

Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement: Astrology and Religion in the Modern West

Chapter 1

Introduction: A Million Dollar Business?

Astrology is... a bizarre survival from pre-scientific times. John Silber.¹

Astrology has grown to be a huge worldwide business...It seems that no sector of society is immune to its attraction. Robert Matthews.²

In the view of much of the academic literature in the area, astrology, as the belief in the occult influence of the stars, is a religion, nothing more, nothing less. And, according to Gallup poll data, about 25% of the adult populations of the UK, USA and France, subscribe to it. We should put this apparently rather large figure into perspective; the adult population of the UK in 2008 was approximately 48 million, 12 million of whom believed in astrology, eleven million more than attended a church service regularly.³ In France the proportions are similar. In the USA, where around 40% of adults claim to attend a church, synagogue or temple service regularly, the number of religious devotees exceeds that of astrology believers, but the latter still represent a sizeable number.⁴ These rather startling figures should tell us something about modern religious culture yet are completely ignored by academics and religious specialists. Or, rather, if noticed, they are taken at face value with neither serious comment, nor critical investigation.

This book is the first major academic examination of the role and function of astrology in the modern world. My intention is to place the discussion in a context which is wide enough to allow a better understanding of the recent history and present status of esoteric ideas, occult practices and alternative spiritualities, that potent cultural matrix which alarms evangelical Christians, disturbs sceptical scientists and perplexes many sociologists. My title is 'Prophecy, Cosmology and the New Age Movement', my subtitle, simply, 'astrology and religion in the modern west'. The prophecy under investigation is the coming of the often synonymous periods of the Age of Aquarius and the New Age. The cosmology under examination is two fold.

1 Silber, John (2001), 'Silliness under Seattle stars', *Boston Herald* 16 May 2001, at <http://www.bostonherald.com/news/columnists/silber05162001.htm>

2 Robert Matthews, 'Astrologers fail to predict proof they are wrong', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 17 August 2003, [hereafter Matthews, 'Astrologers Fail to Predict'], p. 9.

3 The population of the UK in 2008 was just over 61 million, of whom around a fifth were children. See the Office for National Statistics, <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/cci/nugget.asp?ID=6>, accessed 5 November 2009. For church attendance see Peter Brierly (ed.), *UK Christian Handbook: Religious Trends no 3, 2002/3*, London: Christian Research 2001, p. 2.23. For a typical report see Doward, James, 'Church attendance "to fall by 90%"', *The Observer*, 21 December 2008, <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2008/dec/21/anglicanism-religion>, accessed 5 November 2009.

4 For a summary of figures on religious attendance in the US see Religious Tolerance.Org, http://www.religioustolerance.org/rel_rate.htm, accessed 5 November 2009.

First I consider the application of astronomy to the measurement and prediction of historical periods. Second, I examine the nature of modern astrology, perhaps the most widespread representative of the western esoteric tradition. Being concerned with the nature of belief in astrology, I will deal with both millenarianism and the New Age chiefly as ideological rather than, say, sociological, phenomena. From millenarianism I will consider, briefly, issues of modernism and modernity, both of which are heir to apocalyptic thought in their belief that the modern, the 'now' is inherently qualitatively better than the past. My specific examination of contemporary belief in astrology is then intended to illuminate wider contemporary issues concerning the supposed relationship between 'traditional' and 'non-traditional' beliefs, a discussion which can be framed within the context of debates on the place of religion and 'secularisation' in the modern world, particularly Britain. As I am concerned with the numbers of people who believe in astrology as well as with the nature of that belief, I draw partly from existing data and partly my own research, but I also deal with astrology's ideological context and relationships.

Having dealt with the problem of the extent of belief in astrology which, as we shall see, is a somewhat complex question, I will address four major questions concerning astrology's place in modern culture. Firstly, is it a New Age discipline and, if so, what is its relationship with the western millenarian and apocalyptic tradition? Secondly, if astrology is a New Age discipline, should it be seen as a rival to mainstream Christianity, as so many in the Church fear? Thirdly, if astrology is indeed a rival to Christianity, can quantification of belief in it indicate the extent of that rivalry? Fourthly, does astrology's continued existence represent the anomalous survival of a pre-modern superstition in the modern world: is it, as Theodor Adorno claimed, 'basically discordant with today's universal state of enlightenment'?⁵ It is to the solving of Adorno's historical conundrum that I am devoting myself. The core of the work is historiographical and I devote a great deal of attention to dissecting the literature to date on the origins of modern New Age and astrological culture. My fieldwork is tentative and preliminary. As my inquiry is largely literary, and as this is the first time that the disparate sources which deal with the topic have been brought together, I have provided copious references, all the more to encourage other scholars to continue this work.

My initial premise is not controversial: that astrology occupies a prominent position in the contemporary popular culture of the modern west is apparent from the ubiquitous presence of the horoscope column in print and, in the last decade, on the web. What is at issue, though, is astrology's character. On this, opinions diverge. It is widely considered to be a feature of the western esoteric tradition, a New Age belief or practice, paranormal or an 'alternative religion', is seen as a potential contributor to the decline of the mainstream churches in Britain is regarded as worthy of comment by the cosmologist Stephen Hawking and, even though its function may have changed between medieval and modern times, is arguably connected with the origins of the western magical tradition in pre-Hellenistic Egypt.⁶ Richard Dawkins, formerly

5 Adorno, Theodor, *The Stars Down to Earth* (London: Routledge, 1994[1953]), p. 36.

6 For astrology and western esotericism see Nicholas Goodricke-Clarke, *The Western Esoteric Traditions: A Historical Introduction*, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009. For astrology as New Age see Michael York, *The Emerging Network: A Sociology of the New Age and Neo-Pagan Movements*, (London: Rowan and Littlefield, 1995) [hereafter York, *The Emerging Network*]. For

Professor of the Public Understanding of Science at Oxford University, believes that astrologers should be prosecuted for fraud, while the British television regulatory code prohibits the broadcast of 'horoscopes' except as 'entertainment' or as the subject of 'legitimate inquiry', and forbids transmission of it at times when children are likely to be watching television.⁷ Yet all women's magazines in the UK carry horoscope columns and, in December and January, both they and the 'tabloid' newspapers publish heavily promoted supplements of forecasts for the coming year. Moreover, press stories on astrology generally create the impression that it is a multimillion pound industry. For example, in August 2003, Robert Matthews, science correspondence of *The Sunday Telegraph*, wrote that,

astrology has grown to be a huge worldwide business...It seems that no sector of society is immune to its attraction. A recent survey found that a third of science students subscribed to some aspects of astrology, while some supposedly hard-headed businessmen now support a thriving market in "financial astrology"...Astrology supplements have been known to increase newspaper circulation figures and papers are prepared to pay huge sums to the most popular stargazers...[who] can earn £600,000 or more a year. A single profitable web site can be worth as much as £50 million.⁸

Where Matthews found this supposedly £50 million website, and what it was, he did not say. My suspicion is that it did not exist but this is not the point. What we are dealing with is public perception. In 2009 one TV company expanded the common notion of astrology as a 'million-dollar business into the unlikely figure of a 'billion-dollar' enterprise.⁹ Although all such quoted figures are given without reliable sources, they tend to be repeated as journalists base subsequent reports on each others' work.¹⁰ There is, in fact, little in the way of reliable information on astrology's

astrology as paranormal see Tom W. Rice, 'Believe It or Not: Religious and Other Paranormal Beliefs in the United States', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, March 2003, Vol. 42, No. 1, [hereafter Rice, 'Believe It or Not'], p. 100. For astrology as an alternative religion see Stephen J. Hunt, Stephen J., *Alternative Religions: a Sociological Introduction* (Aldershot: Ashgate, 2003), pp. 171-3. For astrology's relationship with declining church attendance see Robin Gill, *Churchgoing and Christian Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1999). For Hawking's views see Stephen Hawking, *The Universe in a Nutshell* (London: Bantam Press, 2001), p. 103. For astrology's background in ancient civilisation see Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 1. The Ancient World, London: Continuum, 2009; Ronald Hutton, 'Astral Magic: The Acceptable Face of Paganism', in Nicholas Campion, Patrick Curry and Michael York (ed.) *Astrology and the Academy*, papers from the inaugural conference of the Sophia Centre, Bath Spa University College, 13-14 June 2003, Bristol: Cinnabar Books 2004, pp. 10-24. See Antoine Faivre, and J. Needleman (eds.) *Modern Esoteric Spirituality*. London: SCM Press Ltd, 1992, p. 5, who note that modern astrology has moved from being initiatory to divinatory.

7 Richard Dawkins, *Unweaving the Rainbow* (London: Penguin, 1998), p. 121; Independent Television Commission (ITC), *Paranormal Programming, Consultation Paper*, Programme Code Consultation, 2003, section 1.10.

8 Robert Matthews, 'Astrologers fail to predict proof they are wrong', *The Sunday Telegraph*, 17 August 2003, [hereafter Matthews, 'Astrologers Fail to Predict'], p. 9.

9 'Supernatural Investigator: It's in the Stars', Sorcery Films 2009.

10 See for example Hale, Beth, 'Is astrology bunk?', *Daily Mail*, 18 August 2003.

place in contemporary British culture. This book is a preliminary attempt to rectify this situation, particularly in the UK and USA. In a context in which anthropologists and sociologists have studied societies, tribes and groups from the first to third worlds, astrologers, who attract so much attention from journalists, have been completely ignored, a problem raised by Alan Smithers, then Sydney Jones Professor of Education and Director of the Centre for Education and Employment Research at the University of Liverpool, in 2001:

The continuing hold of astrology on the human psyche is curious. Millions swear by it. Star columns are one of the most popular features of newspapers. Professional astrologers counsel, predict the share market, and offer career and business advice. Whole cultures are imbued with it. It is even said that Ronald Reagan would clear the dates of his summit meetings with an astrologer. But there is no convincing evidence that astrology is literally or scientifically true. Where proof seems to exist, there is usually a more straightforward explanation. The connection between personality and the zodiac, for example, seems to come from enough people knowing the characteristics of their star sign to affect the overall pattern of results on a self-report questionnaire.¹¹

This study originally arose from my observation that much of the public discourse on astrology is dominated by the assumption that astrology is overwhelmingly a matter of belief. Interest in astrology is interpreted as ‘belief’ and students and practitioners of it are characterised as ‘believers’. In the 1990s, when journalistic questions of a historical and sociological nature were routinely referred to me, I was frequently asked both about the extent of belief in astrology and for explanations for this belief. It became apparent that the question of my own belief or disbelief in the subject was also often an issue for interviewers, even when I was speaking as a neutral ‘expert’. For example, on 18 August 2003 I took part in a number of radio interviews which were part of a wide-ranging media response to the publication of an article in *The Sunday Telegraph* on 17 August, reporting on a paper by Geoffrey Dean and Ivan Kelly, which purported to show that astrology’s claims were false.¹² Although I was introduced on both programmes as an academic, on the London station, Talk Radio, I was asked ‘Are you a believer?’ and, on the Irish station RTE, I was expected to answer the question, ‘Do you believe in it?’. Of the many dozens of radio and television interviews in which I have been involved over the previous decade, I cannot remember a single hostile critic of astrology being asked whether they disbelieve. Yet, the same question is often asked of historians of astrology who may be dealing with the medieval or ancient worlds. Historians of religion are not asked whether they believe in angels and military historians are not asked whether they believe in war but, for historians of astrology the question is, oddly, thought to be relevant. The assumption appears to be that the ‘believer’ can not be trusted to give reliable statements about astrology’s nature, role and function. The ‘disbeliever’, meanwhile, is presumed to be impartial and objective. This is not an original assumption but is common enough to be a matter of comment in the academic literature. As David Hufford, whose work in this area is singularly perceptive, wrote ‘we know that

11 Alan Smithers, ‘Astrology, like literature and music, can invest life with meaning’, *The Independent* Wednesday 4 April 2001, <http://www.rudolfhsmith.nl/h-chai2.htm>, accessed 4 March 2003.

12 Matthews, ‘Astrologers Fail to Predict’, p. 9; Geoffrey Dean and Ivan Kelly, ‘Is Astrology Relevant to Consciousness and Psi?’, *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 2003, Vol. 10, Nos. 6-7, pp. 175-198.

scholars just aren't supposed to believe things like that', adding, 'but we have never been taught exactly why'.¹³ Hufford was writing of religion in general rather than astrology in particular, but the argument remains. One of my intentions is to question the supposed contrast between belief and disbelief. The distinction may well be useful in some circumstances, but whether it is based in actual evidence is another matter.

It is clear that the nature of personal belief and the extent of public belief are more complex than the journalistic request for precise figures and simple 'yes/no' answers to questions such as 'do you believe..?' would suggest. This was brought home to me in the mid-1990s when I participated in a discussion on astrology on the British television station, Central Television. In response to questions from the presenter, ninety-nine members of the hundred-strong audience admitted to reading horoscope columns, but only one was prepared to admit to belief in astrology. The implications of such anecdotal evidence are serious for all research into 'belief', as I hope to show. Apparently, whilst some reports use readership of horoscope columns as an indicator of belief in astrology, the vast majority of people who would be so classified resist categorisation as believers, especially in a forum as public as a television studio. The word 'belief' itself would seem to be loaded with additional meaning. It seems apparent, as well, that there is a gulf between practice, in this case the readership of horoscope columns, and belief, the willingness to subscribe to a worldview in which such columns may be taken seriously.

My study will be largely confined to the astrology of the English-speaking world. This is for the simple reason that the general failure of the citizens of the USA and UK to speak languages other than English extends to the world of astrology, with the result that British and American astrologers read each others' work, but that developments from Europe tend only to have an impact in the English-speaking world when they are championed by single individuals.¹⁴ For example, while German astrologers in the 1920s and 30s were devising ever more complex forms of interpreting horoscopes via the so-called 'Hamburg School', British astrologers, as one historian, Ellic Howe, put it, 'were hardly aware of what was afoot in Leipzig, Munich, Düsseldorf, Hamburg and other centres of Teutonic astrological endeavour'.¹⁵ The situation is unchanged. Since it began holding national conferences in 1968 the Astrological Association of Great Britain has held only one conference, in 1992, at which translation facilities were provided, and European speakers are rare.¹⁶

13 Hufford, David J., 'The Scholarly Voice and the Personal Voice: Reflexivity in Belief Studies', *Western Folklore*, Vol. 54, No. 1, pp. 57-76, [hereafter Hufford, 'The Scholarly Voice'], p. 71.

14 Charles Harvey, 'Foreword', in Udo Rudolph, *The Hamburg School of Astrology: An Explanation of its Methods* (London: The Astrological Association, 1973), p. 1.

15 Udo Rudolph, *The Hamburg School of Astrology: An Explanation of its Methods* (London: The Astrological Association, 1973); Howe, Ellic, *Urania's Children: The Strange World of the Astrologers* (London: William Kimber, 1967), [hereafter Howe, *Urania's Children*], p. 66.

16 For the 2009 figures see the Astrological Association web page, <http://www.astrologicalassociation.com/conference/conf2009/confspeakers.php>, accessed 22 September 2009. To add to the argument, in 2003 only two speakers were from mainland Europe, as opposed to four from the USA, fourteen from the UK and one from Australia; a total of nineteen from the English-speaking world. In 2009, the most recent year for which I have figures, of twenty-four speakers, all were native English-speakers.

In the previous month, the US-based International Society for Astrological Research (ISAR), which makes a feature of its links outside the USA, featured just fifteen non-native English speakers out of a total faculty of fifty-eight speakers at its conference.¹⁷

At this point, let me turn to the question of previous studies. Although astrology is, as has been noted, a subject of considerable journalistic interest, there has been little academic concern with its contemporary cultural nature and function. To put it bluntly, most academics have shunned it. The literature on cultural studies has steered clear of it, largely because it avoids anything which it believes belongs under an existing discipline, such as religious studies; I am grateful to my colleague Sean Cubitt, Professor of Media and Communications at the University of Melbourne, for making this simple point. When we come to the sociology of religion, the English-language literature on the New Age movement includes only one paper devoted to astrology, while there are a handful of sociological studies which attempt to describe and quantify belief in astrology.¹⁸ Most critiques of astrology tend to concentrate on the veracity of astrology's claims and assume an *a priori* hostile position in which astrology represents either scientific ignorance or religious error, with just a few examples of general surveys by sympathetic writers.¹⁹ There is therefore still no wide-ranging work which both examines astrology's cultural locus and which may be classed as academic or rigorous. As Milton Yinger said of religious studies in 1969, 'we are still at the "natural history" level of research, trying to describe all the wonderful beasts of the jungle'.²⁰ Four decades later this is still the case with the investigation of astrology's place in the modern world.

17 ISAR: International Society for Astrological Research, <http://www.isar2009.com/cgi-bin/speakers.cgi>, accessed 22 September 2009.

18 The one paper in an academic New Age anthology is Shoshanah Feher, 'Who Holds the Cards? Women and New Age Astrology?', in James R. Lewis and J. Gordon Melton, *Perspectives on the New Age* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), pp. 179-188. For sociological studies see, for example, Wuthnow, Robert, *Experimentation in American Religion: The New Mysticism and Their Implications for the Churches* (Berkeley CA: University of California Press, 1978); Pawlik, Kurt and Lothar Buse, 'Self-Attribution as a Moderator Variable in Differential Psychology: Replication and Interpretation of Eysenck's Astrology/Personality Correlations', *Correlation*, 1984, Vol. 4, No. 2, pp. 14-30; Bauer, John, and Martin Durant, 'British Public Perceptions of Astrology: An Approach from the Sociology of Knowledge', *Culture and Cosmos*, 1997, Vol. 1, No. 1, pp. 55-72, [hereafter Bauer and Durant, 'British Public Perceptions'].

19 For the assumption of scientific error see Roger B. Culver and Philip A. Ianna, *Astrology: True or False? A Scientific Evaluation*, revised edition (New York: Prometheus Books, 1988) [hereafter Culver and Ianna, *Astrology: True or False?*] and Ronny Martens and Tim Trachet, *Making Sense of Astrology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998). For Christian critiques see Peter Anderson, *Satan's Snare: The Influence of the Occult* (Hertfordshire: Evangelical Press, 1988), [hereafter Anderson, *Satan's Snare*] and Robert A. Morey *Horoscopes and the Christian: Does Astrology Accurately Predict the Future? Is it Compatible with Christianity?* (Minneapolis: Bethany House Publishers, 1981). For non-academic but sympathetic studies see Derek Parker *The Question of Astrology: A Personal Investigation* (London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970) and Neil Spencer, *True as the Stars Above: Adventures in Modern Astrology* (London: Victor Gollancz, 2000).

20 Yinger, J. Milton, 'A Structural Examination of Religion', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Spring 1969, Vol. 8, p. 98.

My interest is with astrology's cultural status, rather than with the truth of its claims. As Gaynard observed in his study of young people's belief in the paranormal, 'it is probably of equal interest to ask, for example, why more people *believe* that they have experienced precognition than OBE [out-of-the-body experience] as it is to question why more people *have* experienced precognition than OBE'.²¹ The distinction he draws is a clear one: that people experience a certain phenomenon as true is sufficient to lead us into an investigation of it. For my purposes, as part cultural-historian, part sociologist and part-anthropologist, my issue is with the claims people make about the personal experience of astrology, both sympathetic and hostile. My approach has been influenced by the phenomenological principles set out in 1913 by Edmund Husserl, who argued that it was essential that all inquiries into any area of human endeavour touching on consciousness paid due respect to the 'I', the individual's subjective experience, rather than attempt to explain it away or reduce it to quantitative measurement.²² Husserl argued that the task of the phenomenologist was not to judge the phenomena under investigation but rather the "description" [of]...the realm of essential structures of transcendental subjectivity immediately transparent to the mind'.²³ In other words, the phenomenon - in this case, belief in astrology - should be understood on its own terms rather, say, than as a variety of some other category, such as a form of religion or science. Husserl's goal, of course, was with the discovery of universal truths. Like more recent phenomenologists, I part company with Husserl on this point: contrary to Husserl, it is the phenomena alone which matters and we can not use them to make any deeper metaphysical inference. I will follow Caird and Law's definition of the phenomenological approach is one 'in which differing belief systems are examined as perceived in their own terms, rather than by adopting a reductionist stance'.²⁴ And this, of course, in turn is the position adopted by Pyrrho and the classical sceptics in the late fourth and early third centuries BCE.²⁵ If I have a guiding principle in this research then it has to be scepticism in its original, classical form of general and universal doubt.

In view of my focus on the question of whether astrology is a New Age movement, and hence on its relationship with Christianity, I have been influenced by the extension of Husserl's phenomenological approach into the new discipline of the study of religions, in particular by Ninian Smart. It was Smart who largely defined the discipline's approach as one of 'methodological neutralism' or 'agnosticism', as opposed to the personal religious commitment which, he argued, had once assumed to be a prerequisite of the student of theology.²⁶ The phenomenological approach is a

21 Gaynard, T. J., 'Young People and the Paranormal', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, January 1992, Vol. 58, No. 826, pp. 179.

22 Husserl, Edmund, *Ideas: General Introduction to Pure Phenomenology* (London: Collier-MacMillan, 1972 [1913, Eng. trans. 1931]), [hereafter Husserl, *Ideas*], p. 7.

23 Husserl, *Ideas*, p. 7.

24 Caird, Dale and Henry G. Law, 'Non-Conventional Beliefs: Their Structure and Measurement', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1982, Vol. 21, No. 2, pp. 152-163, [hereafter Caird and Law, 'Non-Conventional Beliefs'], p. 153.

25 Diogenes Laertius, *Lives of Eminent Philosophers*, trans. R.D. Hicks, 2 Vols, London: Heinemann 1925, 'Pyrrho', IX.78.

26 For methodological agnosticism see Ninian Smart, *The Science of Religion and the Sociology of Knowledge: Some Methodological Questions* (Princeton: Princeton University Press. 1973), [hereafter

useful one precisely because it helps avoid the increasingly pointless arguments about astrology's cultural status, with its detractors and supporters engaged in a rhetorical struggle for the high ground which may be personally satisfying, but gets us no nearer to understanding its cultural locus. My investigation of the question of belief in astrology is therefore descriptive and analytical rather than judgemental, my immediate precedents in this respect being three principal academic works on the New Age; those by Michael York, Paul Heelas and Wouter Hanegraaff.²⁷

The study of astrology's cultural identity within such a framework does not in itself suggest that astrology need be necessarily considered either a New Age discipline or a religion, for, as Ninian Smart argued, 'the study of religion is itself strategic to some of the human sciences; it also passes into the study of "non-religious ideologies" without affecting their status'.²⁸ In other words, he argued, the phenomenological approach developed in the study of religions may be applied to other disciplines without suggesting that they are religions. As we shall see, though, most sociologists assume that astrology is indeed a religion, while most practitioners argue that it is not. In addition, any consideration of whether astrology is a religion does not, as Smart continued, have any bearing upon the truth of its claims. In any case, the conscientious historian of religion makes no claims about the truth of religious claims.

It is important, from a phenomenological perspective, to allow astrologers to speak for themselves and relate their own experiences. This is a goal which I have tried to achieve through surveying the literature with an open mind, reporting on claims and assertions without personal judgment, and through semi-structured interviews. On the grounds that practising astrologers may have specialized knowledge and experience in the field, I therefore conducted the bulk of my fieldwork amongst those active in astrology, particularly attendees at astrology conferences. This may seem obvious, but it is surprising how often statements about astrology's nature are made without any evidence from either practitioners or users. To use Ninian Smart's adaptation of Husserl's phrase, I am concerned with the astrologer's 'I-picture', the definitions astrologers use for themselves, as opposed to those which may be allocated to them by academics or external critics.²⁹ Of course, the trap of academic method can never be entirely avoided. I will myself, as an academic, have to allocate certain labels, for that is what academics do, but I hope only after a fair consideration of the evidence. As Husserl himself noted, the phenomenological study of consciousness is emphatically not the same as the psychological study of consciousness, for the phenomenological researcher is seeking to observe and describe, not explain, like the psychologist, in terms of preordained categories.³⁰ The distinction to adapt Lett's

Smart, *Science of Religion*], pp. 94, 108. For religious commitment see Ninian Smart, *The Phenomenon of Religion* (London: MacMillan, 1973), [hereafter Smart, *Phenomenon*], p. 12; Smart, *Science of Religion*, p. 4.

27 York, *The Emerging Network*; Heelas, Paul, *The New Age Movement* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996); Hanegraaff, Wouter J., *New Age Religion and Western Culture* (New York: Brill, 1996), [hereafter Hanegraaff, *New Age*].

28 Smart, *Phenomenon*, p. 11.

29 Smart, *Phenomenon*, p. 24.

argument, is between the differences between the manner in which astrology is defined externally and with the discourses astrologers use to describe themselves.³¹

My fieldwork amongst the wider public, meanwhile, is more limited and is intended to cast light on existing research in order to suggest possible models for future investigation.

The previous studies to which my own is most closely related are the studies of witchcraft and magic by Tanya Luhrmann and Susan Greenwood.³² There are a number of important distinctions, though, between their work and mine. The worlds of magic and witchcraft, which they investigated, are based around action – often of a collective nature; the groups tend to be closed to outsiders and therefore require a much greater degree of personal commitment than does astrology.³³ In the past astrology and action were frequently intertwined, as they still are in modern India. While modern astrology can be invoked in the service of magical ritual, in the form of the calculation and interpretation of horoscopes, it is often an essentially solitary and intellectual enterprise, the principle shared activity being the consultation between astrologer and client, and the only collective activity being attendance at public meetings or classes which are open to strangers.³⁴ Astrology may itself be defined as a practice, though primarily an individual one, if the casting and interpretation of horoscopes is taken as the primary locus of activity. However, my emphasis is not on such practice, but on perceptions of astrology.

The respectable examination of astrology as a topic within the history of ideas was established by Lynn Thorndike in the early-twentieth century.³⁵ His major work, the eight-volume *History of Magic and Experimental Science*, concluded with the seventeenth-century; hence subsequent historians of astrology, such as Jim Tester assumed that astrology completely died out by 1700.³⁶ In the 1980s Bernard Capp showed, though, that while astrology was dropped from educated society, its popular existence in the form of almanacs continued undisturbed throughout the eighteenth-century.³⁷ Ellic Howe and Patrick Curry then demonstrated astrology's survival and

30 Husserl, Edmund, *Phenomenology and the Crisis of Philosophy*, trans. Quentin Lauer (New York: Harper and Row, 1965), pp. 90-91.

31 Lett, 'Epistemology', p. 135.

32 Luhrmann, T. M., *Persuasions of the Witch's Craft: Ritual Magic in Contemporary England* (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1989), pp. 62-5; Greenwood, Susan, *Magic, Witchcraft and the Otherworld: An Anthropology* (Oxford: Berg, 2000), p. 50-1.

33 Pearson, Joanne, 'Assumed Affinities: Wicca and the New Age', in Pearson, Joanne, Richard H. Roberts and Geoffrey Samuel, *Nature Religion Today: Paganism in the Modern World* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 1998), pp. 51-54.

34 For astrological ritual see Janet Farrar and Stewart Farrar, *The Witches Way: Principles, Rituals and Beliefs of Modern Witchcraft* (London: Robert Hale, 1984), pp. 88-91.

35 Lynn Thorndike, *The Place of Magic in the Intellectual History of Europe* (New York: Ames Press, 1967 [1905]).

36 Jim Tester, *A History of Western Astrology* (Suffolk: Boydell Press, 1987), pp. 240, 243.

revival in the nineteenth-century, leaving only the twentieth-century substantially ignored, with the exception of my own previous work.³⁸ Yet the study of astrology's contemporary cultural status may shed light on the condition of modern society as a whole. As Grace Davie has argued, 'by looking at the way that society reacts to new religious movements and the controversy they generate, we can discover more about that society itself'. And, what if astrology *is* a religion? In this case, the wider significance of the study of its cultural function is clear, for as Bryan Wilson pointed out, 'Religious change is...cultural change'.³⁹ It is not necessary to argue that astrology is a religion in order to make the point that an understanding of the cultural milieu within which it thrives may shed light on contemporary society as a whole. Caird and Law, meanwhile noted that even in the 1980s there was a substantial lack of empirical social psychological research into counter-cultural religious beliefs.⁴⁰ There are some studies specifically devoted to astrology. Of these, there are but three books. One is Marcia Moore's little-known attempt to conduct sociological research amongst astrologers in 1960, the others Derek Parker's survey published in 1972 and Garry Phillipson's collections of interviews, published in 2000.⁴¹ While there has now been substantial work in some areas, astrology has been generally untouched. Within the academic literature Marcello Truzzi attempted to initiate a discussion of astrology in popular culture in 1975, but his challenge was ignored.⁴² Aside from those writers who were concerned with testing astrology's claims, only a few approached anything useful from a sociological point of view. Svenson and White, for example, looked at the content of horoscopes and Dambrun found higher than expected levels of prejudice amongst astrologers.⁴³ While this study cannot tackle the psychological, it does aim to lay the ground for social research.

37 Bernard Capp, *Astrology and the Popular Press: English Almanacs 1500 - 1800* (London and Boston: Faber and Faber, 1979), pp. 238-269.

38 Howe, *Urania's Children*; Patrick Curry, *A Confusion of Prophets: Victorian and Edwardian Astrology* (London: Collins and Brown, 1992); Nicholas Campion, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol. 2, London: Continuum, 2009.

39 Grace Davie, *Religion in Britain Since 1945* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1994), p. 68; Bryan Wilson, *Contemporary Transformations of Religion* (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1979 [1976]), p. 3.

40 Caird and Law, 'Non-Conventional Beliefs', p. 152.

41 Marcia Moore, *Astrology Today: A Socio-Psychological Survey*, Astrological Research Associates Research Bulletin no 2, New York: Lucis Publishing Company, 1960.

Derek Parker, *The Question of Astrology: A Personal Investigation*, London: Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1970; Garry Phillipson, *Astrology in the Year Zero*, London: Flare Publications 2000.

42 Truzzi, Marcello, 'Astrology as Popular Culture', *Journal of Popular Culture*, 1975, Vol. 8, pp. 906-911.

43 Stuart Svensen and Ken White, 'A Content Analysis of Horoscopes', *Genetic, Social and Psychological Monographs*, Vol 12, no 1, pp. 7-38; Michael Dambrun, 'Belief in Paranormal Determinism as a Source of Prejudice Towards Disadvantaged Groups: "The Dark Side of Stars"', *Social Behaviour and Personality*, 2004, Vol. 32 no 1, pp. 627-636.

It seems possible to study astrology in its historical context, but not its present. This is David Pingree, the most influential historian of astrology in the later part of the twentieth century:

For the sciences I study are those related to the stars, and they include not only various astral omens, astrology, magic, medicine, and law... All these subjects, I would argue, were or are sciences *within the contexts of the cultures* in which they once flourished or are now practiced.⁴⁴(my italics)

My mission, then, is to investigate and discuss astrology's character within the culture of the twenty-first century English-speaking world. From anthropologists comes further encouragement: in their introduction to *Astronomies and Cultures*,⁴⁵ Clive Ruggles (actually an astrophysicist and archaeologist) and Nicholas Saunders cite approvingly Tristan Platt's 1991 suggestion that we are in need of an 'anthropology of astronomy'. Platt's words are somewhat more radical than this quote would suggest. He wrote that,

an historical anthropology of astronomy must emphasise the interaction between different cultural perspectives on history and time, rather than subsuming them within what is still a predominantly North Atlantic "World" perspective. Hence the need to deconstruct the universalising discourse of modern professional astronomy itself (still with an inbuilt tendency to appeal to a historicist account of its own past) if we are to arrive at an approach to the subject at once sociological and ethnoscientific, which recognises the recreation of different cultural histories as a more significant and viable prospect than an absolute (and inevitably ethnocentric) Universal History.⁴⁶

This book is, at least in part, an attempt to fulfil the promise of Platt's hope, although I have tended to remain with sociological surveys rather than dive into anthropological depths: this must remain for the future.

Astrology has become an integral part of contemporary popular culture via newspaper and magazine horoscopes and through its continual borrowing from astronomy, for example in its appropriation of newly discovered solar system bodies, and its use of astronomical terminology, it is a genuine modern ethnoastronomy, a cultural astronomy. Indeed, it may be the most visible expression of astronomy in culture. Whereas once, as Evans Pritchard recorded, anthropology was explicitly concerned with the study of 'primitive' peoples, Susan Greenwood's 'anthropology' of contemporary witchcraft has been influential in challenging the dogma that anthropology is about 'them' rather than 'us'.⁴⁷ This study is therefore a step towards an anthropology dealing with a different aspect of modern society: the notion that our lives and destinies are connected in some way with the zodiac, stars and planets.

44 Pingree, David, 'Hellenophilia versus the History of Science', *ISIS* 1991, Vol. 83, p. 554.

45 Ruggles, Clive and Nicholas Saunders, (eds.), 'The Study of Cultural Astronomy', in *Astronomies and Cultures* (Boulder: University Press of Colorado, 1993), p. 12.

46 Platt, Tristan, 'The Anthropology of Astronomy', in *Archaeoastronomy*, the supplement to *The Journal of the History of Astronomy*, 1991, No 16, p. S83.

47 Evans-Pritchard, *Social Anthropology*, p. 77.

If there is one folk or ethnoastronomy which is still awaiting proper study, free from historicist discourses of a supposed struggle between science and superstition, then it is contemporary astrology. I do not claim to have produced a substantial anthropology of astrology. Instead I am laying the groundwork for such an enterprise. Following Ann Geneva, who, in her study of seventeenth astrology, argued that 'it is first necessary to locate astrology within its own universe of discourse before historians can attempt to compare it with other explanatory systems', this book investigates astrology's contemporary 'universe of discourse'.⁴⁸

My concerns are also historical. In particular, I am interested in the problem of origins, in this case of the New Age movement and of contemporary astrology as a language of birth signs, personality and psychological potential. While the foundation of my study is historical, this leads directly into an analysis of the contemporary situation, principally from a qualitative standpoint. My use of quantitative data therefore remains indicative of possible areas for future research and is designed mainly to test whether previous and, often, widely reported figures on 'belief' in astrology are accurate. I am primarily concerned with the nature of the narrative that astrologers themselves weave about their role in society and their place in the cosmos. Even though qualitative and quantitative research are often thought to belong different research categories, the one focusing on subjective experience, the other on the attempt to establish objective measures of such experience, these contrasting approaches are not mutually antagonistic but, when used together, supportive.⁴⁹

Astrology is occasionally categorised as a religion by its practitioners, sometimes as an art or science. Its critics though, invariably describe it in religious terms. In this study I am primarily concerned not with whether astrology actually conforms to any accepted definition of religion, but with whether it is perceived as a religion, and with the consequences of that perception. In part this is due to the difficulty of defining religion. As Stewart Guthrie wrote, 'scholars agree that no convincing general theory of religion exists'.⁵⁰ This simple, bold statement exposes the problem of a lack of any agreed definition of astrology. As Geoffrey Dean and Peter Loftson wrote,

Dictionaries, encyclopaedias and astrology text books have defined astrology variously as a science, a supposed science, an art, a divinatory art, an art/science, a language, a philosophy, and as a system for self-understanding.⁵¹

48 Ann Geneva, *Astrology and the Seventeenth Century Mind: William Lilly and the Language of the Stars*, Manchester and New York: Manchester University Press, 1995, p. xiv.

49 Bryman, , *Quantity and Quality*, pp. 4-5.

50 Guthrie, Stewart Elliot, 'Religion: What is it?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1996, Vol. 35, No. 4, p. 412.

51 Dean, Geoffrey and Peter Loftson 'Discourse for Key Topic 2: Some Philosophical Problems of Astrology', *Correlation*, 1996, Vol. 14, No. 2, pp. 33, 41, n 1; see also Dean, Geoffrey and Arthur Mather, *Recent Advances in Natal Astrology: a Critical Review 1900-1976* (Subiaco, Western Australia: Analogic, 1977), p. 3.

Variety seems to be the key, at least in terms of definition. However, astrology's critics tend to assume that it conforms to a definition of religion which posits supernatural agencies as causal factors within human society. In this sense such critics draw on both E.B. Tylor's definition of religion as a belief in 'spiritual beings' and J.G. Frazer's as the 'propitiation and conciliation of powers believed to be superior to man'.⁵² Although neither definition entirely covers the diversity of expression encountered in contemporary astrology, its critics tend to focus on its occult or supernatural aspects. Religious critics tend to see such supernatural agencies as essentially real, while scientific critics see them as inherently false. Both, though, agree that belief in them is, or can be, dangerous.

Most external definitions of astrology include it in the general sphere of the religious. Stark and Bainbridge, meanwhile, define astrology as a species of magic in that it makes utilitarian but unverifiable claims.⁵³ Saliba, writing from a Christian background, argues that astrology is 'occult' and, in that it is also a New Age belief, is to be categorised as a 'new religious movement'.⁵⁴ Gill, Hadaway and Marler include astrology under the catch-all category 'occult' but also as a 'non-traditional religion'.⁵⁵ Representing sceptical scientists, the astronomers Roger Culver and Philip Ianna conclude unambiguously that astrology is 'a firmly entrenched belief system'.⁵⁶ The psychologists Jahoda and Plug categorised it as a 'superstition', while Richard Crowe pointed out that 'virtually all scientists regard astrology as unfounded superstition'.⁵⁷ This is all very well, but what is a superstition? The usual definition is, as Plug says, an 'irrational or unfounded belief' although, following Yahoda, he then observes that this is problematic in view of the assumption it makes concerning the veracity of the belief.⁵⁸ The physicist Robert Park goes further, taking an overtly hostile position and describing it as one of 'the darkest superstitions that beset our species', language that is not far removed from that of its religious opponents.⁵⁹ The

52 Arnal, William E., 'Definition' in Willi Braun and Russell T. McCutcheon, (eds.), *Guide to the Study of Religions* (London: Cassell, 2000), p. 23.

53 Stark, Rodney and William Simms Bainbridge, *A Theory of Religion* (New Brunswick NJ: Rutgers University Press, 1987), p. 105.

54 Saliba, John A. (1995), *Perspectives on New Religious Movements* (London: Geoffrey Chapman, 1995), p. 23; see also Wilson, Bryan and Jamie Cresswell (eds.), *New Religious Movements: Challenge and Response* (London and New York: Routledge, 1999); Barker, Eileen and Margot Warburg (eds.), *New Religions and New Religiosity* (Aarhus: Aarhus University Press, 2001).

55 Gill, Robin, G. Kirk Hadaway and Penny Long Marler, 'Is Religious Belief Declining in Britain?', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1998, Vol. 37, No. 3, pp. 512-3.

56 Culver and Ianna, *Astrology: True or False?*, p. xii.

57 Jahoda, Gustav, *The Psychology of Superstition* (London: Allen Lane, 1969), p. 25; Plug, C., 'An Investigation of Superstitious Belief and Behaviour', *Journal of Behavioural Science*, 1975, Vol. 2, No. 3, [hereafter Plug, 'Superstitious Belief'], pp. 169-178; Crowe, Richard A., 'Astrology and the Scientific Method', *Psychological Reports*, 1990, Vol. 67, p. 164.

58 Plug, 'Superstitious Belief', p. 169.

59 Park, Robert, *Voodoo Science: the Road from Foolishness to Fraud* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 201.

calculated use by some anti-religious scientists of religious imagery to make their point is, as we shall see, significant for my investigation. Within the sociology of religion, and mimicking such 'scientific' language, Stark and Bainbridge referred to astrology as 'deviant supernaturalism'.⁶⁰ Not just supernaturalism, note, but deviant, as if it is judged against a normal and, perhaps, preferable, supernaturalism. In part such terminology is fuelled by moral outrage. The astronomers Bok and Mayall quoted the attack on astrology from the 'Society for the Psychological Study of Social Issues', which argued that 'faith in astrology...is harmful because it encourages an unwholesome flight from the persistent problems of real life', adding that 'when moral habits are weakened by depression or war, bewilderment increases, self-reliance is lessened and belief in the occult increases'.⁶¹ Returning to the theme in 1975 Bok, by that time emeritus professor of astronomy at the University of Arizona, argued that it was 'morally inexcusable' for the American Astronomical Society not to have taken a firmer stand against astrology. Stephen Hawking made a comment on such attacks when he noticed that 'the real reason most scientists don't believe in astrology is not scientific evidence or the lack of it but because it is not consistent with other theories that have been tested by experiment'.⁶² For Bok and his colleagues, to propose anything which conflicts with prevailing scientific theory is as serious a crime as any transgression of the Jews against God's natural order as set out in Deuteronomy.

Astrology is generally classified as 'paranormal' in the sense that it transcends 'the explanatory power of mainstream science'⁶³ and is widely included in measures of paranormal belief.⁶⁴ Following unnamed 'American scholars', Rice distinguishes two types of paranormal belief, 'traditional' and 'classical'.⁶⁵ On the one hand there are the traditional, the 'religious' beliefs central to traditional Christian doctrine, such as heaven and hell, the devil and creationism. On the other hand there are 'classic' beliefs, commonly associated with the supernatural or occult, such as belief in ESP, reincarnation, psychic healing, UFOs - and astrology. In the sense that such classic supernatural beliefs are distinct from religious ones, they may conform to Plug's definition of a superstition, that it is a 'superstitious' belief which does not form part of the mainstream religion.⁶⁶ However, although the classification of astrology as paranormal may be appropriate if it is accepted that its claims transcend scientific explanation, it may be misleading if it is then assumed that it shares the same internal

60 Stark, Rodney and William Simms Bainbridge, *The Future of Religion: Secularization. Revival and Cult Formation* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985), p. 431.

61 Bok, Bart J and Margaret W. Mayall, 'Scientists Look at Astrology', *The Scientific Monthly*, 1941, Vol. 52, p. 244.

62 Stephen Hawking, *The Universe in a Nutshell* (London: Bantam Press, 2001), p. 103.

63 Gray, W. D., *Thinking Critically about New Age Ideas* (California: Wadsworth, 1991), p. 7; see also Abell, George O. and Barry Singer (eds.), *Science and the Paranormal: Probing the Existence of the Supernatural* (London: Junction Books, 1981), pp. 70-94; Hines 1988: 19.

64 Plug, 'Superstitious Belief', Goode, Erich, *Paranormal Beliefs: A Sociological Interpretation* (Illinois: Waveland Press, 2000).

65 Rice, 'Believe It or Not', p. 95.

66 Plug, 'Superstitious Belief', p. 169.

nature and social status as other beliefs classified as paranormal. For example, Greeley's discussion of the paranormal focuses on communication with the dead and peak mystical experiences.⁶⁷ Thus, when Haraldsson includes astrological consultations as 'psychic or psi-related experiences', along with sightings of ghosts and visits to mediums, the validity of his discussion, beyond the simple reporting of quantitative results, may be open to question.⁶⁸ The lack of a clear definition, as noted by Dean and Kelly, is evident in such work and may, as Zinnbauer *et al.* note in their discussion of the lack of an accepted definition of spirituality, impair communication amongst researchers.⁶⁹ I will argue that this is certainly the case as far as discussions of astrology are concerned. Ultimately, it may be necessary for those studying astrology's place in culture to follow the lead of those studying Buddhism and, as William Herbrechtsmeier wrote, 'recognize the diversity of belief and practice within their own traditions'.⁷⁰

The differences between various definitions of astrology are more than just a matter of language and tend to suggest a reliance on different philosophical models. Dictionary definitions tend to emphasise celestial causality, as does the *Concise Oxford Dictionary* which describes astrology as 'the art of judging of reputed influence of stars upon human affairs'.⁷¹ Astrologers, though, tend to reject simple notions of influence or causation, which are based on a superficial reading of the originally complex notions in Aristotelian physics.⁷² To astrologers a more familiar view of astrology would be that found in Margaret Hone's *The Modern Text Book of Astrology* which emphasised not planetary causation but the 'interpretation of the correlation of planetary action in human experience'.⁷³ According to another prominent astrologer, Robert Hand, astrology is a 'taxonomy of life'⁷⁴ while to Kelly Hunter it is 'an intuitive science, the full power of... [which] lies in transforming consciousness through imagery'.⁷⁵ As Dennis Elwell realised, 'Astrology means

67 Greeley, Andrew M., *The Sociology of the Paranormal* (London: Sage Publications, 1975).

68 Haraldsson, E., 'Representative National Surveys of Psychic Phenomena: Iceland, Great Britain, Sweden, USA and Gallup's Multinational Survey', *Journal of the Society for Psychical Research*, 1985, Vol. 53, pp. 145-158..

69 Zinnbauer, Brian J., Kenneth J. Pargament, Brenda Cole, Mark S. Rye, Eric M. Butter, Timothy G. Belavich, Kathleen M. Hipp, Allie B. Scott, Jill L. Kadar (1997), 'Religion and Spirituality: Unfuzzifying the Fuzzy', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1997, Vol. 36, No. 4, p. 550.

70 Herbrechtsmeier, William, 'Buddhism and the Definition of Religion: One More Time', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1993, Vol. 32, No. 1, p. 16.

71 *Concise Oxford Dictionary* 1952.

72 Campion, Nicholas, *A History of Western Astrology*, Vol 1. The Ancient World, London: Continuum, 2009, chap. 10.

73 Hone, *The Modern Text Book of Astrology*, 1973: 16.

74 Hand, Robert, 'The Proper Relationship of Astrology and Science', *Astrological Journal*, Nov/Dec 1989, Vol. 31, No. 6, p. 316.

75 Hunter, Kelly, 'The Black Goddess of the Eclipse', *NCGR Memberletter*, August/September 1999, p. 1.

different things to different people, and is big enough to accommodate many complementary, and even contradictory, opinions'.⁷⁶

There is, in fact, be no one such single thing as astrology but rather different astrologies. These might appear to be magical, religious or scientific, can be applied to understanding the past, the management of the present or the prediction of the future, and may be used for personal spiritual development or forecasting fluctuations in the stock market. For current purposes the working definition of astrology will be 'the practice of relating the heavenly bodies to lives and events on earth, and the tradition that has thus been generated'.⁷⁷

It must be recognised from the outset, though, that there may be a profound difference of both attitude and practice between an astrologer who may be analysing commodity prices for a bank or forecasting the outcome of soccer games, and one who is counselling clients or concerned with their own spiritual development. As will become clear, my concern is with the majority of users of astrology whose only encounter with it is through horoscope columns, and with astrologers who are operating within a context best described as 'esoteric' or 'psychological'.

Why, we should ask, is this inquiry important? My argument is that the quest for meaning is a universal human attribute and that in most, if not all, cultures, there is a predisposition to find meaning in the sky. To cite the French philosopher Bruno Latour, 'No one has ever heard of a collective that did not mobilize heaven and earth in its composition, along with bodies and souls, property and law, gods and ancestors, powers and beliefs, beast and fictional beings... Such is the ancient anthropological matrix, the one we have never abandoned'.⁷⁸ According to George Gummerman and Miranda Warburton, who combine expertise in archaeology and anthropology, 'to truly comprehend a culture we must have some sense of its cosmology - the group's conception of themselves in relation to the heavens'.⁷⁹ And, in the words of Clive Ruggles and Nicholas Saunders, 'the study of cultural astronomies is concerned with the diversity of ways in which cultures, both ancient and modern, perceive celestial objects and integrate them into their view of the world. This fact, by definition, illustrates that a society's view of and beliefs about the celestial sphere are inextricably linked to the realm of politics, economics, religion, and ideology'.⁸⁰ This sense of cosmology as meaningful is, in modern western terms, astrological, and the

76 Elwell, , Dennis, *Cosmic Loom: The New Science of Astrology* (London: Unwin Hyman, 1986), p. 143.

77 Curry, Patrick, 'Astrology', in Boyd, Kelly (ed.) *The Encyclopaedia of Historians and Historical Writing, Volume 1* (London: Fitzroy Dearborn, 1999), pp 55.

78 Latour, Bruno, *We Have Never Been Modern*, Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press 2006 [1991], p.107

79 Gumerman, George J., and Miranda Warburton, 'The Universe in a Cultural Context: An Essay', in Fountain, John W., and Rolf M. Sinclair (eds.), *Current Studies in Archaeoastronomy: Conversations Across Time and Space*, Durham NC.; Carolina Academic Press, 2005, p. 15.

80 Ruggles C., and J Saunders., *Astronomies & Cultures* (Colorado: University of Colorado Press) [hereafter Ruggles, *Astronomy*], p. 1.

study of astrology's place in the modern world may have implications for our understanding of other aspects of culture which may not be as profound as they were until the seventeenth-century, but may still illuminate our view of twenty-first century society.

Within Curry's definition, it is necessary to consider a distinction between two forms of astrology which was first identified by Cicero in the first-century BCE. Cicero identified an astrology derived from the observation of natural phenomena from one based on 'art', that is, the technical procedures of divination.⁸¹ In the medieval context, then, what we can identify as natural astrology assumed the existence of general celestial influences which may be the basis of statements of broad significance for human affairs or world events. The astrology of art, or judicial astrology, generally required the casting of horoscopes, placing a high reliance on the astrologer's ability to judge, or interpret the complex patterns in the chart. This book is, and this is an important point, concerned only with judicial astrology, with astrology as an interpretative discipline.

It is clear, though, that these are not watertight, mutually exclusive categories, and the theory and attributions of natural astrology were integral to judicial astrology. On the other hand, it was possible to accept the principles of natural astrology and be utterly opposed to judicial astrology. A modern natural astrology might therefore include other phenomena which are not usually considered astrological, including the sun-spot cycle, circadian (daily) rhythms and lunar cycles. The notion of the solar system as a giant clock in which the planets are the hands which indicate different time periods on earth may also be included with natural astrology, even though no celestial influences may be necessary for such a model.

Astrology has two principal sets of opponents: evangelical, fundamentalist or conservative Christians represented by such groups as the Reach Out Trust, and the positivist, secular humanists represented chiefly by the Committee for Skeptical Inquiry (CSI), formerly the Committee for the Scientific Investigation of Claims of the Paranormal (CSICOP). The latter organisation, which was formed following the publication of an anti-astrology manifesto in *The Humanist* in 1975, stands at the heart of modern organised scepticism and regards its mission as to eradicate all forms of the paranormal and occult, including astrology.⁸² Fundamental to CSICOP's perspective is the notion that astrology's survival in the modern world is historically problematic, even inexplicable. This is not a view unique to them. As Michael Hill wrote, interest in astrology seemed to be considerable 'even in the most technologically advanced areas of western society',⁸³ while the astronomers Snow and Brownsberger wrote that 'even today' some people have faith in astrology.⁸⁴ Note

81 Cicero, *De Divinatione*, W. A. Falconer, trans. (Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 1929).

82 Bart J. Bok, Lawrence E. Jerome and Paul Kurtz, 'Objections to Astrology: A Statement by 186 Leading Scientists', *The Humanist*, September/October 1975, Vol. 35 no 5, pp. 4-6; Paul Kurtz, 'A Quarter Century of Skeptical Inquiry: My Personal Involvement', *Skeptical Inquirer*, July/August 2001, Vol. 25, No. 4, pp. 42-47; Hansen, George P., *The Trickster and the Paranormal* (Xlibris Corporation, 2001), pp. 148-161.

83 Hill, *Sociology of Religion*, pp. 247.

the use of the word 'even', as if in the natural scheme of things, astrology should have died out. Glick and Snyder noted that 'belief in astrology...remains as prevalent today as ever, despite the lack of scientific evidence for such beliefs'.⁸⁵ A typical view was expressed by John Silber, President of Boston University. He argued that,

Astrology is in fact a bizarre survival from pre-scientific times. Its theories were worked out when people believed the earth was the center of the universe and that seven planets revolved around it: the Moon, Mercury, Venus, the Sun, Mars, Jupiter and Saturn. Although this view of the universe has been proven false, astrology continues with hardly a wobble.⁸⁶

Silber didn't know it, but he was following a Tylorian agenda, one which is thoroughly discredited amongst historians and debunked by anthropologists. It was Tylor who argued that human culture was subject to an inevitable progression in which primitive magic was succeeded in turn by polytheism, monotheism and atheism.⁸⁷ Astrology, Tylor argued, belonged to the earliest, most primitive magical stage and its survival in the modern world is therefore a serious problem. Tylorian evolution may be contradicted the evidence but its notion that atheism is the highest form of human culture has a natural appeal for atheists, and hence for modern sceptics. The sceptical attack on astrology reached its climax with the publication in 1975 of the manifesto 'Objections to Astrology', drafted by Bart Bok, Lawrence Jerome and Paul Kurtz and published in *The Humanist*, and leading to the foundation of CSICOP. The manifesto pulled together '186 leading scientists' to sign a document calling for a campaign against astrology. The manifesto included an element of surprise that astrology should have survived, as one would expect from Tylorians: 'One would imagine, in this day of widespread enlightenment and education, that it would be unnecessary to debunk beliefs based on magic and superstition', while astrology's survival, it was claimed, 'can only contribute to the growth of irrationalism and obscurantism'.⁸⁸ The manifesto's combative language and dualistic imagery of a society facing a struggle between reason and irrationality pervades the language of organised scepticism. For example, sociologist Erich Goode regards paranormal belief, including interest in astrology, overtly as a 'threat'.⁸⁹ Astrology, in these terms, is not just a bizarre anomaly, but is positively dangerous. At its worst, it is often argued, astrology's survival presents a real threat to the health of society. The French statistician Michael Gauquelin, who was himself sympathetic to astrology, quoted psychologist Hans Bender's damning indictment:

84 Snow, Theodore P. and Kenneth R. Brownsberger, *Universe: Origins and Evolution* (London and New York: University of Colorado, Wadsworth Publishing Company, 1997), p. 7.

85 Glick, Peter and Mark Snyder, 'Self-Fulfilling Prophecy: the Psychology of Belief in Astrology', *The Humanist*, May-June 1986, Vol. 46, Pt. 3, p. 20.

86 Silber, John (2001), 'Silliness under Seattle stars', *Boston Herald* 16 May 2001, at <http://www.bostonherald.com/news/columnists/silber05162001.htm>

87 Tylor, Edward Burnett, *Primitive Culture*, Vol. 1, London: John Murray 1873.

88 Bok, Bart J, Lawrence E. Jerome and Paul Kurtz, 'Objections to Astrology: A Statement by 186 Leading Scientists', *The Humanist*, September/October 1975, Vol. 35, No. 5, p. 4.

89 Goode, Erich, 'Education, Scientific Knowledge, and Belief in the Paranormal', *Skeptical Inquirer*, January/February 2002, Vol. 26, No. 1, [hereafter Goode, 'Paranormal'], p. 27.

It is striking that more than three hundred years of experimental sciences have not succeeded in providing an antidote to astrological beliefs. Astrology is a social reality. Its forms vary from the crudest superstitions to thoughtful attempts at connecting the astrologer's magic vision of the world with modern psychological knowledge...Therefore astrology poses a problem of social and psychological health.⁹⁰

In its milder form scepticism retreats from the argument that astrology is a danger to civilisation and regards it as merely ridiculous. The astronomer, George Abell, one of the most prominent sceptics, mused that astrology seems 'incredible' and an 'absurdity',⁹¹ and, following the general sceptical argument, a note of incredulity was sounded by the sceptic Lucy Sherriff, who wrote,

Nearly all woman's (sic) magazines publications carry horoscopes. Most of us really do only read them for a laugh, and let's face it, the horoscope debunking has been so thorough that the people who actually take it seriously are few and far between. So, why are they still there?⁹²

The journalist Robert Matthews sounded similarly bemused when he wrote that astrology's popularity has been maintained 'despite the scepticism of scientists'.⁹³ The unspoken assumption is that sceptical scientists somehow speak for the modern world as a whole. This is, perhaps, a natural product of belief in the law of progress, an application of evolutionary theory to the human intellect that assumes humanity has evolved from a state of superstition to one of reason in the historic period, over the last four millennia, and that rational, materialist, secular humanism is the highest state of intellectual development reached by humanity. J.B. Bury, who was the first to reflect on the concept of progress as a peculiar historical theory noticed that, by the 1870s the 'idea of Progress' had become 'a general article of faith'.⁹⁴ As Leslie Sklair demonstrated, progress was often regarded as synonymous with evolution. He added that,

When Mr. Frederic Harrison delivered in 1889 at Manchester an eloquent discourse on the "New Era", in which the dominant note is "the faith in human progress in lieu of celestial rewards of the separate soul", his general argument could appeal to immensely wider circles than the Positivists whom he was specially addressing.⁹⁵

90 Gauquelin, Michael, *The Cosmic Clocks: From Astrology to a Modern Science* (San Diego: Astro Computing Services, 1982), p. 35, Citing Schmidchen, G. 'Soziologisches über die Astrologie, Ergebnisse einer repräsentativ-Befragung', *Z.f., Parapsychologie u. Grenzgebiete der Psychologie*, 1957, I.47.

91 Abell, George O , 'Astrology', in George O Abell and Barry Singer (eds.) *Science and the Paranormal: Probing the Existence of the Supernatural*, London: Junction Books, 1981), pp. 73, 94.

92 Sherriff, Lucy, 'Women are NOT from Gullibull', *The Skeptic*, 2001, Vol. 14, No. 3, p.7.

93 Matthews, 'Astrologers Fail to Predict', p. 9.

94 Bury, J. B., *The Idea of Progress: An Inquiry into its Growth and Origins* (London: Macmillan, 1932), [hereafter Bury, *Idea of Progress*], p. 346.

Blind belief in progress theory, from John Baillie to Peter Bowler.⁹⁶ To argue that the positivist-evolutionary view of history can be demonstrated aside from the value judgments of the historians who write that history is, as Herbert Butterfield long ago showed, unsustainable.⁹⁷ Progress mythology holds that, because secular humanism is the highest state of human consciousness yet reached, all other world views must, by definition, be anachronistic. They represent survivals of earlier forms of thought which have survived by accident and are involved in a struggle with science which is envisaged as a titanic battle of light against dark. Carl Sagan's image of science as 'a candle in the dark'⁹⁸ is widely quoted;⁹⁹ yet, while contemplating the apparent rise of belief in the paranormal, Sagan himself adopted the language of medieval Christianity and wrote that 'the demons begin to stir'.¹⁰⁰

The belief that western culture can conform to a single set of intellectual values may itself be a vain one. As Bilgrave and Deluty argued, in their discussion of psychologists' religious beliefs, 'the current Weltanschauung in the west is a curious amalgam, consisting of religious, humanistic, scientific, and romantic elements', and secular humanism, from this point of view, has no special claim to pre-eminence in the modern world.¹⁰¹ Romanticism, which has every much a claim as secular humanism to modernity, stresses 'subjective, immediate experience, the cultivation of affect and intuition, and the creation of personal meaning through authentic choice'.¹⁰² Romanticism's vigour throughout the nineteenth-century, into the origins of the contemporary New Age movement, has been well-documented by Joscelyn Godwin.¹⁰³ And, as Wouter Hanegraaff has shown, there is good evidence for arguing that New Age culture is as much a product of the Enlightenment as is modern secularism. The question of whether astrology is anachronistic, therefore, is a by-product of Whig historiography, the term devised by Herbert Butterfield to describe what he regarded as the mistaken theory that the history of the last five hundred years

95 Sklair, Leslie, *The Sociology of Progress* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul Ltd., 1970), p. 65.

96 Baillie, John, *The Belief in Progress* (London, Glasgow, Toronto: Oxford University Press, 1950); Bowler, Peter J., *The Invention of Progress, The Victorians and the Past* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1989).

97 Butterfield, Herbert, *The Whig Interpretation of History* (London: Norton Library, 1965 [1931]), [hereafter Butterfield, *Whig Interpretation*], pp. 105-6.

98 Sagan, Carl, *The Demon Haunted World* (New York: Random House, 1995), [hereafter Sagan, *Demon Haunted*].

99 For use of Sagan's 'candle' metaphor, see for example, Goode, 'Paranormal', p. 24.

100 Sagan, *Demon Haunted*, p. 27.

101 Bilgrave, Dyer P and Robert H. Deluty, 'Religious Beliefs and Therapeutic Orientations of Clinical and Counselling Psychologists', *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, 1998, Vol. 37, No 2, [hereafter Bilgrave and Deluty, 'Religious Beliefs'] p. 329.

102 Bilgrave and Deluty, 'Religious Beliefs', p. 329.

103 Godwin, Joscelyn, *The Theosophical Enlightenment* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1994).

represents the triumph of reason, including science, over unreason, including astrology.¹⁰⁴

If we accept, though, that Tylorian evolution and progress theory have any validity, this leads us to questions of modernism and modernity. Looking at the context within which astrology thrives, Hess considers the New Age movement as a whole to be post-modern,¹⁰⁵ although he offers no explanation for this. Paul Heelas, meanwhile considers the New Age movement in its counter-cultural aspects, and hence astrology, which he includes as New Age,¹⁰⁶ as an aspect of 'modernity in crisis'.¹⁰⁷ However, he neither defines modernity nor explains why the New Age might not in fact be an aspect of modernism. Robert Bellah, however, did point to the crisis in modernity and the consequent shift in spirituality, which he identified as arising, in the USA at least, from 'the massive erosion of the legitimacy of American institutions - business, government, education, the churches, the family'.¹⁰⁸ Hexham and Poewe point out that the distinctions are not clear-cut and argue that the counter-culture of the 1960s contained elements of both modernism and post-modernism,¹⁰⁹ while Patrick Curry has discussed astrology as a post-modern discipline.¹¹⁰ Elsewhere some developments within astrology, such as the recovery of former traditions, are identified as post-modern, while others – such as the argument that astrology is a science that can be proved, or the New Age proposition that its widespread acceptance will change the world for the better – are clearly aspects of modernism.¹¹¹ The problem, of course is one of definition, for there is no universally accepted meaning of the terms modern and post-modern. Williams notes that aspects of culture defined as modern, such as avant-garde art, are taken to be representative of 'modernity' as a whole while being quite clearly not representative of the entire modern world,¹¹² while Jameson asks whether it is even possible to say that the post-modern exists.¹¹³ If modernism is

104 Butterfield, *Whig Interpretation*.

105 Hess, David J., *Science in the New Age: The Paranormal, Its Defenders and Debunkers and American Culture* (Wisconsin, University of Wisconsin Press, 1993), p. 36.

106 Hess, 1996: 23, 34.

107 Hess, 1996: 138.

108 Bellah, Robert N., 'New Religious Consciousness and the Crisis in Modernity', in Glock, Charles, and Robert N. Bellah, *The New Religious Consciousness* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1976), p. 333.

109 Hexham, Irving and Karla Poewe, *New Religions as Global Cultures* (Boulder Colorado, Westview Press, 1997), P. 149-151.

110 Curry, Patrick, 'Astrology: From Pagan to Postmodern?' *The Astrological Journal*, January/February 1994, Vol. 36, No. 1, pp. 69-75.

111 See for example Hand, Robert, 'Foreword' in Barclay, Olivia, *Horary Astrology Rediscovered* (Pennsylvania: Whitford Press, 1990), [hereafter Hand, 'Foreword'], p. 15.

112 Williams, Raymond, *The Politics of Modernism: Against the New Conformists* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 33.

113 Jameson, Frederic, *Postmodernism or the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), [hereafter Jameson, *Postmodernism*], p. 55.

characterised by the self-confident creation of the future and, if modernists think ‘compulsively about the New ... (try) to watch its coming into being and look for ‘new worlds’,¹¹⁴ then the development of psychological astrology, the most influential development within modern professional astrology, may be an indicator of a modernist trend within twentieth-century astrology.¹¹⁵ If, though, modernity is defined as ‘the social condition of living in an urban, fast-changing, progressivist world governed by instrumental reason’¹¹⁶ and postmodernism ‘is what you have when the modernization process is complete’,¹¹⁷ one could argue from a variety of different positions. The sociologists of science John Bauer and Martin Durant discussed the matter, agreeing with Heelas’ view that astrology is encouraged by the crisis of modernity. They consider that astrology,

may be regarded sociologically, as one among a number of potential compensatory activities that may be attractive to individuals who are struggling to come to terms with the uncertainties of life in late modernity...Belief in astrology is rather a matter of the moral fabric of modern society than of scientific literacy. It seems that in Britain, as in Germany or France, belief in astrology is prevalent among particular social groups; groups which, as we have indicated, may be experiencing difficulty in accommodating their religious feelings to life in an uncertain post-industrial culture. Paradoxical as it may seem, therefore, we conclude that popular belief in astrology may be part and parcel of late modernity itself.¹¹⁸

My purpose is to consider whether astrology’s continued existence in the modern world is an anomaly, a legacy of the past which has survived in spite of the Enlightenment and scientific revolution, or whether it may be considered a natural part of the modern world. We therefore arrive at the key historical question. Which I hope will play a part in the wider discussion of modern esotericism, new religious movements, New Age culture, alternative spiritualities and questions of the nature of secularism and modernity.

114 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. ix.

115 Hand, ‘Foreword’, p. 15.

116 Jencks, Charles, *What is Post-Modernism?* (London: Academy Editions 1996 [1986]), p. 8.

117 Jameson, *Postmodernism*, p. ix.

118 Bauer and Durant, ‘British Public Perceptions’, p. 69.