

Predestination and negotiation in Western astrology

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This essay examines the relationship between fate and free will to reveal active ways in which astrology can be used to prepare, temper, and accept the various levels of human destiny. Using a broad chronological and cultural sweep, from the classical world to the modern world, it addresses the contributions of Claudius Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* (141 CE), Marcus Manilius's *Astronomica* (1st Century CE), Julius Firmicus Maternus's *Eight Books of Mathesis* (334 CE), and Virahamhira's *Brihat Jataka* (575 CE) along with Alan Leo's *Esoteric Astrology* (1913) and Robert Zoller's *The Lost Key to Prediction* (1980). This essay examines various themes of negotiation used by early astrologers such as the use of auspicious timing, counsel and advice, remedial measures, and the development of character. The probe of this discourse reveals that 'negotiation' in all of its variety is the real relationship between fate and free will.

This essay will examine the extent to which narratives of predestination is a feature of western astrology. It will examine the relationship between fate and free will to reveal active ways in which astrology can be used to prepare, temper, and accept the various levels of human destiny. The question of predestination will be reviewed using the following primary sources: Claudius Ptolemy's *Tetrabiblos* (141 CE), Marcus Manilius's *Astronomica* (1st Century CE) Julius Firmicus Maternus's *Eight Books of Mathesis* (334 CE), and Virahamhira's *Brihat Jataka* (575 CE) along with Alan Leo's *Esoteric Astrology* (1913) and Robert Zoller's *The Lost Key to Prediction* (1980). This essay will examine various themes of negotiation used by early astrologers such as the use of auspicious timing, counsel and advice, remedial measures, and the development of character.

The term 'predestination' has been defined as divine foreknowledge or God's foreknowledge by several secondary sources, and while astrological sources were not found to use this exact term, a common thread of a Stoic truth remains a constant; 'divine fore-knowledge is a moral appropriation of responsibility'.¹ It is not a person's fate as one might assume, but more a person's obligation to obey morality. In Stoic terms, predestination is 'one's internal inclination of the will to fend off causes of pain and accept what one cannot change and change what one can'.² The idea that astral determinism

¹ Lenn Evan Goodman, *Bahya on the Antinomy of Free Will and Predestination*, Journal of the History of Ideas, Vol. 44, No.1 (Jan-March 1983) pp.115-130

² Lenn Evan Goodman, *Bahya on the Antinomy of Free Will and Predestination* p. 120

shows the instability of man is a compelling idea. It can engage an individual with acceptance of astrological predictions because it alludes to the idea that while certain events can be foreseen, free will can be used to negotiate acceptance and right action. To follow, a 'narrative' is an attempt to 'communicate detail about events in time' which lead participants from the simple to complex.³

Firstly, predestination could be negotiated in a significant number of ways according to the sources. First evidence of omen astrology from the Babylonians showed an intimate connection between the terrestrial and the celestial worlds. The omens themselves were presented to the kings by the scribes to communicate the will of the gods so that rituals and prayers could be developed to address them.⁴ Later, Plato used them as a stepping stone to refine managing destiny through mathematical astronomy.⁵ In early European pagan times, fate was determined at the end of life rather than the beginning. In the discussion of fate, Patrick Curry (2004) quotes this pagan era, 'the shaping of destiny did not stop at birth, fate was perceived as a steady ongoing process, only fully completed at the end of a lifetime'.⁶ Predestination as narrative in this way is more about a journey of life and choices to be made. If, as in Plato's *Myth of Er* (380-350 BC), one chooses their lot, then in essence they are choosing a goal; a goal to overcome something, to become something, and to rejoin with creation.⁷ This idea is further supported by Max Webber who argued that every single important action and life as a whole signifies a chain of cause and effect (otherwise known as decisions) where the soul chooses the fate of their future.⁸ This appears to echo the idea of Plato, that individuals decide what has meaning for their soul; he called it genius. In essence, a person's desire to become is their predestination narrative. Nicholas Campion (2008) said that Plato used the

³ H.Porter Abbott, *The Cambridge Intro to Narrative* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008) p. xii

⁴ Nicholas Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology*, (London: Hambledon Continuum 2008) p. 43

⁵ Nicholas Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology*, p. 151

⁶ Patrick Curry and Roy Willis, *Astrology, Science and Culture*, (Oxford: Berg Pub. 2004) p. 56

⁷ Plato, *Republic*, Translated by Benjamin Jowett 1871 (New York: Barnes and Noble 2004) 343-352

⁸ Patrick Curry and Roy Willis, *Astrology, Science and Culture* p. 55

pluralist idea that astrology should be used to 'manage becoming with mathematical astronomy'.⁹

Ancient science seems to have had a social and intellectual context of which Neoplatonism, alchemy, and astrology have had a role; subsequently the rules of inquiry have shaped the study of predestination narratives. Claudius Ptolemy (141 CE) argues that heavenly motions must be combined with the customs and particulars of the individual.¹⁰ In *Tetrabiblos*, Ptolemy states that strict care must be taken not to foretell future events by natural processes 'unless properly considering all conditions of the future individual and the ambient'.¹¹ In summary, Ptolemy says that one must combine planetary motions with education, country, customs, and rank to 'render a course'.¹² While astrology is conveyed as potent in affecting the properties of the individual; he admits, 'since returns of planets never exactly repeat themselves; it must naturally follow that predictions are sometimes not born out by the events'.¹³ With the Hippocratic school of medicine (fourth century BC) there was an opportunity to unite predictions with medicine using the doctrine of the four qualities of hot, cold, wet, and dry which expressed themselves as the individual's temperament. Since each planet expressed a quality and ruled a part of the body, diagnosis and treatments were emphasised.¹⁴ Therefore, medical astrology became a further consequence of cosmic sympathy involving complex herbal remedies, this is one place that the overt fatalism appears to recede.

Early stoicism has a firm hold on the predestination narrative by encouraging all citizens to accept their destiny. This acceptance is a skill to be learned for the determinism of such influential writers such as Marcus Manilius (first century CE) in *Astronomica*. The stars, he explains, 'diversify the chequered fortunes of mankind'.¹⁵ One must 'bear his appointed lot' because by fate he is at birth given 'skill, character, merits and defects, losses and gains'.¹⁶ The

⁹ Nicholas Campion, *The Dawn of Astrology*, p. 160

¹⁰ Tamsyn Barton, *Ancient Astrology*, (New York: Routledge 1994) p. 55

¹¹ Claudius Ptolemy, *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos*, by J. Ashmand (London: Foulsham and Co. 1917) p. 11 book 1

¹² Claudius Ptolemy, *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* p. 9 book 1

¹³ Claudius Ptolemy, *Ptolemy's Tetrabiblos* p. 8 book 1

¹⁴ Peter Whitfield, *Astrology: A History* (London: Harry N. Abrams, Inc. 2001) p.62

¹⁵ Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica* p. 8 book 1

¹⁶ Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica* p. 225 book 4

translator of *Astronomica* G.P Gould explains that Manilius's Book 4 claims that the ecliptic signs restore the idea that man is a microcosm of the universal macrocosm. This is an image of the divine by asserting that one can comprehend heaven, when heaven exists in their very beings in the likeness of God.¹⁷ This relationship between all things, parts of the universe, stars, and mankind are a snapshot of the stoically potent idea of *sympathia*.¹⁸ The astrological causality of Robert Zoller represents this stoic theme of pairing individuals with the divine via the natal chart. The desire to be separated or individualised seems to be one's fate. Zoller explains astrological causality as metaphysics; the idea that all things flow out from the One which he calls 'the First Principle'.¹⁹ He understands that roots of astrology are in-fact buried in an 'astro-theology' of the Chaldeans and the Egyptians with influences from India and China.²⁰ This 'First Principle' is comprised of itself, the macrocosm, and the microcosm; 'the stars and planets are the heart of the macrocosm and they were considered as lying at the center of Man's being'.²¹ In other words, the celestial bodies along with their movements are located physically in our world (macrocosm) but also figuratively in our hearts (microcosm). In *Astronomica*, Manilus argues, 'all heaven moves to the eternal spirit of reason and by sure tokens distinguishes the vicissitudes of fate'.²² N.C. Aiyar, the translator of *Brihat Jataka*, explains this further, 'each man is a little world exactly representing the universe'.²³ It has also been argued by Zoller that since the center of the world is in the human heart it is also the key to fate in early 'astro-theology'.²⁴ For ancient astrologers, the natal chart is where Man and God meet; he asserts that it's the place where potentials and limitations mingle.²⁵

The Vedic (Hindu) tradition of Astrology hinges on a defined idea that the law of Karma will dictate what a person must accept as fate, and it's not without

¹⁷ Marucs Manilius, *Astronomica* p. 223 book 4

¹⁸ Julius Firmicus Maternus, *Matheseos Libri VIII* by Jean Rhys Bram (Bel Air MD: Astrology Classics 2005) p.1

¹⁹ Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction*, (New York: Inner Traditions Intl. 1980) p. 2

²⁰ Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction* p 11

²¹ Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction* p. 21

²² Marcus Manilius, *Astronomica*,(Cambridge Ma. Harvard University Press 1977) p. 9 book 1

²³ Virahamahira, *The Brihat Jataka* p. 11

²⁴ Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction*, p. 22

²⁵ Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction*, p. 22

a negotiation. The science of horoscopy in India is to treat the effects of good and bad deeds (karma) of men in their previous births.²⁶ There are three types of karma that can be seen in the chart: karma from a past life which is unalterable, karma that is ready to be experienced now of which you have freedom to improve, and future karma which is created based on your aspirations and subsequent accomplishments and duties including refinement.²⁷ But more, the planets together ‘form a body of executive officers charged with the duty of rewarding and punishing humanity for past karma’, but at the same time allowing for the freedom to improve one’s life through prayer, mantras, and deva worship.²⁸ The effects of unalterable karma in Hindu astrology are the fixed signs.²⁹ But through freedom one can soften the fixed energy with complex remedial measures that prescribe repeating a mantra thousands of times per day, praying to the gods or goddesses who preside over the difficulty, wearing certain colours and fragrances, eating certain foods, and using gemstones to promote a full level of cooperation with the divine. Zoller supports this discussion by saying, ‘the key to unfolding karma is to be found in the study of astronomical law’ which he refers back to the ‘macrocosm and microcosm’ idea.³⁰ The modern astrology of Alan Leo (1914) utilises the Hindu doctrine of karma to convey a new way to approach predestination. While Leo criticised Vedic astrology in some respects, he agreed with the idea that ‘man is both a slave of the effects of his past deeds and is a free agent in regard to fresh deeds’.³¹

Depending on the culture, education, and rank of the astrologer; the negotiations of pre-destiny are comprised of advice. Examples of this advice are richly imbued with philosophy; such as that of Firmicus Maternus (334 CE). He does not overtly accept that one has any free will over destiny, the staunch determinism by which he is described by his translator, is softened by his desire to direct his clients into a proper course of action.³² It is the responsibility of the

²⁶ Virahamahira, *Brihat Jataka* by N. Chidambaram Aiyar (Madras: Minerva Press 1905) p. 2

²⁷ Hart de Fouw and Robert Svoboda, *Light on Life* (Twin Lakes WI: Lotus Press 2003) p.29

²⁸ Virahamahira, *Brihat Jataka* p. 9

²⁹ Hart de Fouw and Robert Svoboda, *Light on Life* p. 29

³⁰ Robert Zoller, *The Lost Key to Prediction* p. 21

³¹ Virahamahira, *Brihat Jataka* p. 6

³² James Holden, *A History of Horoscopic Astrology* (Tempe, AZ: AFA 1996) p. 70

astrologer to 'educate the corrupt desires of men not only by responses but also by counsels'.³³ Divine predestination 'affords no excuse for moral lapses' but show that God predestines and compels an individual to obey a moral responsibility to fend off causes of pain. To struggle against what one cannot change is a form of pain, according to the Stoics. In essence, Maternus who is considered one of the more determined Stoic fatalists, values the remedy of counsel and moral responsibility. Further, a more contemporary theme of negotiation is the one of advice; otherwise known as the epistemological view. Curry explains this as, the very act of cognizing and recognizing one's fate changes it'.³⁴ In other words, every prediction is necessarily also an intervention which is emphasised in his dialogue on divination; since astrology is a form of divination according to Curry. He finds support for his case with Geoffrey Cornelius who he cites as saying, 'destiny is negotiable' and to foretell the future is to create the future.³⁵ Therefore, predestination narratives are reflective of the process of creation.

Negotiation can also be choosing a lucky time for something. Jyotish (Hindu astrology) emphasises that all remedial measures must begin and end during auspicious times governed by astrology.³⁶ Marcelino Ficino (1460) was considered an expert to consult on obtaining 'the most propitious hour' to lay a corner stone for instance.³⁷ Ficino's judgment of providence, fate, and free will was not to separate them but to explain the relationship between them. He is cited as saying, 'the whole of the heaven is within us, gird yourself and together with me, temper your heavens'.³⁸ Ficino favoured making talismans and medicines during favourable astrological times and days. The drawing down of cosmic power through Hermetic rituals from the Second century was a negotiation developed most significantly in the Renaissance.³⁹ The revival of magical correspondences played a role in the Renaissance to create talismans and use music to contemplate the heavens. Paintings and murals could be seen

³³ James Holden, *A History of Horoscopic Astrology* p.79

³⁴ Patrick Curry and Roy Willis, *Astrology, Science and Culture* p. 55

³⁵ Patrick Curry and Roy Willis, *Astrology, Science and Culture* p. 55

³⁶ Hart de Fouw and Robert Svoboda, *Light on Life* p. 32

³⁷ Melissa Merium Bullard, *The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino's Thought on Astrology*, (*Renaissance Quarterly*, Vol 43, No. 4, Winter 1990) p.692

³⁸ Melissa Merium Bullard, *The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino's Thought on Astrology*, p. 698

³⁹ Peter Whitfield, *Astrology A History* p. 146

as ways to accomplish this as well.⁴⁰ Ficino put measures in place to ‘utilise the heavens to avoid dangers’ with a variety of remedies.⁴¹ But not only that, his idea that the zodiac lies within each person opened up a way to use a form of psychology to ‘conceptualise astrological influences’.⁴² Under Ficino, mastering the heavens equals cooperation with a remedial measure.

In the modern era, the theory of predestination is tempered with the negotiation of depth psychology. Leo fathered this approach by publishing the idea that character is destiny.⁴³ But he does not stand apart from his predecessors; locating the zodiac within the soul equalled a new psychological way of conceptualizing astrological influences by making one’s life agree with the heavens according to Ficino.⁴⁴ The theme that the physical destiny can also be studied and negotiated agrees with both Ptolemy and Leo. Ptolemy used the physician as an example of this; ‘proper constitution of the sick person, his disease, every other consideration, in addition to the motion of the planets’.⁴⁵ Virahamahira uses the mixture of Moon and Mars as a result of ‘mensur’ appearing for women.⁴⁶ In more detail, Leo states that the birth moment will indicate the type of body and type of personality the person will have as well as the true character of the soul.⁴⁷ For him, each personality is a new evolution of the soul and the structure of the nervous system either permits free action of consciousness (talents), hinders it by the less prominent planets (building of skills) or stops it altogether (hardship) with very weak planets for karmic reasons.⁴⁸ Leo promotes that the character belongs to the soul, the soul has faculties, and its efficiency is based on the body as the vehicle. The idea that the body, brain and nervous system go with special types of character are inherent in the esoteric astrology of Leo, the body fits the soul like a glove; he says that

⁴⁰ Peter Whitfield, *Astrology A History* p. 149

⁴¹ Melissa Merium Bullard, *The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino’s Thought on Astrology*, p. 699

⁴² Melissa Merium Bullard, *The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino’s Thought on Astrology*, p. 699

⁴³ Alan Leo, *The Progressed Horoscope* (London, L.N. Fowler Ltd. 1905) p.4

⁴⁴ Melissa Merium Bullard, *The Inward Zodiac: A Development in Ficino’s Thought on Astrology*, p. 702

⁴⁵ Claudius Ptolemy, *Tetrabiblos* p. 11

⁴⁶ Virahamahira, *The Brihat Jataka* p. 11

⁴⁷ Alan Leo, *Esoteric Astrology* (New York: Astrologer’s Library 1913) p. 103

⁴⁸ Alan Leo, *Esoteric Astrology* p. 103

the plan of the body is expressive of both fate and character and this is the fabric upon which the horoscope is built.⁴⁹

Conclusion

When examining the relationship between fate and free will each of the primary sources elucidate the idea of negotiation. This ‘negotiation’ is actually what defines a predestination narrative in western astrology. Ptolemy said that one must negotiate astrological information with mental preparedness and tranquility because the ‘unforeseen will either overwhelm the mind with terror or destroy its composure’.⁵⁰ Plato was suggesting early on that the process of becoming can be managed with the math of astrology. Ficino believed that we can temper our heavens by personal choices, medicines, and talismans. Ptolemy suggested that we can prepare ourselves for stormy weather both figuratively and literally. According to Leo, tendencies can be drawn out of a perfect mathematics formula, but ultimately the soul will decide if it’s going to separate or unite with the oneness of all things. The recognition of the divine operating within us is paramount for Zoller who suggests that our fate is where the potentials and limits of life mingle. The Stoicism of Manilius and Maternus echo the divine connection with the idea of sympathy between man and cosmos. The doctrine of karma explains that some things cannot be altered because they are consequences of past life actions, meanwhile the individual is a free agent to refine his responses to destiny. The doctrine of temperaments offer diagnosis and remedy for diseases. It comes to pass after these careful and complex considerations that predestination narratives are present in eastern and western astrology. They are negotiations of earthly life through counsel, remedial measures, preparedness, character development, coupled with the timing of predictions and auspicious moments; the natal chart is necessarily the place that the individual meets and comeslingles with its future.

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