

MA in Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Introduction to Cultural Astronomy and Astrology
Week 10: Astronomy and Culture in The Modern World
Weekly Description
Nick Campion

Purpose of the Week

This week we aim to understand the nature of debates about whether the contemporary world is modern or post-modern, as well as the lesser known argument: that both modernism and post-modernism as value-laden descriptions of the contemporary world are mistaken descriptions.

Tasks this week

Make a final decision on your final essay title and work out your essay plan
Do the required reading – or, if you are concentrating on your final essay, download anything you wish to read later.

Weekly Description

This class will introduce the main ideas associated with the terms 'modernism and 'postmodernism', and a third option, the 'non-modern'. This week's work is significant for the entire MA, mainly because post-modern approaches to knowledge have influenced the humanities and social sciences very widely. Particularly, in relation to this MA, sociologists tend to categorise contemporary western astrology as 'postmodern'. But is it? Similarly what is widely described as the new science or new physics (such as relativity and quantum mechanics) is sometimes described as postmodern. Recent cosmological theories, including Big Bang theory, dark matter and dark energy are sometimes described as postmodern (Jerome Drexler, *Discovering Postmodern Cosmology*). While the question of whether astrology (specifically modern western astrology in a modern western cultural context) is modern or postmodern is of specific relevance for the nature of astrological theory and practice, interest, postmodernism as a whole is significant for our understanding of cosmology in the wider sense – as the way in which human beings relate to the cosmos.

In some disciplines, such as history, there is some resistance to post-modern ideas but in others, especially anthropology, they have been highly influential. Postmodernism's liberal attitudes to what constitutes acceptable academic study has encouraged the study of, for example, paganism, within Study of Religions departments and was a factor in the development of this MA.

Thought for the week

Given the choice, would you define astrology as modern or postmodern?
or
Is modern cosmology always characteristically modern?

NB. REMEMBER: THIS WEEK'S COURSE MATERIAL, LIKE EVERYTHING ELSE IN THE MODULE, IS OF USE IN EVERY OTHER MODULE.

