

Class Notes, Week 2
Psychological Perspectives

Weekly description text

Jung once stated that astrology is the summation of the psychology of antiquity. This 'psychology', which is also cosmology, is primarily focused on the nature and destiny of the soul, which is often equated with human character as well as the qualities and attributes of those aspects of the human being which were deemed to be divine. In this class we will briefly survey some ancient cosmological systems in which the individual human soul and its attributes are understood to be a reflection of the larger cosmos – the 'as above, so below' theme, sometimes called 'correspondences' or 'sympathies', which permeated virtually every religious current in late antiquity and which was intimately linked with an understanding of astrology.

Required reading:

1. Hans Jonas, 'Myth and Mysticism: A Study of Objectification and Interiorization in Religious Thought', *The Journal of Religion*, Vol. 49, No. 4 (October 1969), pp. 315-329 (on JSTOR and Moodle)
2. Morton W. Bloomfield, 'The Origin of the Concept of the Seven Cardinal Sins', *The Harvard Theological Review*, Vol. 34, No. 2 (April 1941), pp. 121-128 (on JSTOR and Moodle)
3. C. G. Jung, 'Conscious, Unconscious, and Individuation', in *The Archetypes and the Collective Unconscious*, Vol. 9 Part 2, *Collected Works* (London: Routledge, 1959), pp. 275-289

Optional reading:

1. Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, 'Temperament and Astrology in Theory, History and Practice' (2001) [handout for BSU module], OR Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, Part 1, 'Theory and History of Temperament', in *Temperament: Astrology's Forgotten Key* (Bournemouth: The Wessex Astrologer, 2005), pp. 1-56
2. Thomas Moore, Chapter 4, 'The Elements of Psyche', in *The Planets Within: The Astrological Psychology of Marsilio Ficino* (Great Barrington, MA: Lindisfarne Press, 1990), pp. 76-95

Forum discussion:

One of the current discourses in modern astrology is that the relationship between astrology and psychology is a modern 'scientific' interpretation which has no history or tradition in older astrological practice. Do you agree?

The ascent of the soul

The term 'psychology' is often used in scholarly literature to describe ancient cosmologies in which the nature of the soul is discussed, especially in relation to the cosmos. For example, Sanford L. Drob, in *Kabbalistic Metaphors* (Northvale, NJ: Jason Aronson, 2000), uses the term 'psychological views' (p. 156) to describe the perspectives of the Gnostics, and cites a text from the Dead Sea Scrolls (c. 1st-2nd century CE) called Manual of Discipline, which speaks of

'the man who would bring others to the inner vision so that he may understand and teach to all the children of light the real nature of men, touching the different varieties of their temperaments with the distinguishing traits thereof, touching their actions throughout their generations, and touching the reasons why they are now visited with afflictions and now enjoy periods of well being'.

According to Drob, Jung refers to the Gnostics as the first depth psychologists. You will see from Jonas' paper that one scholarly perspective – perhaps somewhat evolutionist in approach – understands this 'psychology' as a process of **interiorisation**, i.e. a gradual internalising of what were once perceived as objective celestial entities so that they become accessible to inner work and to explorations in self-knowledge. Jonas assumed that this process of interiorisation began with the emergence of Christian mysticism, but Gnostic texts show that it began long before, in the internalisation of the seven planetary archons and their respective spheres, which were equated with character qualities. This same interiorisation occurred in early Jewish esoteric teachings, called *merkabab* mysticism (*merkabab* = the chariot-throne of the deity), where the seven 'palaces' or levels of the cosmos through which the ascending soul of the mystic passes on its way to a vision of the deity are understood as internal moral attributes. Not only is the spark of deity to be found in the soul; so too is the hierarchical cosmos with its planetary spheres. The manner in which the individual deals with his/her inner life thus affects the experiences that occur during this celestial ascent, and ensure a safe passage to the supernal regions and back again to manifest reality.*

*If you are interested in Gnostic and early Jewish mystical literature, see the following references:

- Kurt Rudolph, *Gnosis: The Nature and History of Gnosticism*, trans. R. M. Wilson (San Francisco, CA: Harper & Row, 1987)
- Giovanni Filoramo, *A History of Gnosticism*, trans. Anthony Alcock (Cambridge: Basil Blackwell, 1990)
- Ioan P. Couliano, *The Tree of Gnosis: Gnostic Mythology from Early Christianity to Modern Nihilism* (New York, NY: HarperCollins, 1992). NB: Couliano's book is particularly interesting because he attempts to explain the pervasive presence of the soul's ascent in Gnostic cosmology and in later systems through the cognitive science of religion: i.e. humans are 'hard-wired' to formulate these kinds of cosmic representations to reflect processes which occur internally in the human brain and are therefore inevitably expressed in various religious as well as psychological formulations through the centuries.
- Gershom Scholem, *Origins of the Kabbalah*, trans. Allan Arkush (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987, pp. 24-35)
- Peter Schäfer, *The Hidden and Manifest God: Some Major Themes in Early Jewish Mysticism*, trans. Aubrey Pomerance (Albany, NY: State University of New York Press, 1992)

Another example of cosmology interiorised as psychology in Gnostic literature can be found in the treatise called *The Hypostasis of the Archons*, Nag Hammadi Codex II.4.95, trans. Bentley Layton, in James M. Robertson, ed., *The Nag Hammadi Library in English* (Leiden: Brill, 1977), p. 158. In this treatise, the planetary sphere of Saturn is personified by the unpleasant archon Ialdabaoth, who is full of pride and self-aggrandisement and who refuses to recognise that he is not self-engendered but is actually the child of a higher, unknown supernal power. When the Angel of Wrath reveals to Ialdabaoth a vast and

beautiful celestial region above his own which he is not permitted to enter because of his pride and unpleasant nature,

‘He envied him [the Angel]; and the envy became an androgynous product; and this was the origin of Envy. And Envy engendered Death, and Death engendered his offspring and gave each of hem charge of its own heaven; and all the heavens of Chaos became full of their multitudes.’

It is difficult to find any modern psychological – or, for that matter, astrological – text that is more sophisticated in its understanding of the source and nature of envy.

Bloomfield’s paper on the Seven Deadly Sins makes clear that this ascent of the soul through the planetary spheres is the origin of the idea of special sins or ‘character failings’ which are more pronounced in some individuals than in others. The Hermetic literature from Greco-Roman Egypt, known as the *Corpus Hermeticum*, also presents the soul’s journey in terms of character qualities (there are several translations of the Hermetica; see, for example, Brian P. Copenhaver, ed. and trans., *Hermetica: The Greek Corpus Hermeticum and the Latin Asclepius in a New English Translation*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1972). In CH1.25-26, p. 6, the soul ‘rushes up through the cosmic framework’ and is gradually purified of the ‘garments’ it acquired from the various planetary spheres in its descent into human incarnation; each sphere is associated with a particular destructive human attribute such as envy, overweening pride, aggression, lust, and so on. The association of the planetary archons/spheres with particular soul attributes can also be found in the late 3rd-early 4th century work by Macrobius called *Commentary on the Dream of Scipio*, trans. William Harris Stahl (New York, NY: Columbia University Press, 1990 [1952]). Macrobius acquired his idea from Cicero’s *Dream of Scipio* (in M. Tullius Cicero, *De re publica and De legibus*, ed. and trans. C. W. Keyes, New York, NY: Loeb Classical Library, 1928, pp. 261-283) in which the soul of Scipio Africanus ascends to the heavens to visit the great spirit of his dead grandfather. Cicero in turn acquired his idea from Plato’s Myth of Er, found in the *Republic*. Macrobius’ version found its way into the work of the Renaissance Neoplatonist Marsilio Ficino (*Commentary on Plato’s Symposium on Love*, VI.4, trans. Sears Jayne, Dallas, TX: Spring Publications, 1985, p. 112). Ficino’s ‘natural magic’, which involved efforts to transform the character qualities represented by the internalised planetary spheres, has exercised a great influence on the archetypal psychology of James Hillman in the 20th century, as we will see later in the module. Ficino, in contrast to the earlier Gnostic and Hermetic literature, does not perceive these interiorised planetary spheres as wholly negative; it is up to the individual to decide which aspects of the soul will be emphasised and which will be ‘healed’ or held contained.

The Gnostic, Hermetic, and Jewish approaches to the soul are accompanied by a related idea: the concept of an ‘astral body’ or intermediary ‘vehicle’ (in Plato it is called the *ochêma*) which allows the soul to incarnate in the physical body and which absorbs the various planetary attributes as the soul

descends into incarnation and then sheds them as the soul ascends after death or during a mystical experience. A long tradition of this astral 'vehicle' pervades certain currents in Renaissance medicine and surfaces in the medical alchemy of Paracelsus, one of the great influences on both early modern Western science and later Western occultism and esotericism. Through Paracelsus, the idea of the soul sharing substance with the planetary spheres or 'worlds' enters 'spiritual' alchemy, which formed the basis for much of Jung's later psychological models: the alchemical work, symbolised by the process of transforming base matter into 'gold' and representative of the transformation of the base nature of the human being into a 'spiritual gold' equated with the Gnostic revelation of human-divine identity.*

*Alchemy is a very important symbolic system in terms of the models formulated in modern dynamic psychology and modern psychological astrology. Its origins lie in Greco-Roman Egypt and it always linked the planets with the metals; and there is still considerable scholarly debate about whether it was originally meant as a specifically chemical work or always possessed a dual nature on both chemical and spiritual levels. Some sources (from a huge and growing body of literature) are:

- C. G. Jung, *Psychology and Alchemy*, CW12, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970)
- C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies*, CW13, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1973)
- C. G. Jung, *Mysterium Coniunctionis*, CW14, trans. R. F. C. Hull (London: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1970)
- Françoise Bonardel, 'Alchemical Esotericism and the Hermeneutics of Culture', in Antoine Faivre and Jacob Needleman, eds., *Modern Esoteric Spirituality* (New York, NY: Crossroad, 1992)
- Mircea Eliade, *The Forge and the Crucible: The Origins and Structures of Alchemy* (Chicago, IL: University of Chicago Press, 1956)
- Stanton J. Linden, *The Alchemy Reader: From Hermes Trismegistus to Isaac Newton* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003)

With the appropriation of the Aristotelian cosmological model during the Christian Middle Ages, the connection between soul attributes and cosmos is attenuated. Although character qualities are certainly associated with the planets, they belong to the 'sublunar' realm of the body rather than to the soul itself. It is at this point that psychology, or proto-psychology, begins to bifurcate and develops two distinctive but contradictory streams: the understanding of character as physiological, and the understanding of character as soul. The Gnostic, Jewish, Hermetic, and Neoplatonic currents eventually surface in the depth psychology of C. G. Jung, while the Aristotelian/Ptolemaic currents surface in the development of organic psychiatry and the psychological approaches of the cognitive science of religion. The Aristotelian current first develops along the lines of the four elements as representative of temperament (the best work on this theme in relation to astrology is Dorian Gieseler Greenbaum, 'Theory and History of Temperament', in *Temperament: Astrology's Forgotten Key*, Bournemouth: The Wessex Astrologer, 2005, pp. 1-56). This approach enters the medical stream through the physician Galen, and becomes one of the primary references in terms of astrological medicine and astrological temperament throughout the Middle Ages. It may still be understood as 'psychology', although the two

perspectives are rather different. However, this approach dominates astrological practice throughout the medieval period and, with a break during the Renaissance, throughout the early modern period until the late nineteenth century when the Hermetic-Neoplatonic-Gnostic-Jewish approaches begin to surface again through two apparently disparate channels: the occult revival of the late nineteenth century with the resurgence of astrology through the Theosophical framework of Alan Leo, and the emergence of dynamic depth psychiatry through the work of Sigmund Freud. Although alchemy carried the symbolism of the earlier interiorised astrological cosmologies, 'mainstream' astrology as it is expressed by such figures as William Lilly did not partake of this perspective.

'Interiorisation' is perceived by some scholars of Western esotericism as a unique product of post-Enlightenment secularisation: because the cosmos has been 'de-animated', Wouter J. Hanegraaff sees this shift as 'the psychologisation of the sacred'. He believes it could only occur because of the process of 'disenchantment' and 'secularisation' that followed the Enlightenment and the industrialisation of Western societies. The most important text presenting this thesis is Hanegraaff, *New Age Religion and Western Culture: Esotericism in the Mirror of Secular Thought* (Leiden: Brill, 1996). We will look more carefully at this scholarly perspective in later classes. However, it is clear from an examination of the cosmological psychologies of antiquity that 'interiorisation' and a psychological understanding of cosmology is evident as early as the first centuries CE. It might be argued that a process which is the reverse of Hanegraaff's subtly evolutionist approach has taken place: what was once understood to be an identity between the structure of deity evidenced through the cosmos, and the structure of the human soul, was gradually suppressed in favour of a Christian-Aristotelian bias which left cosmology entirely in the bodily and worldly realm and denied the relationship between the planets and the soul. It might also be argued that a form of 'exteriorisation' of cosmology dominated until the end of the nineteenth century with the resurgence of the late antique cosmologies in the form of occultism, Theosophy, and modern depth psychology and psychiatry. In other words, the 'psychologisation of the sacred' is embedded in the cosmologies and psychologies of antiquity, and what has emerged in the modern era is not in fact modern at all, but a much older form of astrological understanding first formulated in the cultural and religious melting pot of the late Roman Empire.