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History of Astrology historiography and typologies

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Purpose of this lecture

- To consider agendas in the historiography of history.
- To read academic works on the history of astrology with this in mind.

The History of Astrology

- Modern astrology
- What typologies (methods of classification) are used by (a) outsiders and (b) insiders, when considering contemporary astrology?
- All historians have an agenda.
- Therefore it is necessary to know how texts are being read.

1. OUTSIDERS

External views of Astrology

The Standard View: superstition

Immanuel Kant (1724-1804)

- in Kant's vision, there was no space for anything approaching astrology, which he despised, especially as it is clear from his mockery of Swedenborg that he despised those who prophesied the future and then, yielding to 'vice and corruption', could think of nothing apart from 'means cunningly to escape the threatening consequences of the future'.^[1]

^[1] Kant, Immanuel, *Dreams of a Spirit Seer*, trans. Emanuel F. Goerwitz, Bristol: Thoemmes Press 1992, p. 121.



The Standard View

E.B. Tylor 1832-1917

‘Primitive Culture’, 3 Vols

Evolution Intellectualised

Astrology represents a form of magical thinking and a primitive stage of intellectual evolution

i.e., astrology is subjected to a framework inspired by Natural Selection (Darwin’s explanation for evolution).

However:

Although many Darwinists except the conclusions of this line of reasoning many challenge the discipline of evolutionary psychology



The Standard View

Sigmund Freud 1856-1939

- Evolution
Psychologised
- Religion = a form of
psychological
immaturity
- Astrology = so
dangerous that we
shouldn't even
mention it



The Standard View

Theodor Adorno 1903-69

- Freud + Marx
- Astrology is so serious a psychological malfunction that it is an indicator of Fascist/Nazi sympathies



CRITICAL OUTSIDER VIEWS OF ASTROLOGY

As a failed form of
something else (cf
Curry)

Pseudo science

Substitute religion

- As inherently false
- A hang-over from the past

2 INSIDERS

Patrick Curry: reflexivity

- To be a historian of astrology it is necessary not only to be able to practice astrology, but to **HAVE AN EXPERIENCE OF ASTROLOGY WORKING**
- Curry, Patrick, 'The Historiography of Astrology: A Diagnosis and a Prescription', in Oestmann, Günther, H. K. von Stuckrad, G. Oestmann and D. Rutkin (eds.), *Horoscopes and History*, Berlin and New York: Walter de Gruyter 2005, pp. 261-74.



Phenomenology and Reflexivity

- All knowing is subjective, and the “objective world” is what knowers claim to know about. Reflexivity in knowledge-making involves bringing the subject, the “doer” of the knowledge-making activity, back into the account of knowledge.^[1]

^[1] Hufford, David J., ‘The Scholarly Voice and the Personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies’, in Russell T. McCutcheon, ed., *The Insider/Outsider Problem in the Study of Religion* (London: Cassell 1999), p.295.



Therefore.....

- The Astrologer as a sociologist, anthropologist or cultural historian.....
- What stories to astrologers tell about the nature of astrology?
- Apologies to everyone I am about to misquote!

An Insider's view of Astrology's history: Alan Leo

- British astrologer, died 1917.
- Founded modern esoteric astrology
- Thought astrology as we know it now originated 100,000 years ago.
- Exoteric astrology = a pale shadow of its original self



Themes of Decline

- Schmidt
- Zoller
- Curry

Patrick Curry

- Believes in an ancient period when people lived in an 'enchanted' environment.
- Decline set in when the balance in astrological practice shifted from inspiration to technique



Geoffrey Cornelius

- Believes astrology declined in the move from Babylon to Greece when 'divination' was replaced by Greek naturalism.
- He (2003, p.xxii) devoted considerable attention to the attacks on astrology that had, in his view, resulted in its "fall from grace" and perhaps with the result that the question of divination was hardly ever addressed by astrologers.

Robert Schmidt

- There was a pure Hellenistic astrology in the 2nd c BCE. The variety of technical approaches apparent by the 2nd c CE is evidence of decline.



Robert Zoller

- Back in the 1980s Bob was the sole (almost) practicing medieval astrologer.
- Developed high regard for the classical tradition after Project Hindsight was formed.



Golden Ages

- These could all be classed as 'golden age narratives', a product of nostalgia
- (NB. I'm not saying that. This is what academics say)

On the other hand: 'It's Never Been Better'

- Themes of advance/evolution
- Dane Rudhyar
- Glenn Perry

Dane Rudhyar

- Pre 20th century astrology was 'fated', dealt only with external conditions and was unable to serve the essential modern purpose of spiritual growth



So has astrology

- Declined from a high, 'enchanted' point
- OR
- Risen from a old primitive state???

Enchantment: a counter view from Manilius

- Manilius, *Astronomica*, l. 66-69: human beings lived in barbaric ignorance, not enchanted bliss, and reason liberated them.
- Before their times man lived in ignorance: he looked without comprehension at the outward appearance and saw not the design of nature's works: he gazed in bewilderment at the strange new light of heaven, now sorrowing at its loss, now joyful at its birth.
- 105-8 It (reason) freed men's minds from wondering at portents by wresting from Jupiter his bolts and power of thunder and ascribing to the winds the noise and to the clouds the flame.

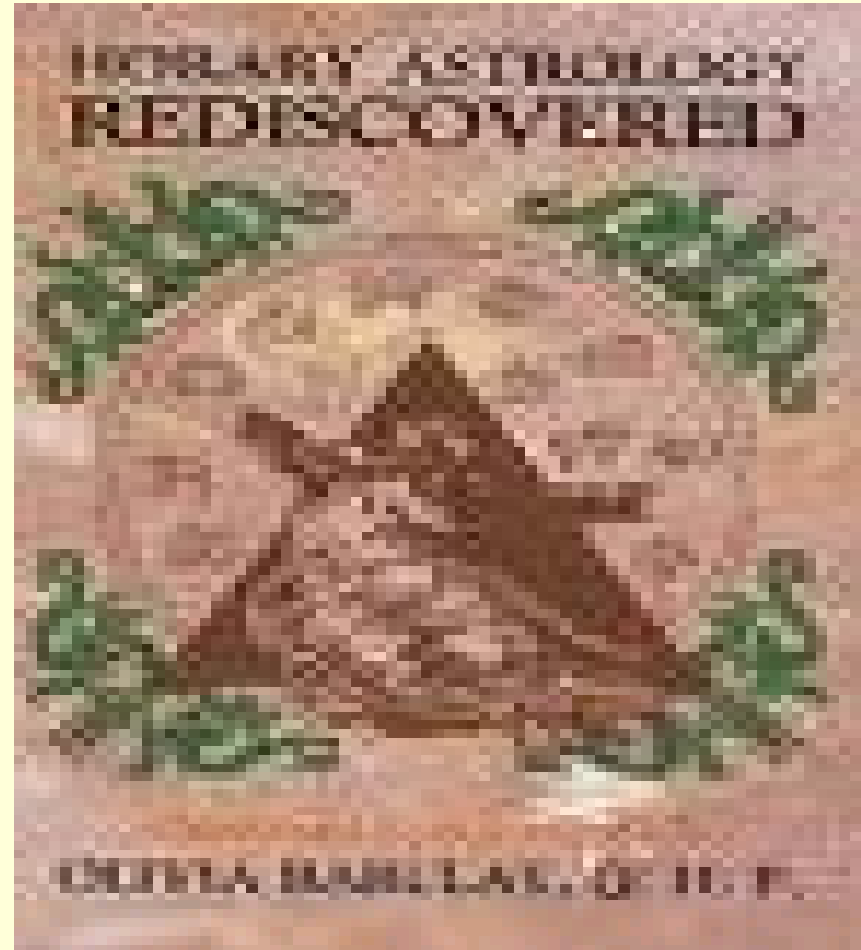


Manichean Astrology

- Manicheans believed in the struggle of light and dark.
- So.
- Rudhyar = the new spiritual astrology = good. Old fated ('exoteric') astrology = bad (and useful only for people who are unevolved)
- Cornelius = divinatory astrology good. All other astrology bad
- Alan Leo = esoteric astrology good. Indian astrology bad

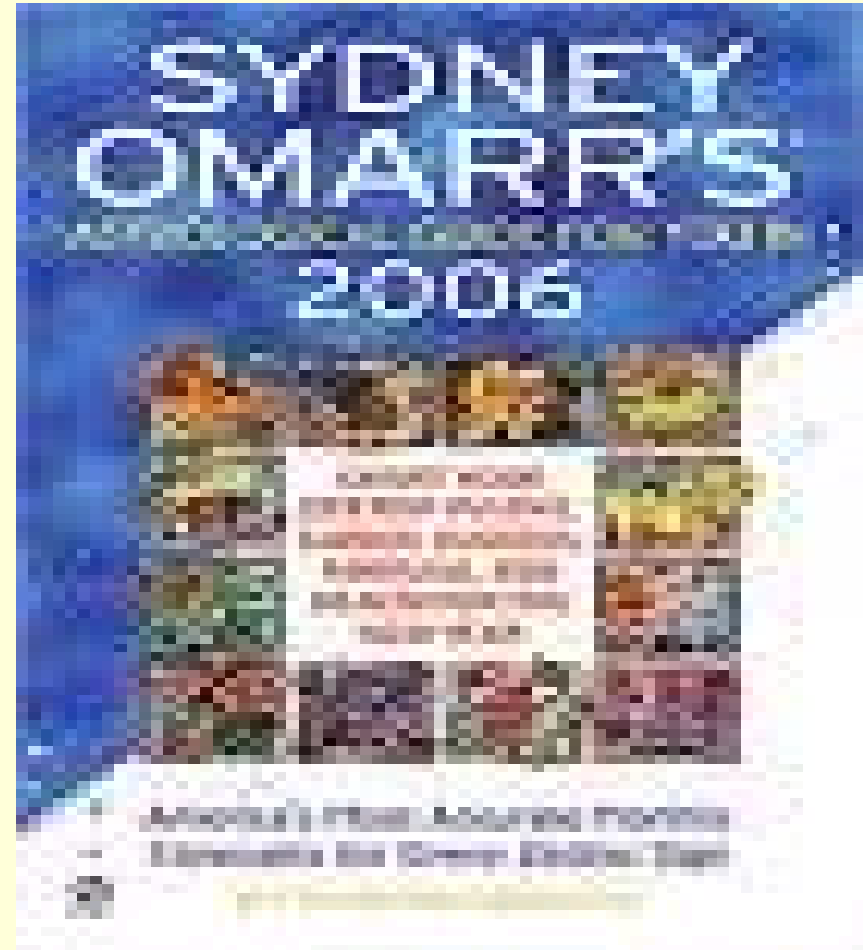
At the extreme

- Olivia Barclay (1919-2001), one of the founders of the recent 'traditional revival' said that psychological astrologers were not even astrologers at all.
- 'traditional astrology' good. Psychological (and Indian) astrology bad.



And many astrologers

- Used to think that Sun-sign astrology was not proper astrology at all



My argument in *A History of Western Astrology*

- All modern view points on astrology, traditional neo-traditional, psychological, humanistic, esoteric, revolutionary, scientific, evolutionary, elite, popular, philosophical or practical, have been around for two millennia. The arguments about astrology, its, use, nature and operation have been around for at least two thousand years.

For example, is it true that psychological astrology is modern?

- The argument against:
- All astrology influenced by the Greek philosopher Plato (c 400 BCE) HAD to deal with the psyche.

Ptolemy and the Psyche, 2nd c CE

- When Mars dominated the soul, Ptolemy argued, the individual would display the planet's qualities, whether negative or positive, either blind aggression or great courage. When Venus was dominant, the soul had the characteristic of that planet, whether pleasant affectionate and charming or 'careless, erotic, effeminate, womanish, timid...depraved and meriting reproach'.^[1]

^[1] Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, III.13.

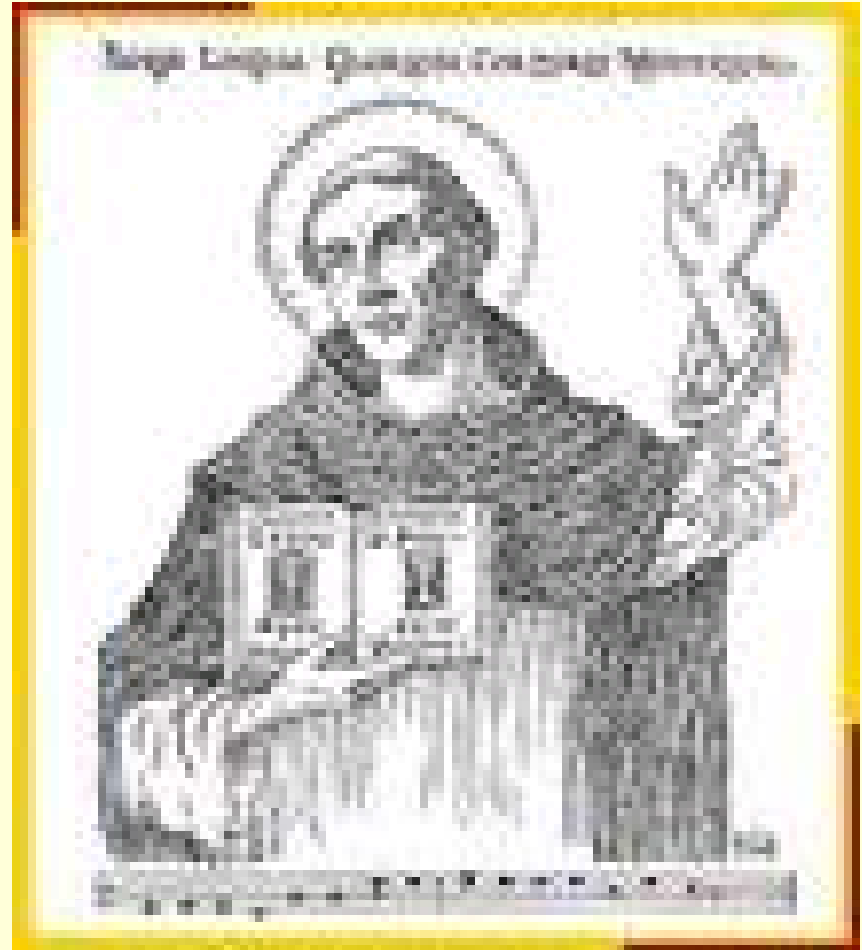


Is it true that Medieval Astrology was Fated?

- The argument against
- In a world in which failure to make the correct moral choice resulted in eternal damnation, nothing can be totally fated, whatever the language of astrological texts

Thomas Aquinas, 13th C

- The stars influence the body.
- The body influences the mind
- But the soul is responsible only to God



And are psychological astrologers, astrologers?

- Yes, of course they are.
- These days, fortunately, nobody seems to say that any more.

Can you be a good astrologer without doing divination?

- Yes, of course you can.
- It's surprising anyone still says this!



And 'tradition'?

- In the 1980s British astrologers became fixated on William Lilly.
- The term 'traditional astrology', previously applied to character description, became attached to Lilly's astrology.

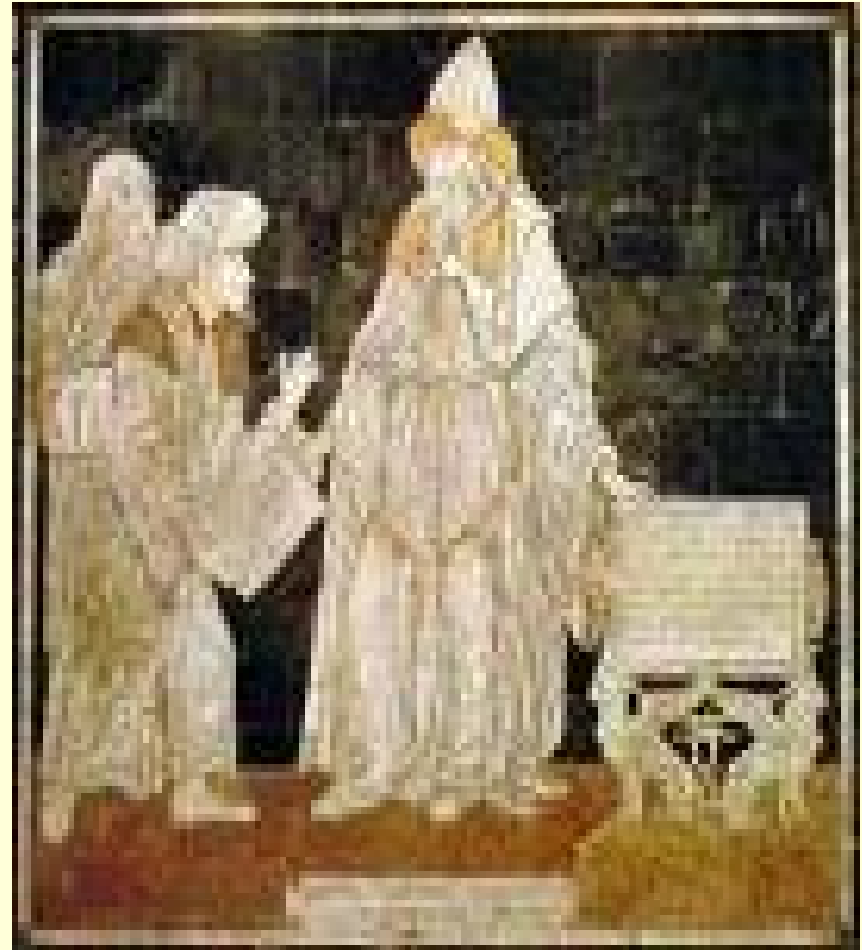


But what is a 'tradition'?

- How long does something have to be practiced to be a tradition?
- One year, 6 months? Twice?
- The claim to be part of a 'tradition', like the counter-claim to be 'modern' allows one to feel superior: everyone else has got it wrong.

And what about Sun-sign astrologers?

- Right Sydney Omarr
- Well, the belief that the Sun is the spiritual heart of the astrological cosmos dates back to the Corpus Hermeticum, c 200 – 1 BCE



Astrology as 'ideal types'

- Astrology is:
- 'a psychological developmental model'
- 'a means of preparing for the New Age'
- 'science'
- 'divination'
- 'traditional'
- '....and nothing else'
- All these positions represent a belief in a single truth.

Astrology as....

- Language
- Symbolic language
- Means of self-understanding.....
- Such views tend to be less exclusive

Is the astrologer a

- Scientist
- Shaman
- Psychologist
- Diviner
- Counsellor
- Priest?
- ????????

My scheme of the history of astrology

- Three main perspectives:
- Babylonian
- Platonic
- Aristotelian

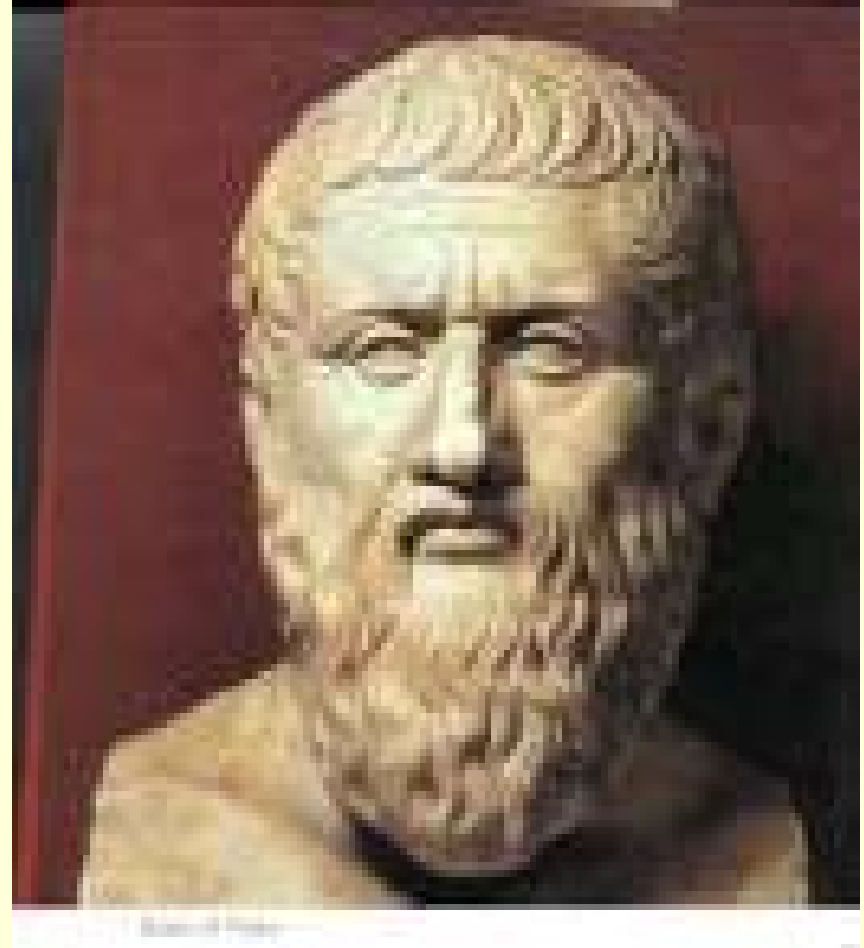
Babylonian

- Babylonian
- Stars = writing of the gods/goddesses
- Future negotiated via prayer, ritual
- People subject to the gods/goddesses



Plato c 400 BCE

- Movement of Stars reveal the thoughts of the Creator/Supreme Consciousness
- Cosmos is a single order
- By looking at one part you see what is happening in another
- Future negotiated by pure lifestyle



Aristotle c 350 BCE

- Stars transmit divine influence to earth
- By studying the influence of the stars we find out about the world
- The future is negotiated by involvement in the real world



Plus - the Stoics

- The future is essentially fated.
- We can choose how to respond
- (and we can change our behaviour through education)

From these three positions, all subsequent debates in astrology flow

- E.g.
- Are the stars signs (Babylon, Plato), causes (Plato, Aristotle) or influences (Aristotle)?
- Can astrology be improved by finding out what works and what doesn't (Aristotle)

- But, considering Curry further:
- Can one be a historian of music without playing an instrument?
- Can one be a historian of ancient Rome without being an ancient Rome.
- Does Curry's view represent an aspiration rather than a requirement?

Conclusion

- When thinking about the history of astrology do we need to think in terms of diversity?
- 'Astrologies'
- Are insider views more or less accurate, or appropriate, than outsider views?

Conclusion

- Do Insider and Outsider views on the history of western astrology share any features?
- Evolution: Tylor and Rudhyar
- Inaccuracy: Leo
- The view that all (outsiders) or some (insiders) forms of astrology are ineffective.
- Most take western astrology as 'normative' of all astrology