

**Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement
The Extent and Nature of Contemporary Belief in Astrology**

Chapter 14

Conclusion

Introduction

In this thesis I have considered four main questions set out in chapter 1.

Firstly whether astrology is a New Age discipline and, following from this, what is its relationship with millenarianism?

Secondly whether, if astrology is New Age discipline, it is incompatible with Christianity.

Thirdly, whether quantification of belief in astrology is possible.

Fourthly, whether astrology's continued existence represents the anachronistic survival of a pre-modern superstition in the modern world.

As belief in astrology is the central issue, the main concern has been with perceptions of astrology's nature and purpose rather than with the truth of its claims. Evidence has been drawn from the literature, both etic and emic, from questionnaires distributed to selected groups of the public and astrologers, and from interviews with astrologers.

The starting point for discussion throughout has been the existing body of literature, primarily sociological and historical works. However, as Hill (1979: 6) observed, all academic disciplines 'which pursue the goal of a rigorous and systematic investigation of the empirical world sooner or later come up against the "pure" and "applied"

dichotomy' (Hill 1973: 6). Some of the historical texts which have been consulted, such as Garin (1976) and Thomas (1980) deal with what astrologers did, although not to the extent advocated by Geneva (1995). Those sociological works which refer to contemporary astrology tend to ignore the actual theory and practice of modern astrologers and assume *a priori* that astrology should be categorised as a religion, new religious movement, New Age discipline or superstition, and that its claims are false. It is also assumed that astrology can be treated as a single entity, as if all astrologers think the same and work according to a single code. Yet astrology is, like any other discipline, marked as much by its diversity as by its uniformity. As David Hufford (1987: 27) remarked when arguing that belief cannot be considered in isolation from disbelief, 'we must be prepared to tolerate some theoretical uncertainty and even dissonance while we develop a comfortable theoretical consistency primarily by selectively avoiding pertinent information and by forcing that information into appropriate, preconceived patterns'. In this respect Festinger's (1968) notion of cognitive dissonance removes the need to look for consistency of thought or practice amongst astrologers any more than within any other discipline. The goal, as Primino (1995: 41) advocated, has been to 'do justice to belief and lived experience'.

The Nature of Belief

Definitions of belief were discussed in chapter 8, in which it was noted that the word frequently carries pejorative overtones, the result of which is to distort research into the extent of belief. For this reason the very notion of belief in astrology amongst both astrology's detractors and its supporters is bound up with the view that astrology is necessarily false. However, if the word's core meaning, 'to have confidence', is taken as the principal definition, then the issue becomes one of confidence in astrology. But, in view of the diversity of astrological claims, which aspect of astrology might any believer have confidence in? As was discussed in chapters 6, 7, 12 and 13, there are sharply polarised differences of view amongst professionals and students of astrology

concerning, for example, the use of astrology for prediction as opposed to counselling, or the value of sun-sign columns as against the interpretation of the individual birth chart. Additionally, as was found in chapter 11, lay attitudes to astrology can be shown to be inconsistent, once the nature of the questions asked is modified.

The Extent of Belief in Astrology

In chapters 9 and 10 it was argued that quantifying belief in astrology is a deeply problematic exercise, in that questions worded in different ways result in wildly differing figures. It was argued, therefore, that simple yes/no answers of the type favoured by the Gallup polls are unreliable and the majority of sociological discussions of astrology which rely on such figures, are therefore flawed. The results reported in chapter 11 indicate that, when the wording of questions changes, figures for belief in astrology may increase from around 20% to almost 70%. Further, if attitudes to different types of astrological claim are inconsistent, research which posits a simple linear scale moving from disbelief to belief, such as Paulik and Buse (1984) and Bauer and Durant (1996), may disguise a more complex picture, in which individuals may pick and choose which of astrology's claims they have confidence in. In addition, as discussed in chapters 11 and 12, there seems no reason why individuals who read a horoscope column once a month because the astrologer they read is only published monthly, may not believe more intensely than another who visits an astrologer, takes an astrology course or attends a conference, yet actually denies belief in astrology. My thesis therefore supports the doubts expressed by Davie (1994: 45), Shiels and Berg (1977: 27) and Hill (1979: 14) in relation to attempts to quantify belief based on outward behaviour or institutional affiliation. Attempts to derive a single figure for belief in astrology may therefore lack credibility and it may well be that measures based on behaviour, such as readership of horoscope columns, or opinion, such as whether it can predict the future, be left as they are, rather than be converted into scales of belief. From a phenomenological perspective the primary measure of belief should be based on

individual testimony and, even then, as discussed in chapters 8, 11 and 12, individuals tend to answer such questions in the context of widespread pejorative associations with the meaning of belief.

In chapters 10 and 11 the popular assumption that belief in astrology is increasing was examined and it was argued that it is difficult to demonstrate that this is the case. Quite simply the source data do not suggest an increase in belief in astrology in recent decades. In addition the continuation of a tradition of popular astrology from the seventeenth to nineteenth-centuries suggests that belief in astrology never actually died out following the scientific revolution. The popularity of newspaper astrology columns after 1930 may therefore be a symptom of belief in astrology, rather than a cause of it. As Howe (1967: 66) points out, the response to R.H. Naylor's article on Princess Margaret in 1930 was immediate. This suggests that, rather than creating an interest in astrology as Bok (1941: 237-9) implies, the new sun-sign columns catered to an existing interest, one which can be traced back to the nineteenth-century and earlier. Modern popular astrology may therefore be seen as a part of what Grace Davie has identified as the 'common religion' of Britain' (Davie 1994: 77), one which has direct and continuous links with the seventeenth-century and hence with early-modern Britain.

Reasons for Belief in Astrology

Chapter 8 discussed the reasons for belief in astrology given in the sociological literature. These reasons are generally based on the assumption that from a positivist perspective, not only are astrology's claims false, but this information is so widely available that belief in astrology must result either from psychological inadequacy or from social marginality in the sense of poverty, low educational attainment or membership of an ethnic minority. One response to the positivist position is the argument that, in a context of epistemological pluralism there are domains of human experience and knowledge which lie outside the territory of modern science. However,

as noted in chapter 8, for the current discussion it is perhaps more important to point out that there is in the public domain literature which accepts the right of contemporary science to comment on astrology and which both details positive scientific evidence for astrology and criticises the scientific attitude which attacks astrology. For the purposes of the present discussion it is not necessary to comment on the veracity of that work, only to observe that it exists, and therefore that explanations for belief in astrology based on its obvious falsity are themselves derived from a false premise.

It is apparent, both from questionnaire results and interviews, that the vast majority of those who attend astrology conferences do so because their interest was stimulated by a personal experience which showed them that astrology worked. These findings confirm Dean, Kelly and Mather' s (1996: 868) claim that belief in astrology arises mainly either from reading astrology books or visiting an astrologer, although frequently it is a social acquaintance who provides the chart reading rather than a professional. As Richard Gregory (1998: 50) observed, ' Anyone who has taken even the most casual interest in astrology will have noticed that, contrary to all common sense, it seems to work' . The argument that the experience that astrology works is the result of psychological flaws is supported by some findings, but contradicted by others, so should be regarded both as unproven and, in any case, no more applicable to astrology than any other world-view in which the layperson has to take a great deal of the literature on trust. In this respect Barrett' s (2001: 337) views on magic are relevant: ' Does magic actually work? The short answer has to be "Yes", so far as those who use it are concerned. Whether a sceptical observer could be persuaded is another matter, and is perhaps irrelevant. If someone believes that magic works, then magic does work' . The issue of whether particular knowledge skills are required to understand what ' works' is less important in this context than the individual experience that it ' works' .

A suitable model for belief in astrology is therefore Stark and Bainbridge's 'rational choice theory' in which the believer, far from being the victim of a delusion, makes a reasonable choice as to what sort of belief system will most adequately provide a meaningful framework for comprehending their place in the cosmos.

Astrology as a New Age Discipline

Astrology's possible identity as a New Age discipline was discussed in chapters 6 and 7. The function of New Age astrology, it was argued, is primarily to facilitate spiritual development, enhance self-understanding and encourage both personal and collective transformation. For Rudhyar the purpose was to maintain political order and assist in a smooth transit to the New Age. Astrology in this respect conforms to Popper's historicist/activist model described in chapter 1. Using Hanegraaff's (1996) typology, New Age astrology *sensu-stricto* was distinguished from New Age astrology *sensu-lato*, the former being more esoteric and millenarian, the latter more concerned with psychological dynamics. The distinctions may not always be clearly defined though, and individual psychological astrologers may be motivated by millenarian confidence that the Age of Aquarius is about to begin. A development from both forms of astrology is sun-sign astrology, which may be considered New Age *sensu-lato* by virtue of the absence of any requirement for millenarian belief.

The question of the New Age as a movement was discussed in chapter 6 and it was noted that there can be many movements, described as networks or through 'family relationships'. In this sense the network of astrologers who follow Leo and Rudhyar's ideas closely may constitute a New Age movement although astrology is diverse enough and the boundaries between its different schools sufficiently fluid to suggest that the family relationships' model may be most appropriate.

The Appeal of Astrology: the pursuit of meaning

In chapter 12 it was found that more astrologers declared that their lives had become ' more meaningful' as a consequence of their use of astrology than any other option. Holden (2001: 15) suggests that believers in astrology may indeed be ' motivated by a greater need for self-knowledge' than nonbelievers. As discussed in chapter 9, astrology' s function as a means of providing a sense of meaning and to connect humanity with the divine, particularly in the context of the current historical crisis, is the foundation of contemporary psychological astrology, especially when it is closely linked to psychoanalysis, psychotherapy or counselling (Sasportas 1989a: 3). ' Meaning' , wrote Greene and Sasportas (1987: xi-xiii), ' is essential for life' . When life is devoid of meaning they add, the very psychological problems may develop which are typically those that, in turn, prompt clients to visit astrologers. Such statements, born of the evolutionary spirituality of theosophy, contain a profound parallel with contemporary evolutionary psychology (see for example Pinker 1997: 24-5, 329-30). In an interview in 1999 the evolutionary psychologist Stephen Pinker claimed that ' We have meaning and purpose here inside our heads, being the organisms that we are. We have brains that make it impossible for us to live our lives except in terms of meaning and purpose' (Douglas 1999: 6). Similarly, Krupp' s (2000: 434) statement that the projection of order and meaning on to the heavens originated as a necessary survival tool further opens the way to an understanding of astrology as, in Pinker' s terms, one of a number of systems which may be essential for an ordered life. Astrology may fulfil this purpose. Other systems may fulfil it. But if every single human requires some such system, and the need is fundamental to human existence, the argument (discussed in chapter 8) that astrology appeals particularly to people who are psychologically inadequate or socially deviant in a way in which other models do not, may be questioned.

There may be many systems which may provide meaning in life. 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.

The essence of a meaning-system, Wuthnow argued, 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, he argues, does not exist without the distinctions that an organising concept such as time makes possible (Wuthnow 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 in 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 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); a suitable description of Leo and Rudhyar's New Age astrology.

Wuthnow's concept of the ' meaning-system' may be equated with Glock and Stark's ' value orientation' or ' perspective realm' (1964: 110) or Glock's ' alternative reality' (1976: 365). Such phrases may describe more accurately astrologers' own profound resistance to the description of astrology as a religion discussed in chapter 12. Luckmann's concept of ' symbolic universes' is also a useful one. These he defined as ' socially objectivated systems of meaning that refer, on the one hand, to the world of

everyday life and, on the other, to a world that is experienced as transcending everyday life' (Luckmann 1967: 43). Within this model, the transcendent content of New Age astrology *sensu stricto* may be 'objectivated' in organisations such as the Lucis Trust, Rudhyar's International Committee of Humanistic Astrology (Rudhyar 1970: xi), or the original Astrological Lodge of the Theosophical Society, founded by Alan Leo in 1915 (Campion 1988). The New Age *sensu lato* may be represented in the Lodge's later existence as the Astrological Lodge of London, which was formally constituted in 1982, or in the Astrological Association (although, as noted in chapters 5 and 6, those organisations may also contain explicitly anti-new age elements).

Astrology as a Religion

As discussed in chapter 9, astrology is often categorised as a religion. It was also observed, though, that definitions of what constitutes a religion are many and varied. Neither do such arguments recognise the diversity of astrology. In chapter 1 it was noted that there is a profound difference between astrologers who forecast financial futures or the outcome of sporting contests, on the one hand, and those who may be counselling clients or pursuing their own spiritual development on the other. For current purposes I am considering only the latter forms of astrology, together with sun-sign horoscopes and sun-sign delineations, those varieties of astrology which I have classified as New Age.

It is clear that in this sense astrology does not conform to exclusivist definitions of religion. It has no organised church, set of dogma or priestly hierarchy in the sense required by Durkheim. Neither does it have a moral code. However, esoteric astrology, as developed by Leo and Rudhyar, does posit the existence of supernatural beings, although there is no personal creator. It may therefore correspond to Tylor's key requirement of a religion: belief in supernatural beings. Leo certainly predicted that astrology was to be the religion of the twentieth-century, and the millenarian New Age

astrology *sensu stricto* of Leo and Rudhyar may, therefore, be legitimately considered religious. However, there is no place for supernatural beings in those forms of psychological astrology, as pioneered by Arroyo and Greene, which have become detached from their esoteric roots. The same point may be made of sun-sign delineation and forecasting. It is inevitable that inclusivist definitions of religion may encompass other forms of astrology just as they include science and Marxism. Michael York (1995b: 107) defined religion as the 'shared positing of the identity of any relationship between humanity, the world and the supernatural in terms of meaning assignment, value allocation and validating enactment'. Here, again, problems of definition are encountered. Astrology takes no consistent position on the supernatural. Indeed, some explanations of it are entirely naturalistic (see for example Seymour 1990). However, if it is considered that astrology's explanatory models, such as synchronicity (Jung 1971), are beyond natural explanation then they are by definition 'supernatural', and astrology may be a religion, along with Marxism and scientism, which also take explicit positions in relation to the supernatural. In that case astrology may also be described as hidden (Yinger 1969: 90) or invisible (Luckman 1967) religion; one generally not recognised or respected by other religions. It may also be considered what Hill (1973: 247) defined as a 'God of the Gap'; that is, one of many popular responses to the 'disenchantment', or the loss of sacred character, which is characteristic of the modern world.

Astrology as a Popular Religion

However, there is an alternative approach that bypasses those exclusivist definitions which tend to see Christianity as normative and which insist that religion requires supernatural dogma and institutional hierarchies. Using this approach astrology may be regarded as a series of 'perspective realms', 'meaning systems' or 'symbolisers' which flourish at a popular level but are not officially recognised. Indeed they may be widely condemned, as was discussed in chapters 4 and 9, or subject to official restriction, as was noted in chapter 1 in the case of the ITC code. Thus Lewis (1990:

Introduction), described astrology's survival until modern times as being 'at the level of 'folk religion'. This relates to what, in turn Grace Davie has identified as the "common religion" of Britain' (Davie 1994: 77), as opposed to what Hornby-Smith (1991) referred to in the title of his study of modern English Catholics as 'customary', that is, traditional mainstream religion. Davie considered the diversity of 'common religion' which

at one end of the spectrum...[has] some link to Christian teaching,...[and at] the other...is extremely diverse...ranging through a wide range of heterodox ideas; for example...healing, the paranormal, fortune telling, fate and destiny, life after death, ghosts, spiritual experiences, prayer and meditation, luck and superstition (Davie 1994: 83).

Popular astrology may also reasonably be added to this list. Davie herself observes that these beliefs and practices are now generally included within the overall category of New Age, the popularity of which counters the proposition that Britain is becoming more secular. An alternative to the terms 'folk' and 'popular' religion is 'vernacular' religion (Primiano 1994), which Bowman and Sutcliffe (2000:6) follow Yoder (1974: 14) in defining as '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'. They include New Age culture as a subtype of 'popular religion' and add that,

If social religion [is] defined as religion founded on authoritative documents and propagated by religious specialists, priests or hierarchy, then the term 'popular' can apply to any layperson, whether peasant or ruling-class, who adopts beliefs and practices which may be at odds with the religious specialist's views (Bowman and Sutcliffe 2003: 11).

However, as reported in chapter 12, the overwhelming majority of astrologers are keen to remove astrology from the religious sphere, while supporting the definition of astrology as a spiritual path. In relation to this problem Bowman and Sutcliffe wrote (2000: 5), 'That converts to belief systems as varied as Buddhism, Islam, and Paganism consistently say "It's not a religion, it's a way of life" speaks volumes about a

previously impoverished understanding of what 'religion' is'. It may therefore be argued that astrologers' attitudes to the word religion are both 'impoverished' and as influenced as are their responses to the term belief by negative cultural associations. Such negative attitudes amongst astrologers are evident in the literature on the Age of Aquarius in which, as reported in chapters 5 and 9, there is an overwhelming assumption that the traditional religion of the Christian church is oppressive and is to be overthrown when the Age of Aquarius begins. Astrologers' general resistance to the definition of astrology as religion is, as the Aquarian Age literature demonstrates, itself based on an understanding of Christianity as normative. This assumption, as Smart (1973a: 10, 34-5) noted, was shared by much of the literature on sociology of religion. In addition, astrologers' overwhelmingly pragmatic, rational justifications for their interest in astrology, as noted in chapter 12, may be seen both as an attempt to locate a place for astrology outside religion, and as a rhetorical answer to astrology's scientific and religious critics' etic definitions of astrology as 'superstition', 'substitute religion' or 'alternative belief'. However, if Christianity is no longer regarded as normative and inclusivist definitions are accepted then it may be argued that astrology is a vernacular religion.

I am aware that this definition may be taken out of context by those positivists whose *a priori* assumption is that, if all religion is false then the definition of astrology as a religion must indicate that its claims too, are automatically false. Following Herbrechtsmeier's (1993: 1) discussion of the emic/etic problems raised when Buddhism is defined as a religion in the face of opposition from its western adherents, I am also aware of the issues raised by my challenging the emic position taken by astrologers. Yet, if astrology is a religion within York's (1995: 197) inclusivist model, as discussed in chapter 9, then it is in no different a position to those ideologies which are most hostile to it; that is, evangelical Christianity and sceptical scientism.

This conclusion brings my own emic position, discussed in chapter 1, into sharp relief. At the beginning of my research process I resisted the definition of astrology as New Age and, like the majority of my respondents and interviewees, I was generally hostile to definitions of astrology as a religion, although it was clear from a historical that it may be an adjunct to religious practice. My conclusion, then, that much astrology may be defined as both a 'common', 'vernacular' or 'folk' religion and as New Age, runs contrary to my original assumption. I should make it clear, though, that I am not including in this definition 'natural' astrology as defined in chapter 1. I am therefore not considering any astrology, whether natal or mundane, the rationale for which is derived primarily from the concept of physical relationships between humanity and the cosmos, and which is not based on the complex procedures of horoscope interpretation (see for example, Gauquelin 1982, 1988, 1991; Seymour 1990). As discussed in chapter 1, the boundaries between judicial and natural astrology are not watertight and may overlap, but the distinction is one which has to be recalled whenever conclusions are reached about what astrology as a whole is or is not: all such conclusions refer only to a part of the phenomenon of astrology. My definition of astrology as New Age or as a form of religion therefore applies particularly to popular newspaper and magazine astrology and those applications of astrology to spirituality, psychology or counselling in large part derived from, or inspired by, theosophy.

Lastly, in that my surveys indicate that the typical profile of an astrologer is a very high regard for spirituality yet a low rate of attendance at group religious or spiritual events, I have found support for the theory of 'privatisation', discussed in chapter 8.

Astrology and Christianity

The question is raised, then, as to whether astrology, as a New Age discipline, is a rival to Christianity. In chapters 4, 8 and 9 it was observed that there were two schools of thought within theosophy after the 1890s, the 'eastern' and the 'western'. The former was

truer to Blavatsky' s profound hostility to the Christian church but the latter, inspired by traditions of esoteric Christianity, emphasised Blavatsky' s gnosticism and respect for Christ as a great teacher. Most of the Aquarian Age and New Age literature forecasts the collapse of traditional church structures yet, for astrologers such as Rudhyar, influenced by the two most prominent westerners, Bailey and Steiner, the coming of the New Age will bring a reform of Christianity rather than its destruction. According to this account, and true to the tradition of Swedenborgianism, the *parousia* will not take place as Christ' s literal return, but as the triumph of ' Christ-consciousness' within every human being. It is this essentially humanistic Christianity which alarms astrology' s evangelical Christian critics. It is arguable, therefore, that, while, as found in chapters 12 and 13, there is clear antipathy from astrologers to the established institutions both of the church and mainstream Christianity, the rivalry between the two may be seen within the broader historical context as a revival of the two thousand year old clash between two Christianities, Gnostic and Catholic.¹

Millenarianism

In chapters 2, 3, 5 and 6, the widespread assumption that New Age culture is millenarian was considered and the discussion was expanded into the question of the long-established use of astrology as an adjunct to, and often as a central component of, millenarian prophecy. Astrological historiography is clearly, according to Collingwood' s categorisation (see chapter 1) ' substantialist' . Like Marxism, its substantialism is derived from neo-Platonism. Karl Popper' s model of historicism and activism was identified as a rationale according to which astrology' s use as a decision making tool may be justified within the context of a broadly predetermined historical pattern. Following on from the conclusion that astrology is New Age, New Age astrology *sensu stricto* may be described as overtly millenarian, while the position regarding New Age astrology *sensu lato* may be more nuanced. Psychological astrology, which I have classified generally as New Age *sensu lato*, may be heavily

influenced by Jung' s historicist framework, as discussed in chapter 3, and defined as millenarian, even though this blurs the distinctions, central to Hanegraaff' s typology, between the two forms of New Age. Yet, while sun-sign forecasts have, as was argued in chapter 7, developed out of Leo' s astrology, it is enough to say that they have therefore arisen from a millenarian context, but do not in themselves require any sort of millenarian belief.

Popper' s historicist/activist model as applied to millenarianism also permits discussion of astrology' s potential function. As an activist discipline its purpose may be to encourage individual decision making within a framework which posits that the future both has a purpose and that, at least for New Age astrology *sensu stricto*, it is bound to represent an improvement over the present. As Hall argued (2000: 7), ' When fully manifest, whatever their contents, apocalyptic narratives work against the grain of existing social orders. They hold the power to reorganise cultural meanings' . Williams (1996: 377), meanwhile, claimed that religion provides a source and shape for ideology and culture, and hence for social movements. In turn, social experimentation, Wuthnow (1976: 203) claimed, has a strategic social value in encouraging innovation. Astrology, with its dual historicist/activist emphasis on personal responsibility within a much greater context, in which individual character and destiny is linked to the changing qualities of time and the heavens, may then, as York suggests (2003), be not only the lingua franca of the New Age but a key organising philosophy of it. However, in view of Irving' s point, noticed in chapter 13, that there are some intellectual ' New Agers' who are deeply hostile to astrology, astrology should be called *a*, not *the*, organising principle.

The cultural context of astrology may therefore be considered in relation to other contemporary ' millenarianisms' . The hostility expressed by evangelical Christians to astrology may be seen as an objection to New Age views of the *parousia*, particularly

the rejection of the second coming as a literal event, while Aquarian Age literature, on the other hand, regards the established church as a failed symptom of the Piscean Age. Hostility to astrology from secular quarters may also be seen as a clash between different views of the future. For example, in chapters 2 and 8 it was argued that the positivist world-view has adopted the evolutionist theory of religion; that this is in turn a manifestation of the theory of progress and that, following Bury (1932: 1-36) and Baillie (1951: 64-5), belief in progress may consequently be defined as a modern species of millenarianism. In addition, elsewhere I have argued that positivism itself originated in the millenarian thought of August Comte (Campion 1994: 429-434). Popper (1986: 12-13) argued on similar lines, pointing out that the emphasis on prediction in the social sciences may be interpreted as a variety of historicism. Positivism's hostility to New Age astrology may therefore be based on its competing views of evolution and humanity's future development. Christian, New Age and positivist models of history may all, therefore be forms of what Collingwood (1946: 14-15, 18) defined as quasi-history; each has its own prophecy of the future to champion and proceeds partly by attacking its rivals. This clash of millenarianisms may itself be a feature of modernity. As Baldwin *et al.* (1999: 155-6) argued,

it is one of the great paradoxes of modernity that, on the one hand, time is organised according to an objective, scientific model, and, on the other, everyday life fragments into multiple cultures of time. This is perhaps explained by the revolutionary nature of modernity, which sweeps away old orders in the name of the new, but which is constantly creating new forms of culture which contest a single, normative standard.

Detraditionalisation and Modernism

Although astrology's roots lie in second and third millennium BCE Mesopotamia and, although it had acquired its current technical basis by the first-century BCE, I have argued that much of modern astrology, including psychological astrology, esoteric astrology, sun-sign columns and Aquarian Age historicism, is the result of innovations which took place from the 1890s onwards. Comparison may thus be made with Eric

Hobsbawm's (1983) study of the invention of historical traditions and Ronald Hutton's (1999) argument that contemporary pagan witchcraft is essentially a creation of the modern world. Both demonstrate that apparently antique beliefs can be of recent origin. They are, as Heelas argues of New Age astrology, 'detraditionalised'. There is no contradiction between this argument and the claim that astrology is part of the common religion of Britain, for the former refers to the form that it takes, the latter to traditions of belief in it.

The question arises then, as to whether astrology's survival in the modern world is anachronistic. This question was addressed in chapters 8 and 9 by challenging the positivist argument that 'belief' as a whole, and hence belief in astrology, is itself anachronistic. The argument is fundamentally an epistemological one and concerns the issue of who has the right to pronounce on matters of truth. The positivist view that only modern science can make such declarations was shown to be deeply flawed. In chapter 10 I argued that contemporary popular astrology should be understood in terms of continuity with the early-modern period, the seventeenth-century, rather than a revival of a lost tradition. In this sense then, popular astrology is a defining condition of the vernacular modern world-view rather than an eruption into it of a extinct superstition.

Moreover, as Bennett (1987: 24-5) argued, the notion that astrology's existence in the modern world is somehow incompatible with post-Enlightenment rationalism is based on a misunderstanding of popular belief. In the sense that New Age astrology is a peculiarly twentieth-century innovation then, following Hanegraaff's (1996) arguments on New Age culture's intellectual lineage, it may be seen in part as a product of Enlightenment secularisation. Bauer and Durant (1997: 55) concluded that astrology is 'part and parcel of late modernity', while Patrick Curry took a similar line, writing of the esoteric and psychological astrology which was developed at the beginning of the

twentieth-century that, ' Far from being an irrational aberration, the new occult astrology was perfectly suited to the capitalism and individualism of the age' (Curry 1992: 132). As Bowman and Sutcliffe (2000 : 11) wrote of New Age culture, the ' alternative' may be now better seen as ' mainstream' . Astrology exists within a view of modernity in which religion and spirituality are not dying out, as traditional secularisation theory claims, but diversifying. Its survival in the twenty-first century is therefore not an anomaly to be explained, but an aspect of the modern world to be examined on its own terms.

Notes

¹ By Catholic I mean that form of Christianity whose dogma was outlined at the Council of Nicaea in 325 and subsequent church councils, accepting the doctrine of the trinity and Christ' s divine/human status. See Goring 1992: 90. 370.