

Fate and Astrology

Some Ancient Insights

by Robert Hand

[Editor's Note: Latin and Greek words are in *bold italic* where they are defined.]

One of the most common charges leveled against astrology is that it limits or denies free will. We are accused of espousing a kind of fatalism that reduces human beings to playthings of the planets. Yet, almost everyone who studies astrology discovers that this does not seem to be the case. When we counsel clients, we discuss ways of taking advantage of planetary energies, and we try to describe tactics that minimize the "effects" (whatever that may mean in regard to planetary combinations) of difficult ones. And then there is electional astrology, which requires that we be able to act freely at an appropriate time — something completely incompatible with fatalism. We are all able to make free choices, rightly or wrongly, and even when we feel something that we think may be "due" to planetary combinations, we also believe that we exert our will to overcome such feelings. Then, at times, we are under such a compulsion to act in certain ways that we are not able to avoid acting in accord with the compulsion. At times such as these, it seems plausible to believe that something outside of ourselves, such as planetary influence, is "forcing" us to act in some such manner. Even among astrologers, some argue that freedom of the will is an illusion and that the inability of astrologers to make precise forecasts is due to deficiencies in either astrological technique or the astrologer. So, is astrology fatalistic, and what would that mean? I do not expect to give a definitive answer to these questions, but I want to share some insights that I have drawn from one ancient source in particular, along with other insights derived from my study of ancient thought. Then, I will

show what these mean for the study of astrological practice.

First of all, what do we mean when we talk about "Fate"? No discussion of fate, fatality, and freedom of the will can possibly take place until we look at what we mean by these concepts. Too often, these terms are thrown about in debate without ever ensuring that, first, we have reasonable definitions and, second, that we are all using the same ones. Obviously, this is not an issue that can be settled easily. I cannot claim to have the "correct" definitions, and I cannot compel anyone who disagrees with mine to accept them, but maybe we can at least gain some degree of clarity about what each side is saying in the debate. I will examine words that pertain to fate in English, Latin, and ancient Greek — words that have had tremendous impact on both the popular and philosophical notions of fate.

First, let us look at English. "Fate" is obviously our primary word, but we also use words such as "destiny," "allotment," or "lot" (as in "his lot in life") and, occasionally, more elaborate words such as "providence" (as in the term "Divine Providence"). This last word I will take up below, but let's look at the other ones now.

From the *Oxford English Dictionary* (OED) we have the following definition of the word "fate."

The principle, power, or agencies by which, according to certain philosophical and popular systems of belief, all events, or some events in particular, are unalterably predetermined from eternity.

This definition certainly does a decent job of summarizing common notions concerning fate, and it has several components. First,

there is a power of some kind; second, there is the idea of unalterability; and third, there is the idea of predetermination, or determinism. It is not quite as clear that fate is essentially predetermined "from eternity," because even ancient philosophies differed on the eternity of the universe. So, we have a force or power that causes or determines a particular outcome of a series of events in such a way that the outcome cannot be changed.

However, if we look at the origin of the word "fate" itself, we find something quite different. The word "fate" is from the Latin *fatum*, which in turn is derived from a Latin verb meaning "to speak" or "to say" and also "predict" or "foretell." A *fatum* is something that has been spoken in the manner of an imperial decree or a decree of the gods. As such, it may determine an outcome only insofar as the power of the emperor or the gods is actually capable of making the decree stick! Ironically, the very root of the word "fate" indicates that the *source* of the power behind the *fatum* does have free will and is exercising it at the very moment of making its decree. It is clear that there is a bit of a gap between the Latin root concept of the *fatum* and the English word "fate," as defined by the *OED*.¹

Another English word for fate is "destiny." The *OED* defines it as closely synonymous with "fate." But the Latin root of the word, the verb *destino*, shows quite a different range of meaning. Lewis and Short's Latin dictionary gives the following English words for *destino*: "to establish, determine, resolve, consider; to design, intend, devote, destine; to appoint, choose, elect."² These are mostly words of choice, that is, free will. And we can also see this if we consider the related word "destination." A destination is something we choose, or that is chosen for us, as a place to get to on a journey. The only way that the original sense of the word can point to fate, as we have seen with *fatum*, is if some higher power does the choosing for us. So, for both the words "fate" and "destiny," their original Latin root words imply that fate is the exercise of some higher power's free will.

In either case, we come to "determinism." From the *OED*, we see that determinism is the

result of a "necessary chain of causation," and "causation" clearly means what that word commonly means to most people: something that causes or makes inevitable a subsequent chain of events. From this, we can see that "cause" is closely bound up with fate.

The Greek Roots of Fate

The other language that has a great impact upon both philosophical and common notions of fate is ancient Greek. In Greek, the most common word for fate was *moira*. The three goddesses of fate were even called the *Moirai* (the plural form). Many of us are familiar with the image of the three fates from Greek mythology: Klotho, Lachesis, and Atropos. Klotho spun the thread of destiny, Lachesis handed it out, and Atropos cut it off, indicating the end of life. This mythic image suggests dynamic fate that comes from a kind of process. Yet, the actual root meaning of the word *moira* indicates just the opposite. In ordinary Greek, a *moira* is an allotment, a lot, a division or portion. Except for the word "division," these are all words that modern English occasionally uses to mean fate as well. We refer to someone's "portion in life" or "lot." But this is a very different image of fate from what we have described above. It is static, not dynamic. A *moira* is a part, something spatial allocated to a person, the idea that one's place in the world, the portion of the world where one lives, is a cause that determines one's fate.³

There is a second word that played the heaviest role in ancient philosophy: *heimarmene*. This word is related to *moira* and has the same root, but it is derived from a verb, *meiromai*, which refers to the action of allocating or allotting. *Heimarmene* comes from the past participle of the verb and means "that which is allotted." By making this into a verb, the static image of fate as an allocation is transformed into the idea that something or someone is doing the allocating. The concept of fate-as-power can be seen here once more.

So far, we have two distinct ideas of fate in all of this: a superior power that, by some kind of force, unalterably determines an outcome; and fate as a place, portion, or allotment in life. And these two come together, as we have

seen, in the word *heimarmene*. So, what was it, how was it different from *moira*, and what does this have to do with astrology? It actually had a great deal to do with astrology! In the first book of the *Corpus Hermeticum* (*CH*), called the *Poimandres*, we find a statement (translated by G. R. S. Mead) that reflects a widespread belief in the ancient world:

And God-the-Mind, being male and female both, as Light and Life subsisting, brought forth another Mind to give things form, who, God as he was of Fire and Spirit, formed Seven Rulers who enclose the cosmos that the sense perceives. Men call their ruling Fate.⁴

The word used in the Greek of the above passage is *heimarmene*, and the seven rulers are clearly the planets. To some of the ancients, at least, astrology was the study of *heimarmene*. However, this does not quite settle things for either ourselves or the ancients. Although it is clear that fate was supposed to determine the outcomes of things, one way or another, it is not clear that it was unalterable or complete. Was everything subject to fate as *heimarmene*? Was nothing undetermined? Or was fate simply an influence that has some effect in bringing about an outcome? The answer to this will become clear further on. But first, let us turn to a passage from the *CH* that I believe speaks to our problem and shows very clearly a possible relationship between the various kinds of fate and their relationship to the soul.

In addition to the main body of the *CH*, there are several fragmentary quotations from the ancient philosophical *Hermetica* that no longer exist in their complete forms. These were collected in ancient times by an anthologist in the 5th century C.E. named Joannes Stobaeus (in the Latinized spelling), who compiled a collection of what he regarded as important philosophical and theological works, apparently for his son's education. One of these fragments consists of a brief dialogue between Hermes and his son, Tat. The original Greek text is full of gaps and missing words, but it begins with the following request by Tat:

Tat: Rightly, O father, hast thou told me all; now further, pray, recall unto my mind what are the things that Providence doth rule, and what the things ruled by Necessity, and in like fashion also those under Fate ...⁵

And Hermes ends his response with this:

Hermes: Reason [*logos*] comes under Providence [*pronoia*]; unreason [*alogos*] falls under Necessity [*ananke*]; the things that happen to the body fall under Fate [*heimarmene*].⁶

In between these two passages, we have passages that will be cited and discussed below, which will help us to understand exactly what the authors of this dialogue were trying to tell us. In the passages we have here, there are three words that pertain to fate: "providence," "necessity," and "fate." Taking the last word first, the one translated as "fate," we have *heimarmene*. This passage clearly states that *heimarmene* is the kind of fate that determines what happens to the body. This was preserved up through the Middle Ages in the idea that only the body was subject to planetary "influences." There is more to be said about *heimarmene* and its relation to the physical world, which we will take up shortly. But let's look at the other two words.

The first of the three words, "providence," is a translation of the Greek word *pronoia*. This word literally means "knowing beforehand." "Providence" (from the Latin *providentia*) means much the same thing. Lewis and Short give a post-classical Latin definition of the word: "the government of the world by infinite wisdom and foresight." This definition clearly shows the influence of Christianity. There is nothing wrong with this interpretation, but the original sense of the word — and certainly the sense of the word as used in the Stobaeus fragment — is simpler and, at the same time, a bit more complicated. Although the Christian form of the word does imply some kind of predetermination by a higher power, the original and older interpretation does not appear to be a fate-word at all, but

rather a form of knowledge. According to the unabridged Greek lexicon, *pronoia* also has a clear sense of purpose. In other words, it is a form of foreknowledge that has an intention or purpose. The fact that knowledge is part of this word is extremely important for our understanding.

The second word, the Greek *ananke*, is usually translated as “necessity,” but it also has the sense of “constraint” and “force.” Here, we have a fate-word that truly fits our conception of “fate” — something that forces an outcome, possibly against our will. It is a word that denotes determinism and was often used as a synonym for *heimarmene* by the ancients. Perhaps more important, regarding modern ideas of fate as we encounter them in astrology, *ananke* suggests a blind, mechanical power manipulating destiny, not the free will of a conscious, higher power such as a god. And in fact, this view of fate was quite widespread among the ancients, especially the Stoics.⁷ Cicero, the Roman orator, described fate as follows:

... an ordering and sequence of causes, since it is a connexion of cause to cause which out of itself produces anything. It is everlasting truth, flowing from all eternity. Consequently nothing has happened which was not going to be, working to bring that very thing about. This makes it intelligible that fate should be, not the “fate” of superstition, but that of physics ...⁸

The fate that Cicero refers to in this passage is the Greek word *heimarmene*, which he explicitly states earlier in the same passage, but this is a view of *heimarmene* that is indistinguishable from *ananke*, or necessity. Outside of our passage from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, it was common in the ancient world to equate *heimarmene* and *ananke*. An article in the *Dictionary of the History of Ideas* (hosted on the Web by the University of Virginia) entitled “Fortune, Fate, and Chance” makes this quite clear, and it is clear from many other sources as well.⁹ Nor was ancient astrology free of this influence. Although Cicero was a

Stoic and a foe of astrology, many other Stoics were enthusiastic advocates of astrology. One of the most notable of these was the poet Manilius, who wrote the following passage well known to students of ancient astrology:

The fates rule the world. Everything stands on certain law, and long seasons are signified by sure causes. As we are born, we are dying, and the end depends upon the beginning. From this both wealth and kingships flow, and, more often, has arisen poverty, and character, skills, vices, and praises have been given to the ones created, as well as the loss and the gathering of things.¹⁰

Here, we see precisely the philosophical attitude that all of astrology has been accused of. But is this what the author of our Hermetic fragment had in mind, disregarding for a moment whatever other ancient philosophies may have taught? No, and this is made very clear in the following passages of this dialogue. As mentioned, the original Greek contains gaps and missing words, but another translator, Walter Scott, has made an effort to edit the Greek into something intelligible, and his result is in broad agreement with Mead’s rendition. The passage is worth citing at length.

Hermes: ... there are in us three kinds of incorporeals. The first of these is apprehensible by thought alone ... This is a thing without colour and without shape; it issues from nothing else than the primary intelligible substance.¹¹

Scott (in a note) equates this quite reasonably with divine mind. The fragmentary text continues, and it is clear that the second incorporeal is irrational mind or soul but is capable of being moved by the first and highest incorporeal, so that it “is at once transformed into an image of the Maker’s thought.”¹² And the third level of incorporeals attached to the self are the attributes of the body itself. Although the body

is material, its characteristics are attributes of form and, therefore, immaterial. The author concludes this middle section by saying:

Now the intelligible substance, if it has drawn near to God, has power over itself, and in saving itself, it also saves the other part [the lower, irrational intelligible incorporeal]. As long as it is by itself, it is not subject to Necessity [*ananke*], and its choice is in accordance with Providence [*pronoia*]. But if it falls away from God, it chooses the corporeal world, and in that way becomes subject to Necessity which rules over the Kosmos.¹³

Ananke here rules over the cosmos just like the fates of Manilius, but unlike the fates of Manilius, its effects can be overcome by *logos*, or reason. However one may interpret reason (*logos*), the decrees of necessity can be overcome. This kind of fate is not due just to the mechanical workings of destiny but requires a lack of reason (*alogos*) in the soul to become fully effective. In the presence of reason, *ananke* is not fully effective. The text makes it clear that, whether one has free will or not, the dominance of reason causes an aspect of the self to align itself with providence. What that means we will see below.

I cannot say for certain what the original author had in mind, but I can say a few things from a general knowledge of ancient philosophy, and I can add to that from my own understanding of this passage. Then, we can apply it to modern astrology.

First of all, *logos* does not mean "reason" in the everyday sense of the word, as when we say that an idea is "reasonable." Nor does it mean "reason" in the sense that we often see Reason as opposed to "superstitions," such as astrology and similar arts. The word *logos* is derived from the verb *lego* in Greek, which has several meanings, including "to pick up," "choose," "count," "tell," and "to say" or "to speak." *Logos* itself also has meanings that relate to saying and speaking. It also means "relation, correspondence, proportion." The *logos* of something is the set of ordered rela-

tionships that make it what it is. What is of the nature of *alogos* (or unreason) is that which has no order, no defining relationships, and no pattern or structure. Our word "illogical" should mean "having no order or rationale," but it has been hijacked by modern so-called "rationalists" to refer to things that are not ordered in a manner *acceptable to them*. In the proper sense of the word, astrology is not "illogical," even though its *logos* is very much out of accord with any *logos* acceptable to people who have chosen themselves as the ones to define which *logoi* (plural form) are "logical" and which are not. The problem is that there cannot be any such thing as an illogical *logos*.

Putting all of this together in terms of our Hermetic passage, we can see that the highest incorporeal is supposed to align itself with the principle (*logos*) of having a defining structure, order, and internal form. If we can decide not to get hung up on very undefined words such as "soul, mind, spirit," we can plausibly say that this higher incorporeal is the part of the soul that is supposed to govern the entire soul in conjunction with the principles of *logos*. This soul is "logical," in the highest sense of the word. The lower aspect of the soul can be guided by it and can attain the same state of being an image of the divine, but it needs to be guided by the higher aspect. Otherwise, both levels of soul fall into complete governance by fate, that is, *ananke*.

So, we are moving toward the idea that freedom from at least the lower kinds of fate, *heimarmene* and *ananke*, is attained through the activity of a faculty that we can regard as having qualities of wisdom, consciousness, awareness, or something of that sort. It is historically plausible that such wisdom or knowledge could liberate an individual from fate, because all of the surviving texts of the Hermetic tradition are examples of pagan gnosticism. This must be distinguished from Judeo-Christian Gnosticism (usually written with a capital G); these texts were conceived in the context of particular currents in early C.E. Judaism and Christianity and, in particular, make theological claims about a saving *Gnosis*, a special knowledge needed for salvation in the context of Jewish and Christian theology.

Astrology and astrologers

All forms of gnostic philosophy and religion see *gnosis*, or knowledge in general, as necessary to “salvation,” “enlightenment,” or whatever. But in the ancient period in which the Hermetic texts were composed, one part of this salvation, or enlightenment, is liberation from fate!

This brings us to two additional Greek concepts and words: *gnosis* and its opposite, *agnoia*. *Gnosis* is defined in the Greek lexicon as “seeking to know, inquiry, investigation.” It is a *process* rather than a *state* of knowledge. The word *gnosis* is also directly connected to the verb in the phrase *gnothi seauton* (“Know thyself”) written over the entryway to the temple of the oracle at Delphi. *Gnosis* is the process of direct knowing through observation and experience. It is not abstract or theoretical knowledge. *Agnoia* is simply the absence of *gnosis*. It is usually translated as “ignorance,” although one must be careful with the pejorative or negative tone of the word “ignorance.” *Agnoia* is simply a state of not knowing, and one cannot know or directly experience everything. Nevertheless, there are things that one cannot afford to be ignorant of; the part of the soul that would overcome fate cannot be ignorant of its own nature.

So, what do I mean by soul? This is one of those words mentioned above as “very undefined,” at least in popular usage. I have found it useful to turn to Aristotle, a philosopher not read very much these days by persons outside of philosophy departments. His treatise on the soul — titled, since the Middle Ages, *De Anima* — gives very clear definitions of soul.¹⁴ Basically, there are two characteristics that define soul. In all living things, soul is what makes a living thing alive. The presence of soul in something makes it alive; its absence makes a thing dead. The second definition has to do with the idea of form or essence. The soul of a living thing is what makes it that specific living thing and not some other. In particular, in sentient life forms there is a level of the soul that is called “rational” — i.e., “logical” in our expanded sense of the word. (There are also two other levels of the soul that are irrational.) From the rational soul comes speech and

*have always
made errors
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all forms of conscious communication, thinking, consideration, and self-awareness. The emotions, impulses, passions, habits, and other unconscious causes of thought and behavior, as we would consider them, belong to the irrational aspect of the soul. This is a doctrine well enshrined in astrology. Here is Ptolemy (Book III) in his discussion of the soul.

Of the spiritual qualities, however, all those which are rational and intellectual are contemplated by the situation of Mercury; while all others, which regard the mere sensitive faculties, and are independent of reason, are considered rather by other luminaries of a less subtle constitution and more ponderous body; for instance, by the Moon and such stars as she may be configured with.¹⁵

The word “rational” in Greek is from our word *logos*, and the part of the soul that deals with sensation independently of reason is *alogos*. I believe that these are precisely the first two levels of “incorporeals” referred to in our passage from the *CH*. The first part that is capable of comprehending *logos* is also capable of *gnosis*, and the other part is not — although it can be guided by the part that is.

But there is one more thing that we have to understand before we can get to the problem of astrology. This has to do with Aristotle’s idea of “form” or essence. The form or essence of a thing is what makes a thing *that particular thing* and not something else. A form we could call “treeness” makes a tree a tree and is different from what makes an automobile an automobile. As stated previously, one aspect of soul, particularly the higher soul, is that it makes a living thing, especially a sentient living being, *that* living being and not a different one. The soul of each of us is who we are, as individuals; it is our form and our essence. And there is something else about forms for Aristotle and his successors: A form is something that is originally potentially present in some matter and that,

over time, actualizes itself within that matter. Although the seeds of one species of tree look different from seeds of other species of trees, the seeds of the one species look pretty much alike. The mature trees, however, can look quite different, partly due to circumstances of the environment, to be sure, but also due to genetic makeup. Even mature trees have somewhat different “souls” than other trees of the same species. And this is much more true of human beings! Aristotle refers to the soul as the “actuality [*entelecheia*] of the body,” that is, the manifestation of the soul is the perfect completion (*entelecheia*) of the body’s potential.¹⁶ Few people are aware that Aristotle was an advocate of human potential.

So, here is what we seem to know about this ancient conception of fate, based on our passage from the *Corpus Hermeticum* and fleshed out by Aristotle.

- We have a somewhat (but not completely) unusual variant of *heimarmene* in that it affects only the body, i.e., it has dominion over the material realm.
- We have a second level of fate called *ananke*, or necessity, which has dominion over the soul only if the higher aspect of the soul abdicates its association with *logos*. It does this by not pursuing direct knowledge or *gnosis* and thereby allows the emotional or instinctual aspect of the soul to fall away from its best state.
- We also have a third level of fate called providence, or *pronoia*, which is associated with divinity. This is the level of fate that governs both aspects of soul when the higher aspect does not fall away from *logos*.

Fate in the Stars

Now let’s apply all of this to astrology as we understand it, not as it was understood by Stoics such as Manilius. Our first question is this: Do we have evidence that astrology itself is a manifestation of an unalterable fate (whichever kind it may be)? Does astrology manifest a fate that imposes a higher power against which free will is powerless? I suggest that we do not have such evidence. Many astrologers and schools

of astrologers — both in the past, as we have seen, and some in the present — have thought that astrology does provide evidence of such a fate. When astrologers fail to predict accurately, these astrologers believe that this is due solely to deficiencies on the part of the astrologer or the system of astrology employed. I have personally heard this claim made by Vedic and modern medievalist astrologers with respect to predictions in conventional modern Western astrology. But astrology and astrologers have always made errors in prediction. There is no credible evidence that any system of astrology has ever approached anything like the complete reliability that one would expect if astrology were a manifestation of unalterable fate. Our experience of astrology does not support this!

So, let’s look at our Hermetic/Aristotelian model. What kind of *heimarmene* do we see here? It affects only material things such as the body, and it is unalterable. Do we have anything like this in astrology? We do! The motions of the planets are highly determined. Otherwise, astrologers from the Babylonians to the present — and astronomers as well — could not predict the positions of the planets for any date in history. And because the motions of the planets are determined, we can make the following statement about astrology: Once someone is born, the dates of every transit, every direction, every progression, and the form and arrangement of every solar return are completely determined.¹⁷ This is because the planets move according to natural laws that govern the behavior of matter and energy almost completely.¹⁸ But it has never been established that the effects of astrological movements upon the individual — and the individual’s responses to those effects — are predetermined in the same way. In fact, our experience strongly suggests otherwise.

Does this mean that we do have free will? That depends upon what we mean by free will. We often seem to have the ability to choose our course in life according to what we want. At other times, we are constrained by circumstances that appear to be beyond our control, even if these circumstances are not in turn determined by planetary movements. We

*We do not have
the freedom to
be anything
other than
who we are.*

must all acknowledge that there are limitations upon our freedom, which come from a wide variety of causes. But even when we can choose our own course, are we really doing so freely? I have to ask what makes us choose what we choose.

True free will is a kind of uncaused cause. It is an intention that arises freely within us. It is conditioned only by what we *know* to be true, so that we take a course of action solely because we intend it. A decision made on the basis of true free will is not predetermined by mental habit, irrational desires, emotional states, or other kinds of mental programming. To the extent that one's will is predetermined by any of these, the will is *not* free. It is the action of the second level of mind (or soul) described in our passage from the *Corpus Hermeticum*, the part that, on its own, is not associated with *logos*. Its very unconsciousness, its lack of association with *logos*, is *agnoia*, or ignorance. Yet, for the most part, when we make decisions that we believe are based on free will, what we are actually doing is acting in accordance with the unconscious impulses that are the result of the second level of mind. We are not acting freely; we merely act on the basis of unconscious drives.

However, sometimes we change the way we operate. Instead of simply and blindly wanting what we want, regardless of why we want it, we look at our world and ourselves and make an effort to see the truth clearly. We attempt to turn off our emotional drives, to see with detachment — a form of seeing that is often (but inaccurately) called objectivity.¹⁹ It is not important that we do this perfectly, although that should be the goal; it is only important that we make as strong an effort as possible. Once we make this effort to transcend *agnoia*, we have entered onto the path of *gnosis*. And this, interestingly, is a choice that itself can only be made according to free will. This is a choice that comes about when the higher aspect of the soul begins to align itself with *logos*. And this in turn brings us to alignment with providence, or *pronoia*.

From what we have seen, what can we say about *pronoia*? It does seem to be a kind

of fate, but the descriptions given of it, in both Christian and non-Christian traditions, seem to associate it with a benevolent, divine

will. The passage states: "Now the intelligible substance [the higher aspect of the soul], if it has drawn near to God, has power over itself ... and its choice is in accordance with Providence [*pronoia*]." But if *pronoia* is a kind of fate, how can the soul gain power over itself by aligning itself with *pronoia*? The answer, I believe, lies in something like the teachings of Aristotle on the soul.

Science (or more precisely, Scientism) would have us believe that soul, in either sense of the word as defined above, arises as a product of completely physical or material activity. Soul is a result, not a cause. But Aristotle believed, along with many other ancients (including Plato), that soul was a cause. Later authors such as Plotinus, who attempted in many respects to combine Plato and Aristotle, taught that the realm of soul was prior to the realm of matter, that soul in some way generates matter. Aristotle specifically taught that soul exists as a potentiality in matter and attempts to manifest itself. Because a soul strives to become completely actualized in a material body, which would in turn perfectly manifest the soul, this means that for this to happen in *actuality*, the soul must exist as a potentiality that in some way can pull us, as body and *partially realized* soul, toward that perfect and complete manifestation (*entelecheia*). But soul meets resistance in this process. Matter has inertia; things happen that interfere with the process. Just as each acorn does not grow into a perfect oak tree, almost all of us (with the exception of the occasional enlightened being) are the result of the interaction and conflict between the pull of the soul toward its own perfect manifestation and the distortions that happen as the result of circumstances on the material plane. This "pull of the soul" is *pronoia*. The contrary pull is *ananke*. When other people, society, and family have intentions for us that are not in accord with what our souls truly are, when we have experiences in life that damage us and make us fear to change, this is *agnoia*.

When we make decisions in life having powerful consequences that make it difficult for us to do what really needs to be done later on, this is *ananke*. This is the most powerful fate of all in our daily lives. It is not from planets compelling us against our will; it is not a fate induced by a higher power, but rather the consequences of past actions, past decisions made in a state of unawareness (*agnoia*). This makes us do what we believe we *have* to do; it is “necessity.”

Now, turning for a moment to energies symbolized by the planets and their manifestations in our lives, one fact is obvious. No matter how elaborate our techniques are for pinning down what will happen — no matter what house system we use and no matter how many planets, asteroids, or fixed stars we use — all energies symbolized by astrological factors have many possible manifestations. We cannot anticipate all of them, nor can we always accurately choose among them. Also, experience with my own clients has convinced me that there are no astrological combinations that are so difficult or malevolent that they cannot be made to work. So, here again are the factors that often prevent the more difficult combinations from working out positively:

- Individuals *do not know or understand* about something that is available to them to enable them to take positive advantage of the energies. (*agnoia*)
- Their families, social group, or cultural background *do not allow* individuals to take advantage of possible ways of dealing with the energies. (*ananke*)
- The consequences of past actions *have put* individuals in positions from which they cannot take advantage of possible ways to deal with the energies. (*ananke*)
- Psychological damage *creates irrational fear* in individuals that *prevents them from seeing or considering* possible strategies for dealing with the energies. (*agnoia*)
- Irrational emotional drives or impulses within individuals *force them* into courses of action that prevent them from dealing with the energies. (*ananke*)

- Individuals are attached in some way to things as they are, which keeps them from letting go and in turn prevents them from dealing with the energies. (*ananke*)

If all this looks like the law of karma, that is because it *is* the law of karma, but stated in terms of Western spiritual teachings.

So-called malefics or malefic combinations symbolize energies that any given society does not collectively know how to deal with in a positive manner. Plotinus and other ancients were very clear that no astrological energies are in fact malevolent. Nor are they benevolent. They are simply there. Still, as an astrologer, I believe that the combinations within a chart do tell us something very real about who we are, actually and potentially. But the combinations do not tell us whether we will deal with them from the perspective of *agnoia* or *gnosis*, or whether we are driven by *ananke* or are in accord with *pronoia*.

Implicit in all of this is the following idea: The soul's effort to fully and perfectly realize itself in matter is *pronoia*, because such self-realization is in accordance with divine will or its equivalent. Also, from the point of view of such a divine plan, it is desirable that each of us become who we truly are as much as possible within the physical universe.

How is *pronoia* a form of fate? Simply put, we have the freedom to align with *pronoia* or not, but we do not have the freedom to be anything other than who we are. And we can manifest who we are over the full range of *agnoia* and *gnosis* and between *ananke* and *pronoia*. At all levels, each of us is somewhat who we are supposed to be, but incompletely and imperfectly so, depending on where we are in the range. And where we are in that range is neither astrologically determined nor capable of being read in the chart.

So, where does astrology and astrological counseling fit into this? We do have two forms of unalterable fate: physical law and physical circumstances (*heimarmene*), and we are necessarily who we are at whatever level we have attained. The level at which we are who we are is our location in the *agnoia-gnosis* range. In every situation in life, and in

life in general, we start with physical law (*heimarmene*), and we have a choice (and this is a free will choice) whether we pursue a path of *gnosis* or not (*agnoia*). *Heimarmene* with *gnosis* leads to a life governed by *pronoia*. *Heimarmene* with *agnoia* leads to a life ruled by *ananke*. The function of the astrologer is to use astrology to help each individual begin a path of *gnosis* toward self-realization and to help each individual dispel *agnoia* and thereby cease to be under the rulership of *ananke*. The irony is that astrology is routinely accused of imposing limitations on the freedom of the will. But if my interpretation of these ancient ideas is correct, the proper function of astrology is to teach people how to use free will in choosing *gnosis*, and to increase real freedom of the will by aligning themselves with providence (*pronoia*). My own experience with clients tells me that there is something to this.

References and Notes

1. Interestingly, the *Oxford English Dictionary* also describes "fate" as a synonym and replacement for the Old English word *wyrd*, which survives as our word "weird" and originally meant "to become." All references to the *OED* are from the online version at <http://dictionary.oed.com>

2. All references to Lewis and Short's *Latin Dictionary* and to the Greek lexica of Liddell and Scott are from an online version at <http://www.perseus.tufts.edu/cgi-bin/resolveform>

3. A fact that seems to be fraught with implications for astrology is that the Greek word for degree (that is, one-360th of a circle) is also *moira*. This was translated into Latin as *pars*, from which comes our word "part." A second word in Greek that has almost exactly the same range of meanings as *moira* is *kleros*. It, too, means an allotment or portion. The most common use of the word was to designate a yard or field that was allocated to a farmer. And, intriguingly, the word *kleros* was also used in ancient astrology to designate a lot, as in "Lot of Fortune," what modern astrologers call the "Part of

Fortune." Here, in fact, is the connection between *pars* meaning "degree" and *moira* = *kleros* also meaning "degree." "Part of Fortune" actually refers to a *degree* from which comes one's fortune or luck.

4. G. R. S. Mead, *Thrice Greatest Hermes*, vol. 2, Hermes Press (no date given), 7. This edition is a page-by-page reproduction of the London Theosophical Society edition printed in London, 1906.

5. Mead, vol. 3, 55.

6. *Ibid.*, 57. The Greek is not in the Mead translation but may be found in the edition of the *Hermetica* of Walter Scott cited below.

7. A. A. Long and D. N. Desney, *The Hellenistic Philosophers*, vol. 1, Cambridge University Press, 1987, 333-343. This consists of translations of fragments of ancient writers on Stoicism and its view of fate and causation.

8. *Ibid.*, 337.

9. <http://etext.lib.virginia.edu/cgi-local/DHL/dhi.cgi?id=dv2-27>

10. Marcus Manilius, *Astronomicon*, Book IV (translation by author).

11. Walter Scott, *Hermetica*, vol. 1, Dawsons (London), 1968, 421.

12. *Ibid.*

13. *Ibid.*, 423.

14. I have used the following edition: Aristotle, *De Anima*, trans. Hippocrates G. Apostle, The Peripatetic Press, 1981.

15. Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos*, trans. J. M. Ashmand, Aries Press, 1936, Book III, chapter 18, 107.

16. Aristotle, *De Anima*, Book Beta, 19.

17. Many astrologers believe that one can alter the outcome of a solar return by choosing where one is located when it happens. This would be an exception to the general principle.

18. There is some indeterminacy in planetary motion, but very little. Otherwise, the resulting instability would make the evolution of life in this solar system impossible.

19. I say "inaccurately" because this is a change within the subject (oneself), not a change in the relationship of the subject to the object.

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