2003). My mother inadvertently introduced me to astrology. Around Christmas she would read aloud salient

passages from *Old Moore's Almanack* and comment on the astrological predictions made for the year ahead. The almanack, first printed in 1699 and in continuous print since then, publishes what Patrick Curry (1989: 101, 102) has referred to as prophetic speculation. As a teenager *Linda Goodman's Sun Signs*, the only astrology book ever to appear on the New York Times best seller list (Goodman 1972; Thomas Jr. 1995), was choice reading at school. I read my own sun sign, Capricorn, with a sense of deep disappointment. The Capricorn woman, Goodman claimed, needed patient help to get 'over her lack of personal confidence' and suffered from 'Saturnian gloominess, pessimism and depression', which was triggered by fear (Goodman 1972: 422, 418).

For years, I wrestled with the unsavoury idea that as a Capricorn my life trajectory would somehow be determined by stern, melancholic, serious Saturn, the planet that Goodman claimed would ultimately rule my actions and secret aims (Goodman 1972: 416). This perceived relationship between the zodiacal sign Capricorn and the planet Saturn was something that I wanted to investigate. As a practising astrologer and a researcher, one of my aims has been to find out what astrologers knew about Saturn and to explore the way this knowledge, if present, was applied in practice. In so doing, my intention was to try and make connections through scholarship to broader historical and cultural themes.

The length of time that Saturn requires to pass through the entire zodiac and to return to the position it held in the sky at the time of birth is approximately 29.5 years. The astrological term for this event, coined by the American astrologer Grant Lewi (1901–1951), is the Saturn Return. The introduction of the notion of the Saturn Return in 1936 highlighted the important role of the late twenties for adulthood and paved the way for what has since become an important rite of passage for astrologers in what could be viewed as a source of enchantment. Max Weber (1864–1920) (1991: 129–56) famously contended that science had contributed to disenchantment because it explained away magic and mystery; whereas the Saturn Return, in contrast, falls outside the remit of science and provides many in the astrological community with an overarching sense of meaning coupled with magical expectations. Jeffrey Arnett's research (2004: 14) subsequently confirmed the longer transition to adulthood in contemporary Western culture and suggested that only by their late twenties and early thirties do most Americans feel they have become adult. Given the growing academic interest in the cultural role of ritual, the Saturn Return offers insight into a contemporary non-secular rite that marks the transition to adulthood. Though not a religion, if by that one means beliefs in divine agents of some kind, research by Nicholas Campion (2013: 16) has suggested that between 25% and 75% of the

adult population 'believe' in astrology. If these figures are correct then astrology plays a significant role in contemporary culture, and a broader understanding of how astrologers think and work within their discipline is crucial to understanding the reason behind this belief.

Methodology

My approach is reminiscent of Kimberly Lau's (2002) experimental auto-ethnography. During the research period, I actively saturated myself in relevant astrological material. I became what Claude Lévi-Strauss (1966: 17) described as a *bricoleur*, a person able to make do 'with whatever is at hand'. Pamela Chapman Sanger (2003: 35-36) suggested that auto-ethnography is a research method able to give a voice to marginalised communities, and I adopted a qualitative and reflexive research methodology to construct an auto-ethnographic study of my own community. As a practising astrologer, taking an auto-ethnographic approach placed me in a position to open a window from the inside on astrology's cultural heritage and enabled an in-depth exploration of the ways in which contemporary astrologers engage the history of their practice. Taking my own experience as a focal point further allowed me, as Lisa Star (2010: 3) has argued, to reveal a 'new understanding of the culture' under review. Carolyn Ellis, Toney E. Adams, and Arthur P. Bochner (2011) suggested that the purpose of ethnography was to help '*insiders* (cultural members) and *outsiders* (cultural strangers) better understand the culture'. As an astrologer known to the Dutch astrological community, I was aware of my 'insider' status, yet, as a researcher, I was also aware of my role as 'outsider' (Aull-Davies 2002: 72-73). According to Charlotte Aull-Davies (2002: 229), navigating these two roles would be crucial for the overall authority of the results. An alternative view is given by Kirin Narayan (1993: 671-72), who argued against an insider/outsider dichotomy. Narayan claimed the researcher is never outside and is always implicated in the research. She pointed out that we should focus less on our status within the group and more on the quality of our relationship with the people we wanted to represent.

In order to explore the ways in which contemporary astrologers worked with Saturn and to assemble a body of qualitative data, I organised the Amsterdam Saturn Focus Group (ASFG). Because focus groups concentrate on a particular issue, Grahame Fallon (2002: 196) noted that they generate not only insight but also facilitate 'the disclosure and validation of group attitudes and thinking'. The focus group was held in English. To create a broader knowledge base I also formed an English-speaking Saturn Focus Group on Facebook (SFGFB). I chose

Facebook because, as Daniel Miller and Dan Slater (2000: 10) noted, the Internet provides 'a space for enacting core values, practices and identities'. Robert Kozinets (2002: 62) coined the term 'netnography' for the adapted form of ethnography that makes use of Internet-based data and social media. The degree of involvement in the SFGFB varied, the majority of the sixty-three members being 'tourists' who occasionally dropped by; however, there was also a group of approximately ten 'insiders' who were dedicated to the research project and able to provide relevant on-topic knowledge. As Kozinets (2002: 64) pointed out, when the group is small but well informed, it is possible to draw interesting conclusions. All participants in this research—including those who participated online—were required to sign interview release forms and were told that pseudonyms would be used.

Saturn and Astrology: Myth, Allegory, and Meaning

The oldest complete mythical account of Kronos is from the *Theogony* (eighth century BCE) written by the Greek poet Hesiod (c. 700 BCE) (Hesiod 1999; Versnel 1993: 90-91). Hesiod recounted how Earth, the mother of Kronos, sought help to avenge her children whom her partner, Great Heaven (Uranus), hid in a cavern at birth. Kronos, the youngest of her offspring, volunteered and was given a sharp-toothed sickle by his mother and instructed to castrate his father when he next came to lie with her. When night fell Kronos carried out the task and threw his father's genitals into the sea where they formed white foam from which the goddess of love, Aphrodite, appeared. Kronos married his sister Rhea but discovered his fate was to be overthrown by one of his own children, so he devoured each of them as they emerged from the womb. Rhea then hid her youngest baby Zeus 'in a cave...in the secret places of the numinous earth' and offered Kronos a large stone wrapped in swaddling to swallow (Hesiod 1999: 17). Nurtured by the goat Amalthea, Zeus grew to manhood and overthrew his father Kronos and imprisoned him in Tartarus (Hesiod 1999: 17-28), thus repeating the cycle of father and son. The common epithet for Kronos, *ankulomêtês*, originally meant 'with the curved sickle', thus showing the paradox bound up in the myth or in the double-bind between father and son. Yet it was more commonly interpreted as meaning 'with crooked tricks' or 'devious' (Versnel 1993: 94). The sickle was the weapon that made Uranus forever infertile, an instrument of outrage but also an agricultural tool. Kronos was ruler of the Golden Age, an era when according to Hesiod (1999: 40) men lived 'remote from toil and misery...wretched old age did not affect them' and they died as if overcome by sleep. Hesiod's concept of a Golden Age,

Versnel (1993: 96) suggested, is the source for a tradition of utopianism and 'wishing-time' which can be traced from this time up to the present day (1986: 135-36; Blundell 2014).

In Roman mythology, Kronos was known as Saturn, and the Roman writer Marcus Manilius (first century CE) fused the ancient mythology of the deposed father with Saturn's astronomical features—its distance from the sun and slow revolution—and painted a sombre early astrological portrait of Saturn:

Where...the universe subsides...from the depths of the midnight gloom gazes up at the back of the Earth, in that region Saturn exercises the powers that are his own: cast down himself in ages past from empire in the skies and throne of heaven, he wields as a father power over the fortune of fathers and the plight of the old. (Manilius 1977: 157)

Once fused, the Stoic search for explanations for natural phenomena meant myths were no longer simply interpreted as abstract allegory but, as Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl noted, became a method of concrete analogy:

Saturn no longer signified 'Time because Time devours temporal events as Saturn did his children'; but: 'Saturn, cast out from Olympus into Hades, rules the lowest region of the celestial globe'; or 'Saturn, himself an old man and a father, determines the fate of old men and fathers'. (1979: 142)

By analogy, Saturn's unfortunate family experience appointed him as ruler over celibacy, childlessness, widowhood, orphanhood, violence, and hidden malice (Hesiod 1999: 17). His dethronement resulted in associations with sadness, worry, chains, beggars, and captivity. Saturn's original high rank appointed him as ruler over great fame, and his role as an agricultural god established his guardianship over earth, wood, and husbandry.

Astrologers have continued to expand on these analogies, which also included categories of human character and destiny (Bills 1971: 242-62; Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl 1979: 132-43). Saturn's symbol, often referred to as an ancient scythe or sickle, can be used by astrologers as a metaphor to signify any number of other referents, which include the bones, graveyards, grave-diggers, lead, old men, owls, crows, thresholds, and walls (Lilly 1985 [1647]: 57-61). These referents are not randomly connected but rather intimately linked by way of a chain of correspondences to the original referent. As Peter Struck has noted, a symbol is able to produce 'a form of representation that has an intimate, ontological connection with its referent' (2004: 2). When approached as a symbol, therefore, Saturn can be viewed as an anchor for astrology's collective cultural memory. Jan Assmann (1995: 129) suggested that such cultural

memory reaches beyond the personal and is anchored in texts, cultural events, observance, and practice. Assmann conceived of these cultural memories as islands of time, as memory spaces, which can be retrieved and opened up when touched upon, so that ideas seemingly forgotten, 'suddenly become accessible again across millennia' (1995: 129). In all communities, Assmann (2008: 114-16) claimed, certain individuals can be seen as experts on a certain piece of the past and as such will be given a decisive role in shaping contemporary attitudes. With regard to contemporary astrological views of Saturn, Liz Greene (1976), in her re-evaluation of Saturn, loosened the bond between Saturn and its malefic past and framed Saturn in modern psychological terms. One can argue that Greene's re-evaluation of the role of Saturn in the horoscope is reminiscent of the eminent Italian Renaissance scholar and Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (b.1433–d.1499), who Angela Voss (2006: 28-29) maintained took a Platonic stance toward Saturn and transformed the then pervading melancholic, calamitous nature of Saturn into the hallmark of genius. In the Platonic view, Saturn's comparatively great distance from Earth placed him in closer relationship to the fixed stars and to the divine mind than any of the other planets. While cultural memory may be unable to preserve the past, it is able, as Assman (1995: 130) suggested, to reconstruct it within its contemporary frame of reference.

The resilience of the father theme in Saturn's astrological narrative, which my research revealed, confirmed the longevity of the long standing mythical association between Saturn and the father. Astrologers in the ASFG and the SFGFB also agreed that the traits associated with Capricorn in popular sun-sign astrology could be traced back to the myth of Kronos. Kronos was a 'crooked schemer' and for Capricorns the end justifies the means. Kronos was ambitious and overthrew his father, and Capricorn is an ambitious sign. Saturn is a cold and distant planet and Capricorns are cold and calculating, even in love. A small number of astrologers in the SFGFB, however, thought Saturn's mythology related specifically to a female deity or to the mother figure. According to Hesiod (1999: 9, 17) in the mythology it was Great Earth who enlisted the help of Kronos, and it was the action taken by his sister/wife Rhea that eventually sealed his fate. Although the female protagonists clearly played a major role in the myth, there was a lack of evidence in the astrological literature to support Saturn's direct association with a female goddess. This appeared to be a wholly new phenomenon which might suggest a break among some astrologers with certain fundamental distinctions which astrologers have established over time with regard to Saturn. This contemporary development could be a result of the emergence in the latter half of the twentieth century of the Goddess

movement, one feature of which Denise Dijk suggested was the reversal of patriarchal myths of creation (Dijk 1983: 262). Johan, a member of the SFGFB, agreed that his description of the Mesopotamian god Ninurta, Saturn's Babylonian predecessor, was grounded in ancient astronomical perceptions of the planet, its astrological meaning being derived from its appearance. Johan's adherence to a view of Saturn that is ultimately based on ancient astronomical/astrological tradition, highlighted the diversity of opinions held by contemporary astrologers and again confirmed Assman's (1995: 132) idea that cultural memory comprises a body of reusable material specific to each society and epoch.

Contemporary Views on the Sun-Sign Capricorn

Taking these thoughts and ideas into account, I then explored the depiction of Capricorn in popular astrology and its relationship, if any, with the malefic qualities astrologers had traditionally assigned to Saturn, which is understood as the planet that 'rules' the sign of Capricorn.

It is possible to discuss the sun-sign Capricorn with astrologers in terms of a recognisable stereotype. In order to obtain a view of the qualities currently associated with the sign I carried out a Google search for the word 'Capricorn'. The following citations are representative of online sun-sign delineations. Astrology.com, for example, claimed:

Capricorn...is all about hard work... Capricorns are both ambitious and determined... Capricorns want to get to the top of their chosen field so that they can reap the benefits of success; namely fame, prestige and money... Capricorn is ruled by Saturn... In Roman mythology...the father of many of the gods. (No author 2017)

Stefan Stenudd (2015), on his website *True Horoscope Traits of the Goat*, wrote:

Capricorn belongs to the element earth, its quality is cardinal... Its Ruler is Saturn, the stern planet of tradition and duty... Capricorn's motto is: 'I use'.

Comparing these descriptions with earlier astrological texts enables an understanding of the way in which the astrological description of the planet has been expressed through the lens of contemporary culture, and thus shows how the description has changed in different cultural contexts. In the second century CE, for example, Greek astrologer Vettius Valens (120–175) wrote of Capricorn:

Capricorn is the house of Kronos, feminine, tropical, earthy, destructive, unfruitful, descending, chilled, mute, cause of evils, licentious, servile, enigmatical, dual-natured...a zoidion [zodiac sign] for hunchbacks and cripples, the setting of the cosmos, indicator of toil and trouble. (Valens 2010: 17)

In the tenth century, Islamic astrologer and mathematician Alcabitus (d.967) described Saturn in this way 'he is bad, masculine, in daytime cold, dry, melancholy...he presides over fathers...the heavy...the dead, magicians, demons, devils...miserly gains, avarice...Judaism...black clothing' (Alcabitus Bodleian Ms. Codex, March 663, cited in Klibansky, Panofsky, and Saxl 1979: 131-32). Such laden depictions of the malefic face of Saturn/Capricorn are currently only to be found in old astrological texts; however, the presence of this particular Saturn/ Capricorn typology can be encountered in contemporary popular culture.

According to William Compson (2003: 20), the author J.K. Rowling studied French and Classics at Essex University and thus, one can argue, may have been familiar with the mythology and history of Kronus/ Saturn. If so, then it could be suggested that the birthdates Rowling chose for her characters were not random. Indeed, in 2010 a twelve-page, handwritten, and illustrated child's personal horoscope Rowling created as a gift for a friend, turned up for evaluation on the British television programme *The Antiques Roadshow*, a show in which a group of experts examine and value antiques and collectibles, and provided evidence that Rowling had an understanding of the qualities associated with Saturn and of the planet's relationship to Capricorn. In Rowling's *Harry Potter* books, Harry's evil nemesis and the main protagonist in the series is Lord Voldemort, 'the most dangerous Dark wizard of all time' (Rowling 2005: 258). Voldemort was born in an orphanage on New Year's Eve, hence he was born under the zodiac sign Capricorn (2005: 249). A second dour figure appearing in the *Harry Potter* series is also a Capricorn: the Potions Master and Professor of Defense against the Dark Arts, Severus Snape. On her official website *Pottermore*, Rowling listed Snape's date of birth as 9 January (Rowling n.d.). Rowling described Snape as 'a thin man with sallow skin, a hooked nose and greasy, shoulder length black hair' (Rowling 1999: 62). Black-robed and cryptic by nature, Snape's sharp nose was reminiscent of Saturn's longstanding association, noted by Alcabitus, with Judaism, and is a reminder of the anti-Semitic caricatures used in the Middle Ages to depict Jews (Burnett, Yamamoto, and Yano 2004: 65; Zafran 1979: 21). It could be suggested that astrological knowledge helped Rowling shape two complex, three-dimensional characters: the unremittingly evil, Voldemort, reflected in the writings of Alcabitus, and the wholly ambiguous Snape, whose true character and ultimate loyalty to Harry Potter was only finally revealed in the seventh and final book of the series. Snape is reflected in the contemporary psychological view of Saturn, as the alchemical lead from which, with hard work, we may ultimately extract gold (Greene 1976: 14).

I wanted to know how contemporary astrologers remember the old malefic Saturn. When specifically asked to give only key words for the negative Capricorn stereotype, the SFGFB members responded with the following words: cold disciplinarians; cold and mechanic; overly serious; over authoritarian; pessimistic; fearful; depressive; expecting worst-case scenarios; suspicion; fear mongers; doom thinkers; cranky like old people; emotionally distant. In the astrological canon, Saturn's cold nature was associated with its astronomical distance from the sun, and the planet's slow revolution gave him rulership of old age (Ptolemy 1917: 42). The long-standing connection between the planet Saturn and the melancholic humor could be seen reflected in the keywords 'doom thinkers', 'depressive' 'pessimistic', and 'fearful'. These results confirmed the association I had established between Kronos/Saturn and the negative Capricorn stereotype and underlined the longevity and robustness of some of the astrological associations between Kronos/ Saturn and Capricorn, which extended at least as far back as Ptolemy (1917: 42). Of the Capricorn characteristics I had listed, there were two notable omissions: 'ambition', which I had linked to Kronos' dethronement of his father and 'the end justifies the means', which I had linked to Kronos' epithet, 'crooked-schemer' (Hesiod 1999: 17). Taking the key word 'ambition' as an example, it is possible for astrologers to argue that the Capricorn stereotype is capable of change. While astrologer Erin Sullivan (2000: 7) linked Kronos' murder of his father to ambition, contemporary astrologers, like Hetty in my ASFG, questioned whether ambition actually was a negative Capricorn trait. In a society in which success is considered important, it is even possible that for contemporary astrologers, ambition is becoming a positive Capricorn trait.

The Saturn Return

The return of Saturn to the exact position it held at the time of birth takes approximately 29.5 years and, using astrological software, it can be accurately timed to the minute. Lewi first published his findings on the Saturn Return based on fourteen years research into the cycle of Saturn in 1936, under the pseudonym Michael Bogan in *Horoscope* (Weschcke 1992: xvii). The result of the changes set in motion by the Saturn Return, Lewi wrote, are 'permanent in their effects' (1992: 337). Lewi's research suggested that the first Saturn Return would bring about 'a complete revision of ideas and plans, so that by the time the aspect is passed you are a new person, living a new life with a deeper purpose... [Y]ou will have put away childish things and be ready to take your place in the world as an adult' (1992: 337). Lewi's ideas resonate through

contemporary astrological literature; for example, Sullivan proposed that the first Return (at age 29-30 years) is about 'separating from the parental mould' and is related to 'rebirth' and the opportunity 'to look at one's life from a new perspective' (Sullivan 2000: 72). This view is echoed online. On 15 October 2014 I carried out a Google search using the term 'Saturn Return' and received over six million potential hits. The website 'Astrostyle', accessed 27 February 2015, is representative of the results and claimed that 'the first Saturn Return is a bit like a cosmic bar mitzvah, quinceanera or communion...a rite of passage welcoming you into your more mature role'.

The term 'rite of passage' was devised by ethnographer Arnold van Gennep (1873–1957) (1977 [1909]: 10-11) to describe an individual's transition in societies from one important phase to another. Van Gennep noted the importance of the initial experience—the first pregnancy, the first harvest, the first menses, and so on—and suggested 'once the new domain or situation has been entered, the repetition of the first act has a decreasing importance...[since] psychologically the second act no longer presents anything new' (van Gennep 1977: 176-78). All of the astrologers who participated in my research were over thirty years of age and discussions centred on the second Saturn Return which takes place at around age sixty. The second return (at age 59-60 years), Sullivan claimed, is about 'reaping the rewards of life's journey' (Sullivan 2000: 86). Depending on one's attitude, this could be either a liberating experience or 'a time of ossification and physical death' (2000: 88). In order to make some comparison between those experiencing their first Saturn Return, at around age thirty, I signed up to receive posts from numerous weblogs. Violet's in-depth analyses of her first Saturn Return encapsulated the general reported on-line experience; she discussed being in a 'state of transition' and ended by saying she is now more mature and ready to 'learn under the guidance of the old scythe bearer' (Violet 2013).

The idea that the period of time during which the Saturn Return takes place is different in some way to other time is reminiscent of the ideas of the twentieth century historian of religion Mircea Eliade (1907–1986). Eliade suggested that there are two versions of time, one of which was sacred or mythical and 'periodically reintegrated by means of rites' and one which was temporal and allowed 'no room for mystery or divine presence' (Eliade 1987: 70, 71). For archaic cultures, Eliade suggested, the sky reveals transcendence and cosmic life is imagined in the form of a circular course. Ritual ceremonies, such as that performed at the New Year, celebrated cosmic renewal and the birth of a new, pure, holy time. Eliade discussed the importance that rites of passage or initiations played when people faced radical change, but recognised that initiation, as a

religious act, no longer exists in modern, largely non-religious society. Eliade suggested that the loss of rites of passage, which marked out liminal phases in a person's life, left behind vague memories and even nostalgia for these ceremonies (Eliade 1987: 184-88). The idea that secularisation, intellectualisation and rationalisation have led to an accompanying loss of overarching meanings and spiritual connections is reminiscent of Weber's development of Friedrich Schiller's notion of the 'disenchantment of the world' (Weber 1991: 139). The significance astrologers attached to the Saturn Return, however, questioned this concept of disenchantment. It is possible that the Saturn Return was an expression of the emerging antinomian understanding of modernity, which Michael Saler (2006: 702) referred to as a 'specifically modern "disenchanted" enchantment', one feature of which was that it had the capacity to delight but not to delude. The potential to renew one's life, to experience a rite of passage, also introduced the possibility to re-enchant one's own life or to re-invent one's self anew. This idea of the Saturn Return appeared to contradict Roy Willis and Patrick Curry's view of an initially Platonic but predominantly Aristotelian/Ptolemaic astrology, which had become rationalised to such an extent that it had become a Machine of Destiny and, in effect, disenchanted (Willis and Curry 2004: 109). This process, Willis and Curry wrote, 'entailed a significant impoverishment of symbolism, and consequently its potential for enchantment, whose hallmark is existential wonder' (2004: 109). The sense of lost meaning and significance that accompanied disenchantment stands in sharp contrast with the sense of meaningfulness that accompanied individual stories of the SFGFB astrologers' Saturn Return experiences. Furthermore, since astrologers are able to know in advance when the Saturn Return will occur, if they understand its meaning, then it has the potential to not only mark a transition but also to actively affect one.

The Saturn Return in the Field

In order to find out what contemporary astrologers thought of the Saturn Return, I posed a number of questions to the SFGFB members. I quoted astrologer Robert Hand, who suggested that the Saturn Return was 'one of the most important times in your life'—a time of endings and new beginnings (1976: 348). I asked the group 'Is this how the Saturn Return works? Are there alternative views?' Janis recounted how, at the time of her second Saturn Return in 2001, she was trying to move from Kent. Heavy traffic meant that her living room 'stank like a garage' and she was 'having a nervous breakdown'. Her partner, she said, was adamant that 'he would only leave our house in a box'. I noted the words in

Janis's text that seemed to me to describe Saturn: 'stressed', 'difficulty', 'pruning', 'depression', 'spending a lot of time on my own'. Angela described an 'off and on' relationship she had with an elderly man, who became a father figure to her. She talked about 'the father I never knew... I remember how proud I was when we went out lunching or dining and the waiter referred to him as "being my father". I loved that.' Angela said the relationship 'was based on a lie' and couldn't last, but that the Saturn Return made her accept 'the absence of a father in my life'. Karen referred to her second Saturn Return as 'a profound passage'. In 2006–2007, Karen was diagnosed with chronic leukaemia and required daily medication. She recalled feeling the transition to 'Elder very clearly'. She wrote, 'I felt for the first time how much I cared about future generations and for the "world without me"'. The last respondents took up Karen's idea of the transition to Eldership. Arni wrote, 'Yes the Elder role comes up, its physical impact most strongly present perhaps at the second return—"maturation" is a key word here, a concretization of both responsibility to self and others'. Arni noted the challenging choice of 'become Elder or elderly, dependable or dependent'. Betty, who had recently experienced her second Saturn Return, had been having health issues and had reached the conclusion that she could 'no longer live independently'. Betty wrote, 'I share the feeling of the second Saturn Return as a transition to Elder'.

In summary regarding how these astrologers experienced the Saturn Return, a common thread among them was the idea of transition. One of the themes with which most of the SFGFB astrologers identified was the taking on of the role of Elder and the confrontation with what Arni referred to as 'the rigours of aging'. Given that all the participants in this thread were discussing the experience of the second Saturn Return, van Gennep's recognition of the comparative importance of the first time we experience an event was significant (van Gennep 1977 [1909]: 176–78). It was noticeable that no-one mentioned the idea that they were starting life anew, though considering the type of events respondents describe, this phrase would have been apposite. Furthermore, based on my limited findings, I have concluded that it is possible to identify a number of important themes in connection with the Saturn Return.

First, while life-changing events do not conveniently wait for the return of Saturn, the coming together of events experienced as important and the astrological knowledge that a significant planetary cycle is ending and a new planetary cycle is about to begin, offered the possibility of giving meaning and context to events. Astrologers were also able to share the experience with other astrological 'insiders'. This was the stated aim of the Facebook page, *Love Your Saturn Return*: 'This space

offers a way to connect with others who are going through the same dramatic life changes and offers a loving community where you can spread compassion and feel heard’.

The second important function of the Saturn Return reflects the concept of a ‘rite of passage’. Victor Turner (1920–1983) noted that rites of passage were most noticeable in small-scale cyclical societies which were bound to biological or meteorological rhythms, such as the phases of the Moon, rather than to technological innovation (Turner 1964: 4). Turner claimed rites of passage constitute a process, a becoming, even a transformation between states—legal, physical, mental, or emotional—in which a person or group may be found at a particular time. Astrology is based on the cyclical movement of the heavens. Astrological forecasting offers a conceptual framework that identifies when the Saturn Return will be in effect and thereby encourages people to look ahead and see beyond any difficulties they might be experiencing. I did not ask astrologers for the date that their Saturn Return took place. Nevertheless, specific dates were given by the astrologers themselves. This suggested that the timing of these past events was relevant to them. It seems very likely that the Saturn Return acts as a marker that singles out and gives chronological sequence to transitional moments in the astrologers’ personal narrative and life story. The amount of online involvement with the Saturn Return also suggests widespread interest in this cyclical approach. If a society is understood as a group of people who share the same culture (Tischler 2014: 411), then such interest in the Saturn Return appears to have become a recognisable symbol within astrological society.

Finally, it was also possible to view the Saturn return within the context of enchantment. One of the meanings of enchantment is ‘to delight’ or ‘to captivate utterly’ (McLeod and Hanks 1985: 365). The key to understanding the planet Saturn in this way comes through the god Saturn’s ancient link with the Golden Age and with wishing-time, as noted previously by Versnel (1993: 96). Lewi’s idea of complete renewal, the possibility of becoming ‘a new person living a new life’, suggested that it was possible to wipe the slate clean at the Saturn Return and somehow start life anew (Lewi 1992: 337). This was a message that astrologers could clearly relate to and to whom the Saturn Return made sense and thus was not delusory. When understood as a state of transition or a rite of passage, the critical period around thirty which has relevance both to astrologers and non-astrologers alike (Arnett 2004: 15) can be viewed as a liminal period. For astrologers however, the liminal period is defined by specific dates and imbued with meaning derived from a belief system that is rooted in a mythical past. The Saturn Return

is simultaneously a moment of possible personal redemption and a modern form of re-enchantment, which seems to reflect a need within contemporary society to believe in something larger than oneself.

Conclusion

My research has demonstrated the usefulness of an auto-ethnographical approach to cultural and religious studies in general and the usefulness of social media for conducting online research. The sense of community among those who participated was facilitated by the use of a common language, in this case, that of astrology. One of my initial aims was to understand the background of what I had perceived to be a negative Capricorn stereotype in sun-sign astrology, and, on reflection, it was this search that coloured my results. Even at this late stage, however, one can appreciate that to contemporary astrologers, Saturn also has a positive side. In my discussions with astrologers, it was this positive side of the Saturn archetype, reflected in a sense of shared responsibility and shared commitment to establishing the essence of Saturn's contemporary meaning, that I encountered. When taken as a positive force Lewi (1992: 19) claimed what the astrological community as a whole appears to accept, namely, that Saturn is a teacher and guide. Saturn thus represents the extension of the Self and its establishment in the world, reflecting both the drive for self-preservation and the acceptance of the limitations of our finite existence. In the Saturn Return, Lewi laid the groundwork for a contemporary modern ritual, able to fulfill a cultural need formerly satisfied by religion, but that lies outside the remit of science.

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**Is the Medium the Message? A Consideration of
Whether the Internet Can be Used Effectively
for Astrological Consultations***

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Abstract

While a large body of literature exists on the practice and validity of online religious activity and rituals, to date no literature exists investigating the validity of the online astrological consultation and whether or not the medium of the Internet can influence the connection between astrologer and client. My initial qualitative research with sixty-five astrologers, conducted between 2012 and 2014, revealed that over sixty percent of astrologers use the Internet for astrological consultations with clients. Taking this number as my dataset, my aim was then to investigate whether, when astrologers conducted consultations for clients online, the chart continued to have agency in creating a meaningful consultation space. My results showed that the online medium did not impact on the message or content of the consultation and that, as in face-to-face astrological consultations, the effectiveness and validity of the consultation was independent of the media used to hold it.

Keywords

Astrology, Internet, consultation, Marshall McLuhan, online religion.

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Introduction

An astrological consultation occurs when an astrologer interprets a horoscope for a client. Lindsay Radermacher (2011), a practising astrologer in the UK, described an astrological consultation as taking place over a specified period of time in a reasonably private place with a fee paid to the astrologer. It involved a discussion of the client's situation, motivation, state of mind, and possibly a current question or decision for which the client was seeking guidance. Where it differed from a non-astrological consultation, such as a counselling or therapy session, was by the presence of the client's birth chart as the point of reference in the discussion (2011: 124-25). For Radermacher, interpreting the chart was, she considered, a form of divination in which ritual plays a role. She wrote, 'Even for the smallest question, diviners need ritual in order to create a "sacred space" or receptive state of mind in which they can be "visited" by the divine' (2011: 85). For Radermacher, the process that occurred in the astrological consultation was one whereby a space, separate from the surrounding space, was created between the astrologer and the client. This space, she believed, facilitated what she termed 'a dialogue with the divine' (2011: 156). She argued that,

The divine encounter, on the other hand, is characterised by an element of surprise, and sometimes of shock, as the case material demonstrated. It is, as observed earlier, as if the 'other', in whatever form it is described, takes the initiative and speaks to the astrologer: the address comes from the other and is not, therefore, within the control of the astrologer. (2011: 127)

Radermacher claimed that it was the active physical presence of the birth chart in the consultation that turned the consultation from a dyad of astrologer and client into a triad involving this dialogue with the divine. She explained this dialogue as 'when the astrologer has a strong sense of being in touch with something outside the parameters of normal human experience' (2011: 126). Describing the meeting with the divine that participants experience in the space created in the consultation, she wrote, 'We are, then, validating the interpersonal as potentially a space for the transpersonal. This underlines the vital link between religion and astrological divination which has, in my view, not been acknowledged' (2011: 176).

The experience of meeting with something 'outside the parameters of normal human experience' during an astrological consultation, and of a different space being created, was not unique to Radermacher. Astrologer Demetra George called this space, 'space for the presence of the

transcendent', while another astrologer Geoffrey Cornelius, like Radermacher, referred to the experience of the consultation as 'entering into a dialogue with the divine' (George 2009: 251; Cornelius 1994: xix). Astrologer Liz Greene viewed the consultation process in the following way:

Much of what we do for a client has nothing to do with the specific configurations we are looking at, but rather, with the fact that the chart, and ultimately God or the gods through the patterns of the chart, affirm the right of the person to be what he or she is. (Sharman-Burke and Greene 1997: 177)

Other scholars, however, differed in this necessity for divinity to be part of an astrological consultation. Darrelyn Gunzburg's research was predicated on the view that initially, 'In talking with practicing astrologers, most agree that when they read a chart for a client at its best something happens in the consultation space that is unutterable and inarticulate' (Gunzburg 2011: 182-83). Thus, in order to investigate the phenomenology of this 'unutterable and inarticulate' experience, between 2007 and 2010 Gunzburg conducted semi-structured qualitative interviews with twenty-three practicing, teaching, and consulting astrologers. Gunzburg's research found that their experiences could be mapped to what Mihály Csíkszentmihályi defined as a creative process of flow, with Gunzburg concluding that the reading of a chart is a 'secular creative endeavour' (2011: 198).

What appeared to be common between on the one hand Radermacher's research and the views of the astrologers quoted above, and on the other hand, Gunzburg's research, was the experience of the chart having agency and facilitating a space separate from the surrounding space. In Gunzburg's interview with professional astrologer and author Darby Costello, speaking about interpreting a chart, Costello said to Gunzburg, 'The person hands me the key to their inner landscape and I go into their inner landscape with my particular eye...' (Gunzburg 2011: 183). She continued, describing the passing of time in the space, 'Beautifully. The most beautiful place. No matter how frightened or tormented I am, once I'm there, there's nothing else except there. It's another time, it's completely central...' (2011: 194). Astrologer Evelyn Roberts, like Radermacher, experienced the space as being outside the control of the astrologer. She told Gunzburg, 'It's a space that doesn't exist anywhere else...but when I go into the space of doing a reading it's like something else takes over and...it's a very joyful place for me' (2011: 196). Another astrologer, Jack Fertig, described the end of the reading: 'You come out of the space and come back to the real world feeling exhausted, but happy and productive...' (2011: 194).

Although the consultations designated above referred to the traditional, offline, face-to-face consultations, I was interested in understanding how astrologers' experiences were affected by the online space of the Internet. My initial qualitative research with sixty-five astrologers, conducted between 2012 and 2014, revealed that over sixty percent of astrologers use the Internet for astrological consultations with clients. Taking this number as my dataset, my aim was then to investigate whether, when astrologers conducted consultations for clients online, the chart continued to have the same form of agency in creating a meaningful consultation space.

The Online Space

The concept of a space called 'cyberspace' was developed by American author William Gibson in his 1984 novel, *Neuromancer* (Gibson 1995 [1984]: 67). Gibson's cyberspace was a fully immersive, three-dimensional virtual environment, which the visitor entered with all five senses and where they were temporarily out of touch with the physical world (1995 [1984]: 217). A body of literature discussing cyberspace started to appear during the late 1980s. At this point, however, cyberspace was perceived as different to the physical network known as the Internet which was developing simultaneously but separately. It was not until 1990 that the Internet was first associated with cyberspace by John Perry Barlow (Barlow 1990). At that stage it was believed that the Internet was in the process of becoming a Gibsonian, three-dimensional virtual reality. Michael Benedikt, for example, one of the earliest Internet scholars, who believed that a fully immersive environment was imminent, called this 'a technology very nearly achieved' (Benedikt 1991a: 131).

In the literature, the Internet/cyberspace is usually portrayed as a space in itself, separate from the physical world. One example of this comes from 1991, when Benedikt called cyberspace 'A new universe, a parallel universe created and sustained by the world's computers and communication lines' and 'a place, one place, limitless' (Benedikt 1991b: 1-3). By the early twenty-first century, authors such as Anastasia Karaflogka and David Bell had begun to distinguish this space from the physical network that supported it and thus, once more, separated the Internet from cyberspace. While 'The Internet' was used to refer to the physical network, 'cyberspace' was the virtual space or place people go to when they use the Internet. Discussing the public's tendency to use the terms 'Internet' and 'cyberspace' interchangeably, in 2006 Karaflogka argued that, although she saw them as entirely distinct from each other, the notion of cyberspace as a place contributed to the growth of the

real-life network that is the Internet (Karaflogka 2006: 3). Bell also differentiated between cyberspace and the physical hardware and software that allowed the Internet to exist, or what he called, 'The network of computers, modems, communication links, nodes and pathways that connect users into something (or some things) like the Internet, the World Wide Web, the information superhighway and so on' (Bell 2000: 2). Like Karaflogka, Bell believed there was another dimension to the Internet which he called 'everywhere and nowhere' (2000: 2). In Bell's words:

We have to move beyond the simple answer that physically we are seated in front of a monitor... We are simultaneously making ourselves over as data, as bits and bytes, as code, relocating ourselves in the space behind the screen, between screens, everywhere and nowhere. (2000: 3)

Thus using this definition, in this other parallel universe the person in front of the monitor is not just visiting a website, they are clearly entering another world. This world is what Karaflogka called cyberspace or, as she put it, 'where the act of connectivity and interactivity takes place' (Karaflogka 2006: 24). She described it as a place which, although part of the network, was nevertheless completely different from it (2006: 25). To clearly differentiate between the two she used the term 'Internet' to refer to the physical network and 'cyberspace' to refer to the place Bell called 'everywhere and nowhere' (2006: 25). By the time Bell and Karaflogka were writing, it had become clear that the Internet had developed differently to the three-dimensional world anticipated by the early theorists. Although Gibson's cyberspace has not, as yet, however, become a reality, the idea of cyberspace as a separate space can still be found in some literature up to the present day. Writing in 2015, Isabelle Jonveaux, for example, discussed the idea of the Internet as a separate world from the mundane world (Jonveaux 2015: 31).

This idea of separation was also explored in 1996 by geographer Edward Soja, who sought a theory of space that reflected lived experience. He created a way of thinking about space that encompassed both the way people experience space on a day-to-day level, and the way they conceptualise it. He coined the term 'Thirdspace' to represent what he called 'an other way' of looking at space (Soja 1996: 11). By 'an other', he meant other than a view of space that contained a gulf between practical or lived space, and the theoretical view of space (1996: 2). According to Soja, Thirdspace is people's everyday experience of the space in which they live. In his words, Thirdspace is 'the creation of another mode of thinking about space that draws upon the material and mental spaces of the material dualism, but extends well beyond them in scope and

substance, and meaning' (1996: 11). Soja believed that a dualistic view of space is part of the modern Western worldview, and that the modern mindset has become accustomed to viewing space in that way. Thirdspace was a composite of all spaces and designed to break down what he termed a 'rigid dichotomy' (1996: 11).

The view of cyberspace as a place separate from the physical world is what Lars Qvortrup called, 'the dualistic cyberspace concept' (2002: 14). Opposed to this, in his view, is the positivist cyberspace concept, where cyberspace is considered a representation of real space. This debate highlighted by Qvortrup, of whether cyberspace is a separate world or an extension of the offline world, would be frequently debated in the first decade of the twenty-first century. Qvortrup, however, rejected both of these views and opted for a third option, which he termed 'the phenomenological space concept' (2002: 16). He viewed cyberspace not as a separate place, or a representation of real space, but as a representation of space experience, and argued that how we build virtual reality models, such as cyberspace, is based on how we experience space. Thus, cyberspace reflects how we experience space with our physical senses and how we interact with objects in space (2002: 6). He concluded that in order to construct cyberspace, it was necessary to construct a technological representation of space experience and not a technological representation of space (2002: 20).

Qvortrup was not the only theorist to challenge a dualistic view of the Internet. This had been done at the first cyberspace conference held in Texas in 1990 by Allucquere Rosanne Stone who wrote:

No matter how virtual the subject may become, there is always a body attached. It may be off somewhere else—and that 'somewhere else' may be a privileged point of view—but consciousness remains firmly rooted in the physical. (Stone 1991: 111)

As the Internet developed, challenges to the dualistic theory continued. Changes in how the Internet was being used would, according to later theorists such as Wendy Robinson and also Stephen Graham, change how people viewed the Internet. Both Robinson and Graham described an Internet where the online and offline worlds had merged, which Robinson called 'Online life', and Graham described as a global-local world which comprised of the material and the virtual (Robinson 2006: 55-56; Graham 2010: 96). While the cyberspace of Robinson and Graham bears some resemblance to Qvortrup's positivist view of cyberspace, it is more closely related to Soja's Thirdspace in that like Thirdspace, it is comprised of both the offline world of the physical and the online world of the mental, or in Soja's terms, lived space and theoretical space.

Literature arguing for what Qvortrup calls 'the dualistic cyberspace concept' frequently portrays cyberspace as qualitatively different from the offline world, sometimes seeing it as a sacred space, as opposed to the mundane quality of offline space. Many of the earlier cyberspace theorists, such as Michael Heim or Nicole Stenger, compared it to sacred places or abodes of the divine (Heim 1991: 69; Stenger 1991: 52). As late as 2005, Douglas Cowan stated that the virtual world of cyberspace is seen as somehow superior to the material world (Cowan 2005a: 258). Christopher Partridge, in 2006, described it as 'numinous':

There is, it would seem, something peculiarly numinous about the very existence of cyberspace and what it enables the human imagination to achieve. Cyberspace has a transcendent quality. There is something enchanting about its very existence, not to say its exotic possibilities. (Partridge 2006: 162)

Partridge was referring to the qualities of non-physicality and transcendence or what Gibson had called 'the bodiless exultation of cyberspace' (Gibson 1995 [1984]: 12). It was these qualities, Partridge believed, that made the Internet attractive to religious believers and spiritual seekers (Partridge 2006: 135). This raises the question as to whether online religious rituals can form an amalgam with sacred activity in cyberspace and, if so, whether that can be used as a comparator with astrological consultations.

Online Religious Rituals

Ritual is described by Christopher Helland as 'purposeful engagement with the sacred (whatever the sacred may be for those involved)' (Helland 2013: 27). So using this definition of 'purposeful engagement', I looked for examples of rituals that were traditionally celebrated offline and were now taking place in cyberspace. What I found was often described with a discussion on the potential changes the move from offline to online could bring to the ritual, and how it was experienced by the participants. One example of this was Stephen O'Leary, who compared an online Neopagan ritual to the Christian Eucharist where virtual bread, salt, and candles were just as acceptable as their physical equivalents (O'Leary 2004 [1997]: 49-50). Opinions on the suitability of cyberspace for religious rituals varied from cyberspace being inherently suited to religious rituals, that the validity of the rituals was not affected by the medium, and, to a lesser extent, that online rituals were somehow not as real or valid as offline rituals and did not fully satisfy the spiritual needs of the participants (Arthur 2002: 305; O'Leary 2004 [1997]: 54;

Campbell 2005: 191). Heidi Campbell, for example, believed that participation in online religious communities did not fully meet religious members' desire for face-to-face interaction and a shared, embodied worship experience, so the online communities represented only one part of an individual's overall religious involvement (Campbell 2005: 191). Both Shawn Arthur and Brenda Brasher argued for the suitability of cyberspace for online rituals, given how both cyberspace and online rituals were concerned with being outside space and time (Brasher 2004 [2001]: 47-56; Arthur 2002: 305). Arthur argued that this suitability was the reason for the growing popularity of cyber-rituals (Arthur 2002: 305). Using the example of online Wiccan rituals, he claimed that the placelessness and timelessness of cyberspace had an obvious parallel to a Wiccan understanding of sacred space, stating that 'the parts of cyberspace that Wiccans utilise are being appropriated by them and taken out of the ambiguous virtual realm into a created pseudo-simulation of real space' (Arthur 2002: 307). If Arthur's argument is applied to an astrological consultation, it suggests that cyberspace is a suitable venue for an astrological consultation also. The placelessness and timelessness he saw as common to both cyberspace and Wiccan ritual, has clear parallels with the space described by Gunzburg's astrologers, such as Evelyn Roberts who portrayed the astrological consultation space as 'space that doesn't exist anywhere else' (Gunzburg 2011: 196).

O'Leary and Helland argued the view that the validity of the ritual transcended the medium (O'Leary 2004 [1997]: 47-48; Helland 2013: 27). Both emphasised the role of the participants in validating the ritual. O'Leary concluded that the validity of a sacred ritual is not necessarily linked to physical presence (O'Leary 2004 [1997]: 47-48). In his view, 'It is the declarative act of setting the space apart that sacralizes the acts within that space, which turns further uses of ordinary language into performative speech acts—for those who take the ritual seriously' (O'Leary 2004 [1997]: 52). He drew parallels with the granting of a plenary indulgence to participants in a televised Catholic Mass (O'Leary 2004 [1997]: 48). According to O'Leary and later confirmed by Helland, the preparation for the rituals, or what Helland termed 'the script', was the means for actually creating the space, and it was the ritual itself which turned cyberspace into a place where the ritual could occur (O'Leary 2004 [1997]: 30). A clear parallel can be drawn between these findings of O'Leary and Helland and those of Radermacher and Gunzburg, where it was the agency of the astrological chart that facilitated a space separate from the surrounding space in the consultation (Radermacher 2011: 156; Gunzburg 2011: 182-83).

Writing in 2013, Helland considered the question of whether or not online rituals were real rituals and if the person needed to be bodily present to be a participant in a religious ritual (Helland 2013: 26). He concluded that it was the intention of the individuals that made the ritual 'real'. Citing O'Leary's 1996 conclusions, Helland also concluded that, 'People in these new online environments created places where ritual could occur and through their own construction, shared narratives and similar vision, they perceived these places to be special, set apart, and even sacred' (Helland 2013: 30). Like O'Leary, he reasoned that it was possible to create a virtual sacred space that was qualitatively different from the surrounding space.

This same point was made by Cowan, who described how the space in which the online ritual occurs could be sacralised and thus made separate from the larger enclosing space (Cowan 2005b: 138). Discussing online Pagan rituals, he stated: 'It is the psychic and imaginative connection established by their shared ritual world that allows for the blessings to occur' (2005b: 134). He observed that this did not make it 'less real, less efficacious, or less significant for its participants because of this than those rituals that take place in more traditional venues' (2005b: 138).

Taking all of this into account, academic research on online rituals tends, with some reservations, to support the view that the validity or sacredness of a ritual is not affected by the medium and that it is the intention of the participants and the steps taken to prepare the online space that turns cyberspace into an appropriate venue for the ritual. Arthur and Brasher both argued that cyberspace was inherently suitable as a container for rituals, as both cyberspace and rituals involved a sense of timelessness and placeness (Arthur 2002: 305; Brasher 2004 [2001]: 47-56).

The findings of the research on online rituals in this respect were contrary to the views of Marshall McLuhan, who in 1964 famously claimed that 'the medium is the message' (McLuhan 1964: 7). McLuhan argued that the medium was more important than its content in its impact on society and believed that it was the medium that should be the focus of study: 'For the "message" of any medium or technology is the change of scale or pace or pattern that it introduces into human affairs' (1964: 8). The message of the railway, for example, was the acceleration of movement and transportation, and new kinds of cities, work, and leisure were created as a result (1964: 8). He argued that the content of a medium distracted us from the effects that the medium had on society, and likened this process to a juicy piece of meat carried by a burglar to distract a watchdog (1964: 19). McLuhan believed this was largely overlooked by society (1964: 11).

In the digital age, the work of McLuhan has been examined in relation to the medium of the Internet. Citing McLuhan's claim that hearing the news on the radio differed to hearing and seeing it via a television, media professor Paul Levinson asked how reading the news from the Internet differs from hearing it on the radio or reading it from a newspaper (Levinson 1999: 2). He concluded that McLuhan's theories were as relevant in the digital age as they were before the era of the personal computer and were applicable to the world of the Internet. Sixteen years later, discussing McLuhan's theories in the age of social media, Levinson concluded once more that McLuhan's theories were relevant, and that

McLuhan in his thinking and mode of expression was in touch with something which transcends the traditional culture of publishing, academe, and political and critical analysis, and connects to patterns of human expression which are more adept at understanding our rapidly changing world. (Levinson 2015: Loc. 271)

Extending and updating McLuhan's theory, in 2002 Manuel Castells, a Spanish sociologist who has written extensively about the Internet and its impact on society, stated that 'The network is the message' (Castells 2002: 1). He claimed that a network as powerful as the Internet had the power to shape society and, as stated earlier by McLuhan, the media was more powerful than its content (2002: 3). Castells reiterated this view in 2014 and urged for more research into the effects of the Internet, claiming that there was little understanding of its social implications (Castells 2014).

McLuhan gave an example of the impact of the telephone on the user and its content. He wrote, 'when you are "on the telephone", or "on the air", you do not have a physical body. In these media, the sender is sent, and is instantaneously present everywhere. The disembodied user extends to all those who are recipients of electric information' (McLuhan 1978: 45). He claimed that the disembodied user could not operate in the real world in the same way as the embodied user and furthermore that 'discarnate man, deprived of his physical body, is also deprived of his relationship to Natural Law and physical law' (1978: 45). Accepting Levinson's statement that McLuhan's theories were applicable to the Internet implies that astrologers conducting online consultations are similarly disembodied and deprived of their relationship to physical law.

Astrologers and Space

In my research, I found that astrologers tended to have a dualistic view of cyberspace, with many of them clearly differentiating between the online and offline world (Clynes 2016: 314). The astrologers' view was closer to Qvortrup's dualistic cyberspace view. If, however, Qvortrup's concept of cyberspace is applied as a representation of humanity's relationship with offline space, then it follows that an astrologer's experience of the astrological consultation in cyberspace will be based on their experience of a consultation in offline space. It would be expected that their interaction with the client in offline space will reflect how they interact with the client in cyberspace. My research revealed that Soja's view of an all-encompassing Thirdspace was not reflected in the astrologers' view of cyberspace.

In comparison with the research of online religion, astrologers have described the different space that was created by the interaction between astrologer and client in an astrological consultation as being similarly timeless and placeless, raising the question of whether astrologers believed cyberspace was also suited to astrological consultations. At the beginning of 2015, more than 60% of the astrologers regularly conducted astrological consultations with clients using the Internet (Clynes 2016: 189). Applying the theories of McLuhan, Levinson, and Castells to astrology implies that the content of the astrological consultation, the communication between the astrologer and the client, should be impacted and shaped by the medium. Like the telephone discussed by McLuhan, the astrologer and client on Skype have no physical bodies, so therefore, according to McLuhan, they should not be able to operate in the digital world in the same way that they do in the physical world (McLuhan 1978: 45). This was the question my investigation sought to answer.

Methodology and Findings

Between 2012 and 2014 I interviewed sixty-five professional astrologers regarding their views on astrological consultations conducted online. All the interviews were semi-structured in style. Many of the astrologers I interviewed practiced as full-time astrologers; many of them were leaders in the field, which I defined as astrologers who had written astrological texts that were recommended to students by the established schools, astrologers who were repeatedly asked to speak at national and international conferences following positive feedback from delegates, or high-profile astrologers whose names were frequently mentioned in a positive light in comments on the returned questionnaires. Thirty of the

interviewees were women and thirty-five were men. To ensure candour, given how astrologers are sometimes very private, in part due to fear of being subjected to harassment by those critical of astrology, I have ensured their anonymity by not using the real names of my interviewees quoted in this article, and instead have assigned each astrologer fictitious first names.

My background is that I have been a student of astrology since 1987, a teacher and practitioner since 1990, and have lectured at astrological conferences and local group meetings in Ireland, the UK, and the United States of America. I hold a Diploma from the Faculty of Astrological Studies (FAS), currently work as their IT Manager, and also hold the positions of distance learning tutor and council member. I am also a member of the board of The Astrological Association (AA) (formerly the Astrological Association of Great Britain)—a UK-based umbrella organisation. Most of the astrologers I interviewed knew me personally or through my work with the AA and the FAS, and recognised that I shared many of their beliefs. I already knew, from nearly three decades of involvement with astrology, what Kenneth Pike called ‘the system’ and ‘the individual actors’ (Pike, Headland, and Harris 1990: 32). This removed the distrust that could arise when people were questioned about their beliefs by someone who did not share the same perspective, as discussed by Joanne Pearson (2002: 103-104), David Hufford (1999: 300), and Gustav Jahoda (1969: 133-34).

In considering the results of my interviews, my findings fell into five areas: the idea of place, the concept of the sacred, preference for traditional methods, venue, and that people create the space.

The Idea of Place

When they were asked if they believed that a space or place has been created by the Internet, more than 50% of the interviewed astrologers to whom the question was put said that they believed that a separate world—the word ‘territory’ came up frequently—had been created online. When asked to describe this online world, the most common response was to relate the world to the mind, such as a ‘world of the mind’, or ‘world of ideas’, or ‘mental arena’. One example was Sandra, a UK-based astrologer and teacher, who stated that the online world was not physical, but mental: ‘It [the online world] will operate quite differently because it’s not “hands on”. It’s “mental on”; it’s “head on” instead of “hands on”. It’s not a physical thing.’ As noted earlier, Bell (2000: 3) and Karaflogka (2006: 25) both wrote about a place called cyberspace that has been created by the Internet, with Bell describing it as ‘the space behind the screen, between screens, everywhere and nowhere’ (Bell 2000: 3).

The Concept of the Sacred

The 50% of the interviewed astrologers (mentioned above) who agreed that a separate world had been created online were then asked if they believed that this mental space created by the Internet was in itself inherently sacred, or somehow qualitatively different from the offline space. The vast majority did not view cyberspace as sacred in itself. A comment by Anna, a British astrologer, best represents the views expressed by the astrologers:

I think a sacred space can be created anywhere. But the whole Internet isn't going to be a sacred space because it's accessible by everyone and, human nature being what it is, there's lots of horrible things on the Internet as well—which I wouldn't associate with sacred space. I think you could make a particular website or a particular group have what I would consider to be a sort of sacred consciousness around it. It depends on the people using it.

Heim and Stenger have both suggested that the space created online was sacred in itself and have likened it to other sacred places such as the abode of the divine (Heim 1991: 69; Stenger 1991: 52). Views such as those led Partridge to describe cyberspace as having a 'transcendent quality' (Partridge 2006: 154). The astrologers I interviewed, however, did not believe that cyberspace was, in itself, sacred, and so disagreed with the perspectives of Heim, Stenger, and Partridge.

Preference for Traditional Methods

Many of the sixty-five interviewed astrologers commented that it was no longer possible to live in the Western world without being connected to the Internet, and many stated that to survive financially as an astrologer they needed to have a website, Facebook account, email, and, in most cases, conduct online consultations. Despite this, most expressed a preference for the traditional face-to-face consultations, or as some interviewees called it, 'a preference for the embodied world'. Carla, another British astrologer, who referred to the physical world as the 'real world', called her preference 'a privileging of real world'. In her words,

It [cyberspace] feels like techno world which is a different order of reality. It's techno world, where I have an ambivalent and unhappy relationship with techno world. So for me there's some kind of privileging of real world over techno world, so therefore I have a different relationship to it.

Unlike Arthur and Brasher who viewed the Internet as inherently suited to rituals, Helen, an Irish astrologer, said, 'It's [online consultations] never as good. Never as good; nothing like that is ever as good as a one-to-one in a contained space.' Carla also privileged the 'real', and this was

the view of the majority of interviewees. Apart from a tiny minority of interviewees who preferred online consultations, the astrologers stated that they were happy to use Skype or other technologies for consultations, but their preference was for face-to-face consultations, with many using the word 'embodied'. This view echoed that of Campbell, who found that practicing religion online did not fully meet religious members' desire for face-to-face interaction and a shared, embodied worship experience (Campbell 2005: 191). It also echoes McLuhan's 1978 statement that the user 'on the air' is disembodied (McLuhan 1978: 45). McLuhan also stated, however, that the disembodied user could not operate the way they did when embodied. This was not the experience of the astrologers.

Venue

Fifty-one of the astrologers interviewed were first asked if they believed that the astrological consultation contained a sacred element as described by Radermacher. Only one of the fifty-one said it never did. The fifty interviewees who believed it did contain a sacred element were then asked their views about conducting this ritual online. O'Leary argued that the validity of a sacred ritual was not necessarily linked to physical presence (O'Leary 2004 [1997]: 47-48). To determine if the astrologers shared this view in connection with astrological consultations, the interviewees were asked, 'Can cyberspace be the venue for this sacred dialogue?' There was a wide range of answers. On one end of the spectrum were two interviewees who did not think this sacred dialogue could happen online and, therefore, did not hold online consultations; on the other were three interviewees who felt that the Internet was the preferred venue for this meeting. The other forty-five interviewees all held online consultations and believed that the sacred space could open or, as Richard, an American astrologer, put it, 'the magic can happen'. While some interviewees qualified that it took longer, all expressed the idea that what Richard called 'the magic', a colloquial use meaning 'different' or 'special', and which I am equating with what Gunzburg's interviewees initially described as something that was 'unutterable and inarticulate' (Gunsburg 2011: 182-83), worked for them online.

People Create the Space

O'Leary's view that it was 'the declarative act of setting the space apart that sacralizes the acts within that space', and Helland's comment that it was the intention of the individual that made the ritual 'real', were frequently echoed in the responses of the interviewees, for whom the intention of the astrologer was key to creating the sacred space (O'Leary

2004 [1997]: 52; Helland 2013: 30). For example, Michael, an American astrologer, said, 'I don't think that it's the Internet that's holding the sacred space, I think it's the people who are holding the sacred space'. Similarly, Tina, a British astrologer, said,

It's the idea of one person, as a practitioner, showing up for the other person...the sacredness is in the interpersonal interaction. And that interaction happens whether we meet together in person or whether we connect...over Skype video. The sacredness is still present, I would say.

O'Leary's 'setting the space apart that sacralizes the acts within that space' was echoed by Maria, a European astrologer, in this quote:

I think it's about the intention to create that space, and so you have to, as it were, make a mental magical circle which encompasses you and then the client. So it's a kind of mental thing; you make that mental link with somebody else. So it does create, on a kind of intangible level, a connection that is a sacred space, if you like. It's harder to do it because you have to do it mentally rather than being able to do it physically by delineating your space, as in having a particular room set aside for the work or a particular area of a room. But I'd say it's possible to do it.

Maria was describing a conscious decision to make the space happen. This was also suggested by Robert, an American astrologer, who, when asked if a sacred space could open up for him in an online astrological consultation, said, 'I've found a way to do that'. In an interview with Erik Davis, Mark Pesce, a computer professional, lecturer, and author, who was instrumental in the creation of Virtual Reality Modelling Language (VRML) which is used to create virtual worlds, discussed the conscious use of the will to create a magical space online. He argued that cyberspace and magical spaces were both entirely constructed by a person's thoughts and beliefs (Davis 2004 [1998]: 229). This view could be heard in the words of Maria, who spoke of performing a task of mentally delineating the space before the consultation. Diana, a UK-based astrologer, who compared cyberspace to an online mosque in that both are created by people for the purpose of enacting something sacred, considered the preparatory steps necessary to consciously bring about the ritualistic space to be important. She continued:

And the question is, would there be some sort of ritual accompanying the entry to the sacred space?... You enter the virtual environment randomly whereas, really, for a sacred space I feel there should be some type of ritual within that space, not even just for entering the space: within the space.

The comments of Maria and Diana suggested that accessing cyberspace for astrological consultations should have a ritual accompanying the entry to it. Several interviewees mentioned certain tasks, similar to what

Helland called a 'script', that they always performed before a consultation. The astrologers felt it was just as necessary to carry out these tasks before an online consultation as it would be before an offline consultation. A comparison between preparation for offline consultations and online consultations was made by Carla, who explained:

Usually before looking at the chart, I'll clear the physical space—tidy up, Hoover, make sure all personal stuff is out of the way, get it client-ready, etc. So then I'm sitting down to do the more creative bit of prep in a 'cleared' space. Yes, I do exactly the same thing for Skype readings... Even on Skype one can still create a temenos or sacred space within which to work. The temenos encompasses my desk/computer and the backdrop which the client can see, and also the view that I have of them on screen, so the space is held psychically as much as physically.

Cindy, a British astrologer, made identical preparations before online and offline consultations. These involved saying a short prayer before meeting the client and then conducting a short meditation with the client before the interpretation of the chart began. As she put it, 'This sets up the time and space as separate for us'. She ended the consultation with another short meditation, 'to close the space'.

In summary, then, these seven astrologers reflected the views expressed by all the astrologers that I interviewed, which were that, although disembodied in the 'mental' arena of cyberspace, they were able to act in the same way that they did in the physical world. The venue, they claimed, was less important than the intentions and approach of the astrologers to the consultation, and it was this that made 'the magic happen' in cyberspace, just as it does in offline space.

Conclusion

The aim of this research was to investigate if, in the experience of the astrologers conducting face-to-face consultations, the experience of the chart having agency and facilitating a space separate from the surrounding space could also be facilitated online. Literature on online religious rituals claimed that cyberspace was inherently suited as a venue for hosting sacred activity (Brasher 2004 [2001]: 47-56; Arthur 2002: 305). This concept was not supported in the interviews I conducted with sixty-five professional astrologers in connection with online astrological consultations. The vast majority expressed a preference for face-to-face consultations and what was frequently referred to as an 'embodied' experience. This echoed the statement by Campbell that participation in online religious communities did not fully meet religious members'

desire for face-to-face interaction and a shared, embodied worship experience (Campbell 2005: 191). Nevertheless, while the concept of the online experience as disembodied parallels McLuhan's statement that the telephone user is disembodied, his further assertion that the rules of the physical world did not apply 'on the air' was not echoed by the astrologers in connection with Skype and the astrology that takes place there. All of the astrologers who use Skype consultations stated that it was possible to conduct a meaningful consultation in cyberspace.

In taking these ideas forward, the results of my research fell into five areas: the idea of place, the concept of the sacred, preference for traditional methods, venue, and that people create the space. O'Leary, Helland, and Cowan argued that the validity of the ritual did not require the physical presence of the participants. They stated that it was the intention of the participant and the steps they took to prepare the online space that ensured the validity of the rituals taking place there. This concept was overwhelmingly supported, and strongly echoed, by the astrologers that I interviewed. The view that was repeatedly expressed was that the magical or sacred element in a consultation, the opening up of a sacred space or what Radermacher termed a 'meeting with the divine', could and did happen in online astrological consultations. Also stated repeatedly was the view that it was the intention of the astrologer and the preparatory steps they took to prepare the space that, as in the online religion literature, ensured the validity of the ritual.

The literature on online rituals argued that the effectiveness and validity of the ritual was independent of the media used to hold it. This was the case also with online astrological consultations, which were found by astrologers to transcend the medium used to communicate with the client. These findings thus were in opposition to the theories of McLuhan and Castells. If astrology is viewed as the content or message of the online consultation, not only was the medium of the Internet not the message, it appeared not to change the message or the content in any fundamental way. A preference for the embodied experience of a face-to-face consultation in the physical world did not mean that astrologers viewed the online consultation as inferior to the physical. Drawing all of these ideas together, I concluded that medium did not impact on the message or content of the consultation and that, as in face-to-face astrological consultations, the effectiveness and validity of the consultation was independent of the media used to hold it. One can conclude, then, that the opposite of McLuhan's famous statement applies to astrological consultations, and that the medium is not the message.

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Book Review

Charles Burnett and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum (eds.), *From Māshā'allāh to Kepler: Theory and Practice in Medieval and Renaissance Astrology* (Ceredigion, Wales: Sophia Centre Press, 2015), 529 pp., £35.00 (pbk), ISBN: 978-907767-06-7.

One of the thorniest questions for historians of medieval astrology concerns the relationship between theory and practice and, in particular, the extent to which astrologers actively practised the art reflected in their textbooks and instruments. As Charles Burnett and Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum comment in their Introduction to this volume, it continues to be the case that historians writing about astrology have focused on issues that matter more to modern scholars, to the social context of astrology, or to the arguments against its efficacy, theological legitimacy, or rationality, rather than medieval and Renaissance contemporaries. It is thus very welcome to see this dense collection of essays by leading practitioners addressed to different aspects of the central conundrum: what did medieval and Renaissance astrologers do? From across the different points of the astrological world, some eighteen authors respond to this question. The final volume makes up a very satisfying outcome to a conference that ran at the Warburg Institute, London in 2008. The book has had a long gestation period (during which one of the contributors, Giuseppe Bezza, passed away) but it is worth the wait.

The volume presents an eclectic mix with no clear unifying themes other than that most contributors demonstrate an interest in astrology in particular contexts and times. The essays have been ordered by the simplest of all organising principles, alphabetical by author. It might have helped scholarly and educated astrologer readers if ordered by another principle, chronological order perhaps, or the geographical focus of particular papers. There are some omissions; there is little or nothing about medicine, for example, that most practical of astrological pursuits. But there is much to enjoy and learn here with accounts that range geographically from Morocco and England in the far west to Baghdad in the east, and from the reception of the second-century Ptolemy to Nicholas Culpeper in the seventeenth. There are essays that delve deeply into particular techniques and theories of astrology and broader reflections on the philosophy and theory of astrology.

Bernadette Brady, Geoffrey Cornelius, and Josefina Rodriguez-Arribas consider questions relating to the philosophical status of astrology for contemporaries. The focus of Brady's essay is Galileo's *Astrologica nonnulla*, which she uses to examine the philosophical basis of his natural world, whether Platonic or Aristotelian, or something else. Helpfully printing the tables that Galileo used to calculate the lord of the nativity for different natal horoscopes, Brady suggests that Galileo absorbed the Arabic notion that the heavens were a changing rather than a static canvas. Astrology, she suggests, provided Galileo 'with a different place to think', and reflect his restive

mathematical intelligence (p. 99). Cornelius provides an analysis of the use made by Cardano of 'aphorisms', or sets of pithy astrological guides to interpretation of which the pseudo-Ptolemaic *Centiloquium* was the most influential. Cornelius concludes that astrological interpretations were not 'scientific' but are better understood as judgments, and that the heavens, for astrologers, were (and no doubt still are) signs that they were called to interpret. Steven Vanden Broecke provides a deeply interesting interpretation of annual prognostications, the well-known Renaissance genre of specially commissioned astrological predictions produced by cities for particular years. He convincingly suggests that these have a much older pedigree than the Renaissance and go back to Hellenic mundane astrology. More importantly Renaissance prognostications were targeted at princes and rulers but reflected the medieval philosophical culture of divine and cosmic guidance, a source of reassurance rather than anxiety in an unruly world.

A number of contributors focus on particular techniques and branches of astrology. Jean-Patrice Boudet looks at the rise of the horoscope of the city, which is largely absent from the medieval corpus of practical astrology but emerged in force in the fifteenth century. He suggests that, rather like the prognostics considered by Vanden Broecke, city horoscopes were attempts to harmonise the known historical events associated with particular places with their political present. This essay is a real treasure as it gathers together many existing examples of Renaissance city horoscopes, of which there are almost no contemporary medieval examples. The late Giuseppe Bezza looks at the doctrine of the Great Year, a Greek cuckoo in the overwhelmingly Arabic corpus of the branches of astrology known to medieval practitioners. Despite vigorous attempts to reform it away, he concludes that most astrologers were swayed by the grandness of conjunctionist doctrine. Meira B. Epstein examines the way in which astrologers learnt their art, using the textbooks of Abraham Ibn Ezra (fl. 1148) to map the path taken by teachers from fundamentals to reasoning to analysis. Her conclusion, that the purpose of the textbooks of Abraham Ibn Ezra is fundamentally pedagogic rather than encyclopaedic in intention, might be extended with profit to other scholastic teachers and scholars. Similarly, H. Darrel Rutkin has made teaching his theme in his important foray into the voluminous Renaissance commentaries on Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos*.

Astrology provided a universal theory and was remarkable for the extent to which a single corpus of authorities was deployed across almost the entire medieval world. But there were regional differences. Julio Samsó examines the practice of astrology in Morocco in the late fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, based on a study of two astrological treatises written for that realm. This is a limited knowledge base on which to cultivate too many assumptions, but it would seem that Moroccan astrologers practised all the known branches of traditional astrology plus some outside the main tradition and that the known orthodoxy and rejection of astrology by the tenth Marīnin sultan of Morocco did not constrain their practice.

I have not tried to exhaust the riches of this volume, which will be of use and interest to all scholars of medieval astrology. This is a scholarly, valuable, and well-produced book that is well worth its (very reasonable) purchase price.

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Book Review

Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, *The Daimon in Hellenistic Astrology: Origins and Influence* (Leiden: Brill, 2015), xiii + 573 pp., €186.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-9004306-20-2.

To invert a saying, this book delivers much, much more than it promises. Ostensibly, it is about one component, albeit an important and complex one, of Hellenistic astrology. Actually, it is the entire story of Hellenistic astrology, told from the narrative ground of that component. It is also a remarkably full and proficient technical manual of Hellenistic astrology and it draws extensively on the entire corpus of horoscopes now extant and recovered from the period, both 'literary' (i.e. from texts, principally Vettius Valens' *Anthologies*) and original (principally from Egyptian papyrus fragments). All serious students of ancient astrology, whether their interests are cultural-historical or whether they stem from engagement with astrology today, will want to have access to Greenbaum's work.

Who or what is the *daimon*? 'Intermediary' is perhaps the best one-word answer: intermediary between the world of god(s) and the world of men, or intermediary between the higher and the lower levels of the *kosmos*, the ordered whole. Before astrology arrived on the Greek scene (more precisely, the Greek-speaking scene), *daimon* was present as 'the veiled countenance of divine activity' (Burkert 1985: 180, appositely quoted by Greenbaum on p. 299). Likewise, '*Daimon* does not designate a specific class of divine beings, but a peculiar mode of activity' (Burkert 1985: 180, quoted in Greenbaum, p. 300).

The Western tradition knows the *daimon* best as the voice of conscience that spoke to Socrates, and which, many centuries later, Plutarch explored in his essay *On the Genius of Socrates* (note the Latin term, which in Christian times shifts into something approximating a 'guardian angel'). Burkert again is relevant:

When Socrates sought to find a word for that unique inner experience which would compel him...to stop, say no, and turn about, rather than speaking of something divine, he preferred to speak of something daimonly, the *daimonium*... This was open to misinterpretation as dealing with spirits, as a secret cult. It cost Socrates his life. (1985: 181)

It did indeed. Fortunately, the astrological *daimon* was usually less exacting. Ethically, it could be good, bad, or indifferent.

The *daimon* is best considered not as a primary astral agent, like the planets, but rather as something that works through (a) its 'place' (*topos*—modern 'house') and (b) its 'lot' (*klêros*). In astrology, there is a circle of twelve celestial (and infernal) places

that runs counterclockwise from the all-important ascendant or rising point in the East, first underground for a semicircle of six places, and then above the horizon from the setting point in the West back to the ascendant. The celestial bodies and the signs of the zodiac revolve daily through all twelve places. The eleventh place is the Good Daimon, the twelfth the Evil Daimon. Diametrically opposite them on the circle are Good Fortune (fifth place) and Bad Fortune (sixth place). (On the logic of the disposition of these four places in the great circle, see Chapter 2.)

The pairing of Good Daimon and Good Fortune (*agathos daimôn* and *agathê tychê*), and likewise of their opposites, is crucial, not simply because one would expect—or hope—that someone with a good *daimon* (whatever that is) might enjoy good fortune, but because of the connection between fortune and *character*. *For your daimon is what you choose*. Here, for Greenbaum, lies the importance of Plato's Myth of Er at the end of the *Republic* (p. 394). The choice of *daimon*—and of a personal *daimon* at that (see Chapter 7)—introduces into a universe of inexorable celestial revolutions causing inexorable terrestrial outcomes an element of choice and change, whether for better or for worse. This easing of Greek determinism was 'influenced by Egyptian and Mesopotamian ideas' (p. 391; on Egypt see Chapter 3). 'In this view, fortune is not blind or random, but a goddess who controls destiny. Fate is not utterly predetermined; its judgements can be appealed' (p. 391).

If the places are relatively straightforward, the lots are anything but. The lots (with all of the connotations of 'rolling the dice') are points on the zodiac determined by arcs added to or subtracted from the ascendant. The 'lot of the *daimon*', for example, is determined, in some circumstances, by calculating the longitudinal distance between the Sun and the Moon and adding it to the longitude of the ascendant. There are several lots, of which, not coincidentally, those of the Daimon and of Fortune are the best attested (Chapter 9). Other lots are those of Eros (Love) and Ananke (Necessity) (Chapter 10). Again, note the interplay of what is or might be and what has to be.

In the context of her chapter on 'Allotment, the Daimon and Astrology' (Chapter 8), Greenbaum provides as succinct a statement of the positives and negatives of the uses of the lots in Hellenistic astrology as one could wish. The principal negative is the apparent imposition upon the chart of 'needless clutter and confusion' by the addition of the lots to the planets (p. 301). But this can also be claimed as a positive. 'If the planets themselves do not show a particular outcome in a life, the lots can provide another layer of interpretation for that life' (p. 301). The danger, as Greenbaum wittily remarks, 'is not a *reductio* but a *multiplicatio ad absurdum*' (p. 301).

In Chapter 5, under the heading 'Divergent Paths', Greenbaum discusses 'Daimons and Astrology in Gnosticism and Mithraism'. Her assertion that Gnosticism in general viewed the celestial powers as malevolent, while Mithraism viewed them as benign, is uncontroversial. This reviewer, as a student of Mithraism, would like to comment further on Greenbaum's take on Mithraism. Not unpredictably, I commend her analysis in Chapter 5, sections 3.1 and 3.2, noting her sympathy to my filiation of the cult through the politically powerful astrologer Balbillus and the Commagenian dynast C. Iulius Antiochus Epiphanes Philopappus of Athens, whom I identify with the astrologer Antiochus of Athens (pp. 183-84). I am also in awe of her hypothesis (pp. 185-92) that the nativity of Mithras, represented on the relief from Housesteads (Northumberland), encodes the horoscope of a god—and of the universe—intimated by that same astrologer Antiochus.

All in all, this is a remarkable work that explores not only the concept of the astrological *daimon* as it developed in the early centuries CE in the context of the religions and cultures of the Eastern Mediterranean but also the development of the complex systems of nascent astrology as a whole. It is a demanding study, but an essential one for those seeking to understand the ideas of fate and fortune current in antiquity.

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Book Review

Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson (eds.), *Religion and the Ecological Crisis: The 'Lynn White Thesis' at Fifty* (New York and London: Routledge, 2017), 205 pp., \$140.00 (hbk), ISBN: 978-1-138-64412-0.

As of early 2018, Lynn White Jr.'s 1967 article 'The Historical Roots of our Ecologic Crisis' (henceforth, 'Roots') had been cited 5,003 times, making it one of the most cited pieces of scholarship exploring the religion and nature interface. (For a humbling comparison, Clifford Geertz's 1973 book *The Interpretation of Cultures* has been cited almost 54,000 times.)¹ White's four-and-a-half page article looms large in our field, playing a major role in the creation of the field of religion and ecology and inspiring over 700 pieces of scholarship that address 'what, if any, role religious ideas, and *which* religious ideas if so, shape environment-related perceptions or practices' (Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha 2016: 308). White's article also helped to initiate the scholarly ferment that led to the creation of this journal, its predecessor, *Ecotheology*, and the similarly themed journal *Worldviews*, to mention a few of the many scholarly ventures it inspired (see Stoll 2017 and Taylor 2016 for more detailed descriptions). Like it or not, we all stand on White's shoulders, and it is therefore fitting that on the fiftieth anniversary of the publication of 'Roots' we are seeing a small wave of reassessment and reflection about his influence.

Figuring prominently here is Todd LeVasseur and Anna Peterson's edited volume *Religion and Ecological Crisis: The 'Lynn White Thesis' at Fifty*, which asked contributors to 'not only reflect upon any enduring significance of White's article but also to explain how it may have helped influence their own academic fields and their trajectories as scholars interested in human–nature interactions' (2017: 11). While the book was thus apparently intended to be primarily about White's intellectual legacy, quite a few of the authors also decided to evaluate his claims. The happy result is that a book that might have been of interest only to a small group of scholars is in fact a useful teaching tool for the many courses that might assign 'Roots', presenting a concise (though not exhaustive or entirely novel) introduction to both critiques and constructive uses of White's argument. Indeed, the extent to which the contributors agree, disagree with, and talk past each other makes it ideal for this purpose.

The book opens with a unique distillation of White's argument in 'Roots': 'that religions—particularly Western Christianity—are a major cause of worldwide ecological crises' (back cover). This is, in fact, an expansion of White's thesis, since he argued

1. Both numbers come from a Google scholar search conducted February 22, 2018. They may be slight underestimates because there are several entries for both titles.

that only one religion (Christianity) caused the ecological crisis, while other religions (Buddhism and animism) might solve it. When one considers how the scholarly conversation has progressed, however, this interpretation seems more justifiable, for it was primarily 'Roots' that spurred scholars to consider whether religion in general was an important variable shaping environmental attitudes and behavior. The book then offers an introductory chapter that will be particularly useful to those new to the Lynn White discussion. In it, LeVasseur and Peterson summarize the thesis of 'Roots' and how it was understood and received in different fields.

Subsequent chapters tackle White's argument and/or White's intellectual legacy from the perspective of different scholarly disciplines or subdisciplines, usefully demonstrating in the process how variably White's argument is construed in the various fields. To begin with, Elspeth Whitney's chapter contextualizes 'Roots' within White's broader scholarly interests in medieval technology, while also providing a useful sampling of some of the ways in which various fields (medieval history, environmental history, ecotheology, sociology, and religion and ecology) have both critiqued and built upon his work. Whitney adeptly finesses scholars' and the broader public's polarized response to White, acknowledging that 'Roots' was 'overly simple and exaggerated in its claims' yet has endured because it nevertheless 'tapped into a reservoir of deeply held but unresolved cultural issues' (p. 29).

In the next chapter, J. Baird Callicott describes how 'Roots' was vital to the emergence of the field of environmental philosophy, constituting 'both a calling and a compass for all of us who constituted the first generation' (p. 35). Callicott's chapter provides a candid first-hand account of the evolution of the field, complete with his conclusions after nearly half a century of pondering the issue. Callicott also draws attention to a key idea undergirding White's argument in 'Roots', which is that ideas drive behavior (i.e., as Callicott puts it, that 'what we do depends on what we think' [p. 41]). Callicott's discussion, and a similar one by the anthropologist Leslie Sponsel later in the book, is part of what makes these chapters so stimulating to read; they touch on so many of the basic questions in our field. That Callicott now finds this assumption 'laughable' (p. 44) would make an excellent starting point for an essay question—or a qualifying exam.

The environmental historian Mark Stoll's chapter is particularly satisfying, perhaps because it meets White where he was, in the field of history. Distilling his previous work on the relationship between Protestantism and environmental concern, Stoll argues that it was 'ideals of social justice and stewardship, and not doctrines of dominion, anthropocentrism, arrogance or a Weberian disenchantment of nature [that] led Calvinists to so efficiently exploit natural resources and pollute air and water' (p. 51). Stoll further argues, and I completely agree, that we should abandon the White thesis and instead 'look at history [or, I would add, contemporary cases] to see when, how, and why religion inspired sustainable societies' (p. 56).

Adopting a similarly historical approach, in the next chapter Michael Northcott partially agrees with White, acknowledging that Roman Catholicism had anti-nature tendencies, although he faults White for the thin evidence he offered in support of this. Like Stoll, however, Northcott criticizes White for obscuring how Christianity, specifically Protestantism, and even more specifically Presbyterianism, 'had within it the seeds of a different trajectory' (p. 72).

In the next chapter, the anthropologist Shepard Krech III draws on his research among Native Americans to discuss whether White was correct in his assumption that

animism leads to better ecological behavior. Krech argues that animism does not preclude exploitation. In the next chapter, the anthropologist Leslie Sponsel dismisses this conclusion summarily as 'confirmation bias' (p. 94). In Sponsel's view, Krech ignores examples of indigenous societies that were sustainable (herein lie the seeds of another comprehensive exam question, or at least a good class discussion).

Christopher Cone's chapter advances a new interpretation of the dominion mandate in Genesis. He argues that his interpretation, called *redacted dominionism*, is superior to the two interpretations that are currently most prevalent among American evangelicals, dominionist ('mankind has dominion over nature' [p. 103]) and stewardship (God charged humans to be stewards or caretakers of the earth). According to Cone's reading of Genesis, the dominion mandate found in Genesis 1.26-28 may have been redacted or reversed in Genesis 9.7 (p. 106). Cone's is the only explicitly theological chapter; however, it fits well if we accept Stoll's claim that 'Roots' should be read as a sermon rather than a piece of historical scholarship.

Christopher Key Chapple reviews 'Roots' from his perspective as an expert on Asian religions, showing how White 'romanticized, and perhaps exoticized, Asian culture' (p. 118). The chapter pairs well with Krech's and Sponsel's chapters in that it adds much-needed nuance to 'Roots'' simplistic treatment of non-Christian religions.

Heather Eaton offers the most positive appraisal of 'Roots' in the volume, writing, 'I tend to think that White is correct; that a fundamental collective rethinking, world-view evaluation, and cultural reorientation are necessary' (p. 124). She sees Thomas Berry as providing one of the most powerful responses to this challenge.

Chaone Mallory's very accessible chapter puts 'Roots' into dialogue with Carolyn Merchant's groundbreaking work *The Death of Nature* (1980) (which has been cited almost 5,800 times). The two are synergistic in many ways, although Mallory argues that White's 'gendered scholarly assumptions miss very important factors' (p. 144), namely how patriarchy oppressed/oppresses both women and nature.

I was initially unpersuaded by Paul Waldau's argument that 'Roots' 'beckons us to journey back to our own animality' (p. 161). Did White really say much about animals? It turns out he did, but not so much in 'Roots' that it emerges as a dominant theme. As Matthew Riley (2014) has argued convincingly, however, in his other writings White consistently promoted the idea that Christians needed to recognize a 'democracy of all God's creatures'. Indeed, when White's larger body of work is considered (and considering this larger body is in fact necessary to make the case Waldau wants to make), 'the importance and centrality of this theological position in his thought is overwhelming' (Riley 2014: 944).

Whitney Bauman explores how 'the White narrative' constrained how the field of religion and ecology developed. According to Bauman, White's background (white, male, Protestant, academic, historian) set up a particular trajectory that foregrounded Christianity over other world religions, encouraged romantic orientalism about non-Western religions, and promoted instrumental approaches to religions ('mining' them for their environmental insights) (pp. 167-69). On the whole this chapter offers the most contemporary critique of White in the book, as it inserts White into active lines of discussion in the areas of intersectionality, postcolonialism, and new materialism. The result is provocative, especially in its conclusion that we should not overestimate human power to fix environmental problems and should 'practice the art of failure' when it comes to solving them (p. 175). Rather than subscribing to a particular narrative about what should happen—which will only lead to 're-creating the world

in our own image’—Bauman proposes that we ‘begin to live differently toward possibilities that understand other earth-creatures as partners in this process of world-making’ (p. 175). It is an attractive suggestion that is, nonetheless, hard to square with Bauman’s well-founded observation at the outset of the chapter that ‘[e]very good movement...needs a narrative’ (p. 165).

William Jordan III’s chapter, the last in the book, will be familiar to fans of *The Sunflower Forest* (Jordan 2003). Similar to Stoll and Northcott, Jordan argues that the real problem with Christianity began during the Protestant Reformation. Departing from his co-contributors slightly, however, Jordan cites the repudiation of ritual as the key anti-ecological shift (p. 186). He further contends that White’s neglect of ritual is itself a legacy of the anti-ritualism inherent in White’s own (Protestant) tradition (p. 188). For Jordan, the solution lies in creating new rituals to negotiate the human–nature relationship; he sees ecological restoration as providing a particularly promising context for doing so.

The high quality of the chapters in *Religion and the Ecological Crisis* make for gratifying reading; it is a boon to find in one volume the thoughts of so many scholars who have spent years pondering these issues. Furthermore, even though many of the arguments are not new, the juxtaposition of the different disciplinary perspectives serves as a gateway to a number of important debates in our field. As such it will be useful to students and scholars alike.

If I were to ask for anything more from this volume it would be some hard-nosed assessment; fifty years and five thousand citations later, what conclusions can we draw? A few ideas come to mind. *Religion and the Ecological Crisis* documents how profoundly White’s article has informed our field, but there are two ways in which we might consider the prominence of ‘Roots’ to be a problem. First, Matthew Riley (2016) has pointed out that scholars responding to White have primarily engaged only with ‘Roots’, while ignoring White’s broader scholarship (indeed, many of the chapters in the LeVasseur and Peterson volume continue this trend). The result is that despite the nearly five thousand citations of ‘Roots’, there is still plenty of room to better understand and appreciate the nature of White’s contribution. Riley (2014) demonstrates just how illuminating such an approach can be.

The drift in the volume’s chapters from considering White’s legacy to disputing his claims also suggests a second problem: if we are still debating the same question after 50 years, what have we accomplished? As my colleague Randolph Haluza-DeLay put it, speaking about general trends in the field, it is as if we were modern geneticists still citing Gregor Mendel (the man whose work on pea plants helped establish patterns in hereditary traits in the nineteenth century) (for similar critiques, see also Jenkins [2009], Minter and Manning [2005], and Whitney [2015]).² Why have we not moved forward, advancing and testing new theories about the connections between religions and environmental attitudes and behavior?

This seems particularly critical for social-scientific researchers, whose work is unfortunately discussed only briefly in LeVasseur and Peterson’s volume. While every discipline has developed a unique take on White’s message, social scientists might have developed the least accurate view. As Whitney’s chapter rightly observed, much of the quantitative literature relies on a strange re-working of White’s thesis (p. 28). White claimed that everyone living in Western society—not just Christians—was

2. Facebook communication, August 28, 2017.

subject to the nature-dominating worldview that Latin Christianity had instilled. As White wrote, 'Our science and technology have grown out of Christian attitudes toward man's relation to nature which are almost universally held not only by Christians and neo-Christians but also by those who *fondly regard themselves as post-Christians*' (1967: 1205, emphasis added). Ignoring this point—which White made twice in 'Roots'—most social-scientific studies have compared Christians to non-Christians or to the non-religious within the same culture (usually, the United States). When they have found Christians to be less environmentally concerned, they have attributed this difference to White's thesis, *even though his thesis actually had no mechanism to account for this difference*. In fact, there should be no differences among these groups because according to White we all live within the same Christian axiom.³

Social scientists' stilted operationalization of White's thesis has had the unfortunate effect of diverting attention from other lines of inquiry. As Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha showed in their comprehensive review of the literature on the Lynn White thesis—an undertaking also inspired by the fiftieth anniversary of 'Roots'—White's legacy has contributed to (1) ignoring other hypotheses connecting religion and environmental behavior, such as the tendency to attribute environmental change to divine agency (2016: 312-15) (2) focusing excessively on Christianity in the United States (and within this, on denominations and doctrines as the key drivers of environmental attitudes) (2016: 311), and (3) discussing examples of the greening of religion without properly assessing their impacts or considering countervailing forces (2016: 312).

Part of the reason it has taken so long to move beyond White, I would argue, is because it took time to answer White seriously, bringing historical, theological, and social-scientific research to bear on his provocative assertions. In addition, White was writing not only as a scholar but as a committed Christian with an 'unwavering belief in the power of his own faith, Christianity, to shape society toward more humane and egalitarian forms' (Riley 2014: 940). This theological project did not exactly lend itself to theory building. But is it possible that now, with so many decades of debate behind us, we can move beyond 'Roots', viewing its contribution the way geneticists view Mendel's—path-breaking but penultimate?

Minteer and Manning (2005) is an excellent and underappreciated resource in this regard. It draws on research from a variety of fields to demonstrate that White's assumptions about the anti-ecological effects of anthropocentrism, democracy, and agriculture were both a product of his time and largely incorrect. It should be required reading for anyone who researches or teaches on the topic.

Taylor, Van Wieren, and Zaleha (2016) offer a complementary and critically important addition to the project of revising 'Roots' in light of subsequent scholarship, in this case in the area of religion and environmental attitudes and behavior. As they show, far from seeing religious traditions as monolithic, worldview-shaping cosmologies, over the past several decades scholars of religion and the environment have developed a more sophisticated understanding of religious traditions as (1) internally

3. It would be possible to extrapolate from White reason(s) why Western Christians' environmental attitudes might differ from non-Christians in the same society, but I have never seen them articulated. The closest I have seen is the idea that conservative Protestants are less environmentally concerned than other Christians because they take the Bible seriously and therefore would likely pay more attention to its teachings about dominion (e.g., Guth et al. 1995: 368).

diverse (2), shaping environmental attitudes not only through ideas but through practices, rituals, and social norms (3), shaped not only by sacred texts and the views of religious elites but by the cultures and times in which they appear, including attendant issues like race, class, gender, politics, and identity, and (4), acting to both encourage and discourage environmental behavior, sometimes in counterintuitive ways (interestingly, as Jenkins [2009] makes clear, these advances have permeated non-empirically oriented fields, such as religious ethics, as well).

As for future research, cross-disciplinary work seems to offer some of the most promising new directions. For example, in a short discussion that merits elaboration, Taylor and colleagues drew on the work of the sociologist Robert Wuthnow to explain differences in environmental concern across traditions and denominations in the United States context (2016: 311). Djupe and Hunt (2009) took a well-established finding in political science that the congregational environment shapes members' political attitudes and showed how this same factor shapes environmental attitudes. One could also imagine that, with the work of Stoll (1997, 2015), Dunlap (2004), Berry (2015), and others modifying the received historical narrative about Christianity and the environment, social-scientific researchers could ask questions such as whether Protestants are (globally) less environmentally concerned than Catholics or Eastern Orthodox Christians. A 2014 paper that looked at environmental attitudes across Europe in fact found that there was stronger concern in Catholic and Eastern Orthodox countries than in Protestant ones (Hagevi 2014). Unfortunately, the primary theoretical basis for Hagevi's paper was White's 1967 article. It need not and should not be that way.

What was wonderful at first but, as the decades have worn on and the citations piled up, became grating about White's argument was that it was stated in such bold, sweeping terms. This is what made it start conversations and build fields, and what now makes it (and LeVasseur and Peterson's volume) such an excellent teaching tool. It is also what makes it an eddy from which we should exert ourselves to escape. If the golden anniversary of White's influential paper does not properly nudge us on our way downstream—others have urged to no avail—we can at least take a moment to celebrate that we understand the relationships between religions and the environment better than we did in 1967 and that, even with these advances, new horizons beckon.

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Book Review

Celia Deane-Drummond, *A Primer in Ecotheology: Theology for a Fragile Earth* (Eugene, OR: Cascade Books, 2017), 167 pp., \$23.00 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-4982-3699-7.

Celia Deane-Drummond begins her excellent survey of the field of ecotheology with the affirmation that one cannot adequately do ecotheology without taking into account mainstream scientific consensus. While one might expect a Christian theologian with a PhD in plant physiology to say this, it also indicates the reality of our present society: the average American Christian is skeptical of the truth of climate change and other global environmental problems because of a fear that science is somehow tainted by partisan political agendas. From there Deane-Drummond lays out the ecotheological map, as she calls it, in Chapter 1. The second chapter, 'Ecological Biblical Hermeneutics', does not shy away from the rather tenuous relationship the Judeo-Christian scriptures have had historically with environmentalism. She is fair in assessing Lynn White's 1967 critique of the Judeo-Christian creation story, but ultimately argues that it is far too simplistic.

The third chapter looks at the robust influence various liberation theological thinkers have had on the field, spending time explaining why and how these thinkers have incorporated an ecological mindset into their own theologies. Chapter 4 highlights the impact Pope Francis and his encyclical *Laudato Si'* have had in such a short time on contemporary ecotheology. Chapter 5, 'Deep Incarnation', reviews how some thinkers have turned to Christology for insights into understanding the predation, suffering, and death that are intrinsic to our evolutionary universe. In Chapter 6, Deane-Drummond does not survey the field of anthropology so much as examine a few case studies that suggest the relationship between *Homo sapiens*, humans made in the image of God, and the rest of creation is far more complex than previous generations may have believed. The final chapter, 'Christian Ecological Ethics', reviews a number of contemporary ethical issues in the field, ending with four suggestions that might help Christians shift to more theologically informed ecological ethics. I found myself wishing that those four suggestions were developed more fully though, not because they were incomplete thoughts, but because I wanted to know more of her reflection on these topics. The intended goal of each chapter is to give the reader a taste of what the field has to offer, and, for the most part, I believe Deane-Drummond is highly successful in this effort. The book also includes a very detailed glossary of terms that are essential for anyone who wants to be fluent in ecotheological vernacular. It also includes a list of prominent examples of Christian environmental activism. These two additions are welcome ones, especially for someone who might be completely new to the field.

The gray boxes within each chapter are sometimes less than helpful. At times it is especially difficult to understand whether the box text is supplementary material, which is common enough to that sort of formatting, or if it is material that should have been written into the regular text of the chapter. For example, in Chapter 6, this situation is particularly dicey as the recounting of a story in Box 1 is not an aside, but is relied upon in the subsequent pages of the chapter. While this may be the book's most flagrant example, these formatting irregularities occasionally distract from the general readability of the book.

While most of the time Deane-Drummond gives an equitable amount of time to each author during the course of the survey, when she does not, the reader can be left a bit confused. Do the extra words spent on one theological position rather than another indicate a tacit or explicit acceptance of that specific worldview? This is the case in her review of The Earth Bible project in Chapter 2. Moreover, the survey approach employed in most of the book completely breaks down in Chapter 6, which is not a survey but instead a version of a previous academic piece written by Deane-Drummond. The content of that chapter is a thoughtful reflection on the topic of anthropology in light of ecotheology, but it is not a survey of the field per se.

As I mentioned already, Chapter 4 is dedicated entirely to Pope Francis and the encyclical *Laudato Si'*. While I join in celebrating the magnitude of this work's impact on the Christian world, especially Roman Catholics, as well as on those outside of the Christian faith, I question whether Deane-Drummond is too lenient in her appraisal of the encyclical. In particular, she asserts that Francis speaks out against types of oppressive anthropocentrism that his predecessors were often negligent to address. I certainly do not disagree, but I maintain that she gives Francis far too much credit. There are definitely portions of *Laudato* that question destructive versions of anthropocentrism, but most of the encyclical is entirely in step with the anthropocentrism that has been historically fundamental to Catholic dogma, and unfortunately too common in much of Christian thought and practice in general. It is questionable whether the current Pope's namesake, St Francis of Assisi, would recognize the Vatican's words on the position of humanity vis-a-vis creation as a step forward in the ecotheological dialogue or only a slight adjustment of the status quo.

While this book is not for the grizzled ecotheological veteran, it is perfect for anyone looking for a concise, yet thorough, introduction into ecotheology.

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Book Review

Aurélie Choné, Isabelle Hajek, and Philippe Hamman (eds.), *Rethinking Nature: Challenging Disciplinary Boundaries* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2017), xiii + 268 pp., £31.99 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1-138-21493-4.

Rethinking Nature is presented by the editors as a 'textbook' but goes way beyond that. Its purpose is to critically investigate developments in the debates on nature at the crossroads of nature, environment, society, and culture. Contributions came from twenty-one scholars from diverse disciplines from both the French/European and the American schools of thought. Bringing together these hitherto largely separated academic traditions is an accomplishment in itself. Developing lines of thought from social sciences, literary, and cultural studies are explored and integrated in new views on environmental humanities. The book is well written and provides a wealth of information for students and scholars of many disciplines.

Rethinking Nature contains twenty-one chapters divided in five parts. Part I discusses 'Values and actions'. Larrère (Chapter 1) describes North American and European traditions of environmental ethics and argues for combining them together with non-Western cultural worldviews into a global/local ethic of respect and responsibility. Deep Ecology is investigated by Afeissa in Chapter 2, emphasizing that everything is 'relational' and nature protection is essentially self-realization. Choné's Chapter 3, 'Ecospirituality', describes current discourses on ecology and spirituality familiar to the readers of the *JSRNC*. She sees them gradually converging toward the building of an 'inner ecology' to re-enchant a secularized world. Important Western philosophers and practices are presented (however, leaving out Patriarch Bartholomew's waters blessings and Pope Francis's landmark *Laudato Si'*). Chapter 4 (by Merritt) describes 'Ecopsychology', which aims to re-connect the human self with nature on the basis of Jungian and other psychotherapeutical schools, almost presenting ecopsychology as a remedy to all flaws of modernism (pp. 56-57).

Part II deals with 'Writings and representations' of nature in literature and art. Chapter 5 (by Blanc) cleverly analyses the potential of nature aesthetics for re-connecting landscape inhabitants to nature. In Chapter 6, Peraldo discusses the origins and meanings of 'ecocriticism' as well as its potential for ecological and ethical reflection. Dahan (in Chapter 7) traces 'Epistemocritical Perspectives on Nature' in literary texts and observes unfolding human-nature integration under the 'posthuman paradigm'.

Part III, 'Movements, activism, and societies', examines how connection with nature is inextricably bound with culture and power. Chapter 8 (by Repussard) traces the history of environmental activism and policies from the nineteenth century to current ecological visions embracing either 'green markets' or antimodernist

'de-growth'. In Chapter 9, Lauwers gives an insightful account of the development of ecofeminism and its underlying 'logic of domination', criticisms, misconceptions, and challenges (p. 94). Chapter 10, 'Ecosociology' (by Woodgate), presents a well-argued framework for analysing socioecological discourses and practices. This could have been enriched by including social representation of nature theory (Buijs et al. 2012). In Chapter 11, Navet charts the anthropocentric Greco-Christian roots of anthropology and hails the latter's evolution to a more people-respecting ethnoecology.

Part IV discusses the positioning of nature in the globally on-going urbanization. Jones (Chapter 12) analyses the 'shifting rural/urban complexities of space and nature' (p. 152) engendering renewed landscape approaches and urban ecologies to counter widespread 'ecocide'. In Chapter 13, Hajek and Lévy discuss trends in research on urban ecology hinging around the paradigm shift from city-nature opposition toward an integrated view on human-nature relations in urban planning. In Chapter 14, 'Nature, Environment, and Health', Charles describes the history of 'environmental health' in depth but ignores research on health benefits of 'green' nature (Hartig et al. 2014). Chapter 15 (by Hamman) details the integration of 'sustainable development' in urban planning and theorizing including the emergence of transition and resilience concepts. Buclet (Chapter 16) investigates the development and perspectives of ecosystems-based, cyclical economies. In Chapter 17, Muradian skilfully discusses the politico-strategical merits of the ecosystem services model as well as its analytical inadequacies for accommodating cultural dimensions and instead proposing more comprehensive models.

Part V, 'Human-Animal' starts with Navet's (Chapter 18) tracing of 'ecocide and ethnocide' in the Americas to Christian biblical roots. He advocates a 'traditional peoples' perspective to counter planetary destruction, but omits critical debates on this issue. In Chapter 19, 'Animal Studies', Borgards discusses philosophical, methodological, cultural, and literary views on 'animals' and the blurring boundaries with humans. In Chapter 20, Baratay argues for a multidisciplinary, non-anthropocentric *animal* perspective on history. Both chapters overlook current ethological thinking which, having left anthropocentrism far behind, investigates empathy, culture, and even 'religion' of animals as subjects (de Waal 2016). In Chapter 21, 'Outlook', Wilke sketches a future research agenda for environmental humanities in the context of intensifying global/local interactions, postcolonial power structures, changing views on human-nonhuman relationships, and novel forms of cultural expressions. She urges for radical integration of the humanities with science and notes the importance of new spatial, visual, and narrative/linguistic methods. The book concludes by stating that the ultimate goal of producing nature-knowledge is to invent 'new ways of living together' in the real world (p. 257).

This book evokes three comments. First, various authors discussing the link between biological and cultural diversity seem unaware that 'biocultural diversity' already exists as an intrinsically 'relational' concept standing at the heart of the book's matter. Originating from indigenous societies (Posey 1999) it is increasingly applied to Westernurbanities (Elands et al. 2015). Secondly, 'non-Western paradigms' are unevenly covered, despite the book's promise to the contrary (p. 8). Aboriginal perspectives from the Americas feature in Chapters 11 and 18, but insights from Africa and Asia are hardly presented. The reader is thus deprived of knowledge on how these other-than-Western perspectives view the visible and invisible environment.

References to the invisible—the domain of spirituality and religion—are also lacking among the specifications of ‘non-humans’ (p. 250) in Chapter 21 outlining the future of ‘environmental humanities’.

This relates to the third point. Notwithstanding the book’s frequent mentioning of religion and the inclusion of a specific chapter (3) on ‘ecospirituality’, the outlook overlooks religious studies and theology as potential partners for integrated research. It could have benefited from the last decade’s cross-cutting work in this journal, ISSRNC conferences, and other humanities-science fora. Despite these shortcomings, the book is a valuable and inspiring source for further integrated research on human–nature relationships.

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Book Review

J. Baird Callicott, John Van Buren, and Keith Wayne Brown, *Greek Natural Philosophy: The Presocratics and their Importance for Environmental Philosophy* (San Diego: Cognella Academic Publishing, 2017), 386 pp., \$93.95 (pbk), ISBN: 978-1516528561.

J. Baird Callicott, the first philosopher to teach an environmental ethics course, has coauthored a book returning us to the first philosophers in the Western philosophical tradition, philosophers who were environmental philosophers first. Carefully reexamining the foundations of Western philosophy's past will provide, the authors believe, a better foundation for philosophy's future. Western philosophy was originally interested primarily in questions about the underlying principles of nature. Later, Plato and Aristotle began to emphasize ethics and metaphysics. Later still, philosophy left *natural* philosophy behind as the scientific revolution produced offspring disciplines like physics, chemistry, and biology. Philosophy lost something in this transition. Callicott and his coauthors believe environmental philosophy will be better off if it reconsiders what might have been lost. The text is designed to introduce readers not only to the historical foundations underlying their disciplines but to challenge the presupposition from which most modern accounts begin: that humans are separate from the rest of nature. This cornerstone is buried deep in the Western intellectual tradition; its presence continues to colour and contour our discourse—like Marley's ghost shaking his chains behind our unexamined presuppositions.

To this end, the text: (1) delivers a clear historical exposition of developments in philosophy from Thales to Aristotle with provocative attention to etymologies that highlight the environmental dimension of key philosophical terms, still in use today; and (2) concludes with a manifesto arguing that 'the future of philosophy lies in a neo-pre-Socratic revival, a return to natural philosophy in its original meaning' (p. 294).

The bulk of the text attends to the first of these; it is a revisitation of W.K.C. Guthrie's exhaustive *A History of Greek Philosophy* series (a series of six books published by Cambridge University Press between 1962 and 1981) in a more compact form, thoughtfully refracted through the lens of environmental concern. The authors lay out the core concepts, provide historical context, and spend a great deal of time distinguishing how philosophical speculation was distinct from earlier ambient modes of thinking found in local mythological and religious traditions. The discussion includes figures often left off the plate of ancient philosophy courses: Herodotus, Xenophanes, and Theophrastus—all of whom are useful in understanding the pre-Socratic philosophers who predated them.

The authors are careful to acknowledge that much of what we know of these early thinkers comes down to us by way of Aristotle, Diogenes, and a few other authors. They describe their mode of interpretation of these ancient texts as a 'diachronic dialectic of ideas' (p. 16). In other words, we can work out what a previous philosopher thought and meant by looking at the way the successor philosopher interpreted, critiqued, or attempted to refute those earlier works. That assumption makes it possible to work backwards from the fragmentary shards of argument, compiled by later philosophers, to the views they were critiquing. This allows reasonable inferences about what was important to that previous philosopher.

One provocative, and evocative, strength of the text is the useful and never intrusive references to key etymologies. The vocabulary assigned to philosophical concepts among pre-Socratic philosophers borrows from geological and geographical metaphors—and includes the presupposition that climate, culture, and landscapes influence the thought processes of different peoples. It seems a short jump, given this context, from Thales to Aldo Leopold's thinking like a mountain. These etymologies lie below the surface of our visible vocabulary, like tectonic plates conditioning the overlying topography of current usage.

Some suggestive examples include the words *arche* and *hyle*. *Arche* seems to have its origins in notions of place, power, sovereignty, or authority. This connects notions of First Principles to the community or political context in which humans exist. For Aristotle, it is the political sphere that finally grounds and justifies human understanding, human activity, and the ethics that accompanies human activity. *Hyle*, another common term adopted by Aristotle for his discussions of physics and used to describe matter in a general sense, meant timber. It was, originally, the name used for forest or woodland.

Finally, the root of the term harmony means to join together and fasten: there is the musical sense of joining notes together, but the metaphor carries with it the notion of joinery and structure that references a fascinating etymological underlayment. Similarly, the root of *aretē* (typically translated as 'virtue') means to fit together properly. Harmony is what happens when notes in a chord fit together properly. Suggestive analogies spill out of these linguistic observations. Tables and chairs, or arguments, which fit together, with *aretē*, do not fall down. They display harmony, and the universe itself, the *kosmos*, displays a harmony in its *arche*, in its *architecture*. These harmonies can be known and understood by the rational capacity in humans—the function of which is to work out ratios and, thus, the ways in which numbers fit together. Justice itself for the Greeks means to be in accordance with proper measure, proper ratios, and an appropriate fit.

All of which begins to sound, suspiciously, like an integrated, biotic, community. These etymological threads, tying well-established philosophical concepts directly back to nature, are confirmed by Aristotle, who noted that 'of the first philosophers, the majority thought that the principles of all things were found only in the form of matter' (p. 72). Their search for the *arche* begins and ends in the physical world. The authors' investigation into the pre-Socratics makes it clear that philosophy was *natural* philosophy, an exploration and explication of the physical world—a world not distinct from the mind investigating it but, instead, a world that houses that mind.

A Neo-Pre-Socratic Manifesto

By grounding philosophy, metaphorically and literally, in natural philosophy the authors hope to clear the way for their central proposal: a *neo-pre-Socratic Manifesto*. In the beginning, Callicott suggests, the function of philosophy was to provide a coherent account of the origins of the cosmos, where humans came from, and how we fit into that order (p. 299).

Nothing has changed.

But during the nineteenth century, as natural philosophy fractured into separate, institutionalized departments of natural and social sciences, philosophy was whittled down into a narrowly defined discipline in its own right (p. 309) in two flavours: analytic and continental. Callicott and his coauthors hope to restore the synthesizing and, well, *grounding* role philosophy once played: putting Humpty Dumpty back together again by reuniting natural philosophy and natural science.

Of course, some scientists complain that science no longer needs philosophy—but this is wrongheaded. Empirical science is as urgently in need of philosophical reflection as it ever was. Whenever science attempts to provide origin stories or to place its discoveries into a social or political context—that is, an existential, human context—scientists inevitably come home to their mother discipline and start doing philosophy: whether they're good at it or not. Sometimes they're very good at it: witness Aldo Leopold or David Suzuki or Carl Sagan.

How to proceed? Callicott offers three suggestions (p. 336):

- 1) From an evolutionary point of view *humans, and everything else on this planet, share a common ancestor*. This might be one way to give us a sense of kinship with our fellow creatures (as Aldo Leopold said).
- 2) Darwin and Evolution can provide *a sense of wonder* 'over the magnitude and duration of the biotic enterprise' (once again quoting Leopold). This might be a way to create some sort of new spirituality that has a ground in the wonder produced by scientific discovery.
- 3) We can consider the notion that ethics evolved to facilitate social organization and community.

Social and political structures remain critical to environmental progress, a component hampered by confining environmental philosophy to environmental ethics. By returning philosophy to its origins, Callicott suggests we can and should revive an environmentalist philosophy in the tradition of natural philosophy, grounded on ontological and metaphysical questions that rest squarely within the originating tradition of Western philosophy, a tradition concerned originally with understanding nature and humanity's place in it.

The Audience

In a Masters level course on environmental philosophy, this should be the first text required. It provides not only the necessary historical background but the metaphysical foundations on which the inertia of Western philosophy depended—and depends. At the undergraduate level the text could also serve as one component in an

undergraduate course on ancient philosophy. Outside the classroom, anyone involved in exploring environmental questions here in the early twenty-first century has an obligation to read this book and consider how the origins of our disciplines can help us reconnect to other disciplines and, more importantly, to the universe we inhabit.¹

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1. I found two editorial wrinkles in the text that looked more like editorial than authorial carelessness: (1) a strange editorial glitch on page 218 where the first sentence of the first two paragraphs is repeated and (2) stranger yet, a change in font sizes on p. 308.

Book Review

Evan Berry, *Devoted to Nature: The Religious Roots of American Environmentalism* (Oakland: University of California Press, 2015), 272 pp., \$29.38 (pbk), ISBN: 978-0520285-73-6.

Evan Berry's book *Devoted to Nature* offers a fascinating new take on the religious origins of the American environmentalist movement. Unlike many works that focus on individual thinkers like Aldo Leopold or Rachel Carson, Berry focusses on popular organizations and writings that capture the motivations of the American mainstream. His central claim is that the American environmentalist movement grew out of Progressive Era (1890s–1920s) Christian soteriology (i.e. rooted in the scheme of fall and redemption). In other words, the environmentalist movement was in some way the result of ordinary Americans trying to overcome the effects of sin in their lives. Christians of this period, like Christians of earlier periods, believed that human beings lived in a fallen condition. Peculiar to this era was the locating of sin and its consequences in urban pursuits such as drinking, going to movies, gambling, or whoring. Urban environments where the human impact was greatest were seen as both corrupted by sin and facilitators of sin. In this urban world it was increasingly difficult to reflect on the divine. However, not far away were pure, virgin wilderness areas unspoiled by sin, where one could go to be in the presence of God's world as yet uncorrupted by the presence of 'fallen man'. Spending time in these environments was key to moral improvement because it was seen as time spent with the Savior. Hence Christian groups of the period organized regular outings into these areas and sought to preserve them for them for soteriological reasons.

Berry's argument is carefully nuanced: 'Concepts from Christian theology were the necessary but insufficient conditions for the emergence of a...cultural formation in which nature provided the...basis for spiritual redemption (p. 14). Although Christian soteriology was a key factor, it was certainly not the only factor, and Berry also argues that tensions between the movement and traditional Christian doctrine should not be downplayed. Nevertheless, the weight given to soteriological motives is surprising in that it counters several alternative explanations. One is that environmentalism arose in resistance to Christianity. This view gained traction with Lynn White's 1967 article arguing that the roots of the ecological crisis lay in the Christian belief that nature was devoid of spirit and so made only for human use. By this logic the environmental movement arose as a rejection of Christianity in which spirit or the God principle was removed from heaven and infused into nature such that love of nature replaced love of God.

Another alternative countered by Berry is that the environmentalist movement was a secularization of Christianity. Following this argument, one may expect that on the way to this secularization Christians might move away from central Christian doctrines like soteriology toward a vaguely deistic or unitarian sense of stewardship of nature. From there they would move on to advocate merely technological forms of forest management. By contrast Berry's claim that the motives of Progressive Era American environmentalists were heavily soteriological means that they were neither secular nor anti-Christian, but rather located near the heart of popular Christian piety.

Four core chapters explore how nature worked as a spatial and experiential basis for this Progressive Era experience of Christian salvation. Chapter 1 explores the historical development of walking in nature as a morally virtuous activity. Chapter 2 describes how Evangelicals of the period countered the moral dangers of urban life by organizing clubs like the Boy Scouts, the Sierra Club, and the YMCA to plan summer outings where their members could experience the moral corrective of nature. Christian camp meetings became a ritual convention that 'established an interior space where guests could reflect on the divine presence in Nature [and] apprehend God's immanence' (p. 70). In the idiom of the time this form of moral correction by nature was called 'muscular Christianity' (presumably as opposed to the wimpy or effeminate Christianity of those who did not get out into nature). Chapter 3 traces the history of Christian thinking about mountains. Early medieval thinkers had pictured the original creation as geometrically smooth with mountains being wart-like distortions caused by sin or punishment for sin. By the nineteenth century, however, American Christians saw mountains as analogous to cathedrals (but perhaps even more effective in facilitating worship). Chapter 4 examines the popular genre in which members published their memoirs of time spent in the woods in club journals such as the *Sierra Club Bulletin* or *The Mountaineer*. According to Berry this genre blended romanticism with natural history and Christian reflections in an unconsciously eclectic harmony that expressed the piety of the period.

Throughout the work Berry's tone is free of either Christian advocacy or anti-Christian reaction. It is free too of condescension. The optimism of the Progressive Era was of course ended by the horrors of the World Wars (especially World War II) and the Great Depression. Postwar Christians looking back on that era often felt a certain condescending disdain for what they saw as the naive romanticism of the time. Because Berry's gaze is free of this disdain he is able to give a remarkably fresh portrait of American Christianity in this period. At the same time he is not blind to its failings. In fact, part of Berry's purpose in writing the book is to make readers aware of the present dangers that may stem from overlooking these origins. He argues that to ignore the Christian soteriological roots of the modern environmental movement leads to an inability to understand both its strengths and its weaknesses. On the one hand the underlying religious assumptions provide a motivating power that merely technological approaches to solving ecological problems will never have. This religious core is still present as a cultural resource for ecological action that can be tapped into today. To overlook it is to miss an important opportunity for organizing the American public around ecological issues.

However, the unrecognized Christian origin of the movement also has its down-sides. Victorian Christians imagined the bars and brothels of the urban environment as a defiling result of the fall. Any human impact on nature was by extension similarly defiling. By contrast, the wilderness where God's handiwork could be seen most

clearly was imagined to be virgin or pure nature unspoiled by human contact. According to this view, anthropogenic changes to forests were almost by definition 'spoiled'. This view led Christians to see nature as empty of previous human inhabitants such as Native Americans, and it also led them to overlook or undervalue the anthropogenic quality of the forests that had been actively managed by Native Americans. It led to a defining of ecological goals as the restoration of nature to an imaginary and impossibly pure previous state. Berry argues that in moving forward the environmentalist movement should tap into the religious motivation that is there in the American public, but that it must also rid itself of the illusion of a nature unspoiled by human touch.

Devoted to Nature is a delightful read that opens a very different window on an important period of American history. It provides valuable new insights on how turn-of-the-century popular Christianity contributed to the particular shape the American environmentalist movement has in the present. In doing so it offers key insights on how best to move forward.

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Notes for Contributors

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The *JSRNC* seeks to publish the widest possible diversity of critical inquiry into the relationships among what people variously understand to be religion, nature, and culture. Further information about the journal can be found at www.religionandnature.com/journal, including the précis, an introduction by Founding Editor Bron Taylor, and sample entries, which provide a sense of the journal's vision and interdisciplinary range.

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