

Fate, Sympathy and the Individual

Bernadette Brady

Presented at ESSWE4 – Gothenburg 26-29 June 2013

Abstract

Fate is a concept which is clouded in confusion and misrepresentation. Often seen as fatalism by many scholars or disregarded as an early version of determinism by philosophers, it has largely, with very few exceptions, remained undefined since the seventeenth century. This paper challenges this dismissal and presents fate as a requirement for living in a sympathetic cosmology, and defines the personal relationship that one has with an ensouled cosmos. The paper uses research from amongst a global community of astrologers and shows how a belief in fate provides the holder with a sense of a meaningful life, offering them solace at times of personal crises. In conclusion the paper offers a contemporary view of fate and suggests that fate is one of humanity's great therapeutic philosophies.

Introduction

Fate is an enigma, frequently referred to by scholars, popular authors, and journalists, but rarely defined. In seeking to give a voice to fate Sarah Broadie commented in 2001 that fate was a belief in 'an agency concerning which ...all we know, is that it has a certain purpose and is clever and foreknowing and powerful enough to carry out this intention no matter what'.¹ Another approach to fate was presented by Robert Solomon in 2003 who argued that fate has an 'otherness' to it. He suggested that, 'fate provides something by way of "hands" in which we can place ourselves whether or not we have the confidence in their goodness'.² Nevertheless the nature of these "hands of fate" can vary greatly from one person to another. Indeed fate, with its inherent organic nature, as implied by Broadie and later Solomon, sits invisibly in the background of an individual's pursuits, invisible because it is largely ignored, over-looked and misunderstood yet, from this shadowy position, it has the potential to dominate and shape the person's beliefs and philosophy. The broadest definition that can be offered for fate is that it is the personal consequence of seeing oneself as a part of an ensouled cosmos; it is one's individual and unique relationship to the whole. Thus the exploration of fate begins with a consideration of sympathy, the doctrine that we exist in an animated cosmology.

The idea of sympathy

Homer (c. 850 BCE) saw this interconnectedness as the influence of the divine law of Necessity. This was a force which Simone Weil argued was guided by "geometrical rigor", a force which constantly redressed itself with no regard for humanity as it sought perfection or

¹ Sarah Broadie, *'From Necessity to Fate: A Fallacy?'*, p.28.

² Robert Solomon, *'On Fate and Fatalism'*, p.279.

balance.³ Balance was also the theme of sympathy expressed by Aristotle (384–322 BCE) who acknowledged the Empedoclean elements of fire, air, earth and water and enshrined them into a cosmology where these elements were made up of the four qualities of hot, cold, wet, and dry. These four qualities, contained in all things, were in constant motion, driven by the conflicting tensions between Love and Strife and stirred by the movement of the living stars.⁴ However, the four qualities were also animated and, although potentially scattered, they actively sought to find a balance, their “proper place”, and this desire to return to balance or correct order was the force or “gravity” within Aristotle’s physics.⁵

A different view of sympathy was held by the Stoics, who saw *sumpatheia* as the influence of the *pneuma*, a divine substance which connected all things.⁶ Diogenes Laertius, the third century Greek biographer, wrote of the Stoic cosmos as, ‘being an animal and alive and rational’.⁷ The sympathy of this cosmology was the thread of a divine mind deeply embedded in nature. Aetius (c.100 CE) noted that, ‘The Stoic made god out to be intelligent’ and he commented that it, ‘encompasses all seminal principles according to which everything comes about according to fate’.⁸ This communion within the cosmos was later embraced in the idea of *heimarmene*, defined by R. Sklenář, as ‘the all-pervading network of causation’.⁹ In discussing Stoic sympathy J. B. McMinn noted that *heimarmene* was ‘like a fine thread running through the whole of existence; it is the logos of the cosmos, the mind of God’.¹⁰ This “mind of God” expressed by *heimarmene* was also the unifying theme within the later Neo-Platonist views of unity and oneness of the soul with the divine.¹¹ It is *heimarmene* that Kocku von Stuckrad argues is the prime causal agent or the logic behind the doctrine of correspondences.¹² Hence while the physics behind a notion of sympathy will vary, the varieties of sympathy are not limited to these three examples of Aristotelian, Stoic, and Neo-Platonism, and regardless of its form sympathy will always embrace a notion of a cosmos held in a web of interconnectedness.

It was the Empedoclean/Aristotelian style of sympathy which was placed into astrology by Claudius Ptolemy (90-168). He began the *Tetrabiblos*, his astrological work, by stating his cosmology, a cosmology held together by the “Ambient”, which had, ‘a certain power, derived from the aethereal nature, [which] is defused over and pervades the whole atmosphere of the earth’, and he went on to note that, ‘These elements in their turn encompass all inferior matter, and vary it as they themselves are varied; acting on earth and water, on plants and animals’.¹³

³ Simone Weil, *The Iliad, or the Poem of Force*, p.15.

⁴ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*: A4, 985a 931–983; Aristotle, *Meteorology*: 339a 319-324.

⁵ Aristotle, *Meteorology*: 339a 319-324; Aristotle, *Categories*: 4a 17-20.

⁶ Brad Inwood and Lloyd P. Gerson, *The Stoics Reader*: p.62.

⁷ Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, II: Book II - 139.

⁸ Aetius cited in A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley, *The Hellenistic philosophers*, 1: p.274.

⁹ R. Sklenář, *Seneca, Oedipus 980-94: How Stoic a Chorus?*, p.193.

¹⁰ J. B. McMinn, *Fusion of the Gods: A Religio-Astrological Study of the Interpenetration of the East and the West in Asia Minor*, p.203 .

¹¹ Ilsetraut Hadot, *Studies on the Neoplatonist Hierocles*: p.113.

¹² Kocku von Stuckrad, *Jewish and Christian Astrology in Late Antiquity: A New Approach*, p.9.

¹³ Claudius Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos*: Bk. I Ch. II.

Ptolemy's cosmology was summed up by Daryn Lehoux who stated that, 'Rivers, plants, and animals *co-wax* and *co-wane* with the moon. And in general the hot and cold, wet and dry mixtures embodied in the planets and stars co-move the hot and cold, wet and dry mixtures embodied in all things down here on earth'.¹⁴ Ptolemy saw this elemental sympathy as the mechanism of his astrology and considered it central to his ideas on health which, for him, was based on the balance of these qualities within the human body. The Greek physician could thus use astrology to understand the health of their patient by watching the shifting heavenly bodies which in turn influenced the Ambient, and altered the balance of qualities within the individual.¹⁵ The philosophy of Ptolemy's medicine, founded in an Aristotelian view of sympathy, was thus of the four qualities seeking a balance within the cosmos.¹⁶ This style of sympathy, one driven by balance, dominated medical philosophy for over a thousand years. Indeed Mark Harrison argues that this notion of balance and counterbalance defined by the heavens was present within British medical practice until the early nineteenth century.¹⁷

However, in the fifteenth century Theophrastus Paracelsus (1493-1541) of Hohenheim challenged the dominance of Aristotle's sympathy as a foundation for medicine. Paracelsus accepted that health was a matter of one's delicate relationship to an ensouled cosmology but he did not accept a doctrine of qualities that needed to be balanced. Rather, he based his medical philosophy in a theory of microcosm and macrocosm, two levels of the same. As Paracelsus wrote, 'That is what philosophy is: [things] are in the human being in the same way that they are outside, intangibility, as if one were looking at oneself in a mirror'.¹⁸ Paracelsus still used the heavens as a diagnostic tool, for he wrote, 'The physician must decidedly base his knowledge on the stars. He must define medicine in accordance with the stars, recognizing that the *astra* are both above and below. And since medicine can do nothing without the heavens, it must be guided by the heavens'.¹⁹ However, where Ptolemaic/Aristotelian medical philosophy sought balance and counter-balance, Paracelsus' medical philosophy, as Nicolas Goodrick-Clark pointed out, adopted a Neo-Platonist view while also supporting pantheism and Nature.²⁰ Such a blend is a mixture of Neo-Platonic divine oneness with the nature-focused unity of Stoic philosophy.²¹ In talking of the body and the heavens Paracelsus wrote, 'Nothing separates these two aspects from one another but the figure of their form; and yet the form of either should be understood as one'.²² Deep within Paracelsus' medical philosophy was an engagement with nature itself, a rejection of treatment by contraries, and a drive to treat like with like.²³ Paracelsus' battle against Aristotelian

14 Daryn Lehoux, 'Tomorrow's News Today: Astrology, Fate, and the Way Out,' p.108.

15 Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos*: Bk. I Ch.III.

16 Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos*: Bk I, Ch III.

17 Mark Harrison, 'From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy: Sol-Lunar and Planetary Theories of Disease in British Medicine, c. 1700-1850,' p.47.

18 Andrew Weeks, *Paracelsus* H 2:24.

19 Weeks, *Paracelsus* H2:63-64.

20 Paracelsus and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *Paracelsus : essential readings*: p.13.

21 Walter Pagel, 'Prognosis and Diagnosis: A Comparison of Ancient and Modern Medicine,' p.394.

22 Weeks, *Paracelsus* H2:31-32

23 Weeks, *Paracelsus* p.11.

medicine is well documented and discussed, but the point of this comparison of Ptolemy's and Paracelsus' view of sympathy is to demonstrate that their different cosmologies, their different views of sympathy, lead to very different attitudes regarding medicine.

A crucial point is that it is from sympathy fate emerges. For if all is linked by sympathy, regardless of how this sympathy is defined, then the link that binds each individual to this ensouled cosmos is their personal, organic, individual, and unique fate: their story within, their journey through, and their contribution to the ensouled cosmos. If we change the nature of the sympathy, then we change the believed nature of fate and for this reason the fate of Ptolemy's astrology is different to the fate to which Paracelsus would have subscribed. The believed nature of fate varies from one individual to another and just as the different views of sympathy can produce, for example, different medical philosophies, then different views on fate produce different life styles, spiritual practices, attitudes to prayer, and expectations of the world.

The idea of fate

In the seventeenth century the science of nature became separated from theology and fate was disregarded in favour of the new concept of determinism. Previously, as Solomon notes, 'the concept of fate and fatalism were both very widely accepted and taken quite seriously'. He continues by making the point that 'Today both concepts tend to be the target of widespread philosophical disdain'.²⁴ For as philosophers replaced fate with determinism, Carl Hofer states that they allocated fate to the religious, mystical, esoteric realms and consequently held it in disdain.²⁵ However, my research shows that fate seems to be absent from these areas. With regard to the religious discourse Saint Augustine (354–430) replaced fate with universal providence and God's grace.²⁶ Later, Cartesian dualism, defined the soul as superior to, and independent of, the fated world of matter.²⁷ This separation of fate and soul flowed into mystical/spiritual teachings. Within the esoteric doctrines fate is also absent. According to Antoine Faivre and Karen-Claire Voss, what constitutes an esoteric subject are four prime components: universal correspondence (sympathy), a living Nature (ensouled cosmology), imagination (the organ of the soul which can put the theory of correspondence into practice), and transmutation (change in the individual),²⁸ thus the personal relationship one has with the ensouled cosmos (one's fate) does not appear to have a voice. Astrologers live by fate, but even they are generally reluctant to speak its name or explore its features.²⁹ Hence although esotericism, according to Faivre and Voss, emerged out of the discarded

²⁴ Solomon, 'On Fate and Fatalism,' p.435.

²⁵ Carl Hofer, "Causal Determinism." 18 June 2011.

²⁶ Saint Augustine, *City of God*: V.8.

²⁷ Robert Rethy, 'The Teaching of Nature and the Nature of Man in Descartes' "Passions de l'Ame", ' pp.682-683.

²⁸ Antoine Faivre and Karen-Claire Voss, 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions,' p.48.

²⁹ Bernadette Brady, 'Theories of fate among present-day astrologers ' pp.26-28.

subjects culled from science and theology in the seventeenth century³⁰, it would seem that fate has been left lying on this seventeenth century cutting room floor.

This abandonment of fate may be due to a confusion between the ideas of fate and fatalism. Voicing today's philosophical stance, Pascal Massey notes that fatalism is inevitable teleology — rigid, unchangeable and fixed. Fatalism is defined as a belief that an event will happen in the future regardless of the pathway taken in reaching that future, it is a belief that something is going to happen no matter what you do.³¹ Knowledge of your eventual death is an example of a fatalistic statement, for no matter what you do you are going to die. You may delay this event by living a healthy life or you can hasten its occurrence by being reckless. However, whatever you do, whatever pathway you take, you are going to die – that is a fatalistic statement. Fatalism does not impose any force or compulsion on us in the “here and now”, rather it is an event that waits for us in the future. Fatalism in this sense is exactly the same as destiny. Destiny may be a softer, more acceptable word for fatalism but they are, according to contemporary philosophy, one and the same concept. Yet fate is not solely about the future. Recalling Solomon's point cited earlier, fate is experienced as being held by invisible “hands” which are active in the present. Thus fate is not the same notion as fatalism.

Another confusion around fate occurs when it is considered to the obsolete or even old-fashioned version of determinism. This, for many people, is a default position and, as such, means that many believe that society has now found a better word for fate and that word is determinism. But fate is not determinism. William James defined determinism as follows:

it professes that those parts of the universe already laid down absolutely appoint and decree what the other part shall be. The future has no ambiguous possibilities hidden in its womb: the part we call the present is compatible with only one totality. Any other future complement than the one fixed from eternity is impossible.³²

Determinism, as understood within science and philosophy, pushes us from behind. It is driven by antecedent causality for it claims that every event is the result of an earlier event. Our actions now, whether thinking a thought or taking a walk, are a consequence of previous events traceable back to an initial and primary cause. Thus both fatalism and determinism promise, in their own way, only one inevitable future; the latter (determinism) driven by previous logical causes and the former (fatalism) manifested by inevitable teleology. Yet still fate remains unexplained.

Classical views of fate

To look more closely at fate we need to turn to classical literature. In the fourth century BCE the Athenian playwright Sophocles wrote *Oedipus Rex*, a play that portrayed Oedipus as

³⁰ Faivre and Voss, 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions,' p.51.

³¹ Pascal Massie, *Contingency, Time and Possibility, an essay on Aristotle and Duns Scotus*: p.52.

³² William James, 'The Dilemma of Determinism,' p.150.

destined to kill his father and have an incestuous relationship with his mother. Sophocles showed that regardless of his actions, Oedipus could not prevent the fulfilment of his destiny. Indeed *Oedipus Rex* is a play about fatalism or destiny. But even within the inevitability of fatalism, Sophocles holds Oedipus morally responsible for his actions. This is the dilemma of the play — an individual being held morally accountable despite his inevitable destiny.³³ Plato was nineteen years old when Sophocles first produced *Oedipus Rex* in Athens and Plato would have seen or been aware of Sophocles' play about fatalism. Plato later offered a solution to this dilemma by creating a dualist argument. This argument limited fate's influence. Plato held that fate did not influence the soul, will or mind rather he privileged the soul arguing that it was insulated or free from the workings of fate.³⁴ Within philosophy this is known as dualism.³⁵ Frances Cornford points out that the nature of the Plato's higher realm was made of a substance which was not subject to the same natural laws as that of the lower realm, even though the latter was created from the former.³⁶ In *Phaedo* Plato showed his dualist credentials when he argued that the soul or intellect must be immaterial because it could conceive of the invisible or the divine and so 'the soul resembles the divine, and the body resembles the mortal'.³⁷ Plato then made the immaterial soul responsible for the moral well-being of the individual. Iham Dilman describes this as moral determinism, for the causal agent of this form of fate was not just the universal law of matter but also a future influenced by personal moral integrity in the present.³⁸ Dilman suggests that Plato did not see the future as fixed, but rather it lay in the hands of the individual's choices made while in a mortal body, as well as in the spiritual realm and influenced by the spindle of necessity.³⁹ This view of fate is a blend of the spindle of necessity — the world of matter and its laws — and the individual's previous life choices. Plato's view of fate was personal and sensitive to cultural values, for his writings indicated that one could alter one's fate in the next life by good moral behaviour in this life.

In contrast to Plato, the Stoics believed that the soul was subject to fate along with the body. The human soul was therefore mortal and linked to the body, for both soul and body were formed of the same matter and thus both were subject to fate. This style of philosophy is a form of monism as the world is perceived as only made of one substance.⁴⁰ As A.A. Long and D.N. Sedley state, 'the soul or self is not fragmented into a plurality of psychic entities, as in the Platonic model'.⁴¹ The Stoic model accepted Plato's concept of a World Soul but did not accept what can be termed as his dualist post-death libertarian style of philosophy. Instead, according to Sophie Botros, the Stoics placed the human soul and the human will within the physical world and appeared to accept the universality of necessity, seeing the two

³³ Sophocles and E.H. Plumptre, *Oedipus Rex (Oedipus the King)*: p.76; Iham Dilman, *Free will: an historical and philosophical introduction*: p.32.

³⁴ George Boys-Stones, 'Phaedo of Elis and Plato on the Soul,' p.4.

³⁵ Gunther S. Stent, 'Epistemic Dualism of Mind and Body,' p.578.

³⁶ Francis M Cornford, *Plato's Cosmology*: p.24.

³⁷ Plato, *Phaedo*: see 78b - 84c. Quote - 80a.

³⁸ Dilman, *Free will: an historical and philosophical introduction*: p.35.

³⁹ Plato, *Republic*: 620e.

⁴⁰ Mark Balaguer, *Free Will as an Open Scientific Problem*: p.70.

⁴¹ Long and Sedley, *The Hellenistic philosophers*, 1: p.321.

concepts as non-conflicting separate issues.⁴² The notion of free will, located *within* the Stoic view of fate, was protected by the development of the concept of mental self-agency. As Epictetus (55–135) put it, mental self-agency means we, ‘deal rightly with our impressions’.⁴³ Fate for the Stoics was the result of being a part of the divine creation, a blending of the self with the ensouled nature, and one’s freedom was the freedom to choose to accept one’s fate with harmony and calmness.

Thus within these schools of philosophy there are two very different forms of fate. People who hold a Platonist or dualist view of fate hold the view that this life is a temporary situation and that their free will functions outside the laws of physics. J. R. Lucas argues that such a personal philosophy has strong consequences as, ‘we believe that as free agents we can introduce an arbitrary disturbance into the universe and thus destroy any pre-arranged harmony’.⁴⁴ In contrast an individual with a more Stoic world view favours a monist position, one where the individual adopts an inward focus, accepting of outer world events, while striving for a level of inner peace and unity with nature.⁴⁵ These are not the only versions of fate; there are many others, such as that of the fourth century Calcidius, a middle Platonist, who considered that we made our own fate by our own actions. In Calcidius’ model humankind was God-like in its ability to be a fate-maker, producing a new flow of fate in this life from one’s personal actions.⁴⁶ In the thirteenth century Saint Thomas Aquinas continued Plato’s thinking by adopting a dualist stance by considering that fate influenced only the body and the soul was free.⁴⁷ In the seventeenth century René Descartes extended Plato’s ideas and Thomist thinking by arguing strongly for dualism and advocating a “universal separability” between mind and body. For Descartes, the mind or soul was so free of the body that it did not require it for its existence.⁴⁸ In contrast, his student Baruch Spinoza (1632–1677) challenged dualism and produced a philosophy which echoed the Stoic position, a monist view of fate.⁴⁹ Steven Smith comments how Spinoza’s acceptance that humanity did not control nature but was instead dependent and embedded within it revealed a Stoic immanent world view.⁵⁰

To be sure, the nature of fate is not settled. Within classical literature fate is presented as a set of beliefs about the way the world works. Susanne Bobzien calls this a ‘theory of fate’.⁵¹ In considering this more closely one can see that a theory of fate is made up of a collection of interlocking beliefs concerning the source of fate, the purpose of fate, and the very nature of fate. Michael Frede comments how each individual requires a personal theory of fate, no matter how incomplete or contradictory, in order for the individual to address the

⁴² Sophie Botros, ‘Freedom, Causality, Fatalism and Early Stoic Philosophy,’ p.276.

⁴³ Epictetus, *Discourses Books 1 and 2*: 1. p.4.

⁴⁴ J.R Lucas, *The Freedom of the Will*: p.63.

⁴⁵ Inwood and Gerson, *The Stoics Reader*: p.xiv.

⁴⁶ J. den Boeft, *Calcidius on Fate*: paragraph 151.

⁴⁷ Saint Thomas Aquinas, *Summa Contra Gentiles. Book 3: Providence, Part II*: 3.91.92.

⁴⁸ Sarah Broadie, ‘Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes,’ p.299.

⁴⁹ Joel I. Friedman, ‘An Overview of Spinoza’s ‘Ethics’,’ p.80; Based on Baruch de Spinoza, *The Ethics*: Part 2. Prop 21.

⁵⁰ Steven B. Smith, ‘What Kind of Democrat Was Spinoza?’, p.8; Also see: Susan James, ‘Spinoza the Stoic.’

⁵¹ Susanne Bobzien, *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*: p.5.

location of their free will (mortal or spiritual domain) and its possible influence.⁵² Extending this argument one can conclude that we all have a personal theory of fate and this theory, independent of how aware we are of it or not, will influence how we view the world.

Contemporary views of fate

Contemporary astrologers work with fate defined by the horoscope and although, as commented earlier, they may not be comfortable with the word they do readily talk about their theories of fate. In sampling over a thousand astrologers for their views on fate I found that they expressed a diversity of opinions, many of which were reflective of the established classical views. Additionally, independent of the variations of their beliefs about fate, the vast majority of astrologers used their theory of fate to provide them with their philosophy of life, their way of being able to place their life events into context.

Some astrologers adopted a Stoic, monist theory of fate. A woman in her forties from Canada expressed her attitude to fate when she talked of the predicted events she saw in her own horoscope:

I would like to change events that you know are coming... but you really can't. And I knew that terrible things were coming for me in the past few years, and I tried to use the energies in positive ways, but in the end, it was just as bad as I thought. The difference however was that by expecting troubles, I was able to reserve more patience and understanding and not resort to anger, and limit my frustration. Maybe that in itself was "easier".⁵³

Her words were reminiscent of Ptolemy on the use of predictive astrology, how accepting one's fate and preparing the mind maintained an inner harmony,⁵⁴ as well as the Stoic philosopher Epictetus (55—135) who wrote, 'I must die. But must I die groaning? I must be imprisoned. But must I whine as well? I must suffer exile. Can anyone then hinder me from going with a smile, and good courage, and at peace?'⁵⁵ Another example of this Stoic attitude to fate came in a note from a thirty-five year old American woman. New to astrology she wrote, 'I like to believe I have more of a say in how my life unfolds, but astrology shows me that some things are out of my control.'⁵⁶ This could be seen as moving towards a fatalist mind set, however, it is a largely Stoic view and its therapeutic use can be seen in the words of a thirty-eight year old, American astrologer, talking of the role of the horoscope and preferring the word "determinism" to fate:

[It] helps you and the client to accept your life for what it is – determinism can be a fairly optimistic outlook or at least one that does not blame the subject for the bad

⁵² Michael Frede, *A Free Will - Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*: pp.176-177.

⁵³ From my own field work and henceforth referred in the following manner: Brady - Survey code 20080680

⁵⁴ Ptolemy, *The Tetrabiblos*: Book I, Chapter II, p.9.

⁵⁵ Epictetus, *Discourses Books 1 and 2*: Bk.I, Ch.I on p.5.

⁵⁶ Brady - Survey code 20080935

things that happen. I think free will plays a somewhat limited role in what happens to us. You work as much as you can or make the effort that you are satisfied with, and you will still fulfil a pre-destined framework to a large degree. There can be a lot of acceptance and compassion built into this outlook. You stop judging others as severely (they are dealing with limitations that won't change significantly despite awareness and efforts to change in some cases). You also stop judging yourself as severely for the same reasons. You do whatever you define as "your best" and try to accept predestined limitations that same way.⁵⁷

In contrast were the opinions of a thirty-nine year old American woman who captured the notion of fate and free will when she wrote that, 'I love the free will that astrology provides. The chart provides you with possibilities; it's up to you to recognize and take advantage of them. Your chart is a fail proof tool for living up to your full potential — not a map to your destiny.'⁵⁸ Unlike the two "Stoic" astrologers cited earlier, this astrologer accepts fate but considers that fate did not impinge on the freedom of her will. She held a Platonic view that the soul was not part of the material world, thus her free will was not subject to the workings of fate. Fate was limited to the material world and thus only influenced her physical being.

This was also reflected in the views of a forty-eight year old, involved with astrology for ten years, who wrote:

Just because something is in the stars, free will can change the outcome. An example is Mercury retro[grade], during the transit I pay close attention to my car, computer, finances, relationships, not sign any contracts etc... [these are objects ruled by Mercury] I also maintain a very positive attitude during the transit, because how I perceive the transit (gloom & doom versus time to revisit and learn) has a tremendous effect on my experiences during that time. I don't boldly challenge the retrograde. I honour Mercury with respect, so my lessons are easier.⁵⁹

This astrologer engaged with her fate, and used it as a set of signals to help her steer through her life. She almost negotiates with it by honouring the planetary gods at the time her fate dictates they are active. This was also the attitude of a younger astrology who talked of the role of fate and astrology in his life by saying, 'That it helps me have an understanding of events in the past which allows me to take proper preparations and actions in order to go with the flow of energy (hopefully) in a positive way — now, in the present and in the future'.⁶⁰

One astrologer talked of living with fate as a form of participation with life, in that one was neither a bystander, nor in total control, but rather one could engage with the narrative of life. He talked of how he dealt with his difficult neighbour while understanding that, according to his horoscope, he was meant to be dealing with difficult situations.

⁵⁷ Brady - Survey code 20080750

⁵⁸ Brady - Survey code 20081287

⁵⁹ Brady - Survey code 20081153

⁶⁰ Brady - Survey code 20080663

But what it [his knowledge of his planetary fate] does is that, well, he is a very nasty person but what it does is lessen my —...if, if ... if I sit with it I feel very rage-full and I am going to go over and smash this person, but really when I reflect on it, because of what I know about it, it lessens that —... There is... there is something bigger going on, and I have to find the answer to that so when I see these things and I use the astrological images, whatever they are, I am trying, as much as possible, be alert to them, to the potentialities and possibilities of them and to be more reflective and be understanding, to try to not, in any way, circumvent life but to live it, and to live it with the knowledge of what is going on around me.⁶¹

This astrologer's story is of a person who lives in a sympathetic cosmos. He defines this as participating in life and, for him, this participation gives him a different perspective on life's situations. He finds himself placed in a situation where he is enraged by his neighbour. However, by using the information in his horoscope he is able to detach from that rage and resist his desire to "smash this person". Instead there is another deeper story at stake, fated and a little mysterious. Anthony Giddens, calls this a fateful moment, 'times when events come together in such a way that an individual stands, as it were, at a crossroads in his existence; or where a person learns of information with fateful consequences'.⁶² The perspective of the astrologer dealing with his difficult neighbour was that he was standing at such a fateful moment, and there was another level of meaning to the situation with his neighbour which he did not understand but was sure that "there is something bigger going on", hence he "sits with it", he "reflects on it because of what I know about it". This astrologer accepted his fate but used his horoscope as an instrument of detachment. This provided him with an inner personal and unbiased authority, from which he found he could "lessen" the heat of his anger. He engaged his reason by pondering the deeper significance of the events. For him this was participating in his life, rather than just blindly living it.

This therapeutic role of fate was evident in interviews with contemporary astrologers. One of the attractions of astrology for them was its planetary fate, for they found in different ways that it offered solace at times of life's difficulties when their belief in fate enabled them to place events into perspective in both meaning and timing which then built a sense of personal story. Furthermore, fate, via the horoscope, produced a unique sense of identity, for one's planetary fate was unique, but this very uniqueness built the individual's relationship to the cosmos. Thus fate for the astrologer locates, orientates, and explains their place and actions in the world – it gives them what Giddens described as their personal life plan, story or narrative, for it placed events into a constantly revealing pattern.⁶³ As one anonymous astrologer stated, 'I like the way it brings obscure threads of pattern into visibility'.⁶⁴

But such views of fate are not limited to the astrological community. Any group that accepts a doctrine of correspondences will live in a sympathetic cosmology and thus will

⁶¹ Brady – Interview April 2010

⁶² Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*: p.113.

⁶³ Giddens, *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*: p.53.

⁶⁴ Brady – Survey 20081258

have a theory of fate. Within that community the different views of fate will be a reflection of the world view of the holder, even if fate itself is not acknowledged.

My research has shown that fate, today, is considered by most astrologers to be like a pattern or story, emergent and flowing, constantly active in the person's life, following its own mysterious rules of maintaining the life story but flexible in its details. These are the "hands" to which Solomon referred, the loyalty to a pattern, the retrospective feeling that one has been steered to a certain place. This is quite different to the William James' inevitability of antecedent determinism, cited earlier; nor is it the inevitable *telos* of fatalism. Fate within contemporary society can be summarised or defined as a belief in a non-inevitable teleological force which influences one's life in a compelling or semi-compelling manner.

The benefits of believing in fate are substantial. Whereas modern determinism can leave one facing life as an automaton, fate provides a place for one's inherent sense of free will, along with one's connection to the cosmos. Such a connection actually gives meaning and purpose to life. My research suggests that we live in story and this personal story, our little unique piece of the cosmos, is a part of the larger story of the cosmos.

To conclude, fate has been dismissed by philosophy as obsolete or old-fashioned determinism, no longer worthy of the attention of philosophers. Fate has also been misunderstood by or fallen out of view of the esoteric communities, possibly due to fate being confused with either fatalism or determinism. Nevertheless fate is a widely held belief, not only within the global community of astrologers, but also by any person who accepts the doctrine of correspondences. People will develop a theory of fate, a collection of interlocking beliefs about how the world works, in order to provide themselves with a methodology for altering, transforming, co-creating, accepting or avoiding the workings of fate, a method of providing themselves with a little more control in the face of the uncontrollable vagaries of life. I am arguing that the presence of a theory of fate provides us with a lifeboat which enables us to encounter the uncertain waters of the future with a feeling of safety and control. In this regard fate is one of humanity's therapeutic philosophies.

References

- Aquinas, Saint Thomas. *Summa Contra Gentiles. Book 3: Providence, Part II*. Translated by Vernon J. Bourke. Notre Dame, Indiana: University of Notre Dame Press, 1995.
- Aristotle. *Categories*. Translated by J.L.Ackrill. Edited by Jonathan Barnes, The Complete Works of Aristotle. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- . *Metaphysics*. Translated by R.P.Hardie nad R.K. Gaye. Edited by Jonathan Barnes, The Complete Works of Aristotle. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- . *Meteorology*. Translated by J.L.Stocks. Edited by Jonathan Barnes, The Complete Works of Aristotle. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1984.
- Augustine, Saint. *City of God*. Translated by Henry Bettenson. London: Penguin Classics, [1972] 2003.

- Balaguer, Mark. *Free Will as an Open Scientific Problem*. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2010.
- Bobzien, Susanne. *Determinism and Freedom in Stoic Philosophy*. Oxford: Clarendon Press, [1998] 2005.
- Botros, Sophie. 'Freedom, Causality, Fatalism and Early Stoic Philosophy.' *Phronesis* 30, no. 3 1985: 274-304.
- Boys-Stones, George. 'Phaedo of Elis and Plato on the Soul.' *Phronesis* 49, no. 1 2004: 1-23.
- Brady, Bernadette. "Theories of fate among present-day astrologers ", University of Wales Trinity Saint David, 2012.
- Broadie, Sarah. 'From Necessity to Fate: A Fallacy?' *The Journal of Ethics* 5, no. 1 2001: 21-37.
- . 'Soul and Body in Plato and Descartes.' *Proceedings of the Aristotelian Society* 101 2001: 295-308.
- Cornford, Francis M. *Plato's Cosmology*. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1935, 1997.
- den Boeft, J. *Calcidius on Fate*. Leiden: E.J.Brill, 1970.
- Dilman, Iham. *Free will: an historical and philosophical introduction*. London: Routledge, 1999.
- Diogenes Laertius. *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*. Translated by R.D. Hicks. Vol. II, Loeb Classical Library. Cambridge, MA Harvard University Press, [1925] 2005.
- Epictetus. *Discourses Books 1 and 2*. Translated by P.E.Matheson. New York: Dover Publications Inc, trans. 2004.
- Faivre, Antoine, and Karen-Claire Voss. 'Western Esotericism and the Science of Religions.' *Numen* 42, no. 1 1995: 48-77.
- Frede, Michael. *A Free Will - Origins of the Notion in Ancient Thought*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- Friedman, Joel I. 'An Overview of Spinoza's 'Ethics'.' *Synthese* 37, no. 1 1978: 67-106.
- Giddens, Anthony. *Modernity and self-identity. Self and society in the late modern age*. Cambridge Polity Press, 1991.
- Hadot, Ilsetraut. *Studies on the Neoplatonist Hierocles*. Philadelphia: American Philosophical Society, 2004.
- Harrison, Mark. 'From Medical Astrology to Medical Astronomy: Sol-Lunar and Planetary Theories of Disease in British Medicine, c. 1700-1850.' *The British Journal for the History of Science* 33, no. 1 2000: 25-48.
- Hofer, Carl. "Causal Determinism." *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (2010), <http://plato.stanford.edu/archives/spr2010/entries/determinism-causal/>.
- Inwood, Brad, and Lloyd P. Gerson. *The Stoics Reader*. Translated by Brad Inwood. Cambridge, MA: Hackett Publishing Company, Inc, 2008.
- James, Susan. 'Spinoza the Stoic.' In *The Rise of Modern Philosophy: The Tension between the New and Traditional Philosophies from Machiavelli to Leibniz*, edited by Tom Sorell, 289-316. New York: Oxford University Press, 1993.
- James, William. 'The Dilemma of Determinism.' In *The Will to Believe and Other Essays*. New York: Longman, 1912.
- Lehoux, Daryn. 'Tomorrow's News Today: Astrology, Fate, and the Way Out.' *Representations* Summer 2006: 105-122.

- Long, A.A., and D.N. Sedley. *The Hellenistic philosophers*. Vol. 1. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987, 2007.
- Lucas, J.R. *The Freedom of the Will*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1970.
- Massie, Pascal. *Contingency, Time and Possibility, an essay on Aristotle and Duns Scotus*. Maryland: Lexington Books, 2011.
- McMinn, J. B. 'Fusion of the Gods: A Religio-Astrological Study of the Interpenetration of the East and the West in Asia Minor.' *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 15, no. 4 1956: 201-213.
- Pagel, Walter. 'Prognosis and Diagnosis: A Comparison of Ancient and Modern Medicine.' *Journal of the Warburg Institute* 2, no. 4 1939: 382-398.
- Paracelsus, and Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke. *Paracelsus : essential readings*: Crucible, 1990.
- Plato. *Phaedo*. Translated by G.M.A Grube. Edited by John M. Cooper. ed, Plato Complete Works. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.
- . *Republic*. Translated by G.M.A and rev Grube, C.D.C. Reeve. Edited by John M. Cooper. ed, Plato Complete Works. Cambridge: Hackett Publishing Company, 1997.
- Ptolemy, Claudius. *The Tetrabiblos*. Translated by Ashmand. J. M. Mokelumne Hill, USA: Health Research, 1969.
- Rethy, Robert. 'The Teaching of Nature and the Nature of Man in Descartes' "Passions de l'Ame".' *The Review of Metaphysics* 53, no. 3 2000: 657-683.
- Sklenář, R. 'Seneca, Oedipus 980-94: How Stoic a Chorus?' *The Classical Journal* 103, no. 2 2007: 183-194.
- Smith, Steven B. 'What Kind of Democrat Was Spinoza?' *Political Theory* 33, no. 1 2005: 6-27.
- Solomon, Robert. 'On Fate and Fatalism.' *Philosophy East and West* Vol. 53, no. No. 4 2003: pp. 435-454.
- Sophocles, and E.H. Plumptre. *Oedipus Rex (Oedipus the King)*: Digireads.com, 2005.
- Spinoza, Baruch de. *The Ethics*. Translated by R.H.M. Elwes: Forgotten Books, [1883] 2008.
- Stent, Gunther S. 'Epistemic Dualism of Mind and Body.' *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 142, no. 4 1998: 578-588.
- von Stuckrad, Kocku. 'Jewish and Christian Astrology in Late Antiquity: A New Approach.' *Numen* 47, no. 1 2000: 1-40.
- Weeks, Andrew, ed. *Paracelsus (Theophrastus Bombastus von Hohenheim, 1493-1541) : Essential Theoretical Writings*. Leiden ; Boston: Brill, 2008.
- Weil, Simone. 'The Iliad, or the Poem of Force.' *Chicago Review* 18, no. 2 1965: 5-30.