

DEFINITIONS OF ASTROLOGY

NICK CAMPION

Astrology

Crucial to the MA is the understanding that the phenomenon of astrology may be understood in different forms. Is the word 'astrology' in the singular, misleading? Are there different forms of astrology?

Patrick Curry has identified four:

- metaphysical* (the different metaphysical bases of astrology);
- formal* (the different forms of astrological theory);
- social* (the different kinds of astrology at various social 'levels');
- schools* (the different internal kinds of astrology).

Explanatory Models

Astrology is an explanatory model. But there are also models which seek to explain it.

We should also be aware of competing explanatory models (not mutually exclusive)

- As divinatory or oracular – astrology as divination, receiving messages from the gods about the future
- As correspondences - the chain of being.
- As causes - divine and/or physical
- As influences - divine and/or physical
- As language/symbol
- As synchronicity
- As correlations

All the above assume that astrology 'works'

We should also be aware of the sceptical models which assume that astrology doesn't 'work' 'objectively' and only appears to 'work' 'subjectively' because

- Astrologers and/or astrology are demonically inspired (religious critics)
- Astrologers and their clients are unable to cope with the real world and therefore seek reassurance in a system that allows them to surrender authority for their lives. Astrology therefore seems to 'work' because of psychological inadequacy (scientific critics)

According to historians

- Natural astrology: general celestial influences with general significance for the material world: was universally accepted in Europe until the 17th c; uses especially in medical and political astrology.
- Judicial astrology: the use of horoscopes to make precise judgements about human affairs, including the details of the past and future.
- NB: there is overlap between these two: while medical and mundane astrology were once widely justified according to natural influences, both practices could use horoscopes.

According to Alan Leo, 1890s-1900s

- Exoteric - events, the outer.

- Esoteric - the soul, the inner

Are there different kinds of astrologer?

Joscelyn Godwin has identified three types of astrologer in the nineteenth century: 'Firstly those yearning to be accepted as scientists. Secondly those with a more religious approach and thirdly those attracted to the occult, magic and spiritualism'.

(Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Theosophical Enlightenment*, New York: State University of New York Press, 1994, pp. 142-43)

Patrick Curry identified three types of astrology broadly equivalent to a three-tiered class system.

- High: philosophical
- Middling: the world of the professional astrologer
- Low: almanacs, street fortune tellers, sun-sign columns

Applications: the 'branches' of astrology.

When astrological texts were translated into Latin (usually from Arabic) in the eleventh century, four 'branches' of astrology were recognised.

- Natal (Genethialogical): the use of horoscopes based on (usually) the moment of birth
- Mundane (Revolutions): the analysis of history and politics.
- Electional: the selection of auspicious moments to launch enterprises.
- Horary (Interrogations): the use of horoscopes case for specific moments to answer questions asked at those moments.

General 'natural' astrology was often treated separately.

Should we consider calendars astrological? Usually not, but all religious calendars are concerned with the need to establish auspicious, i.e., divinely sanctioned, moments for religious ritual, sacrifice and worship. Is this not electional astrology?

Definitions

Crucial to the assessment of public attitudes to astrology is the question of what people think astrology is. They are likely to give different answers to the question 'do you believe on astrology?' depending on whether they think it is 'scientific', 'religious' or 'occult'. To this end I have started collecting definitions of astrology from published literature (sample is included below) and am asking my interviewees to define it.

As Glock (1962: 98) and Yinger (1969: 88) noted, in relation to religion, the definition used or implied in any question, will determine the answer. Yinger further notes that some researchers 'want' particular definitions in order to serve their present political positions, though not, perhaps, on the basis of 'assumptions that are fully articulate' (Yinger 1969: 88-89). The bias is none the less real for not being articulated. As one example, he argues that some researchers want a fairly narrow and fixed definition of astrology because they have a negative view of it, and wish to portray it as being associated only with outmoded beliefs and actions. A wider definition may appeal to those who

There has only been one previous survey of literary definitions, by Dean and Loftson. In 1995/6 they wrote 'Dictionaries, encyclopaedias and astrology text books have defined astrology variously as a science, a supposed science, an art, a divinatory art, an art/science, a language, a philosophy, and as a system for self-understanding. But the majority (roughly half) define astrology as the *study* of relationships between the stars and human affairs. In non-astrology books the reference is usually to "supposed relationships".'

Although they do not give references, they claimed to have surveyed '35 dictionaries and encyclopaedias mostly from 1960 onwards, and 35 reputable astrology books that defined astrology...mostly 1960 onwards'. However, they excluded 'books with definitions that defy classification. They cite as an example "Astrology is an Ego Conscious attempt to differentiate and rationalize relative wholeness by observing the effects of Transcendent Order"'.

(Geoff Dean, Peter Lopton, 'Discourse for Key Topic 2: Some Philosophical Problems of Astrology', *Correlation*, Vol. 14(2), Northern Winter 1995/6, p 33, p 41 n 1)

The exclusion of definitions which failed to fall into Dean and Lopton's classifications (which are themselves not defined) invalidates their own quantitative conclusion that 'half define astrology as the *study* of relationships'. Such quantification also ignores the possibility that some texts might be vastly more influential than others. Thus we might argue that Alan Leo's definition of astrology as science should be considered particularly influential.

Some definitions of astrology may be contained within discursive text rather than made explicitly and are intimately bound up with views about its function. For example: 'As an intuitive science, the full power of astrology lies in transforming consciousness through imagery. What power images have in our unconscious! What images do we hold and where do these images come from? What motivations underlie these images and how might they need to change? Astrology as a language of the soul contains the power of the imagination that is called for as Pluto, the planet of death and rebirth, moves through Sagittarius, the sign of the Truth-Seeker'.

(M.Kelly Hunter, 'the Black Goddess of the Eclipse', *NCGR Memberletter*, August/September 1999, p 1.)

There are a number of conclusions from the following definitions.

- 1) There is no single definition, as recognised by Hone.
- 2) There is an emphasis on 'meaning' in definitions provided by astrologers.
- 3) Also amongst astrologers' definitions, there is a tendency to blur the distinction between science and religion, particularly evident in Carter (a theosophist) and Frawly (an American practitioners of Indian astrology), in a way which neither modern scientists nor theologians might recognise. Astrologers who use the word science might be looking to more archaic definitions*, or to those current in other cultures, such as Hindu. Since the 1960s there has been a conscious move by many astrologers to avoid use of the term science to avoid having to conform to modern definitions of the term.
- 4) Amongst both astrologers and non-astrologers, definitions of astrology express competing political positions and attitudes to culture. Note the changing definitions proposed by astrologers and the hostile definitions in astronomical literature.

***Definitions of Science**

The OED includes the following definitions of science; 'the state or fact of knowing; knowledge acquired by study; acquaintance with or mastery of any department of learning; trained skill, a particular branch of knowledge or learning; a recognised department of study; a craft, trade or occupation requiring trained skill'. Traditional astrology can be included in any one of these definitions.

However, most people who regard themselves as scientists would probably agree with the OED's final definition; 'A branch of study which is concerned either with a connected body of demonstrated truths or with observed facts systematically classified and more or less colligated by being brought under general laws, and which includes trustworthy methods for the discovery of new truth within its own domain'.

Most scientists see astrology as failing to be classified as a science under this definition because it cannot come up with statistical verification under controlled conditions. While some astrologers support statistical research into astrology, others (The US International Society for Astrological Research) would point to astrology's right to discover 'new truth within its own domain'.

There is no one such thing as astrology - instead there are astrologies.

(Halbronn, Jacques, 'The importance of comets for the cause of Astrology; the case of Pierre Bayle in the years 1680-1705', paper delivered at the conference on Astrology and the Academy, Bath Spa University College, 14 June 2003.)

Astrological and New Age Dictionaries and Encyclopaedias

Alan Leo, *The Complete Dictionary of Astrology* (c 1900), ed Vivian Robson, Destiny Books, Rochester Vermont, 1983, p 8.

'The science which defines the action of celestial bodies upon human character, and its expression in the physical world. It is the soul of astronomy, and by it the inequalities of humanity are explained. it shows the working of a definite law by which we may realise that as we sow, we also reap'.

Nicholas de Vore, *Encyclopaedia of Astrology* (1947), Littlefield, Adams and Co, Totowa, NJ, 1976, p 28.

'The science which treats of the influence upon human character of cosmic forces emanating from celestial bodies. It has been spoken of as the soul of astronomy'.

Philippa Waring, *The Dictionary of Omens and Superstitions*, Treasure Press, London 1978, P 20.

'Astrology and fortune telling overlap the fields of superstition...What began with a natural veneration for the heavenly bodies primitive man saw above him, today has become a flourishing science - but the basic belief that their movements can affect people's lives remains unchanged'.

Larousse Encyclopaedia of Astrology, McGraw-Hill, New York, 1980, p 19.

'The central assumption of astrology is that the positions of the Sun, Moon and planets at the birth of an individual or the beginning of an enterprise are related in a significant and observable manner to the intrinsic character and later development of that individual or enterprise'.

Fred Gettings, *The Arkana Dictionary of Astrology*, Penguin-Arkana, London 1985, p 52-3.

'The study of the relationship between the macrocosm and the microcosm, which in (materialistic terms) is often defined as the study of the influence of the celestial bodies on the Earth and its inhabitants. Astrology appears to be one of the most ancient of the surviving occult sciences'.

Eileen Campbell and J.H.Brennan, *Dictionary of Mind, Body and Spirit*, Aquarian Press, London 1994 (originally *The Aquarian Guide to the New Age*, 1990), p 26.

'astrology is concerned with interpreting the influence of the planets on human affairs'.

James R. Lewis, *The Astrology Encyclopaedia*, Visible Ink press, Detroit, MI, 1994,

p xvii: 'Astrology literally means the study (or science, depending on how one translates the Greek word *logos*) of the stars (*astron*). Astrology differs from astronomy by confining its attention to the study of correlations between celestial events and human events'.

p 54. 'Astrology is the science or study of the stars'.

Dean and Mather, *Recent Advances in Natal Astrology*,
p. 3: 'Astrology is symbolism based on astronomy'.

Astrological Books and Periodicals

Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, I.1, trans. F.E.Robbins, Loeb Classical Library, Harvard University Press, Cambridge Mass, 1930, p 3.

'Of the means of prediction through astronomy, O Syrus, two are the most important and valid. One, which is first, both in order and in effectiveness, is that whereby we apprehend the aspects of the movements of sun, moon and stars in relation to each other as they occur from time to time; the second is that in which by means of the natural character of these aspects themselves we investigate the changes that they bring about in that which they surround'.

William Lilly, 'Epistle to the Student in ASTROLOGY', *Christian Astrology*, London 1647..
'this heavenly knowledge of the Stars, wherein the great and admirable works of the invisible and al-glorious God are so manifestly apparent'.

Charles Carter., statement on the back of *Astrology*, the journal of the Astrological Lodge of the Theosophical Society from before 1940 - c. 1984

'Astrology is no mere system of fortune-telling. It is a Universal Philosophy, founded on demonstrable scientific fact'.

This definition was dropped from the Summer 1983 issue (57/2) when Geoffrey Cornelius (see below) took over production. When I became editor in Spring 1992 (62/2) the first part of the definition was restored ('Astrology is no mere system of fortune-telling. It is a Universal Philosophy'), dropping the reference to scientific fact. The definition was dropped altogether from Autumn 1995 (65/4) after I resigned as editor .

Carter, Charles, *The Principles of Astrology*, London: Theosophical Publishing House revised edn. 1963 [1925], p. 13.

'Astrology is the science of certain cryptic relations between the celestial bodies and terrestrial life'.

Margaret Hone, *The Modern Text Book of Astrology*, L.N.Fowler, Romford Essex, 1951, p16.

'Since there are many angles of approach to astrology as to religion or art, it is not easy to formulate a definition to suit all, but few will find disagreement with the following:-
ASTROLOGY IS A UNIQUE SYSTEM OF INTERPRETATION OF THE CORRELATION OF PLANETARY ACTION IN HUMAN EXPERIENCE'.

Robert Hand 'The Proper Relationship of Astrology and Science', *Astrological Journal*, Vol. 31 no 6, Nov./Dec. 1989, pp. 307-316 (p. 316).

'Dane Rudhyar called astrology the algebra of life but I suggest it's much more like a taxonomy of life than an algebra. A taxonomy is a classification system. it classifies animals as reptiles or mammals, or humans as Aries or Taurus. Of we could actually convert astrology into a symbolic algebra, into an algebra of quality, we would really have made a major advance in thought'.

David Frawley, *The Astrology of the Seers; a Guide to Vedic (Hindu) Astrology*, Passage Press, Salt lake City, Utah 1990, p 21.

'Astrology was the science of fate or destiny, used for understanding events on earth, which were seen as originating in the heavens. Astrology was not only the foremost of the outer sciences which deal with the nature of the physical universe, it was one of the most important of the inner or spiritual sciences which deal with the mind and soul. Astrology shows the cosmic source and background for the working of forces in any field of endeavour. In this

way astrological knowledge accompanied or preceded that of the other sciences. As it shows the basic language of cosmic energy, it can be used to help understand all spheres of life’.

Geoffrey Cornelius, Maggie Hyde and Chris Webster, *Astrology for Beginners*, Icon Books, Cambridge 1995, p 3.

‘the experience and interpretation of correspondence between the natural and human worlds below and the heavens above’

Alice Bailey, *Esoteric Astrology*, London: Lucis Press 1973 (1st edn. 1951), p. 14, citing *A Treatise on Cosmic Fire* 1925, p. 1051.

Astrology is concerned with the effect produced in the substance of the sheaths by the influences, vibrations, etc., of the various planets.

Dennis Elwell, Ellwell, Dennis, 'Astrology: An Alternative Reality', *The Astrological Journal*, July 1986, Vol. XXVIII no 4, pp 143-151 (p. 143)

Astrology means different things to different people, and is big enough to accommodate many complementary, and even contradictory, opinions.

It's as big as the elephant in the old parable about the blind men who wanted to know what an elephant was like. You will remember that one took hold of the elephant's leg, another took hold of its tail, another its trunk, another its tusk, and another its ear; and each one thought he was then able to say "Ah yes, now I know what an elephant is".

So from our exclusive standpoint we each arrive at different definitions of what astrology does, and what it is for. Among the definitions...

Astrology is finding out what destiny has in store, so I can avoid it. Astrology is showing me where my hidden strengths lie, and finding out my friends' secret faults. Astrology is a blueprint for the way reality itself is put together. Astrology is an exploded science, but one or two of the pieces may be worth picking up. Astrology is learning how to make Miss Virgo like me. Astrology is probing the unconscious. Astrology is a giggle. Astrology is about God. Astrology is finding the winner of the 2.30. Astrology raises such interesting problems of research and methodology, I could get my PhD. Astrology is making myself mysterious and interesting. Astrology is more hygienic than scrabbling about in the entrails of sacrificial animals. Astrology is pure pseudoscience, a monument to the human capacity for boundless self-deception. Astrology is a jazzy jumper and bonhomie.

Non Astrological Encyclopaedias and Dictionaries

Morris Jastrow, 'Astrology' in *The Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 10th edition, Cambridge University Press, 1910, p 795.

‘the ancient art or science of divining the fate and future of human beings from indications given by the positions of the stars (sun, moon and planets).

Concise Oxford Dictionary, Clarendon Press 1952.

(Formerly) practical astronomy (also called *natural* ~); art of judging of reputed occult influence of stars upon human affairs (*judicial* ~)

(note that this is a précis of Ptolemy's definition)

David Pingree, 'Astrology' in *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (place, publisher), Vol. 1, p 118.

‘the study of the impact of the celestial bodies - Moon, Sun, Mercury, Venus, Mars, Jupiter, Saturn, the fixed stars and sometimes the lunar nodes - upon the sublunar world’.

‘Astrology’ in *Chambers Encyclopaedia*, Intellectual Learning Systems, London 1970, p 724.

‘Astrology (Greek *astrologos*, ‘science of the stars’) in early times was a comprehensive term for the study both of the motions of the heavenly bodies and of their supposed influence on human and terrestrial affairs’.

‘Astrology’ in *Encyclopaedia Americana*, Grolier Inc., Danbury CT, 1972, p 557.

‘Astrology is the belief in the occult influence of heavenly bodies on human affairs and the practice or technique of divining events from astronomical observations’.

‘Astrology’ in *Collins Encyclopaedia*, Macmillan, London and New York, 1987, p 103.

Astrology, in the widest sense ,the discipline which translates general concepts of the universe, based on the assumption of a correspondence between the movements of the sun, moon and planets in the heavens and the movements of life on earth’.

‘Astrology ‘ in *New Encyclopaedia Britannica*, 15th edition, University of Chicago Press, p 1992, p 654.

‘astrology, type of divination that consists in interpreting the influence of planets and stars on earthly affairs in order to predict or affect the destinies of individuals, groups or nations’.

Roger Beck, ‘Astrology’ in *The Oxford Classical Dictionary*, 3rd edition, ed., Simon Hornblower and Anthony Spawforth, Oxford University Press, NY, 1996, p 195.

‘Astrology, the art of converting astronomical data (i.e. the positions of the celestial bodies) into predictions of outcomes in human affairs’.

‘Astrology is the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated’.

Curry, Patrick, ‘Astrology’, in Boyd, Kelly (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Historians and Historical Writing*, 2 Vols. London: Fitzroy Dearborn 1999, Vol. 1, pp 55-7 (p. 55)

The article by Ioan Petru Culianu in the *Encyclopaedia of Religion*, ed Micea Eliade, Macmillan, NY 1987, described astrology’s practices, recognising its diversity, and therefore did not define it.

Astronomical Dictionaries and Books

Patrick Moore, *Astronomy for GCSE*, Gerald Duckworth & Co., London, 1990.

‘Astrologers claim that by working out the positions of the Sun, Moon and planets at the time of a person’s birth, they can tell his (or her) character and destiny. An astrological chart (a horoscope) may look impressive, but it means nothing at all, and the only polite word to describe astrology is ‘rubbish’...The best that can be said of it is that it is fairly harmless when treated purely as a parlour game’.

Jacqueline Mitton, *The Penguin Dictionary of Astronomy*, Penguin, London 1992, p33.

‘The practice of a tradition that purports to connect human traits and the course of events with the positions of the Sun, Moon and planets in relation to the stars...most scientists regard it as pure superstition’.

‘Astrology’ in *Philips’ Astronomy Dictionary*, George Philip Ltd., London 1995, p 20.

‘A pseudo-science professing to assess people’s personality traits and to predict events in their lives and future trends in general from aspects of the heavens, in particular the positions of the planets. Astrology is based on ideas which are scientifically unsound and which the great majority of rational people dismiss...’

Martin Ince, *Dictionary of Astronomy*, Peter Collins Publishing, Teddington, Middlesex, 1997, p 12.

‘The ancient but still popular superstition for attempting to predict the future from celestial portents. Mocked by most (but not all) modern scientists, astrology separated from respectable astronomy in the 17th century as knowledge of the solar system grew, weakening the argument that the positions of the planets could affect our fortunes. Astrology is apparently immune to extinction despite scientific advance and the spread of education’

Histories

Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology*, The Boydell Press, Woodbridge, Suffolk, 1987, p 11.

‘Astrology is the interpretation and prognostication of events on earth, and of men’s characters and dispositions, from the measurement and plotting of the movements and relative positions of the heavenly bodies, of the stars and planets, including among the latter the sun and moon. This may or may not imply belief in stellar ‘influences’; it certainly implies constant and therefore usable relationships between configurations in the heavens and events on earth’.

Definitions from Surveys

In my questionnaire distributed at the Astrological Association Conference in Plymouth August 1999 I posed two questions. The first was a multiple choice question.

25. Would you say that astrology is (a) a science ☐ (b) a divine science ☐ (c) a psychological tool ☐ (d) a form of divination ☐ (e) a religion ☐ (f) a path to spiritual growth ☐ (g) a form of counselling ☐ (h) a healing art ☐ (j) a means of predicting the future ☐

Results:

(Campion, Nicholas, 'Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement: the extent and nature of contemporary belief in astrology', PhD thesis, University of the West of England/Bath Spa University College 2004, p. 243).

Table 4.

Astrologers' Definitions of Astrology		
Definition	AA	UAC
(a) a science	39 (24.5%)	55 (36.1%)
(b) a divine science	67 (42%)	79 (52%)
(c) a psychological tool	103 (64.8%)	92 (60.5%)
(d) a form of divination	53 (33.3%)	61 (40.1%)
(e) a religion	11 (6.9%)	12 (7.9%)
(f) a path to spiritual growth	105 (66%)	85 (55.9%)
(g) a form of counselling	92 (57.8%)	99 (65.1%)
(h) a healing art	85 (53.4%)	88 (57.9%)

(j) a means of predicting the future	67 (42%)	66 (43.4%)
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The second (no 26) Invited respondents to define astrology in their own words. The following are the answers from the first twelve completed questionnaires I read.
(The numbers afterwards are the numbers of the questionnaires)

- 155. A helpful guide to the centre of one's life and to the centre of one's life.
- 157. A system of meaning derived from planetary positions in space and time.
- 159. As above, so below.
- 160. A blue print of psycho/emotional etc. make up.
- 161. The science of the relation between the bodies of our planetary system and life on earth and the art of interpreting the results of the same.
- 162. A tool for those who want to attune themselves to the continuing creation of the universe and particularly those who want to take as constructive a part in it as possible.
- 163. A hermetic system containing all the different psychological combinations.
- 164. Use of natural energy forces, possibly magnetic, given out by the planets.
- 165. A sort of "glasses" through which you can see the true reality of the world.
- 166. A means by which we can observe spiritual law.
- 167. The study and practice of the dynamic, intelligent interconnectedness of all things, through the macrocosmic language of frequency - or! - god's film-script! (PC)
- 168. A form of communication with unseen minds.

FROM INTERVIEWS BY NICK CAMPION

Aleksander Imsragic : 'This circle [the horoscope] is a computer which can answer any question we care to ask'.

And natural astrology? The following e mails are from Mick O'Neill and Bruce Scofield to Nick Campion

From: Mick O'Neill
Sent: 16 January 2008 10:49
To: Nick Campion
Subject: precession influencing climate change?

Hi Nick,
In case you're interested, this program at the end discusses whether Precession is influencing climate change. Lots of links on the page. Mick

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/radio4/science/homeplanet.shtml>

From: Bruce C Scofield
Sent: 16 January 2008 18:48
To: ncampion@caol.demon.co.uk
Subject: Re: FW: precession influencing climate change?

thanks Nick - orbital cycles are taught in all geoscience and climatology courses now - its become a major dating technique - astronomical tuning they call it. I call it natural astrology. The precession cycle used in climate and geological dating is not exactly the same as precession of the equinoxes, however. The tilt of the axis relative to the obliquity of the orbit modulates climate by changing seasonal factors, but because the oval of the orbit is itself rotating, climatic precession is shorter (it varies from 19k to 23k) than precession of the equinoxes. This distinction is something that confuses astrologers and climatologists alike.

http://earthobservatory.nasa.gov/Library/Giants/Milankovitch/milankovitch_2.html

<http://www.emporia.edu/earthsci/student/howard2/man.htm>

http://findarticles.com/p/articles/mi_m1134/is_2_116/ai_n18646467