

MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Introduction to Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Astrology
Weekly Introduction
Nick Campion

This week's material examines the narratives astrologers construct about the cosmos. Astrology has no single definition. It has been defined as a science (a word whose meaning varies), a religion, an art, a means of personal development and a form of divination. Some astrologers emphasise technique, others intuition, some see it as an essentially passive form of interpretation, others see it as a path to action; in the past, or in modern India, active uses of astrology might be considered magical or religious in nature, in the modern west the means for change might be psychotherapeutic. Some contrast 'esoteric' or 'inner' astrology, which deals with the soul, with 'exoteric' or 'outer' which concerns daily affairs. There is also a variety of explanations: the stars and planets are a form of celestial writing revealing divine or cosmic intention, or providing a means for human beings to reflect on their lives; they are links in a causal chain; they send influences, perhaps on behalf of the divine; they coincide or correlate with events on earth as different kinds of time cycles interact.

The course material for this week is designed to focus on the relationship of astrology to these discourses and thus how it has come to be defined. The variety of definitions gives rise to the possibility that there is no such thing as astrology, in the singular, but rather astrologies, in the plural. We will also consider such questions as whether its practice is a matter of reading or analysing external laws or influences, or whether the astrologer's subjective participation is essential, and whether it can be seen as a means of predicting the future, analysing character, or encouraging spiritual development. Other issues to consider include: what (if anything) do different astrologies have in common?; has astrology changed radically since its origins or later, or is it somehow the same practice as ever; and, if so, how has it maintained its identity across a long history which encompasses so many changes?

Forum Discussion

Propose and justify a definition of astrology, drawing on evidence, whether historical or recent, literary, empirical or personal.

Reading

The reading for this week includes material by astrologers, ancient and modern, and historians, and other commentators. Most astrology texts, and this is true going back to the earliest cuneiform records, are technical, offering guidelines or rules for interpretation. Discussions of what astrology is or how and why it works by astrologers are therefore limited and, in recent literature, outnumbered by sometimes hostile accounts by outsider critics. This week's reading can be expanded by using any astrology book or web site, as long as you realise that such material constitutes the primary source material that you should be subjecting to a critical, scholarly eye. This week's reading includes work by Patrick Curry an academic and 'insider' whose body of work analysing

astrology's nature is small but significant, Charles Carter, one of the major astrologers of the English-speaking world in the mid 20th century, Dane Rudhyar, who pioneered the concepts of 'Transpersonal' and 'Humanistic' astrology

Tutor's Notes.

Nick Campion: 'Definitions of Astrology'.

Reading

Addey, John, *A New Study of Astrology* (London: Urania Trust 1996, pp. 1-9).

Carter, Charles, *The Zodiac and the Soul*, London: Theosophical Publishing House 1948 [1927], pp. 13-31.

Curry, Patrick, 'An Aporia for Astrology', *Radical Astrology, A Set of Discussion Papers: Astrology and Theory*, privately published 1983, pp. 5.1-5.15.
(NB pp 4 and 5 are missing)

Curry, Patrick, *Prophecy and Power: Astrology in Early Modern England* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1989), pp. 1-15.

Curry, Patrick, 'Grounding the Stars: towards an ecological theory', *Journal for the Study of Religion, Nature and Culture*, 2007, Vol 1 no 2, pp. 210-9.

Available at

<http://www.patrickcurry.co.uk/papers/GroundingtheStars.pdf>

Curry, Patrick and Roy Willis, *Astrology, Science and Culture* (Oxford: Berg, 2004).
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Gauquelin, Michel, *Astrology and Science*, London: Peter Davies, 1999, pp. 23-38.

Jones, Marc Edmund, *Astrology: How and Why it Works*, London: RKP 1977, Chap 1, (pp. 3-35).

North, John, 'Celestial Influence – the major premises of astrology', North, John, *Stars, Minds and Fate: Essays in Ancient and Medieval Cosmology*, London, The Hambledon Press 1989, pp. 243-298.

Phillipson, Garry, *Astrology in the Year Zero*, London: Flare Publications 2000, chap XII (pp. 182-197).

Ptolemy, Claudius, *Tetrabiblos*, Book 1.

<http://penelope.uchicago.edu/Thayer/E/Roman/Texts/Ptolemy/Tetrabiblos/home.html>

This is a text of immense importance. It is a rare example of a discussion of astrological theory from the ancient world, and the seminal statement of the natural foundation of astrology.

Rudhyar, Dane, *The Astrology of Personality*, Garden City, New York: Doubleday, 1970, Chap 1, 'Astrology Faces Modern Thought'.

Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture*, 3 Vols., (London: John Murray 1920 [1871]), Vol I, pp. 112-137.

This is the classic statement of astrology as a hang-over from a previous, lower, level of evolutionary development.

Web

This is one class when students can make free use of the web. Any web site may indicate contemporary attitudes to astrology. Your critical eye, though, should be attuned to the sense that the mass of astrology you find on the web is *indicative*, not *authoritative*. That is, such sites are evidence which may indicate something about the nature, function, role or appeal of astrology, but nothing they contain can be regarded as authoritative.

<http://www.astrozero.co.uk/articles/articles.htm>

This is Garry Phillipson's web site, an evolution from his book, *Astrology in the Year Zero*. Scroll down this page and you will find a series of interviews. If you are to prioritise your reading, Dennis Elwell, Mike Harding, Rob Hand and Bernard Eccles may be most immediately relevant.

<http://www.skyscript.co.uk/books.html>

<http://www.skyscript.co.uk/texts.html>

These two URLs are pages within Deborah Houlding's Skyscript site. The emphasis is on technical astrology, but there is much information of relevance to discussions on the nature of astrology. Most of the older texts listed are not directly relevant to this module, but low down the 'books' page is a list of interviews, some of which are duplicated on the Astrozero page.

<http://rudolfhsmi.nl/index.html>

Astrology-and-science.com is a comprehensive reference area for links and information related to the scientific investigation of astrology in the late twentieth century. You should NOT become sidetracked into questions of whether astrology is true or false. We are concerned about the phenomenon and, in this sense, for the purposes of the MA, scientific investigations of astrology exist within a cultural framework.