

DEFINITIONS OF RELIGION/ RELIGION AND ASTROLOGY

Lecture notes Nick Campion

'It has long been known that the first systems of representation that man made of the world and of himself were of religious origin. There is no religion that is not both a cosmology and a speculation about the divine'.¹

For an excellent summary of the debate over the definition of religion see:

Stark, Rodney and William Simms Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization, Revival and Cult Formation*, Berkeley: University of California Press 1985, pp.3-8.

Yinger, J. Milton, 'A Structural Examination of Religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Spring 1969, Vol. 8, pp. 88-99.

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In his study of the beliefs of modern British Catholics, Michael Hornsby-Smith (1991: xv) quoted the following passage from Graham Green's *Travels with my Aunt*: 'Are you really a Roman Catholic?' I asked my aunt with interest. She replied promptly and seriously. 'Yes, my dear, only I just don't believe in all the things they believe in.'²
(Hornsby-Smith, Michael, *Roman Catholic Beliefs in England: Customary Catholicism and transformations in religious authority*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991.)

A Dictionary Definition: The Concise Oxford Dictionary

1. Monastic condition, being monk or nun.
2. Practice of sacred rites.
3. One of the prevalent systems of faith & worship (the Christian, Mohammedan, ~ established ~, Natural, Revealed...).
4. Human recognition of superhuman controlling power & esp. of a personal God entitled to obedience...
5. Action that one is bound to do (from *ligare*, to bind)

Herbrechtsmeier, William, 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion: One More Time', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1993, Vol. 32 no 1, p. 1.

The definition of religion continues to be a matter of dispute among scholars. And I suspect that disagreement about the topic will persist so long as religion is studied in academic circles. This is as it should be. No area of academic specialisation should allow its self-definition to be a settled thing.

Zinnbauer, Brian J., Kenneth J. Pargament, Brenda Cole, Mark S. Rye, Eric M. Butter, Timothy G. Belavich, Kathleen M. Hipp, Allie B. Scott, Jill L. Kadar, 'Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1997, Vol. 36 no 4, p. 549.

Current conceptions of religiousness and spirituality in the social scientific study of religion are nothing if not diverse

(They add, p. 562, this variety of meanings must be acknowledged.)

¹ Durkheim, Emile, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields, New York: Free Press 1995 [1st edn., *Les Formes élémentaires de la vie religieuse*, Paris: F. Alcan 1912], p. 8.

² Green, Graham, *Travels with my Aunt*, Harmondsworth: Penguin 1972, p.151.

'Religion is an aspect of culture centred upon activities which are taken by those who participate in them to elucidate the ultimate meaning of life and to be related to its ultimate solutions' (Kishimoto 1961 cited in Caird and Law 1982)

Two types of definition (Zinnbauer et al 1997; 550, citing Pargement 1997)

1. Substantive

'focuses on beliefs, emotions, practices, and relationships of individuals in relation to a higher power or divine being. At the center of the definition is the sacred, and it is the sacred which fundamentally characterises enlightenment'.

2. Functional

'emphasizes the function that religiousness serves in the life of the individual. Beliefs, emotions, practices, and experiences are examined, but the focus is how they are used in dealing with the fundamental problems of existence such as life, death, suffering and injustice

My definition:

An ideology or set of practices which exist to provide a sense of order in the world and which makes claims for its efficacy which are not scientifically verifiable.

Questions:

- What about morality?
- Is the of religion function integrative?

The issues

Is religion true: the result of revelation, reason or experience?

Or false: Primitive error? A psychological construct (Freud)?. A social construct (Marx)? Encourages social cohesion (Cicero - Durkheim)?

Vernacular religion: 'the totality of all those views and practices of religion that exist among the people apart from and alongside the strictly theological and liturgical forms of the official religion' (Bowman and Sutcliffe 2000: 6, citing Yoder 1974: 14).

Following Yinger (1969: 98) Clayton and Gladden give 'people's efforts to grapple meaningfully with that they regard as the Ultimate' (Clayton and Gladden 1974: 142).

Bowman, Marion and Sutcliffe, Steven (2000), *Beyond New Age: Exploring Alternative Spirituality*, Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.

Clayton, Richard R., and James W. Gladden (1974), 'The Five Dimensions of Religiosity: Toward Demythologizing a Sacred Artefact', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 13, pp. 135-143.

Yinger, J. Milton (1969), 'A Structural Examination of Religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Spring, Vol. 8, pp. 88-99.

Yoder, D. (1974), 'Towards a Definition of Folk Religion', *Western Folklore*, Vol. 33 no 1, pp. 2-15.

The supernatural?

'a propitiation or conciliation of powers superior to man which are believed to direct and control the course of nature and of human life (Frazer, *Golden Bough*, I, I:221-222)
(see also Carpentier 1994: 19; Arnal)

Religion requires belief in spiritual beings but not necessarily a supreme being?

Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. 1, London: John Murray 1873. p. 491.

In studying the religions of lower races, the first point is to define and specify what one means by religion. If one insists that the term means belief in a supreme being..., a certain number of tribes will be excluded from the world of religion. But that too-narrow definition has the flaw of identifying religion with certain of its particular developments...It seems better to set "spiritual beings" as a minimum definition'

Religion as Social Function

Durkheim, Emile, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields, New York: The Free Press 1995 [1912],

p. 41.

Religious beliefs proper are always shared by a definite group that professes them and that practices the corresponding rites. Not only are they individually accepted by all members of that group, but they also belong to the group and unify it. The individuals who comprise the group feel joined to one another by the fact of common faith. A society whose members are united because they imagine the sacred world and its relations with the profane world in the same way, and because they translate this common presentation into identical practices, is what is called a Church. In history we do not find religion without Church.

p. 41

A church may be led by a body of priests, but 'sometimes it is more or less without any central directing body. But wherever we observe religious life, it has a definite group as its basis'.

p. 44.

A religion is a unified system of beliefs and practices relative to sacred things, that is to say, things set apart and forbidden – beliefs and practices which unite into one single moral community called a Church, all those who adhere to them...the idea of religion is inseparable from the idea of a Church, it conveys the notion that religion must be an eminently collective thing.

p. 45

It can be said that there is no religious system, old or new, in which we do not find what amounts to two religions existing side by side and in various forms. Although closely allied and even interpenetrating, yet they remain distinct. One is addressed to phenomena in nature – whether great cosmic forces, such as the winds, the rivers, the stars, the sky etc., or the objects of all sorts that populate the earth's surface, such as plants, animals, rocks, etc. For this reason it is given the name naturism." The other is addressed to spiritual beings – spirits, souls, genies, demons, deities proper. These beings are animate and conscious agents, like man, but differ from man in the nature of the powers ascribed to them, in particular the special characteristic that they do not affect the senses in the same way; they are not usually perceptive to human eyes. This religion of spirits is called "animism".

pp. 206-8.

Religion provides social functions and must therefore be based in a church.

Society in general, simply by its effect on men's minds, undoubtedly has all that is required to arouse the sensation of the divine. A society is to its members what a god is to the faithful. A god is first of all a being that man conceives of as superior to himself in some respects and one on whom he believes he depends. Whether that being is a conscious personality, like Zeus or Yahweh, or a play of abstract forces, as in totemism, the faithful believe they are bound to certain ways of acting that the nature of the sacred principles they are dealing with has imposed upon them. Precisely because society has its own specific nature that is different from our nature as individuals, it pursues ends that are also specifically its own; but because it can achieve those ends only by working through us, it categorically demands our cooperation. Society requires us to make ourselves its servants, forgetful of our own interests. And it subjects us to all sorts of restraints, privations, and sacrifices without which social life would be impossible. And so, at every instant, we must submit to rules of action and thought that we have neither made nor wanted and that sometimes are contrary to our inclinations and to our most basic instincts.

P. 223. In Totemic belief systems, 'religious force is none other than the collective and anonymous force of the clan.

Clifford Geertz, TITLE, ed. Michael Banton, *Anthropological Approaches to the Study of Religion* New York: Frederick A. Praeger 1966, p. 4.

(see Yinger 1969: 89, 95)

Geertz notes that chaos threatens to break in upon humanity 'at the limits of his analytical capacities, at the limit of his powers of endurance and at the limits of his powers of endurance. Religion is then a shared system to deal with these threats:

1. a system of symbols which acts to
2. establish powerful pervasive, and long lasting moods and motivations in men by
3. formulating conceptions of a general order of existence and
4. clothing these conceptions with such an aura of factuality that
5. the moods and motivations seem uniquely realistic.

Yinger comments (1969: 89) that

This kind of definition, as contrasted with the kind that points to specific social and cultural systems generally called religion, requires that one try to distinguish between what is intrinsic to religion, and what is part of specific forms for expressing that intrinsicity. The forms change because the ways in which chaos threatens us change and our cognitive styles change.

He then proposes the following operational definition:

Where one finds awareness of an interest in the continuing, recurrent, "permanent" problems of human existence - the human condition itself, as contrasted with specific problems; where one finds rites and shared beliefs relevant to that awareness which define the strategy of an ultimate victory; and where one has groups organized to heighten that awareness and to teach and maintain those rites and beliefs (1969: 91).

He adds

Each part of this definition is a variable, not an attribute. We will do well, I think, to speak in terms of a religious quality, present to greater or lesser degree in many situations, rather than of religions.

He argues that there are therefore three components:

1. individual character aspect (awareness and interest)

2. cultural aspect (shared rites and beliefs)

3. Social structural aspect (groups)

Where one is lacking religion is not present in the full meaning of the term.

Kishimoto, H., 'An operational definition of religion', *Numen*, 1961, Vol. 8 no 3, pp 236-240.

240:

'Religion as treated [by cultural anthropologists] is nothing but, by definition, an aspect of culture. There are many cultural institutions which help to solve man's problems. Religion is one of them....It seems to me that religion is a dynamic value system, which is believed by those who participate in it to contain great power. This dynamic value system is believed to be able to make in man's mind his deepest value of life and elucidate the meaning of life'.

Therefore:

Religion is an aspect of culture centred upon activities which are taken by those who participate in them to elucidate the ultimate meaning of life and to be related to the ultimate solution of its problems. Many religious systems contain the notion of deity and/or holiness in relation with such activities.

Glock and Stark 1966: 11, see religion as a matter of 'value orientations':

'Value orientations are those institutionalised systems of beliefs, values, symbols and practices that are concerned with the solution of questions of ultimate meaning'.

They add that they are universal, mutually exclusive and may or may not have supernatural referents.

p. 10-11. Value orientations are divided into two clusters, or 'perspective realms'

1. religious - supernatural
2. humanist - naturalistic

p. 10. A functionalist definition of religion must include Marxism as a religion in the USSR.

By the same token scientism (Yinger 1970: 12) and secular humanism are religions.

Similarly - Religions generate 'symbolic universes [which] are objectivated meaning-systems that relate the experiences of everyday life to a "transcendent layer of reality".'

Luckmann, Thomas, The Invisible Religion, New York: MacMillan 1967, p. 44.

Meaning Systems

There may be many systems which may provide meaning. Robert Wuthnow (1976: 3; see also 58-81) defined four meaning-systems in 1970s America, distinguished from each other by 'what they identify as the primary force governing life', though they are not mutually exclusive: (1) theism, or mainstream religion, in which God watches over and cares for each person; (2) individualism, in which the individual is in charge of his own destiny; (3) social science, in which life is shaped by social forces such as family and class; (4) mysticism.

This last he defines as the notion that

the forces that govern life cannot be understood; they can only be grasped from the mystical or ecstatic experiences one has. In such experiences the blinders of normal perception are stripped away and one "sees" that life makes sense, one feels that it hangs together. But the mystic does not rely solely on sheer feelings. He too has a philosophy about the forces governing life, just as the proponents of the other forms of consciousness do. The forces that influence his life most are his own intense

experiences. In such experiences he can alter time and space. He can experience God. He can escape the social and cultural forces that impinge upon him. He can create reality itself (Wuthnow 1976: 5).

The essence of a meaning-system is the manner in which it enables consciousness to construct reality out of symbols and experience, selecting those features of the environment which can be organised into a coherent model (Wuthnow 1976: 60-1). Even the mystic's claim to transcendence and timelessness, Wuthnow argues, does not exist without the distinctions that an organising concept such as time makes possible (1976: 62). Further, the organisation of the 'everyday reality...of time and space' into measurable units of time' permits action (Wuthnow 1976: 66). Wuthnow's model provides a plausible explanatory hypothesis for the effectiveness of astrology's role in providing the timing mechanism for the coming of the New Age as a historical period, and galvanising those participants in the New Age culture *sensu stricto* into Popperian activism, the need to participate freely and willingly as an individual in the inevitable historical process. Wuthnow also comments that that material which cannot be assimilated into 'everyday reality', and which is usually dismissed as 'a subordinate kind of experience', may be revalued as a 'structured mystery' or 'a symbolic expression of wholeness and transcendence (Wuthnow 1976: 69, 73)

Spirituality

Zinnbauer, Brian J., Kenneth J. Pargament, Brenda Cole, Mark S. Rye, Eric M. Butter, Timothy G. Belavich, Kathleen M. Hipp, Allie B. Scott, Jill L. Kadar, 'Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1997, Vol. 36 no 4, pp. 549-564.

549: Notes that definitions are diverse.

550:

'a subjective experience of the sacred' (Vaughan 1991; 105).

'that vast realm of human potential dealing with ultimate purposes, with higher entities, with God, with love, with compassion, with purpose (Tart 1983: 4)

Although religiousness and spirituality are often used as synonymous, the latter may not require involvement with organised religion (Miller and Martin 1988: 14).

The variety of definitions amongst researchers mirrors that amongst users.

Lack of clear definition impairs communication amongst researchers.

Spirituality not distinguished from religiousness until the rise of secularism in the twentieth-century and the resulting popular disillusionment with mainstream religious institutions to personal experience of the sacred (Turner et al 1995, Roof 1993).

Interest in spirituality has greatly increased in the last 25 years (Roof 1993)

American religious life has shifted to include more elements defined as spiritual.

Consequently spirituality has begun to acquire distinct meanings and connotations.

551:

Spirituality has acquired positive connotations and religiousness negative ones.

Roof, Wade Clark (1993), *A Generation of Seekers: The Spiritual Journeys of the Baby Boom Generation*, San Francisco: Harper Collins.

Studied 1559 subjects of the 'baby-boom' generation. Found large defection from organised religion in 1960s and 1970s and increase in 'new religions' which emphasised direct experience over institutional religion.

He termed them 'highly active seekers'.

Non-theists, faith viewed as a spiritual journey or quest, individualist, reject organised religion.

Zinnbauer et al . (1997: 560) found that, of all the groups they tested, New Agers had the highest number who claimed to be spiritual but not religious spiritual (47%) as opposed to religious and spiritual (53%).

Found that these people often discussed spirituality in personal or experiential terms.

Chatterjee, Margaret, *The Concept of Spirituality*, New Delhi: Allied Publishers Private 1989.

King, Ursula, Spirituality, in John R. Hinnells (ed.), *A New Handbook of Living Religions*, London: Penguin 1997, pp.667-679.

Vaughan, Frances, 'Spiritual Issues in Psychotherapy', in *The Journal of Transpersonal Psychology*, 1991, Vol. 23 no 2, pp. 105-119.

Mysticism

the forces that govern life cannot be understood; they can only be grasped from the mystical or ecstatic experiences one has. In such experiences the blinders of normal perception are stripped away and one "sees" that life makes sense, one feels that it hangs together. But the mystic does not rely solely on sheer feelings. He too has a philosophy about the forces governing life, just as the proponents of the other forms of consciousness do. The forces that influence his life most are his own intense experiences. In such experiences he can alter time and space. He can experience God. He can escape the social and cultural forces that impinge upon him. He can create reality itself (Wuthnow 1976: 5).

Magic

Durkheim, Emile, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields, New York: The Free Press 1995 [1912], p. 39-44.

Magic doesn't have a church. Magicians work independently and have a temporary clientele of individuals dependent on them for specific, utilitarian tasks.

Religion has a church. Priests work collectively and have a permanent congregation with a group identity dependent on them for speculative tasks such as forgiveness and salvation.

Also see the discussion in Yinger (1970: 77. Magic's primary mode of operation is analogy but in practice it may overlap with science or be obscured by apparently non-magical intent, as in advertising.

Yinger, J. Milton (1970: 77), *The Scientific Study of Religion*, New York: MacMillan.

Malinowski, Bronislaw, *Magic, Science and Religion*, New York,: Doubleday 1954: Magic as attempt to manipulate natural forces

Frazer – 2 types of magic: imitative; sympathetic.

Magic as explanatory model, or as guide to action

See Tambiah pp 65-75.

- Magic, in the usual understanding of this word, means the capacity to accomplish what cannot be accomplished by ordinary physical means. Such would be, for example, the power to influence psychically people and objects at a distance, to see people's actions and to know their thoughts, to make them disappear from our world and appear in unexpected places; the capacity to change one's appearance and even one's physical nature, to transfer oneself in some inconceivable way to great distances, to pass through walls, etc.³

Paranormal: transcends 'the explanatory power of mainstream science' (Gray 1991: 7; see also Abell and Singer 1981; Hines 1988: 19)

Superstition

Hunt, Stephen J., *Alternative Religions: a Sociological Introduction*, Aldershot: Ashgate 2003, p. 170

'Superstition' is not an easy term to define. As in the case of magic, it may simply be understood as representing an attempt to explain or even manipulate one's environment through various mystical or metaphysical means.

Origin of Religion in the Sky?

'At times the sun is suddenly eclipsed; the rain does not come in the seasons when it is expected; the moon is slow to reappear after its periodic disappearance, and the like. Because these occurrences are outside the ordinary course of events, people have imputed to them extraordinary, exceptional - in a word, extranatural - causes. It is in this form, Jevons claims, that the idea of the supernatural was born at the beginning of history; and it is in this way and that this moment that religion acquired its characteristic object'.

Durkheim, Emile, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life*, trans. Karen E. Fields, New York: The Free Press 1995 [1912], p. 25, commenting on Jevons, Frank, *Introduction to the History of Religions*, London: Methuen 1896, p. 15

Durkheim (p 26) then disagrees with Jevons. He notes that

1. there seems to be an order in the world
2. this order is never more than approximate
3. there are all sorts of exceptions
4. we become used to our expectations being unmet
5. these setbacks occur too often to seem extraordinary
6. yet, 'given a certain element of chance, as well as a certain uniformity in experience', there is no reason to attribute one to causes and forces which do not cause the other.
7. yet

To have the idea of the supernatural, then, it is not enough for us to witness unexpected events; these events must be conceived of as impossible besides - that is, impossible to reconcile with an order that rightly or wrongly seems to be a necessary part of the order of things. It is the positive sciences that have gradually constructed this notion of a necessary order. It follows that the contrary notion cannot have predated those sciences.

In other words, the notion of the supernatural only exists as a contrast with modern science. The gods are used far more to account for regular, orderly developments, such as the movement of the stars, than for exceptional ones,

Cf also Max Muller, sun-as-god theory.

Is Astrology a Religion?

³ Ouspensky, P.D., *A New Model of the Universe*, London, Arkana 1984 [1931], p. 110.

1927 Julius Bennett, writing in *Astrology*, the journal of the Astrological Lodge of the Theosophical Society, discussed the timing of the 'New Age of Aquarius'.

the 'combined science and religion of the New Age' would be astrology (1927: 39, 43).

(Bennett, Julius R. (1927), 'The Aquarian Age, and the Evidence of its Inception', *Astrology*, Winter, Vol. 1 no 5, pp. 38-44.)

How do we decide whether astrology is a religion?

Van der Waerden 1974 2.59.

'Babylonian astrology depended on astral religion...The guiding concept of astrology, that the gods of the sky rule our lives, was a religious concept. Very right were the Fathers of the Church to condemn astrology!'

Yinger 1969: 90.

'the simplest procedure is to measure those phenomena labelled religious by the individuals or societies in question. Most current research on religion follows this procedure'.

However, this assumes a common definition of religion, or even that some groups labelled religious, may deny the appellation.

Cohn (1964) objected to the use of religion to describe the belief systems of peoples whose language has no verbal cognate for the word. Yinger (1969: 90 n. 4) responds that the test is whether one can bring together a series of phenomena that have many important characteristics in common, but is aware of the possibility that actions and experiences which may only have superficial similarities may be connected, while those that have deeper but less apparent connections may be labelled differently.

Herbrechtsmeier (1993: 15) 'religion is nothing if it is not intentional. What people believe about the world, about ultimate reality, and about their own religion is indispensable for the categorisation of religious phenomena. Within this way the many emic universes...help to make up the world's religious traditions.

Although Durkheim (p. 200) argues that 'magic forces and religious forces are not different in their essence', he draws an institutional distinction. Unlike a priest a magician operates as an individual with no church, a clientele rather than a congregation. The client's relation with the magician is transient, analogous to that between doctor and patient. The clients do not know each other and do not form a community. The idea of religion, meanwhile is inseparable from that of the church.

Is astrology a hidden (Yinger 1969: 90) or invisible (Luckman 1967) religion?

Astrological columnist Neil Spencer (2000: 245), suggested that, even though astrology is not a religion, 'large parts of it assume that there is a spiritual dimension to human life, a mystical connection to the universe which it can help to clarify. This remains a major part of its appeal, and one which no amount of CSICOP scepticism can easily dispel'

For some the view of astrology as religion proceeds necessarily from the belief that its claims are false. E.g. Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 34:

Client cults deal in serious magic. They exchange specific compensators for rewards of substantial value. Astrologers do not offer access to heaven, but they do claim to be able to give us valuable advice by reading the heavens. If astrologers really could

improve our life chances by telling us the right day to make investments, get married or stay away from the office, those would indeed be valuable rewards. To the extent that the astrologers clients believe in them, their compensators also have value.

p. 35. Astrology is an example of a cult which is in a low state of tension* with society because it has not organised into a fully fledged religious movement:

Participating in cult audiences seems to be a very low risk activity. A 1976 Gallup poll suggests that 22 percent of Americans believe in astrology, and astrology columns and publications flourish. Bit very little flak is directed toward astrology. In general, the clergy of American churches seem to ignore the astrology cult. At most, persons who participate in audience cults may risk censure from those around them.

(*Tension with society: post-modernism as a manifestation of modernity in crisis?)

p. 30. Astrology is an audience cult:

Astrologers offer specific advice but they do not reveal the meaning of the universe.

Personalized horoscopes cast for specific clients represents pure cult activity; impersonal mass media horoscopes are pure audience cult communications" (1985:227).

The typical audience cult

most closely resembles a very loose lecture circuit. Persons with a cult doctrine to offer rely on ads, publicity, and direct mail to assemble an audience to hear their lectures. Efforts almost invariably are made at these lectures to sell their ancillary materials – books, magazines, souvenirs and the like – but no significant efforts are made to organize the audience (1985: 27).

"astrology is most commonly a limited client or audience phenomenon" (1985:227), while "Visiting an astrologer or actually being one is a public cult activity rather than a private belief" (1985:230). A client cult is defined as a "service and therapy occupation", and *est*, Scientology, rolfing and psychoanalysis are given as examples. The weakness of Stark and Bainbridge's typology, though, is that anything can be defined as a cult; if a visit to a therapist is a cult activity, then so must be a visit to a doctor for reassurance. Is the National Health Service then a cult organisation? In other words, Stark and Bainbridge's typology can be applied to almost any public activity and if every form of public behaviour can be cultic then the argument about what is or is not a cult breaks down.

Astrology is often classed as a religion by its critics, partly because they see it as a matter of blind belief. Modern sociologists of religion often include contemporary astrology in their studies of 'new religious movements'. It once formed a practical adjunct to the astral religions of Babylon, Egypt and Rome. It was in this spirit that, at the beginning of the twentieth-century Alan Leo proclaimed astrology the religion of the New Age. However, most astrologers resist the idea of astrology as a religion, arguing that it is based neither on rigid dogma nor a church, and does not require the worship of a supreme being. According to recent surveys just 7% of astrologers in the UK and 8% in the USA accept that astrology is a religion. By contrast 66% in the UK and 56% in the USA regard it as a path to spiritual growth. This reflects a widespread modern view that religion represses the individual, while spirituality sets us free.

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, pp. 153-4.

Astrology is widely treated as a matter of 'belief' (Hunt 2003: 173) or faith (Bok and Mayall 1941: 244) rather than, say, knowledge. Yet there is currently no detailed consideration of the function of belief in astrology in the sociological literature. There are, though certain general assumptions. Hill (1973: 247), for example, suggests that 'astrology provides an 'alternative source of self-definition' among groups of individuals who are searching for such 'definition', but it is not clear why those individuals should have found this function in astrology. Elsewhere claims are made but little independent argument offered. Hexham and Poewe offer no independent reasons for belief in astrology, preferring to cite Eliade, though without a reference, as the source for their claim that belief in astrology arises out of belief in karma and reincarnation, and vice versa (Hexham and Poewe 1997: 104).

The greatest concern with astrology is found in literature written by Christian evangelicals and scientific sceptics. While the Christian evangelical literature on belief in astrology includes the argument that astrology's claims are true, but originate in the satanic realm (see for example Harris 1999; 2000), the major part of the debate on belief in astrology is therefore based on the sceptical premise that science has disproved it. Crowe's comment (1990: 163), that 'there is currently no scientific or statistical evidence for...[astrology's] validity' is typical and is echoed throughout the sceptical literature (see for example Glick and Snyder 1986: 20). The sceptical literature repeatedly promotes the view that all research results into astrology are negative (see for example, Abell 1981: 89; Dawkins 1998: 122; Blackmore 1999: 184; Dean and Kelly 2003: 175). Such information is also cited in the literature on the sociology of religion. For example, Hexham and Poewe (1997: 104), citing sceptical sources (McGervey 1977; Bastedo 1978), write that 'astrology has been thoroughly discredited by scientific testing' and conclude that it is therefore magical and irrational. The need to explain belief in astrology, therefore, arises directly out of the view that its claims are so patently false that those who take it seriously are suffering from psychological weakness or disorder (see for example Dean, Kelly and Mather 1996b: 86).

The following is a draft of Nick Campion's PhD chapter 8. Should be used as source material; not directly quotable.

Secularisation and the decline of traditional religion

There is today a widespread belief that religion in the western world is in state of long-term decline (Wuthnow 1976: 41). It is also a matter of record, as Stark and Bainbridge report (1985: 430), that much of the literature on the recent history of religion in the west assumes a decline in religiosity in western countries. For example, Wuthnow (1976: vii), wrote that 'for some years, a gradual, largely imperceptible, yet overwhelmingly profound cultural shift has been taking place in American society' and has 'wrought changes in our basic conceptions of ourselves and in the meanings we ascribe to our worlds'. This process, known as secularisation, has been defined by Stark and Bainbridge (1987: 429) as 'the erosion of belief in the supernatural - a loss of faith in the existence of otherworldly forces'. On a wider level it should be noted, there are also public concerns over the decline of membership in, or respect for, other traditional centres of authority in the UK, such as political parties (Guardian 22 April 2000) and faith in the police (Burell 2001).

Although the roots of secularisation may be traced back to the nineteenth-century (Chadwick 1985), to seventeenth-century Puritanism, following Max Weber's arguments (1958) or to earlier stages in the history of western rationalism, including Greek philosophy (Hill 1973:

19-46; Wilson 1979: 11), it is widely assumed that the counter-culture of the 1960s accelerated the process (Wuthnow 1976: 1, 6, 12; see also Caird and Law 1982)

Advocates of the theory, those who believe that the process is desirable, take the teleological view that a such an intellectual development is the counterpart of biological evolution and argue, in the words of Peter Berger, that 'modernization necessarily leads to a decline of religion, both in society and in the minds of individuals' (Berger 1999: 2). For example, Bryan Wilson (1979: 11), a leading advocate of the theory, described what he perceived as a long-term trend 'in the nature of human consciousness, towards what might be called a "matter-of-fact" orientation to the world'.

Hill differentiated six varieties of meaning of the term:

1. The decline of religion in terms of the meaning and prestige of its symbols and its practice, although not necessarily its institutions, an argument particularly associated with Bryan Wilson (1966).
2. The shift of attention within religious groups themselves from 'other-worldly' to 'this-worldly' concerns (Shiner 1967; Berger 1969 Canopy).
3. The disengagement of religion from the rest of society's political and social structures as religious choice becomes a private matter. This process, known as 'privatisation' and proposed strongly by Wilson (1969, 1979), is particularly associated with developments since the 1960s (Wuthnow 1976: vii, 1, 2, 6, 207-208). As Rice wrote, 'beginning with the counterculture movement of the late 1960s, people have increasingly rejected traditional; religions in favor of more personalised belief structures (Rice 2003: 105). According to Orenstein this trend 'emphasises personal choice, is ambivalent about religious authority, focuses in experimental practice and personal growth, and mixes together spiritual stimuli from different traditions' (Orenstein 2002: 309; see also (Caird and Law 1982: 152; see also Zinnbauer *et al.* 1997: 51). Stark and Bainbridge (1987: 316) write of religion becoming a 'cultural speciality'.
4. The transposition of beliefs and activities that once possessed a divine point of reference to an entirely secular context. An example would be the overarching claims of such modern ideologies as communism, humanism, Marxism, nationalism and scientism (Hill 1973: 243).
5. The gradual loss of the world's sacred character, the disenchantment of the world strongly associated with the theories of Max Weber (1864-1920) and outlined in his *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, first published in 1905. Hill (1973: 247) suggests that astrology's popularity in the 1960s and 70s may have represented an attempt to re-enchant the world.
6. The shift from a sacred to a secular point of reference in society as a whole, rather than just in the more limited sphere of religious beliefs and practices (Becker 1950)

Criticism of Secularisation Theory

In spite of its popular appeal however, secularisation theory is far from universally accepted. A particularly blunt refutation was offered in 1972 by Andrew Greeley (1974: 45), who argued that the theory that that society is moving inexorably towards secularism is itself less a matter of empirical observation than of a religious faith, shared by both secularists and churchmen. A huge amount depends, though, on how the data is collected and interpreted. Glock noted in 1962 that, of three recent studies of religion in the United States, one showed that a revival was occurring, one that there was a continuation of a long-term increase, and the third that secularisation was increasing (Glock 1962: 100). The issue depends largely on the extent to which Christianity is taken as the normative definition of religion. As Smart (1973a: 10, 34-5; see also Clayton and Gladden 1974) pointed out, there was a tendency in

the 1950s and 1960s to assume that Christianity was normative and that other forms of belief might therefore be mistakenly assumed to be less religious. also notes the tendency of western scholars to adopt definitions which suit their ideologies.

However, as Hill points out, the issue is far from clear cut and depends on one's preferred definition of religion and, given that the argument assumes the existence of long-term trends, it also depends on the period taken into consideration (Hill 1973: 228-250; see also Yinger 1969: 88-89; Herbrechtsmeier 1993: 6 Gill, Hadaway and Marler 1998: 514). That is., decline in religious belief might be apparent from one starting point but not from another. The historical argument is a critical one as part of the secularisation debate depends on the inappropriate comparison of past with present world views. For example, Steve Bruce, noting the claim that in 1976 36% of British adults claimed to have had supernatural experiences (including of horoscopes), acknowledges that this is a large figure but states that it is small compared to the Middle Ages and hence that the secularisation thesis is maintained (Bruce 1995: 55). However, the phenomena which are now defined as supernatural by virtue of their inexplicability within the framework of natural law, were perfectly capable of naturalistic explanation with a medieval Aristotelian framework, as Thorndike has documented in considerable detail (Thorndike 1923-58). The general absence of a historical perspective is a weakness in many sociological texts. For example, Hexham and Poewe (1987: 105), in their potted history of astrology, which was designed to demonstrate its marginal significance, spoke of its revival in the sixteenth-century following its decline in the third-fourth centuries, some four-hundred years after the real date, the twelfth-century (Tester 1987). Wuthnow's argument though, illustrates the extent to which the secularisation thesis is based on arbitrary definitions which take Christianity as representative of religion. Having noted that, between 1971 and 1973, the proportion of respondents in the bay area of San Francisco who knew nothing about Transcendental Meditation and Zen Buddhism dropped from 33% to 3% and 9% respectively, he then defines such practices as 'nonreligion' in order to maintain the thesis that the drop in church attendance indicates a corresponding decline in religiosity (Wuthnow 1976: 37-39). He identified stages in this process in which American adults moved progressively from conservative religion to liberal religion to no religious affiliation, but it is clear that religion is defined as theism, that is traditional Christianity (Wuthnow 1976:, 83-6). The significance for the New Age is that its existence be seen as a consequence of secularisation in that it may be seen as a symptom of privatisation, but that, in that the New Age *sense stricto* gives a high significance to supernatural forces, Bruce (2002: 75-105). has argued that its own demise is also inevitable, precisely because such superstition must also be seen as a phase in the secularisation process.

Thus three models can now be identified for the impact of modernity on religion.

1. Modernity is characterised by increasing secularisation and a and a corresponding growth of scepticism about religion which is therefore in decline, perhaps inevitably, as in the six variants discussed above.

2. Modernity has had little effect on religious belief, which persists relatively undiminished, obscured by the decline in official church attendance, an argument proposed influentially by Greeley (1972) and Luckmann (1990), who coined the phrase 'the invisible religion' to describe the religiosity of those who retain traditional beliefs but no longer attend a regular church service. Stark and Bainbridge relate this theory to their view that secularisation not only is not new but is a continuous and natural process within 'religious economies' in which the tendency of religious institutions to become more worldly is both continuous and is automatically countered by tendencies to revival, producing 'sects', and innovation, which results in the development of 'cults' (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 429-431). The very concept of the decline of the church, the triumph of science and the shift towards a 'religionless' future is therefore, in their view, quite simply wrong.

3. As an extension of point 2, modernity is characterised by increasing fragmentation of established religious forms and greater pluralism, an argument which is, perhaps, most congenial to the inclusion of 'new religious movements; and new age beliefs within the framework of the contemporary religious world. Davie (1994: 93-116) has coined the phrase 'believing without belonging', a direct reference to Hornsby-Smith's (1991: 4) consideration of the joint questions of 'beliefs and belonging' in relation to modern English Catholics (to describe those individuals for whom religious experience is no longer found in one of the mainstream churches. She adds that 'the sacred does not disappear - indeed in many ways it is becoming more rather than less prevalent in contemporary [British] society' (Davie 1994: 43). In Europe as a whole, she reports, the increase of 'other-faith categories' represents a growth area in religiosity since 1945 (Davie 1994: 27).

Callum Brown also considers Steve Bruce's insistence that belief in the supernatural, and hence faith in God, has been in decline since the 1960s but points out that the real shift might be in terms of firstly the shift in the focus of ethical concern towards such matters as environmentalism and nuclear war, about which the Bible had little to say, and secondly the revolution in social attitudes affecting such matters as marriage which made the church seem conservative and out of touch (Brown 2001: 190). That is, levels of religiosity may have little to do with church attendance, a supposition which supports Adorno's finding that people are quite capable of distinguishing between religion and the church (Adorno 1950: 731; see also Batson and Ventris 1982: 142). The crucial issue is whether the church is perceived as being able to satisfy that religiosity.

It should also be noted that the above three arguments are not water tight compartments. Davie, for example, emphasises persistence of traditional belief within the contemporary framework of institutional fragmentation while Wilson's 'privatisation' thesis is particularly applicable to the diversity found within the general category of New Age, as demonstrated by Roof (1993: 194-200) by the simple expedient of dropping Wilson's narrow definition of religion. Thus, as Hall (2000: 4), states, 'students of religion now acknowledge what casual observation attests: contrary to the expectations of twentieth-century social theorists...the rise of modern society has failed to bring the thorough going secularization that would undermine widespread religious belief. Instead, as in times past, people who need spiritual and social support continue to turn to religion in huge numbers'.

Astrology as a Substitute for religion

It is also widely argued that, if not a religion, astrology may be a substitute religion (Kanitscheider 1991: 259-260), or what Hill (1973: 247) considered a 'God of the Gaps', one of many popular responses to the 'disenchantment', or loss of sacred character, of the modern world. That this argument follows naturally from popular accounts of secularisation theory is indicated by the related media reports. For example, in an article by Derek Draper (2001: 3) in *The Times*, the question was posed, 'as religious belief dies in Britain, is it being replaced with a tendency towards superstition, magic or obscure cults?'. Nigella Lawson (1996: 17), citing the 1996 Church of England report, *The Search for Faith*, argued that 'star signs' and 'the cult of the clairvoyant' are replacing the Church as 'the new religion', a view echoed in the sceptical literature (Grossman 2002: 7). The prevailing hypothesis is therefore that religious and classical paranormal beliefs should be negatively correlated, because they are naturally competing sets of beliefs. Plug (1975: 176-7), Wuthnow (1978: 58-9) Gill (1999: 42, 51) and Hunt (2003: 17) all found support for this proposition, finding that belief in astrology correlated inversely with church attendance (see also Persinger and Makarec 1990).

Stark and Bainbridge (1985: 384-6) point to a more complex position, suggesting that 'traditional religious affiliation' does indeed inhibit 'the acceptance of occult practices and cult movements', including astrology, yet that those who claim no religious affiliation are not secular rationalists but show a high acceptance of occultism and cults, and hence astrology. Thus, modernity, in their view is characterised by a shift in the forms of religiosity rather than

a decline. The notion of a rivalry between astrology and traditional religion, is, though retained.

However, an alternative proposition, one that is not necessarily incompatible with the former one, is that religiosity and belief in astrology should be positively correlated because they both appeal to anti-scientific sentiments. Williams, Taylor and Hintze (1987: 356-8) found support for the latter hypothesis, concluding that strong belief in the paranormal, including astrology, is likely to correlate with strong belief in religion and science. In other words, the unifying principle is belief and that object of belief may be irrelevant.

Rice found that the situation is more complex, and that 'there are many belief patterns' (Rice 2003: 101; see also 105). In a recent survey of two hundred randomly selected individuals Sparks (2001) found that there was no relationship between belief in astrology and religious belief. In addition, Caird and Law (1982: 161) found that a substantial proportion of persons involved in 'non-conventional religions', including theosophy and spiritualism, 'tend to have multiple group memberships'. Their conclusion suggests that previous research, which was based on the assumption of a single primary religious affiliation may have been unreliable.

However, the Gallup Polls (1978: 1.574; 1979: 184) concluded that there is no relationship between either church-going or Christian belief and belief in astrology in the USA.

Bias Against Astrology

Profound hostility to astrology, even extending to objections to its critical study as a historical phenomenon, tends to be expressed in an academic environment as has been noted by the astronomers Culver and Ianna (1988:xii), the psychologists Eysenck and Nias (1984: 7-11), and the historians Curry (1987:1-4) and Halbronn (1987:213-5). Stark argued that there is a widespread bias in the literature on the sociology of religion towards antagonism to groups which are small, committed and include vivid images of the supernatural, and that consequently groups which come 'closer to disbelief' are judged 'better' than those which do not (Stark 1999: 57). Secondly, he noted that the attitude to religion amongst social scientists not directly involved in the study of religion tends to conform to the now discredited view that religiosity is a form of stupidity. He observes the emphasis on groups defined as 'weird' (1999: 57; see for example Shermer 1997) Wuthnow (1976: 69; see also 127) noted that what he called the positivist 'meaning-system' dismisses as false or irrelevant all phenomena that are not deemed consistent with its philosophy. Such judgements, as Michael Hill wrote with particular reference to sociologists, are 'extra-sociological' (Hill 1973: 9), or beyond the scope of the discipline within which the researcher is working. Following Hill, then similar judgements made by scientists may be designated 'extra-scientific'.

Astrology as Abnormal or Normal

The central theme, then of most of the literature on belief in astrology is that it is a phenomenon in urgent need of explanation. However, a counter-argument is to be found within the literature on the sociology and phenomenology of religion. Greeley (1975: 7) launched a substantial critique of Adorno and argued that the definition of the paranormal as abnormal is unsustainable, claiming rather than 'the paranormal is normal' and that people who have paranormal experiences are not only 'not kooks...deviants...social misfits', but may actually 'be more emotionally healthy than those who do not have such experiences'. Stark (1999: 56; see also Best and Kellner 1991: 3, 37), argued that Adorno and his colleagues were authoritarian modernists who themselves were concerned with the control of information and ideas to suit their purposes, while Caird and Law (1982: 151-2) noted that the tendency to regard adherence to non-conventional religions, in which they included theosophy and spiritualism, as a form of social deviance, arises from a flawed model of western religion in which a stable society is said to be currently meeting a unique challenge from new ideological sources which it is obliged to resist. Yinger (1970: 78) observed that

'the social use of deviation to reconfirm and re-establish boundaries, a theme so powerfully developed by Durkheim, is, I suspect, a prime source of magical beliefs and practices amongst contemporary people' a category in which he included science. As Ninian Smart said of the psychology of religion, there is a sense that the purpose is to explain away the phenomena under consideration (Smart 1973: 37; see also Hill: 1973: 13-14). Thus the labelling of astrology as deviant may be no more than a device to confirm what Glock and Stark (1966: 10-11) called the 'humanistic value-orientation' or what As Herbrechtsmeier (1993: 15) termed the 'imperial' attitudes of modern science. Thus the proposition that belief in astrology needs to be explained is itself the product of what Dean *et al.* described as systematic errors of human judgement (Dean, Kelly and Mather 1996b: 89-90). As a result, Stark continued, 'it is now impossible to do credible work in the social scientific study of religion based on the assumption that religiousness is a sign of stupidity, neurosis, poverty, ignorance, false consciousness, or that it represents a flight from modernity' (1999: 56-7).

From a phenomenological standpoint, the nature of belief is difficult to understand if it is assumed, *a priori*, to be false. As David Hufford has argued, the investigation of belief traditions has been distorted by the *a priori* assumption that those beliefs are false, even when researchers make obligatory declarations of their own neutrality. As he summarises the situation, the question such researchers ask is "Why and how do some people manage to believe things which are so patently false?...[and] the interpretations that follow often obtain most or all of their explanatory force from the assumption that the beliefs under study are objectively incorrect' (Hufford 1987: 19). Further, Hufford argued that attempts to debunk supernatural beliefs, or to subject them to rational explanations, may be equally based on statements of faith and that, therefore, 'traditional of disbelief should be recognised as such as no more accepted uncritically than are traditions of belief' (1987: 25, 27).

Rational Choice

An alternative model for belief in astrology, then, is not that it represents a superstitious flight from reason, a failure of either scientific knowledge or Christian faith, but a perfectly logical means of viewing the world. As Batson and Ventris (1982: 141) pointed out, 'religious commitments were carefully thought out and taken seriously as a major goal in life. Further, Rodney Stark's findings, that the adherents of the groups he regards as 'cults',⁴ including astrology, decide on their affiliations on the basis of a clear assessment of the benefits. implicitly demolishes the supposedly well-defined boundary between the rational and the irrational in his development of 'rational choice theory', 'Humans', Stark and Bainbridge argued, 'seek what they perceive to be rewards and try to avoid what they perceive to be costs' (Stark and Bainbridge 1985: 5), developing their reasoning is quite simple: human beings make rational choices because their desire for certainty is less likely to be met from irrational choices whose outcome will most likely be unpredictable, and prefer rational gods because they are likely to offer them a greater certainty of reward than a capricious, irrational one (Stark and Bainbridge 1987: 113-4).

Is astrology a religion?

Checklist

- Function? What does it do for people?
- Meaning? What is its inner essence?

⁴ For discussion of the theories on the formation and nature of cults see Hill 1967: 47-97; Bromley and Hadden 1993; Saliba 1995; Dawson 1998: 13-40.

- Nature? How does it work?
- Church?
 1. What is a church? Labour party a broad church?
- God/goddess/gods/goddesses?
- Supernatural beings?
- Soul?
- Worship?
- Prayer?
- Magic?
- Sacrifice?
- Dogma?
- Sacred Text(s)?
- Ritual?

Is astrology a religion?

Is some astrology a religion?

Are some things that astrologers, in relation to their astrology, religious?

Do some astrologers practice astrology as part of a religious framework, regardless of whether the astrology is, in itself, necessarily religious?

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